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TEMPORALITY AND POLITICS IN KANT

The aim of this study is to bring together – in a somewhat panoramic, but plausible manner – two of the main interests of Kantianism, as it emerged in recent exegesis: temporality and politics. In spite of the differences between and within the two fields of interpretive study, we consider that the topics central to them can be reduced to a small number of issues that are intimately related, thus offering a coherent line of critical interpretation, as follows.

Temporality is a recurrent hallmark of the Kantian tradition, needing no special inquiry as to its legitimacy; however, a short overview of its contents seems necessary. The passage towards politics unavoidably involves practical temporality, different from the temporality understood within the metaphysics of the subject as presented in the first Critique. The idea of *life*, being the link between theoretical and practical philosophy, between the rational and the acting subject, presents itself as the first focal point of the discussion.

Whereas the main interest of Kantian politics, on the other hand, seems to be its cosmopolitan purpose, this being clear from the outset as a consequence of universalism, its pragmatic side, however, namely, Kantian anthropology, remains an ambiguous issue all along the interpretive tradition. Here, Michel Foucault's seminal work is called for, as a fruitful intersection of political and existential interests.

Last, we give a hermeneutical account of the historical language-play in *Towards Perpetual Peace*, in order to exemplify Kant's political authorship as a pragmatic activity – as an example of the very intersection of philosophical theory and political practice *qua* discursive performativity.

1. The systematic place of temporality in Kantian thought

Temporality reveals of the critical grounding of Kantian epistemology (sometimes denoted as metaphysics of knowledge, sometimes ontology).

We are talking about a construction from the bottom up, rather of the assumption of premises that find their meaning only during the argument – that is, of a systematic construction.

Time, as a focal term of the system doesn't find its meaning without the other crucial terms, such as sensitivity and spontaneity, apperception, perception, respectively experience. However, in addition to its dynamic role in the system, it has a character of a *datum* that has been difficult to bypass even by the most talented commentators. In this respect, it operates against the system as a final fact of human existence denoted as the subject, something that cannot be interpreted any further – however, everything depends on it. The most difficult problem of the first Critique, the transcendental deduction of the categories, is – if it is – solved by the structure of temporality denoted as the schematism. Due to the epistemological nature of the problem, the “objective” character of time, as the main condition of possibility of knowledge cannot be denied.

This idea legitimizes knowledge in the sense of the mathematical natural sciences - whose categories are “derived” – but it also limits it to this type of knowledge, other possible types being excluded. Thus, the transcendental cannot be known, and the immanent will comply with the logic of time, becoming *phenomenal* – i.e., empirical, real, but without any other own rational (*noumenal*) structure, except that of time. In other words, only empirical knowledge qualifies as knowledge, others are mere illusions.

Temporality within theoretical philosophy

What time and temporality *are* for Kant, in contrast with their *role* in ordering knowledge, is an issue connected to the structure of the subject. Time, together with this structure can be, again, called “objective”, as a given property, common to all, intelligible and *a priori*. Objectivity in this case is not connected to experience and its objects in a direct manner, but to the structural openness of the subject to possible experience: *Anschauung*. I do not hasten to use the term in translation since the primary meaning derived from the verb *schauen* - to look, to watch - would be immediately covered by the semantic element of a sixth sense, transcendent, instinctive, irrational – the translation being, namely, the term “intuition”. From the meaning of “vision”, inherent in this type of openness, we must retain the orientation to an exteriority, to an own “world”, without which all transcendental philosophy would turn into a pure speculation out of conceptual structures – called rationalism.

Time is the primary form of openness to the world as sensitivity. Space orders – is the form of – the same sensitivity considered in its exteriority, that is, insofar as it relates to objects. Sensitivity means, however, affectedness of the subject by the object, a presence of the world to me, and in this respect, has an interior aspect, considered without relation to the object. The form of sensitivity in an internal sense is time, which is more general and more primordial than space, since it orders the purely subjective affects as well, being also the condition of my self-affection – thus even of self-consciousness and of thinking.

We can here witness Kantian existentialism, observed in the gesture of the temporal turn concerning the subject, by which it becomes finite, embodied, “thrown” into the world by definition, and as such, deeply determined precisely by what appears to be non-rational: by animal, sensitive nature. Even if we do not go so far as to deduce reason itself from this bodily nature, we can agree with the idea that thinking might have a “life”, that it could be linked to nature – that is, it does not land directly from the transcendent into the heads of philosophers.

Temporality from a practical point of view

Human existence, of course, is not directly and analytically constituted from nature – animals do not exist in the human sense – but from the consciousness of the contradiction between this very consciousness and its world. Time, as a common ground of the consciousness-of-the-world and consciousness-of-itself is therefore the *par excellence* bearer of the human paradox, born from its rational nature.

The form of time being universal, it constitutes the common ground of the consciousness-of-the-world that is subordinated to the self-consciousness of each subject, thus having an epistemologically mediating role, conferring a public character to the knowledge structured by it. However, as a self-consciousness that is in conflict with its world, human existence is radically individual, separated from other beings, a self that is itself in contrast with other selves-in-themselves, something apparently private. The I, as the principle of the unity of experience, that should always be the experience of a single subject, is a pure abstraction, a Cartesian *cogito*, but becomes, in an active sense, a transcendental *apperception* – the presence for itself of the active subject, dynamic self-awareness, the act of thinking that perceives itself as such. Its status is, in this form, the status of an intelligible being, which, being identical for all such beings, is that of universal self-consciousness.

