Abstract
Whilst acknowledging that there are several major differences in the approach which Kant and Marx take to political philosophy this article argues that there are also several common themes. These common themes of commitment to critique, freedom, equality, human betterment and cosmopolitanism are first highlighted. Subsequently the most marked contrasts in their approaches are examined and evaluated. Although Kant demonstrates greater political wisdom and a greater respect for law, Marx shows greater insight into social and political forces. Taken together Kant and Marx present an as yet unrealized, powerful programme for political and social improvement.

Keywords: Kant, Marx, critique, liberty, equality, cosmopolitanism, human betterment

Introduction
I am going to look at Kant and Marx’s political philosophies from two points of view. First, I consider the similarities Kant and Marx show in their approach to politics and society, and, secondly, I look at the most marked differences in their approach. I shall conclude on the significance of these contrasts and assess what can be learned from the relationship. This is a highly selective discussion. I focus entirely on the most rewarding comparisons and contrasts to be drawn about their views.

Critical Enquiry
A similarity that stands out immediately is their joint commitment to a critical approach. The coincidence in the titles of their major works, The Critique of Pure Reason and Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, is not accidental. Marx and Kant share the same German philosophical
tradition, to which Kant gave its greatest impetus with his trilogy of
critical works. Kant believed that he lived in an age of enlightenment
whose hallmark was that everything had to submit itself to critique
(WIE, 8: 40/21). Kant praised his ruler Frederick the Great for leading
the way in encouraging individuals to think for themselves in religious
and political matters. For Kant he stands out as the prince ‘who first
released the human race from minority, at least from the side of govern-
ment, and left each free to make use of his own reason in all matters of
conscience’ (WIE, 8: 40/21). Kant argued that philosophers should
expect to be allowed to express their opinions freely in scholarly works
(WIE, 8: 37/18). Their debates should be accessible to the wider public
and so encourage an enlightened culture amongst the people at large.
This may legitimately entail ‘candid criticism’ of legislation already
passed (WIE, 8: 41/20). This may lead to a virtuous cycle where
legislators will incorporate in their work the insights which open
and critical public discussion may bring and lead to better public
arrangements and laws.

Marx made his major contribution to social and political thought
by subjecting the relatively new discipline of political economy to
a thoroughgoing criticism. ‘Marx always saw his theory as critique’ –
‘a deconstructive/reconstructive practice associated with uncovering the
social and political conditions and consequences tied to prevailing ideas,
beliefs, and practices’ (Macdonald 2006: 60). For Marx criticism is an
activity which is open to all, and should always be brought to bear upon
current social and political life. Marx’s idea of critique not only requires
the freedom of speech (a prerequisite also for Kant) but also the licence
and scope to act politically to bring about change. Marx’s approach
to criticism and his appreciation of its role is from the beginning more
socially combative than Kant’s. For Kant the most appropriate kind of
criticism must come from informed scholars whose task is primarily to
encourage debate. Marx wants to go well beyond the academic’s study.
Critical thinking should be engaged with political activity, indeed, as
itself a form of political mobilization. As a young philosopher in the
1840s he was prepared to join his fellow German philosophers in con-
demning the backwardness of German conditions but these words had to
be followed by actions. He derides his contemporaries for their passivity
in relation to existing social relations. They have rightly highlighted the
social and political backwardness of German conditions. ‘The struggle
against the German political present is the struggle against the past of
modern nations’ (Marx and Engels 1967: 253). Germany still has the
political system that was overthrown in the French Revolution. It is an
outdated Ancien Regime. Philosophical critics need to be part of the political movement which abolishes the Regime.

This represents a contrast to Kant’s approach to critical enquiry. Kant regarded Prussia in the time of Frederick the Great as in advance of developments in other European states because of the manner in which he encouraged the freedom of thought. Kant also looks to rulers only to create a sphere of free expression for philosophers. Philosophers should not aim to be rulers. Marx, more controversially, wants to realize philosophy in politics. Here, with his idea of revolutionary practice, he dissolves in many respects the distinction between the scholar and the reading public. He requires apparently that those ordinary subjects that form the reading public become scholars and that the scholars, in turn, should become part of the politically engaged public ((Marx and Engels 1967: 256–7). Marx wants to subject ‘modern political and social reality to criticism’ ((Marx and Engels 1967: 254) and then in the course of this criticism to encourage new forms of political action that will overthrow that reality. New thinking cannot of itself make a new world. A new and better reality has to be brought about by revolution. This critique for Marx has to become militant. ‘The weapon of criticism cannot obviously replace the criticism of weapons. Material force must be overthrown by material force. But theory also becomes a material force once it has gripped the masses’ (Marx and Engels 1967: 257). As Marx departs from Kant’s paradigm of peaceful political reform from above (Williams 2003: 188–9), he none the less pays homage to the ethical inspiration that Kant’s political writings can provide. Grasping at the criticism of religion which was so much in vogue in his times in Germany, Marx sees in this advanced thought a clue to the future political radicalism he hopes will grip his nation. ‘The clear proof of the radicalism of German theory and hence of its political energy is that it proceeds from the decisive positive transcendence of religion. The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the highest being for man, hence with the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being’ (Marx and Engels 1967: 257–8). Kant sees criticism as informing progressive political movements led by politicians who are not themselves philosophers. Marx sees progressive political movements as made up of critics who are consciously engaged with changing the world.

Orientation towards the Future

A second likeness in the approaches of Kant and Marx is that both are highly future oriented in their political philosophies. Kant is oriented in
his political and legal philosophy to the possibility of perpetual peace in a world of republican states. This orientation is underpinned by Kant’s conception of an ethical commonwealth which plays a pivotal role in his moral and religious philosophy. Marx is, in contrast, oriented towards a socialist future where ‘the expropriators are expropriated’ (1970a: 763) – where the capitalist owners of the means of production who acquire this status only through depriving the mass of the population of any rights of ownership are themselves deprived of their property. In this future society we have socialized property. ‘This does not establish private property for the producer, but gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era: i.e., on cooperation and the possession in common of the land and all the means of production’ (1970a: 763). The main purpose of Marx’s critical dissection of the capitalist society of the present is to seek to demonstrate how that society, through its very own momentum necessarily tends in the direction of a planned economic system with the common ownership of the land and instruments of production.

Kant’s orientation towards the future comes out very strikingly in the ‘Idea for a Universal History’, where he argues that we should not assume that history occurs entirely without plan. This would be a demeaning assumption. With the growth of science we have come to see our natural environment as forming a fairly well ordered whole. Kant sees little value in appreciating with the respect and awe the ‘glory and wisdom of creation’ (IUH, 8: 30) in the natural sphere where no rational beings are involved, and looking on the human sphere as though there were no intelligence and wisdom at work. So he supports ‘a philosophical attempt to work out a universal history of the world in accordance with a plan of nature aimed at a perfect civil union of mankind’ (IUH, 8: 29).

Marx is oriented strongly towards the end of exploitation and state oppression. This is to be brought about by a socialist revolution which from the very beginning should have a worldwide dimension. The purpose behind this continual change for the better is to attain a situation where ‘the narrow horizon of bourgeois right’ is ‘crossed in its entirety’ and ‘society’ may ‘inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 325). Marx and Engels place great hopes on the working class, or the proletariat, because in their view they represent the sole wholly progressive class in modern society. And as that class adopts socialism and democracy forms the pattern of political rule in advanced states so the human species will develop towards a more rational planned society where war and interstate conflict becomes a thing of the past. In the Communist Manifesto Marx
and Engels proclaim ‘the Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can only be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 63). They round off this blood-curdling call to arms with the declaration: ‘Working men of all countries, Unite!’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 63).

These radical ideas have played a significant part in world history over the last two centuries and of course draw out many points of differences between Kant and Marx in their political philosophies. We shall attend to these differences later. However, the pattern that follows Kant is the emphasis on the present being seen as both a prelude to key progressive developments to come, and a point which may well be subject to future judgement by generations to come. From neither standpoint should present leaders allow themselves to be complacent. They are encouraged to understand and assess what their contribution might be to a better future society, for everyone with a knowledge of the history of their own society is likely to be concerned as to how their descendants will view their contribution to furtherance of their society. He stresses that we should ‘observe the ambitions of rulers and their servants, in order to indicate to them the only means by which they can be honourably remembered in the most distant ages’ (IUH, 8: 31). Kant thinks that the standard of this measurement should be ‘the positive and negative achievements of nations and governments in relation to the cosmopolitan goal’ (IUH, 8: 31). The same standard of measurement is evident in Marx’s orientation towards the future. We should judge the success of political movements now not only in relation to their ability to exert influence but also, and primarily, in terms of their contribution to the cosmopolitan goal which he conceives to be a worldwide community of workers.

Marx and Kant both look forward towards a planned tomorrow. Kant suggests very strongly in several of his writings that human history is at present the outcome of conflicting forces which humans themselves do not fully control. We may discern a pattern in historical development but it is one that we as historical observers impose on the events. Indeed, from a moral standpoint there is an obligation on us to regard human history as, at the least, not standing in the way of our gradual improvement as a species. In the discussion in Conflict of the Faculties of the various standpoints from which history can be viewed (CF, 7: 81) – one of continuous improvement; one of continuous decline; and one of a vacillation
in one direction or the other but ultimately remaining in the same place – Kant implies that the standpoint from which one looks at history should not be determined solely by what appear to be the facts, but rather we should allow our moral capacity to influence our evaluation. ‘In these principles, there must be something moral which reason recognises as not only pure, but also (because of its great and epoch-making influence) as something to which the human soul manifestly acknowledges a duty’ (CE, 7: 87). The human species should set before itself the goal of pursuing its aims ‘in accordance with’ an ‘integral, prearranged plan like rational cosmopolitans’ (IUH, 8:17).

Kant is quite clear that we cannot take any pride in the history of the human race as a totality so far since progress appears random and often unintentional. He holds that from a philosophical perspective we should take a grip and set out the future for ourselves in a planned way. The plan he advances for perpetual peace is part of this picture. ‘We can scarcely help feeling a certain distaste on observing their activities as enacted in the great world-drama, for we find that, despite the apparent wisdom of individual actions here and there, everything as a whole is made up of folly and childish vanity, and often of childish malice and destructiveness’ (IUH, 8:18). Kant admittedly conceives his planned future as part of something that nature has willed for us, but what is willed for certain is that the human species should take greater control of events. What is required is that individuals should come to behave like the rational cosmopolitans which in principle they are already.