The freedom of the subject, postulated in ethics, does not reveal, therefore, of its transcendence, but precisely of its universal form, not communicable as such, however intelligible, that is the active source of the organization of experience – as something autonomous, motivated strictly from the inside according to its own law – that is, motivated by the *interest of reason*. The perspective of practical philosophy is therefore inherent in that of theoretical philosophy.

This explains the legislative status of reason in epistemology: it is always-already a legislative power, active, not descriptive, passive. Therefore, the epistemological problem is always-already a problem of legitimacy, and not of analysis.

The practical perspective is modally different from the epistemological one: the organizing activity of reason can be regarded as being in time itself, directed towards the laws of nature, thus objective and necessary. It can, on the other hand, be seen practically, from the perspective of freedom, becoming noumenal, rational, and autonomous.

2. Towards the problem of the political

This systematic grounding of the normative metaphysics of knowledge in a critical approach succeeds in encompassing the whole of the problematic of Kantian theoretical and practical philosophy. In his late period, however, Kant's thought acquires a new orientation, signaled by the emergence of explicitly political issues (religion, culture, history), on the one hand, and by an increased public sensitivity of the author, on the other – a kind of “application” of the critical system. This change can be observed in the introduction of a heterogeneous perspective in the discourse, in conflict with the basic orientation of criticism, namely, the perspective of a social reality, historically present and pragmatically constituted. The conflict is expressed through the paradoxical idea that, although social and political institutions – laws – should be possible to be thought in an *a priori* way, the specific manner in which they are factually constituted doesn't pertain to pure reason, even practical or ethical, but to an independent rationality, specifically political, which can be methodically differentiated, but not appropriated by philosophical criticism.

The paradox consists – before the emergence of a political philosophy in the sense we are familiar with today – in the very need and simultaneous impossibility of a political philosophy. In other words, although Kant has a theory of law, of the state, of international relations, still, these being

a priori, they do not allow him to capture the very essence of politics in the sense of pragmatic political action aimed at precisely by his own conception. Moreover, this approach produces an ambiguity within the critical discourse, in the sense that the empirical-historical *datum* of a legal order becomes, in a certain sense, the transcendental condition of *a priori* justice, orthogonally overturning the primary methodological structure of Kantianism – towards some type of proto-Hegelianism.

Temporality in politics

This ambiguity leads so far, that the Foucaultian¹ analysis of finitude, in the recently published Introduction to Kant's Anthropology, can speak of an apparent reversal of primordial temporality through anthropological temporal structures that are, in their turn, in time! Namely, he is speaking of "originary" temporalities in contrast with the "fundamental", epistemic one, which occur in time, and through self-establishment, present themselves as being always-already present. Foucault attempts to dismiss these temporalities, and to return to the "fundamental", but runs the risk to be, in turn, contaminated by them, and thus to relapse into relativism.

What could be the temporal sense in which political philosophy might find its critical limitation?

In order to reconstruct the terms of the question, we will need to question the link between philosophy and politics in an epistemological sense. Although political rationality is autochthon, having its own mechanisms and implicit goals – and we emphasize the firmness with which Kant distinguishes them from those of pure reason - there exists, on the one hand, a common meeting surface between the two, on the other, a reciprocal orientation of them, the two of which co-define them in the manner of a difference in complementarity. Politics aiming for the pragmatic goal of perpetuating its own existence over time, and philosophy, for the practical interest of reason in the epistemological ordering of the world, both are based, in the epistemic sense, on the power of judgment. The politician must possess, in addition to his pragmatic, action-oriented commitment, a power the power to judge the *right moment* for this action, and his judgment is formed on the epistemic horizon of practical experience. Being driven and limited by action, this judgment is still deficient in the epistemological sense, even violating the universalizing rules of reason, by the case.

On the other hand, the politician being in turn a rational human being, he is subject also to the dictates of practical reason in an equivocal way, even in the full sense, the categorical imperative being valid against him as well, so that instead of becoming a political moralist, a simulacrum of naïve goodwill, he should become a moral politician. The ambiguity of the two norms – one of expediency in action and another of morality in judgment – represents such a radical rational task, that its eventual perfect fulfillment can be denoted by Josef Simon as “the critical activity *par excellence*.”²

The obligation to associate

The power of judgment, as the common source of the two domains of knowledge, has the effect of legitimizing the philosophical critique of political action. Furthermore, the separation of their orientation, that is, the active, law-giving productivity of political action, completely independent of philosophy as a theoretical field, produces a practical limitation of moral-philosophical normativity in what concerns the political field. Namely, once committed, political action becomes factually normative in the legal sense, and this is why there cannot be – with certain exceptions – moral reasons for denying this normativity. Thus, disobedience to law, or at the extreme, conspiracy to revolutionary change by force against a given legal order is, for Kant, strictly prohibited.

But the paradox thus produced does not come from a source alien to philosophy. Rather, it is the expression of an internal tension, activated by the turn towards the new topics, but one that pertains to the rationally finite constitution of the knowing and active subject. Namely, through its animal, living nature, man is essentially vulnerable, being thus pushed towards association with others, which explicates, if it does not define, man’s finite constitution, signaled by temporality. This instinct, internalized through the self-representation of the subject, is what Kant calls the unsocial sociability of man.