The planned future we should have before us is even more apparent in Marx’s political philosophy. The Communist Manifesto presents a process of human history that is controlled by class struggles that encourage this class conflict to become worldwide. The spread of capitalism to all territories of the world brings wars amongst competing advanced capitalist nations in its wake. This is a process that is not controlled by human beings: it is brought about by the capitalist economic system of which they are part. Marx encourages us to get on top of the haphazard and conflictual economic development of which we are inevitably part by replacing the capitalist mode of production by one in which the producers are themselves in charge. Marx and Engels condemn how capitalism allows the past to dominate the future: ‘In bourgeois society, living labour is but a means to increase accumulated labour. In Communist society, accumulated labour is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the labourer’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 48). By accumulated labour they mean here capital, which they understand to be only the saved
product of past labour generated by the unpaid work of the capitalists’ employees. ‘In bourgeois society, therefore, the past dominates the present; in Communist society, the present dominates the past. In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 48). Our preparations for the future should dominate the planning of society now.

**Revolutionary Approach towards Knowledge**

Thirdly, just as Kant subjects philosophy to a Copernican revolution, where the subject is put at the centre of our knowledge, so Marx also seeks to transform the field of human knowledge. Marx seeks to take philosophy beyond what he regards as its usual contemplative or reflective mode into an active transformative role. With Marx the aim of altering society for the better is taken in tandem with the aim of knowing ourselves and the world as comprehensively and accurately as possible. This sentiment is expressed most strikingly in the second thesis on Feuerbach where he remarks that ‘the question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. In practice, man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 28). In prosecuting these radical aims they do differ most markedly in the attention they give to the methodological details this involves. Marx pays only passing attention to the new epistemology he adopts – he aims to demonstrate its value in his scholarly activity. Kant’s academic activity is, in sharp contrast, dominated by proving the validity of his new Copernican method. Epistemology is at the heart of Kant’s philosophical enterprise, whereas Marx’s philosophical enterprise is dominated by the aim of overthrowing all inhuman conditions. Marx’s radical new epistemology is undertheorized, whereas Kant’s philosophy is devoted in an extraordinary degree to the question of spelling out the most appropriate epistemology.

Marx’s epistemological radicalism comes out most markedly in his critique of ideology. This new critical approach to epistemology is demonstrated at great length in the book he wrote with Engels in the mid-1840s: *The German Ideology*. Marx expresses the revolutionary approach he takes towards knowledge most concisely and strikingly in the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, published in 1859. There he remarks about his methodology:

> In the social production of their life, human beings enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their
will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of human beings that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (Marx and Engels 1968: 182)

Marx’s method appears to take a radically different direction from Kant’s Copernican revolution which brings back all knowledge to the knowing subject. Kant appears to suggest that being is largely determined by our awareness, whereas Marx brings back our awareness to our being. However, Marx is drawn back again to Kant’s greater subjectivism in terms of our knowledge when he stresses that this awareness is always that of practically active human individuals. For Marx there is no being as such of which we become aware, there is only the consciousness of our social being brought about by the relations which ‘are indispensable and independent of our will’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 182).

Equality
Both Kant and Marx argue powerfully for equality. Admittedly they interpret equality differently. Marx not only puts emphasis on equality before the law (which he regards as ‘bourgeois’ equality) but also upon a greater equality in the distribution of income and wealth. Kant, although not wholly comfortable with inequality of wealth and income, puts a good deal less stress upon it, and even believes that under certain conditions such inequality can prove a spur to human progress. He is concerned that our life chances should on the whole be the same, however, he envisages no drastic changes in the distribution of property immediately to address the problem.

Kant’s commitment to equality is expressed in the most remarkable way in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. There he remarks that ‘the human being and in general every rational being exists as an end in itself, not merely as a means to be used by this or that will at its discretion, instead he must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or also to other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end’ (*MM*, 4: 428/79). The same commitment to equality is on display in Kant’s essay
'Conjectural Beginning of Human History’, where he comments that ‘man should not address human beings in the same way as animals, but should regard them as having an equal share in the gifts of nature’ (CB, 8: 114).

From the political standpoint Kant therefore believes that all obstacles to the equality of individuals under the law should be removed. ‘From this idea of the equality of human beings in the commonwealth as subjects, the following formula can be derived: each member of the commonwealth must be able to attain within it each level of a rank or position (which is open to a subject) which one’s talents, one’s hard work and one’s good fortune may bring one; and no hereditary prerogatives (as privileges for a certain class) should stand in one’s way’ (TP, 8: 292/292–3). Marx held highly complex views on equality. He strongly believed that the inherited distribution of wealth brought about by capitalism’s unregulated development should be rectified but he by no means believed that everyone should immediately hold equal amounts. Much would depend in his view on the condition of the society that was being transformed towards socialism. In the early stages of such transformation unequal shares in wealth and income might well be permitted in order that the transformation takes place in the most effective way. Even after a socialist society is properly inaugurated distribution should not be wholly egalitarian. This is because each individual’s needs are different. They may be single, married, married with children, young or old. This differences have to be taken into account. Marx is fully aware that the long-term goal which he states as ‘from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 325) can only be slowly attained.

**Liberty**

Kant and Marx both argue strongly in favour of liberty or freedom. They do so though in their own distinctive ways. In the political context Kant regards freedom as our one innate right. And he is quite specific about its meaning. It is a republican understanding of freedom as freedom from domination. For Kant: ‘no one can coerce me to be happy in his way (as he thinks of the welfare of other human beings); instead, each may seek his happiness in the way that seems good to him, provided he does not infringe upon the freedom of others to strive for a like end which can coexist with the freedom of others in accordance with a possible universal law (i.e. does not infringe upon this right of another)’ (TP, 8: 290/291). This is not a freedom from unwanted interference which is merely self-centred. Indeed it is a condition of the freedom we assert that it is available to all others as well. As Kant
puts it in his philosophy of right, freedom is ‘independence from being constrained by another’s choice (Willkuer)’ and it has to ‘coexist with the freedom of every other in accordance with a universal law’ (MM, 6: 237/393).

Although Marx’s concept of freedom demonstrates evidence of the same concern as Kant (derived, perhaps mutually, from a reading of Rousseau’s political philosophy) that the individual’s particular interest should be incorporated in the social whole, Marx presents it in more historically specific terms as the freedom that can be brought about by a society where class differences have been removed. Marx is not fond of discussing freedom in the abstract. It is very likely that he would regard Kant’s notion of external freedom, derived as it is from the idea of innate right, as a notion of bourgeois right. In his 1843 essay ‘On the Jewish Question’ Marx refers to the ‘so-called rights of man’ which are ‘distinguished from the rights of the citizen’. They are only ‘the rights of the member of civil society (buergerliche Gesellschaft), that is, of egoistic man, man separated from other men and from the community’ (Marx and Engels 1967: 235). Marx denotes this kind of liberty as ‘the right to do and perform anything that does not harm others’ (Marx and Engels 1967: 235). Marx does not think too highly of this kind of liberty. For him it is insufficient. He has in mind a more socialized form of liberty. The bourgeois view of liberty establishes ‘the limits within which each can act without harming others’ (Marx and Engels 1967: 235). Marx regards it as the ‘liberty of man viewed as an isolated monad, withdrawn into himself’ (Marx and Engels 1967: 235). Marx favours a socialized form of freedom where individual independence is fully negotiated within a public context. His general expectation was that this socialized form of freedom would incorporate within it all the positive features of ‘bourgeois right’ but go beyond it in the independence it offers over the unauthorized, non-consensual control of others. Unfortunately Marx is silent on many of the features that society would embrace whilst this transition takes place and on how consensual social agreement would be attained. He relies too much on the assumed class solidarity of members of the working class and the supposed uniformity of view amongst communists as to how this solidarity is to be attained.

For Kant it immediately follows from our innate right to freedom that we all enjoy an ‘innate equality, that is, independence from being bound by others to more than one can in turn bind them’ (MM, 6: 237–8/393–4). These are rights we possess in virtue of our standing as human beings, the solely rational inhabitants of the globe. There seems very little doubt that Marx would share the same belief and, in particular, Marx might
well stress a further dimension Kant notes to our innate freedom: namely, ‘a human being’s quality of being his own master (sui generis)’ (MM, 6: 237–8/393–4). Sui generis means that something is entirely of its own kind or unique. Thus for Kant the human individual is uniquely in the position of being able to assert an entitlement to independence. However, Marx puts a great deal of stress on the inability of a vast number of human beings to realize this independence. Marx is particularly concerned about the condition of the members of the modern working class who, on the surface, have the right to assert their independence in the labour market, however once under the stewardship of their capitalist employers almost entirely lose this independence. The wage system for Marx leads to a form of slavery for the individual worker. In the first volume of Capital he speaks of the labour market as ‘a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity’ in this case the worker’s ability to work ‘are constrained only by their free will. They contract, as free agents, and the agreement they come to, is but the form in which they give legal expression to their common will. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham because each looks only to himself.’ On ‘leaving this sphere’ (Marx 1970a: 176) however there is an entirely different order of things. Marx highlights the dependence, and so the lack of freedom, a capitalist form of production appears to generate. Much of his critical writing on economics and politics is focused on how this dependence and insecurity can be overcome. In Marx’s view the modern division of labour within capitalist factories necessarily stultifies the development of the individuals involved. The system of production often requires them to devote themselves to the continuous repetition of the same (often very simple) task. Marx’s analysis of the modern capitalist system of production leads him to the conclusion that if individuals are to be free and equal in Kant’s sense, then production has to be organized in a new and different way. As the whole social and political system rests on the capitalist form of production he also concludes that the political system has to be transformed to allow the majority of society, those who earn their living by selling their ability to work, to determine its direction. For Marx the first step for that revolution which brings to an end capitalist society ‘is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 52). Marx, like Kant is driven in his political writings by the aim of emancipating people (Wilde 1998: 142). It is simply that this emancipation is seen differently. The realization
of freedom is seen immanently and socially by Marx, occurring as the result of the development of members of the human race as producers and exchangers of products. However, it rests on a commitment, similar to that of Kant, to the dignity and worth of each individual human being.