The instinct of association is, on the other hand, an inherent interest of reason as well. The obligation to exit the state of nature, the movement towards a common social world ordered by laws that are commonly accepted – Kant’s appropriation of the Rousseauian social contract – is a rational law co-fundamental with moral law. The interest of reason to order the world, and its self-representation in the form of universal subjectivity, would not allow an interpersonal world dominated by the chaos of pure force. Thus, the search for law in the exterior sense of a juridical law,

having the power of empirical constraint, is a necessity of reason, and not a pure contingency of nature.

Thus, juridical laws must be rational themselves, because they have been legitimized by reason's necessity. Moreover, there will be a priori deducible laws – so-called natural laws – which will grasp nature in an immediately rational form, giving it legal power. Kant's examples are of the order of family law - legality of sexual relations between a man and woman in the form of marriage - but in the minimalist sense, he says, there will need to be at least one law to transfer political power to a person or a group. We understand that the basic juridical law is exactly the transfer of power from the subject of legislation to one representative of society – and the necessity of this law is purely rational.

Law and culture

The rational ordering of human nature in the actual sense, though necessary, is constituted in an *a posteriori* way. This contradiction is reflected even within the person, in the sense of the subject of the law. The person is, on the one hand, the noumenal, free and rational subject of theoretical philosophy, on the other hand, the living, finite and embodied subject of factual social existence. Specifically, Kant argues that even the person's mere agreement to law (always necessary, at least in the passive sense, for the rationality of the law) would not be possible if the person would be considered a unitary and durable substance, as a mere living being, the part of nature. The agreement to law, through which I recognize its rationality, respectively the acceptance of its practical efficiency, of its external coercive power, would contradict if we considered them as belonging to one and the same subject. I, who agree with the law, cannot conceive of myself without contradiction in my reasoning as someone who could break the law – who could, therefore, be punished – the very conception of constraint being, therefore, impossible. Therefore the legal person is doubled: the free subject reasons and the natural subject is punished.

The tension between the „foreign” nature and the „own” reason within a life subject to laws is mediated by *culture*. Only mediated, because the legal subject is always deficient from the practical point of view – there is always need for a social appropriation of interests (for some *other* aimed at, but not necessarily present) and of an instituting political action (a *third*, the carrier of domination) for its establishment. Thus, the „foreign” nature is domesticated in an *a posteriori* way, according to socially

accepted norms, through the free play of faculties, through which it finds forms – *Gestalten* – in which it may agree with reason – „as if“ it already were rational in itself. The social-cultural modeling of the empirical, phenomenal self refers to a universal reason that shapes human nature in a historically normative way, which is however deficient in terms of the primary interest of reason (objective knowledge): the first is law, culture follows; sociability remains unsociable.

On the other hand, the inter-subjective life of culture creates a world of social substance within legality, which is apparently „natural“. The animal, individual nature of each person becomes, through cultivation, a *quasi* common nature, possibly occulting, on the one hand, the rational status of the laws, on the other, the mediating status of culture.

The nature thus quasi-established seems so real in the eyes of some interpreters³, that its forms of appearance – the products of culture – are declared “phenomena”, having thus an epistemic role – that is, they become objective. Thus – having a social essence – they can be interpreted as being an interpersonal, historical-contingent reconstruction of subjectivity, a subjectivity that, consequently, will need to lose its universality expressed in the form of temporality. Ordinary temporalities instead of fundamental temporality seem to be imminent – phenomenology can obtain the status of ontology.

3. Introducing the concept of life to the discussion of politics

It remains to ask whether in this situation, introducing a fundamental concept of life can have an explanatory role. We are talking about Volker Gerhardt's⁴ attempt to reinterpret the Kantian philosophy as a *critical philosophy of life*, a gesture that is inscribed, without the tendency to deny this fact, into the recent shift of interest from natural sciences towards life sciences. We signal in advance both the exegetical and the systematic gain of this interpretive endeavor in many of the most acute issues of Kantianism, a gain that appears, however, in some cases a solution through cancellation of the question – a *coup de grace*.

Life would have a double effect: on the one hand, in the form of an animal existence of the human individual, on the other, in the form of a cultural life as a *Lebenswelt* of meanings, construed as extensions of the living *conatus* inherent in reason. Thus, Gerhardt may name reason the “organ of life”, a paradoxical statement that is, however, justified by Kant's conception of the human species as being *rational* by its very

nature. The rational animal would be rational *qua* an animal, and reason would be identical with the living will of the species – indirectly, of the whole living kingdom – to self-perpetuate. Politics would possibly lose its methodological relationship of difference towards philosophy, being perfectly understandable as a hub, a nodal point of life-forces.

We must remind, however, of the purely hypothetical way in which Kant speaks of reason as a natural capacity of the human species. Nature cannot be known in itself; hence the emergence of reason in the sense of a productive freedom cannot be projected into it. If, however, such a projection is permitted, this is due to the morally based teleological argument, and it is no more than a hypothesis, impossible to be actually confirmed.

The autonomy of reason in contrast with life should be reaffirmed against such an endeavor. The universal self-consciousness cannot be reduced from the noumenal, free, fundamental representation to an ordinary, active, living one, it must remain, before its public appearance and its empirical modeling in a social space, an end in itself, an absolute transcendence.

But with this qualification in mind, we may approve the interpretation of Gerhardt, largely well-founded textually. The qualification will, still, have a critical effect that will be presented in the form of an analogy between the fields related through the concept of life, namely, that of culture and of the individual, of politics and philosophy, of animal and of rational life.

And if we understand critical thinking in Kant's own sense, that is, in the sense of the public use of reason, an idea which bears in itself the specifically political interest, namely, the reformist-illuminist interest of reason, than we will understand rationalist agnosticism together with the politically engaged rhetoric, the objectivistic orientation together with the teleological argumentation, the limitation to the empirical-scientific knowledge together with the humanist impulse.

Shared temporality under the concept of life

In a public use, reason is presented in its liberty, not only in the epistemological sense, but in the actually social one. I cannot be rational, Kant says, without being able to always think from the perspective of another person as well. This view, however, is not immanent to reason but in its public form, private reason being limited by individual interests and specific individual requirements. The gesture of addressing a public, beyond

the speaker's private status, establishes a simultaneity as an extension of his/her self-consciousness. Namely, by this gesture, the individual nature present for self-consciousness in the form of temporality is proposed as a member participating in a shared self-consciousness – under the form of a common temporality. The proposal cannot be objective – for this it lacks precisely the subject that is just aimed at. It is rather a gesture to open a game – in analogy with the game of knowledge, but with no „nature” to be known. „Nature” would be constituted only by the free consent of the other subjects to participate in the game, who would accept the proposed temporality as the form of a shared self-consciousness. This sharing would possess a necessarily symbolic character, opening temporality to the dimension of a spiritual life, of a *nature present in its transcendence*.

Given the agnosticism of critical philosophy, however, the proposed game remains of a moral and not directly political character, and the participation in it, of an existential and not religious order. Bringing in front of the public the living, perspectively constituted nature of the philosophical author bears the mark of a personal authenticity of the work. Kant's critique presents, in this respect, a real problem of biographical hermeneutics, being subject to and, at the same time, provoked by state censorship, a fact that raises questions both about the message itself, at times hidden behind rhetorical forms, and about the relevant public and its political situatedness. The living Kant is difficult to recover, but a detailed research regarding his life could provide new data for the exegesis.

4. A sketch of Kantian cosmopolitanism

In order to be able to start out to Kant's actual political philosophy on the above prepared grounds, we need to examine the way in which his thought is still active today, so that we may ask authentic questions as concerning his theory.

As the Hungarian philosopher József Himfy⁵ presents, besides the debates in Germany, that have begun in the '60s, and concern Kant's practical philosophy, in the Anglo-Saxon world there have emerged exegetical interpretations with a direct impact on political theory, namely, by authors within the Rawlsian tradition, such as Onora O'Neill and Thomas Pogge. In Germany, exegesis has been oriented, in turn, towards contemporary topics, entering a dialogue from their own perspective with political theory; thus, authors as Reinhardt Brandt, Georg Geismann or Otfried Höffe have published within this topic.

Although in a close discussion with the tradition, these endeavors lead to an ambivalent understanding of the theses from the Kantian corpus, often using the spirit of the author against his letter. Most typically, the theses concerning the desirability, and respectively, the impossibility, of a global state are both equivocally supported on the grounds of Kantian writings, leading to an ambiguity that is argumentatively exploited in both directions: for example, Habermas sustains the idea of a global state, Rawls that of a free collaboration between states.

The same ambivalence may be seen in the use of arguments extracted from the oeuvre of the author both in favor of individual rights, as well as for the authority of states or communities that methodologically precedes these rights. Thus, Rawls treats states as quasi-individuals, *a fortiori* presupposing their relative primordially against their citizens, being criticized by Pogge, who opts for a method that would directly aim at the dignity of the individual. Even David Held⁶, one of the most cited authors in the literature on cosmopolitanism, builds on the social sense of Kantian philosophy understood as a public use of reason, giving a fundamental interpretation that is still existentially deficient.

The concept of a world as central to Kant's politics

Exactly because these problems are not self-evident anymore in the Kantian context, it is recommended to step back to the motivational essence that founds the Kantian moral, juridical and political discourse: this being what he calls philosophy in a cosmopolitan sense, namely the existential vocation of philosophy in promoting the liberty of everyone for the good of humanity as a whole – including future generations. Otfried Höffe⁷ speaks of a philosophy in cosmopolitan sense in Kant as being founded epistemologically through the concept of a *world* of the knowing subject, which is already universal, allowing the universalization of a *nature* humanity is a part of in the practical sense; thus, philosophy places man into a rational and wholly shared cosmos. This author, however, doesn't use the existential load this perspective comports, the definition becoming self-legitimizing. Namely, the philosopher, herself a human being, is situated on the existential-cognitive horizon of temporality, as we can see in the long tradition of phenomenology and hermeneutics of an existentialist inspiration. Finitude must come into contact with reason, all the more, the more intimate the existential situation of the use of reason is for the philosopher – as in the case of philosophy in a cosmopolitan sense.

Thus, we need a re-thematising of the problem, in existential terms, through which philosophy itself is to attain its limits as concerns its capacity of self-legitimizing.

Anthropological interests in Kant's politics

Only through a such re-thematising is a relevant dialogue with other fields to be expected, which are, in turn, inscribed within the same project of philosophy in a cosmopolitan sense, having arisen, even expressly so, from the same enlightenment tradition that has been shadowed by the rival tradition of romanticism. As the Canadian anthropologist Nigel Rapport⁸ proposes, coming back to an authentic sense of anthropology today that is to honor the dignity of the human being is possible only through coming back to a cosmopolitan perspective, based on authors such as Kant, respectively, through the universalizing epistemological grounding of human experience – an idea in which we may observe exactly the critical epistemology in a Kantian sense that allows construing its practical philosophy – including the political one – as we know it. Thus, Rapport argues for regaining a Kantian cosmopolitan anthropology – a project that has not yet been taken seriously, let alone carried out. This project would consist, ontologically, in defining the human being beyond its historical-empirical determinations, methodologically, in the counter-reductionism of individuality in order to find „the objectivity of the subjectivity of man“, and morally-politically, in empowerment of the individual beyond its societal circumstances. Thus, claims Rapport, the social sciences could reach the end of the enlightenment project: the attention given to the capacities of everyone.