**Cosmopolitanism**

Cosmopolitanism, and the internationalism that it implies, is a prominent feature of the thinking of both philosophers. In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels take a remarkably internationalist standpoint. They make it very clear that they do not see the communist future solely in terms of a process of national emancipation. Indeed they express doubt as to whether national ties mean anything to members of the working class. ‘Modern industrial labour, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany has stripped’ the proletarian ‘of every national character’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 44). They emphasize none the less that the liberation of the working class must first take place within the context of the national state, although the process cannot stop there. ‘Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first deal with its own bourgeoisie’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 45). Marx and Engels envisage the working class coming to power in the first instance within the various national states. But their emancipation does not end there. The success of the communist movement in one country requires that the working class in other states too must gain control over their societies. Marx and Engels regard themselves as Communists and, in their view, ‘communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 46). The proletariat is not confined to one country; as capitalism develops the working class becomes the predominant class throughout the world. Marx’s communism therefore seeks always to maintain an international dimension. He has a universal programme of human emancipation. Much as Kant saw the inception of republican government in one country as a signal to neighbouring countries to seek to adopt a similar form of government, so Marx and Engels see the working class of one country as setting an example for nearby countries and countries with similar levels of economic development to proceed in the same direction. In *Perpetual Peace* Kant indicates the example that an advanced state of his day can give to other states in adopting a better form of government (*TPP*, 8: 356/327). Enlightened peoples can for him present a model
for other peoples to follow. Marx thinks of a socialist revolution in one country stimulating the prospects for the success of the working class elsewhere.

Kant’s cosmopolitanism emanates from a humanist ethic. Indeed he is a key figure in that tradition and must be seen as an important source for Marx’s humanist views. Kant expresses his humanist cosmopolitan vision at the end of his Doctrine of Right as a ‘rational idea of a peaceful, even if not friendly, thoroughgoing community of all nations on the earth that can come into relations affecting one another (MM, 6: 352/489). Whereas the core of Marx’s case for cosmopolitan community is the shared feature of the necessity of each human being to labour (particularly experienced by the direct producers under capitalism) and that the ensuing wealth is a product of this labour, Kant’s core case rests on the moral implications of our physical presence on a globe which means that our paths must cross whatever the direction in which we move. Our common presence on a globe forces interaction upon us and creates the necessity for us (so that we can enjoy freedom and equality) to regulate this interaction. And Kant holds strongly that social interaction forces us to develop our talents, by the competition amongst us it arouses. It is very interesting that Kant should bring into his account a consideration of the possibility of our common possession of the earth’s surface and its nature-produced store of wealth. However, for Kant this idea of common possession is a symbolic, moral notion, which underlies subsequent individual possession based upon law, guaranteed by nations with established sovereigns. The idea has implications in law for what we should do now; it is not a factual assertion about the past of any particular people. A nation state for Kant is entitled to seek to regulate the form that ownership takes now based upon this idea.

Marx’s cosmopolitanism downplays the role of nation states in safeguarding ownership and emphasises instead the future entitlement of a worldwide dominant working class to regulate ownership in the way it deems fit in order to empower the whole of humankind. I think it is fair to conclude that Kant pays closer attention to the question of how we might move from an internationally precarious position of unregulated competition to a future cosmopolitan world than does Marx. Marx leaves a great deal to chance and is too sanguine about how working-class revolutions in one country will lead to a more harmonious international order. Kant emphasizes the need to have a smooth organic move from a nationally based legal order to a successful cosmopolitan legal order. Marx appears to be too drawn to the model of revolutionary
change that Europe had experienced with the transition of France to a republican order from a monarchical system. It is very easy to be wise in retrospect, however, the difficulties experienced by the October Revolution in Russia and its subsequent attempts to bring about an international order more in harmony with its own internal socialist structure appear to demonstrate the enormous pitfalls that lay before Marx’s envisaged revolutionary transformation of the world order. The workers of the world were then unable to unite successfully; whereas the old bourgeois order, so much despised by Marx, showed enormous resilience in face of the challenge posed by worldwide revolutionary Marxism.

Human Betterment

Kant and Marx are both strongly focused on the improvement of the human being. They both wish to see our creative human characteristics developing to the full. This they admittedly take from different perspectives. For Kant betterment has to be attained primarily by individuals themselves for themselves. We are held back as moral beings by our propensity for radical evil. The evidence seems to Kant to suggest that we can take this propensity to be innate. But this does not mean it must always or inevitably triumph. Kant thinks merely that our improvement cannot be ruled out. We should seek to learn to curb our propensity towards radical evil.

Although Kant acknowledges that social contact with others can greatly intensify our tendency towards evil (R, 6: 94–5) he none the less believes that the propensity originates within human beings themselves. Marx is drawn more to the view that the evil we observe in human beings can be attributed to their social circumstances. Marx holds that we cannot separate individuals from the social context. Human individuals, as he puts it in the theses on Feuerbach, do not exist outside society. ‘The abstract individual’ belongs ‘in reality to a particular form of society’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 29). Our betterment can occur only within the context of a vastly improved human society. Only in ‘a higher phase of communist society’ ‘can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 324–5; see their 1973: vol. 17, 13–32).

Whereas Kant’s primary focus in human improvement is upon the character of the individual (albeit in a social and political context) and the pursuit of greater virtue through a more skilled approach to those factors that both hinder and aid us in doing our duty, Marx’s main focus is upon the circumstances of our work – the conditions under which we directly
reproduce our lives – and making those circumstances as propitious as possible in the fulfilment of our needs. Those favourable circumstances should be pursued in the higher phase of the communist society that is to come. Under those circumstances the division of labour will not enslave the producer as it does presently. Under capitalist conditions the producer is first hampered by the division between intellectual and physical labour and then secondly by the repetitive, specialized nature of the work. We should be freed from such limiting and stultifying conditions. This focus on external conditions differentiates Marx from Kant. However they are brought back together when Marx highlights the role that satisfying work can play in the individual’s life. In spelling out the importance of the pursuit of virtue as a prime goal of human existence Kant also notes the importance of developing the abilities latent within us in fulfilling ourselves. With Kant the virtuous person pursues ends that are also duties and amongst one of our main duties is the development of our natural powers. ‘A human being has a duty to himself to cultivate his natural powers (powers of spirit, mind and body), as a means to all sorts of possible ends. – He owes it to himself (as a rational being) not to leave idle and, as it were, rusting away the natural predispositions and capacities that his reason can someday use’ (DV, 6: 444/565). Marx’s emphasis on work in a future communist society being not only a primary means for our maintenance, but also the first requirement of our lives, indicates a common awareness with Kant of the importance of fulfilling work in creating the fully rounded human individual. For Kant the all-sided development of our natural powers allows us to take our place alongside others as ‘useful members of the world’ (DV, 6: 445/566). Marx wants to see the all-sided development of the individual which echoes very closely Kant’s concern that it should be seen as the ‘duty of a human being to himself to cultivate his capacities’ (DV, 6: 445/565).

Points of Difference
The most outstanding political difference between Kant and Marx is presented by Kant’s general rejection of revolutionary politics. This is one of the main grounds on which many serious Kant scholars are, I think, averse to even hearing Kant and Marx being spoken of in the same breath. It is quite understandable that commentators, who find much that they admire and can support in Kant’s political philosophy, are at home with the assumption that within an already settled civil society we should work with the existing political structures to bring about improvement in society. They find wholly disturbing Marx’s belief that the existing order has to be overthrown from the bottom up if we are indeed to progress. They share Kant’s horror at the thought of complete, sudden
transformation of society, believing that once the rule of law has been so fundamentally undermined the society will not easily be mended. Just as for Kant the choice of the method of reform is deliberately and carefully made, Marx too deliberately and with much reflection opts for the revolutionary path. Marx’s enthusiasm for revolution can be seen in his materialist account of history, his support for the extra legal actions of oppressed classes and peoples and above all in his support for revolutionary methods he shows in his historical writings on France, especially in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852) and the *Civil War in France* (1871).

Revolution is a powerful mechanical analogy which Marx deploys to show the kind of political change he favours. Marx is writing in the nineteenth century in Europe where the innovative and progressive currents of the French upheaval were still being felt. He clearly allied himself with this progressive spirit which animated many of the leading cultural figures of his time, including figures as diverse as the English Romantics and Hegel. In contrast the analogy which Kant favours is the analogy with metamorphosis (MM, 6: 340/480). Kant presents this analogy at the time of the direct impact of the French Revolution upon its European neighbours. And the analogy strongly recommends a step back from the radical political enthusiasm of the time. In contrast with the analogy favoured by Marx, Kant advocates an organic analogy. For him the next progressive changes in political institutions should grow more naturally from the existing order. The move forward should not depend so expressly on destruction. Rather, as institutions are changed, their positive features should be incorporated in the new rules and organizations. Kant is fully aware that political and legal order first comes into existence through force and domination, however he does not believe that this pattern should be repeated in bringing into being future institutions that are more in accord with the innate rights of individuals.

This brings us to a second main point of difference between Kant and Marx. In rejecting resistance and rebellion as forms of bringing about progressive political change, Kant demonstrates his support for reform from the top down as his preferred method of bringing about progress. We must pursue ‘evolution and not revolution’ (CF, 7: 93–3; Kant 1991: 189). This is improvement that adheres strictly to legal methods. Marx famously regards law primarily as an ideological outgrowth of the dominant social and political structures in society. As he remarks in his Preface to *The Critique of Political Economy*, law is one of the ‘ideological forms’ in which men ‘come conscious of the conflict’ between
economic relations which form the ‘base’ of the society and the ‘immense superstructure’ of ideas which arise from this base (Marx and Engels 1968: 183). Our social being for Marx determines our consciousness and not vice versa (Marx and Engels 1968: 182). Thus, law as it stands – as one of these ideological forms – cannot be trusted to bring about progressive political change. Favouring the interests of the ruling class, one of its explicit aims in his view is to restrain progress. Established law cannot but help preserve and maintain the established ruling class.