Kant's recently re-published *Anthropology* – a new version based on students' notes, more complete than the one published by the author – may offer especially fruitful perspectives in respect of the project stipulated by people like Rapport. Moreover, the introduction written by Michel Foucault⁹, also unpublished until recently, puts the work into a context that is already political-philosophical. As Holly L. Wilson¹⁰ shows, the aim of the anthropology lectures of was exactly to offer students a cosmopolitan education, thus becoming an application exactly of “philosophy in a cosmopolitan sense”. Reinhardt Brandt¹¹ motivates that the cosmopolitan dimension involves, within the Anthropology, the problem of the vocation of man as man, whereas the answer to this problem is of the order of a religiosity that is both Stoic and Christian.

Susan Meld Shell¹² shows that the idea of happiness changed in Kant's thought throughout the development of his Anthropology lectures, namely, from one motivated by joy to one motivated by pain. The change occurs within the problematic of the practical embedding of theoretical philosophy, and has implications concerning morals and politics. Moreover, the key concept the change revolves around is exactly the concept of life, the mediator between the moral and the acting subject, between theory and practice, between spirit and mind.

Foucault's account of Kant's Anthropology

In his posthumously published Introduction to Kant's Anthropology, Michel Foucault tries to reconstruct – on clearly Heideggerian grounds – a genuine sense of temporality in Kantian terms, a challenge that has not been met by Heidegger himself – according to his own testimony – in his enterprise to interpret the Critique of Pure Reason in an existentialist manner.

The stake of the interpretation is double: on the one hand, recovering the sense of existential temporality in Kant that Heidegger in fact elaborated on (partly) Kantian inspiration, but in a way that also accounts for the systematic place of the mere epistemological (i.e., non-historical) temporality present in the first critique. On the other hand, the goal is re-coupling this version of Kantianism to the type of anthropology-oriented thought that is proper to both Heidegger and Foucault.

A text that has been controversial as to its origins, critical meaning and systematic place, Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* is the misbegotten offspring of critical philosophy. In fact, it is the published version of Kant's lectures on anthropology, the popular course that brought intense advertisement to his system, being much more accessible and educative. Its intention coincides with this, being meant as a tool of cosmopolitan education and preparation for worldly wisdom, a display of the practical orientation behind the system itself and an application of its contents. However, the relationship between the *a priori* thrust of the three Critiques and the "pragmatic", worldly, descriptive – hence a *posteriori* – stance of the lectures is unclear, especially in respect of the impact of the latter on the former. Thus, Foucault's endeavor to interpret the text in a philosophical, moreover, a philosophically constitutive manner is a dangerous one – and a correspondingly sizeable act of courage, only rewarded by the publication of his great book, *Les mots et les choses*, based on the very same investigations sketched in his Introduction.

Politics in Foucault's account

The term *politics* only appears at the end of the Introduction, in the title of one of the contemporary applications of Kant's anthropological thought. However, among the central topics of the text we can find forms of social association as they appear in his epoch, and namely, as considered from the point of view of freedom. Moreover, one of the main motivations of the Anthropology, as Foucault explains, is the controversy concerning Kant's philosophy of right. Indeed, the discrepancy between freedom as described by the *a priori* structures of the subject in morality and the dictate of rightful association appearing in the philosophy of right stands in the background of the discipline, the genuine question remaining not whether this should be the proper terrain to discuss politics in Kant – it should – but in what consists its bearing on the whole and the structure of critical philosophy. In other words, the forms of political association and its practices is a question that fits in the logic of a pragmatic anthropology – of the analysis of what man can make of himself – but it is not clear what kind of necessity, hence what kind of philosophical status this analysis possesses, insofar it is different from the normative fields of a philosophy of right, of history, teleology, etc.

Delimiting the elements of a Kantian political theory

As an example of an original Kantian political theory, we propose Volker Gerhardt's reconstruction, which shows that at the basis of *Towards Perpetual Peace* the grounds of such a theory are formed. As an explicit theory, it disqualifies from the outset the paraphrased interpretations that seek a hidden political meaning in non-political themes in Kant. The question that stands at the basis of such a theory sounds like this: what is a political entity? The specificity of the answer will be found in the gesture of grounding the political problematic (exemplarily: of world peace) onto the idea of the rights of man. This gesture describes, according to Gerhardt, the autochthon existence of the theme of politics, this being defined as the special problematic of demonstrating a concordance between the reality of history and the autonomous (moral) evolution of humankind.

Politics can be described as the self-definition of a human society. Since the political has empirical conditions, but refers to normativity, these two dimensions meet under the sign of the term *eternal*, or of what is beyond the difference of the phenomenal and the noumenal. The doctrine of an obligation to participate in history, beyond personal morality, is inscribed

into this meaning of a theory of political culture. This theory is linked to the Greek tradition of self-knowledge, in the sense of a self-definition of persons, co-originary with the self-definition of the political community it pertains to. Thus, Kant can define the state as the society over which nobody else can command but itself.