A third major area of contrast is in their attitude to religion. Kant has an important place for the idea of religion in his account of human progress. Religion for him takes its justification from morality. The essence of the religious point of view is to regard the carrying out of our duties as divine obligations. ‘Religion is (subjectively considered) the recognition of all our duties as divine commands’ (R, 6: 153–4/153). Responding correctly to the demands of the categorical imperative in morality necessarily leads the human individual in the direction of religion (R, 6: 4–6/2–3). Although practising morality does not of itself require recourse to the idea of a divine being, reason none the less has an interest with regard to the outcomes of our attempted moral actions. Reason none the less also wishes to see them as contributing towards a highest good (see Munzel 2014: 214–15). This can only take place on the assumption that what I will corresponds to what is willed by ‘a holy and beneficent author of the world’ (CPrR, 5: 129/244).

Under the influence of Feuerbach, Marx casts aside from very early on the contribution that religion can make to human, social and political improvement. Indeed he appears to believe that religion is predominantly an ideology in the service of the existing order and any person who wishes fully to emancipate themselves must reject it. ‘The basis of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man. And indeed religion is the self-consciousness and self-regard of man who has either not yet found or has already lost himself’ (Marx and Engels 1967: 250). Kant also sees religion as part of the human condition. But for Kant religion has its origins not in the fears of human beings but in their reason. Religion for him arises inevitably from the human individual’s striving to follow the moral law. Historically it has taken on a number of forms, but at their heart all have the aim of depicting ways in which we can approximate to the highest good. Whereas for Kant religion has to be at the core of what we represent as our happier future, for Marx religion should have no future for the rational person. As Marx sees it, ‘the
abolition of religion as people’s *illusory* happiness is the demand for their real happiness. The demand to abandon illusions about their condition is a demand to abandon a condition which requires illusions. The criticism of religion is thus in *embryo a criticism of the vale of tears* whose *halo* is religion’ (Marx and Engels 1967: 250). Although Kant has much to say that is critical about organised religion, and not even the Protestant faiths escape this criticism,⁴ he none the less believes that religion has a rational core which represents the manner in which we can be most responsive to the moral law in our lives. Religion which lies ‘within the boundaries of mere reason’ takes on a much more modest form than the kind of religious belief advocated by the established Christian denominations. The pursuit of virtue, for Kant, is at the core of religious belief. Marx believes in contrast that the religious life must fully make place for the secular life in which the problems that lead to religious discourse are most appropriately addressed. For Marx ‘religion is only the illusory sun that revolves around man so long as he does not revolve about himself’ (Marx and Engels 1967: 251).

**Conclusion**

Whilst it is true that the references to Kant in Marx’s work are rare, and thus it might seem that Marx drew little inspiration from Kant’s critical system, a strong case might nonetheless be made that Kantian philosophy has a deep underlying influence on Marx’s and Engels’s project. Marx, in particular, developed his philosophical outlook – that shaped his own critical system – in the shadow of Hegel’s philosophy. He did so through his relationship with the Young Hegelian philosophers and also through his own early fascination with Hegel’s philosophical system. Like many young German scholars of his day, Marx was drawn in his youth to the towering structure of Hegel’s philosophy and was unable to resist the intellectual challenge it posed (Marx and Engels 1967: 48). More powerfully too we can see the mark of his respect and enchantment with Hegel’s philosophy in many of the articles, chapters and drafts of books that he wrote in the early 1840s. These are writings that engage intimately with the Hegelian system in its many ramifications. Marx here attempts a comprehensive criticism of Hegel’s philosophy which deals not only with the quasi-theological framework of Hegel’s philosophy in the concept of spirit, but also with its theory of knowledge.

Hegel self-consciously regards himself as building upon some of Kant’s main philosophical innovations. He accepts several aspects of Kant’s Copernican revolution in developing his own philosophical idealism. Hegel’s main objection to Kant is that Kant does not go far enough in
making thought into the centre of our experience. Hegel fights against what he regards as the deleterious remnants of empiricism in Kant’s system and he is powerfully attracted by Kant’s transcendental idealism to the point where Hegel constructs his own *Science of Logic* as a more properly worked out and more objective account of the manner in which thought structures our experience (see De Boer 2010: 34–42). Thus in fighting against Hegel’s idealism in his early intellectual career Marx is dealing with many of the pressing problems posed by the legacy of Kant’s system.

We have already seen that Marx is radical and future oriented in his political philosophy in a manner similar to Kant. He shares with Kant a progressive view of history, although they both interpret teleology differently and there are clear differences in the epistemology that lies behind their accounts of history. But Marx in seeking to go beyond Hegel’s ethics and political philosophy returns to territory which Kant had also occupied. Marx rejects the Hegelian view of the implicit ethical completion to be found in modern civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) and state. Marx regards the modern state as Hegel presents it as ethically deficient. Contrary to Hegel’s claims, Marx believes the universal aims of the society are not to be realized in a constitutional monarchy (Marx and Engels 1967: 176; Lefebvre 1972: 26). In this respect Marx mirrors Kant in looking beyond the existing national state in search of ethical community and the best polity. Of course Marx is more radical still than Kant in his desire to transcend the national state. Kant aims for a federal union of republican states, whereas Marx’s long term is the abolition of the capitalist state.

Redemption for Marx (and here he is wholly at odds with Kant) occurs only through the resolution of class conflict. And here Marx expects this change to take a revolutionary form. One of the reasons that Marx looks for progress beyond the national state is that class conflict too goes beyond national boundaries. For him the struggle against capitalism necessarily becomes worldwide since capital too knows no national boundaries. In demarcating his philosophy of history Marx is of course setting up an alternative to the Hegelian model of the onward march of spirit (*Geist*). Marx rejects spirit and world spirit as mystical and he seeks to construct his philosophy of history upon economic and social forces he can report on. Marx interacts with Hegel’s and Kant’s philosophies of history in *Capital*. He imputes a teleological development to history through the influences of changing economic forces upon society. The guiding thread to history for him is given by the endogenous changes of
the social process of production, distribution and exchange. Whereas
with Kant a teleological view of history depends more strongly upon a
moral judgement upon what forces and kinds of social and political
behaviour are regarded as better. The plan for a ‘perfect civil union of
mankind’ must be set out by a philosopher and cannot be discovered
solely within history itself (IUH, 8: 15–31/Kant 1991: 51). Kant’s view of
progressive historical change is somewhat more voluntarist than Marx’s.
A strong impetus for change has to come from outside the economy and
society through the human species’ own intellectual capabilities. We not
only have to discover our better future, we have also to invent it.

The rejection of civil society and the Hegelian state as the embodiment of
Sittlichkeit takes Marx back to Kant. Kant did not endorse the relations
of existing civil society as themselves necessarily virtuous, and encoura-
ges individuals to look beyond existing economic and political relations
in living the fullest life. This is particularly so in the international realm.
Kant complains of the ‘inhospitable behaviour of civilized, especially
commercial states in our part of the world, the injustice they show in
visiting foreign lands (which with them is tantamount to conquering
them) goes to horrifying lengths’ (TPP, 8: 358/329). The commercial
states need to reform both internally and externally in order to meet more
closely the standards of justice. Needless to say, Marx’s rejection of civil
or bourgeois society is more thoroughgoing. Not only does he criticize
the inability of civil servants and businesspeople to live up to ideals of
public service and public life in general, but he also regards them as the
prime agents of a class domination that holds society in check. Patriotism
is not for Marx the positive force it can be with Kant, it is rather a mask
for the domination and exploitation of subordinate classes and groups.
Rather than putting his faith in public functionaries and change from the
top down, Marx dramatically pins his hopes in what he regards as the
one truly revolutionary class: the proletariat. None the less Marx’s vision
here does not wholly leave the realms of Kantian morality. Marx favours
an ethics of self-realization through our creative work, as he and Engels
put it in the Communist Manifesto: ‘the free development of each is the
condition for the free development of all’ (Marx and Engels 1968: 53).
What makes Marx’s and Kant’s political vision stand widest apart is
Marx’s side-lining of law in the progressive development of society. Law
is regarded as a peripheral structure that has to change as economic and
political relations change. There is little respect given to law for its own
sake. If we couple this disregard for law with Marx’s preference for a
revolutionary politics we can drive a deep split between the political
outlooks of the two. Marx appears as a headstrong radical and Kant as
the patient – perhaps too patient – reformer. Kant is perhaps politically wiser than Marx, but Marx maybe understands better how economic and social forces can lay the basis for successful forward development. But even those who wish to drive them apart morally and politically must acknowledge that what most strongly animates both thinkers is their shared commitment to unfettered critical enquiry; freedom (however differently defined); human equality; and global community. Taken together they set an agenda for the improvement of human society that far surpasses its present achievements.

Notes
1 Parenthetical references to Kant’s writings give the volume and page number(s) of the Royal Prussian Academy edition (Kants gesammelte Schriften), which are included in the margins of the translations. English translations are from the Cambridge Edition of Kant: Political Writings and Kant’s Practical Philosophy. I use the following abbreviations: CB = ‘Conjectural Beginning of Human History’; CF = The Conflict of the Faculties; CPrR = Critique of Pure Reason; DV = Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue; IUH = Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim; MM = The Metaphysics ofMorals; R = Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason; TP = ‘On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, But It Is of No Use in Practice’; TPP = Toward Perpetual Peace; WIE = ‘An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?’
2 Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Marx acknowledges the influence of Rousseau on his thinking about citizenship in the essay ‘On the Jewish Question’: ‘The abstraction of the political man was correctly depicted by Rousseau’ (Marx and Engels 1967: 240–1).
3 ‘It is the formal execution of a monarch that strikes horror in a soul filled with the idea of human rights, a horror that one feels repeatedly as soon and as often as one thinks of such scenes as the fate of Charles I or Louis XVI’ (MM, 6: 320/464, n.).
4 Kant, Religion, 6: 176/171 ‘Good-life conduct’ (6: 170/166) is, for Kant, at the heart of religious belief and not any devout practices or observance of church rules.

References