Kantian peace

The idea of peace is considered by Gerhardt to be the central idea of European political thought, beginning with antiquity. The institution of legality is synonymous with an original act of peace between individuals, which explains the fact that the political is based on the intention of pacification, as an internal condition of any political will. The claim of truth that links the political sphere to the moral one consists just in understanding this original ground, in assuming this agreement that conditions both fields. Given the way in which the interdependence of states in modernity paces the problem of peace onto a global plane, the institution of peace – and thus, of the political sphere understood as the process of the formation of rights – is extrapolated to the universal level of the rights of man, as a citizen of the world as a whole. This thematic change modifies the way of contextualizing political action, as Gerhardt explains, towards understanding external political action of the state as its internal condition. This is why Kant may trace states as quasi-individuals within a political super-community, in which they mutually depend from each other analogous to individuals who sign a social contract. The deepening of this idea leads to the reinterpretation of the very concepts of internal and external, these becoming simple concepts of relation, whereas peace reaches a primary position against them, understood as a limit condition of politics as such. The analysis thus extracted from the Kantian text is named by Gerhardt a functional analysis of politics.

5. A hermeneutic interpretation of Kant's political authorship

In his excellent biography,¹³ recently published in Romanian,¹⁴ Manfred Kühn agrees that Kant's theory of politics is essentially found in the essay *Towards perpetual peace*. The author presents us the biographical background of the emergence of the writing as being marked by the struggle with state authorities, including an explicit moment of confrontation between the power and the philosopher: we are speaking

of the letter dated the 1st of October 1794, signed by the notorious Johann Christof Wöllner, Minister of Religious Affairs (among other functions), but issued at the special order of Frederick William II, in which it is ordered to him to refrain from religiously themed writings, under the threat of „unpleasant measures“. We also learn that Kant’s interest turned to these issues precisely for political reasons – we must mention that after the era of ideological tolerance of Frederick the Great, his above named nephew adopted an oppressive policy, using dogmatic-religious correctness as a criterion of political correctness, as a pretext for censoring the Enlightenment movement.

To this tension – to which Kant responded stoically, accepting his position and returning to silence regarding religion – have added the events of 1795.

The historical background

Prussia withdrew from participation in the war against France through the Treaty of Basel (5 April 1795). A reason of joy for Kant, but also for concern about the meaning of this peace. Joy on the reason of sympathy for revolutionary France and the coincidence of his thought with the purposes of the revolution (insofar as these could be regarded as the emblem of Enlightenment), and also on the reason of the consciousness concerning the hardships of war for his fellow citizens. Concern because peace was concluded after the agreement that, until definitivation, France can keep the territories west of the Rhine, including Belgium, which was an Austrian claim, this being an implicit guarantee that France would tolerate invasion of Bavaria by Prussia. There is even a secret condition that, if France did not withdraw until the finalization from the left side of the Rhine, where Prussian territories were to be found, Prussia would be tolerated by France in the case of an invasion of other German territories. Moreover, on October 24, 1795, Poland was finally divided between Russia and Austria, and Prussia agreed to the treaty. For a philosopher, this means not only a clear political, moral or legal flaw, but also an intellectual one: peace so conditioned, that is, having an obvious element of bad faith, to the extent that it is consciously directed towards war, is not peace, just an extended truce. Kant does not give a newspaper article as a response. He does not thematise war, the peace treaty concluding it, the parties who sign it or any of the treaty’s details. He writes (in August 1795 – republished, with a minor modification, in 1796) a “pamphlet” – a little ironic work –

of a philosophical, universalizing type. The irony lies primarily in the presentation of writing: the title taken from the wall of an inn – in turn taken from the entrance of a cemetery, probably – an explicit reference to the idea of death; the structure taken from the peace treaty that served as a writing opportunity: anticipatory and final paragraphs, and in the second edition adds even a secret paragraph (sic!) (and which is no longer secret, of course, being written and published herein); ironic elements of different types in the text, from a *clausula salvatoria*, invoking a harmless intent, in manifest contradiction with the contents of the critical writing, through boasting the power of wisdom unto the cold irony in main argument, that is, the idea of humanity being compelled by nature's secret plan.

Interpreting *Towards Perpetual Peace*

The theoretical contents of the writing is – to the extent that it can be separated from the meta-textual rhetoric which I just referred to – of the order of a political philosophy, almost in the contemporary sense. Among the points of interest we must remind of the proposal for cosmopolitan law as a guarantee of peace – replacing the right of peoples; the autonomy of philosophy against politics; publicity (*Publizität*) as the sole criterion of political correctness, the obligation to expression of opinions. We should note, as Kühn suggests, the universality of these theoretical elements, their transcendence against the momentary situation in which they were born, and to which they react. In this respect, by integration of the nucleus of political philosophy into the *oeuvre* as a whole, says Kühn, we can reach the standpoint that – at least in its practical side – transcendental philosophy translates, ultimately, as a political idealism.

Returning to the writing *Towards perpetual peace*, we can formulate the first question that defies a literal interpretation. If the writing is already in its contents, explicitly and textually, of a critical nature (in the contemporary sense: as a formal questioning of a theme or a situation), why does it receive an ironical-rhetorical form? What kind of positioning, intent, what message does this kind of speech conceal?

First, we need to establish that the answer this question aims at cannot be of the order of a cryptic content, hermetical or mysterious in any way. Although the age is that of glory of secret societies – having largely Enlightenment purposes, in fact – a secret meaning simply overpasses the power of plausible interpretation from a distance of two centuries. Moreover, the whole Kantian philosophy standing under the sign of

transparency, of light, of explicating meaning through the labor of critique, the elusive character of the hermetic hypothesis seems, on purely intuitive grounds, wrong.

However, the paradoxes resulting from the statically read irony requires an explanation of the play through which they can find their meaning in a rather dynamic way. There is therefore a hidden level of meaning, not in the manner of codification in a cryptic language, but that of „wild” meanings, which appear as the products of the performative situation where the text can be relocated. They may not be fully recovered, but the force fields they are inscribed in can be approximately reconstituted, towards the formation of a plausible hermeneutical horizon.

As an example of such a reconstruction, we will bring the interpretation of Volker Gerhardt concerning the paradigmatic role of philosophy regarding the formation of public space – articulated precisely in the secret paragraph of the *Towards perpetual peace* – an interpretation in which irony plays an explanatory role, thus providing examples of the forces that act in the questioned rhetorical game.

The key to understanding the role of philosophy in a public use

The premises of Gerhardt’s argument lie on a background that can be understood only related to the whole of the Kantian work. The well-known, common legal metaphors of the work are, besides being a simple way of expression, bearers of the essential character of Kantian philosophy, especially of its theoretical part: the public nature of the entire foundation of epistemology – this idea being also the key element of the argument. In science, truth is – or at least should be, according to the proper sense of what science means – searched for, articulated and evaluated, or in Gerhardt’s words: produced, in a dialogic, democratic, and above all public way.

As a first premise derived from this background, we understand why in the secret paragraph Kant expresses in a tone of indubitability the fact that philosophers, once allowed to speak freely, will indeed do this, and they will even do this in an objective manner. Specifically, theoretical philosophy as a discipline is concerned precisely with the conditions to produce any scientific truth; in this respect, it is not only objective but also the publicly engaged, because not only its object, as in the case if science, but even its most intimate way to be is bound to a public space, open and objective, of the highest order. So the philosopher as a philosopher will reflect political questions from the same position where

he reflects the scientific ones: from the critical position. The certainty of public expression signed by the philosopher is based therefore on his simple professionalism.

The second premise concerns the way in which free human rationality is constituted in its external aspect, in the sense of a rational public expression. The concept here has only a negative role: to the extent that free reason cannot be limited by anything but itself, it will not be found, nor recognized, but in the confrontation of its various expressions, by different agents. The entitlement to the qualification of rational agent, creator of public opinion, does not come from anywhere else but from this very public space, and even after the expression of alleged rational intentions.

The problem of the primacy of philosophy does not seem obvious, and even if the question itself seems justified, we can easily believe in a positive response given to it by Kant. Volker Gerhardt gives the example of the Roman institution to make decisions related to war. Already in earlier times, there was a college of priests in Rome (*fetiales*) to assess the desirability of the respective war; in addition, the oracles were also consulted. Moreover, the final decision to go to war or not belonged to the people.

In a similar way, we can think of different examples from Plato to Hegel in which the class of philosophers is considered as the class of gray eminences. We could understand, therefore, that the philosopher from Königsberg refers to a kind of committee, organization, class, or group of advisers, in any case, an institutional group that would unite philosophers within the structure of power, but at the same time would give them the role of representatives of the popular will.

But, obviously, this is not the case. As we understand from the text, philosophy cannot be institutionalized in any way between the bounds of power. The only guarantee observed in the explanation to preserve objective impartiality on its behalf is epistemological autonomy. It is, on the other hand, in principle compromised by the necessary loyalty in the frame of any institution.

It becomes hence interesting, even amazing for Kant to claim that philosophers are precisely those assumed and entitled to develop critical activity concerning power – once it is stipulated that they would do this anyway, by their nature. We must remember, however, for the correct understanding of how Kant talks, the fact that this assertion is to be found precisely in the „secret“ paragraph of Towards perpetual peace. As shown by Gerhardt with great inspiration, the sophisticated irony of the pamphlet is proving to have great explanatory power here. That is, first, the writing

was intended for publication, thus the “secret” has an ironical character, by analogy with the secrets contained in the international diplomatic treaties, thus having a critical focus directed against censorship that would silence precisely what essentially requires publication.

The play of irony in *Towards perpetual peace*

The masquerade to which Kant is inviting the authorities is to pretend that they do not know what is just being communicated to them. The irony leads to paradox; in any direction it would be interpreted. If the secret is considered a secret, hence if the power shows no sign of accepting the message of the paragraph, then it should not allow philosophers, and neither to Kant, to speak freely in public. Thus, the whole writing should be censored, the secret message, deleted, which makes the challenge inexistent beforehand.

There remains, therefore, only the interpretation in which the secret is not considered a secret. In this case, its role changes: it becomes a pure underscore that power should guarantee free expression, without qualification. It must accept the call towards this guarantee „in secret”, that is, without counter-arguments, in silence. Volker Gerhardt explains that by giving up the idea of secret we arrive here by way of the simple exclusion of the wrong version, namely just to the idea of public space.

In Gerhardt’s formulation: the secret paragraph is self-dissolved in *de jure* sense (i.e. the right to reduce free expression to silence is itself in right reduced to silence), so that *de facto* the public space can remain open (no longer limited by censorship, this having already been annihilated by the ironic paradox).

Already by this part of the argument the idea of a presumed primacy of philosophy has been relativized: given the irony, the theme of a possible institutionalized class of philosophers cannot be taken on face value. Hence it remains to ask what is the role it still retains in the discourse. If at this point of the argument we complete the above presented conceptual scheme (*de jure* – *de facto*) with the description of the essence of philosophy as a paradigm of free, public, objective rationality, then we must reach the conclusion, that in this case we are talking of philosophy only as of a paradigmatic or exemplary case: that which refers to philosophy here *de jure*, that is, the fact that it is (in right and by its essence) a rational and objective discourse, and must, hence, be left uncensored, *de facto* will be just as true concerning any discourse that may in principle be considered

as part of the same rationality – the public space being already prepared by philosophy to receive any other discourse and to introduce it into the dialogue that forms rational truths.

In this sense, then, we may observe free human rationality, for which philosophy is paradigmatic, but in its concrete, given aspect, that in which it is being formed. It is irrelevant, as we have seen, who exactly speaks in this public space, insofar as one speaks as a private person (public author, in the Kantian sense) and not from a public office (having private obligations, in the Kantian sense). Philosophy manages, through the force of irony, to free the public space *for anyone, hence for everyone*. From the secret, only silence remains, from censorship, only tolerance. And if the secret achieves tolerance, this latter must concern everyone, as exponents simply of some opinions, who will be evaluated as to their rationality only later on.

Although the argument seems complex and subtle, being difficult to follow, the reconstruction of Volker Gerhardt is legitimated by this very complexity of the rhetorical play from within Kant's text, a complexity that in turn is imposed by the specific historical circumstances of the birth of this writing. Kant does not mean to anger the censor, on the other hand he cannot remain silent in a period when he is himself consistently censored. The ironical way to construe his argument is in fact a rational endeavor to start a dialogue with the representatives of power, who are apparently irrational.

The play around the idea of a secret

We have thus learned of the way in which the ironical play allows Kantian writing to achieve what could not have been achieved through a simple theorizing of public space: it achieves to free public space from censorship, and this in a real manner, insofar as it can propose a philosophical text that has a sharp critical edge as a valid position within the frame of a dialogue thus proposed.

This performance however turns on the tiny fact that we might be inclined to ignore: the text managed to be published! In this sense, we must understand that the game was from the outset a power game, and not a writing game: as Kühn shows, Kant was much too famous to be possible to censor him voluntarily and without explanation, hence he was writing from the outset from a power position.

This direction of understanding the performative nature of the text may be considered as being plausible and well arguable as based on the historical information we possess. It remains, however, to ask: does the idea of the secret not allow at least, even counter-intuitively, an understanding, however minimalist, of a hermetic nature, that is, a cryptic reference to something that is, indeed, a secret? Such an interpretation can be found in the highly informative article of John Namjun Kim,¹⁵ who argues that we may understand the criterion of publicity in the Towards perpetual peace (any political action is correct if and only if its carrying out necessitates a public character), *mutatis mutandis*, as a prudential incentive (hence one that is less than moral) to act in secret where it is impossible to act in public.

The American author goes so far as to formulate the hypothesis of a „private public“ around Kant, being allowed to do this by the fact that a great number of his learned interlocutors were parts of secret societies, however enlightened ones, the mode of existence of which seems to correspond to this very hypothesis. In this reconstruction, Kant's allusion – published only in the second edition, after the republican-motivated liberating revolts in Polish territories freshly annexed to Prussia – to the idea of the secret would be translated as an incentive to encourage the conspirators, but also as a threat against those in power.

We can approve this interpretation only in the sense that it brings the element of force within the performative-textual game. We must, on the other hand, refute it, insofar as it is based, in the first place, on a tautological understanding of the criterion of publicity, which would sound this way: if your action necessitates to be kept secret, it means that it must be kept secret. Moreover, the presence of the strong Kantian thesis, according to which this action would become intrinsically wrong, cannot be overlooked, without reducing the author to inconsistency.

Of course, the naturalist theory of history in Kant clearly stipulates the meta-subjective qualification of revolution. In the moment when it begins right and morality lose any validity – the law of the jungle prevails. This fact does not mean, however, the approval of the force of nature under the cover of a revolutionary ideology – confer communism – but is tantamount to a criticism brought to a political class that ignores the possibility of an accumulation of natural forces that could lead to the cessation of any legal order.

Again, as we learn from Kühn, this political class was itself organized in a conspirative manner! Wöllner, being of personal constitution a religious

fanatic, was himself a Mason, and turned to rosicrucianism, took over by infiltration a major lodge of the Masons in Prussia, threatening others with takeover, even drawing the easy-to-manipulate king to enter the lodge, using both the secret organization and the state power in a voluntary manner. The „Rosicrucian clique of Frederic Wilhelm”, as named by Kühn, under the fear of a revolution started by the Enlighteners, has prosecuted any form of free thought under the pretext of religious orthodoxy (i.e., correctness), a doctrine that was actually tantamount to rosicrucianism imposed as a half-official state ideology. The intellectuals, persecuted, have been, in turn, drawn to enter secret circles in order to be able to express themselves in a dignified and rational manner.

Conclusion

If the philosopher from Königsberg had written the apology of the latter societies, he would have approved, if not in contents, at least in form, the conspirative fashion of the highest level due to which he was suffering himself! Can we believe a self-falsification of the author in those told about publicity as a criterion of political correctness, and in the same time a self-defiance as a censored author, thirsty to be able to write publicly in an authentic manner?

If we interpret the criticism of the secret as being directed simultaneously towards the conspirative power and the resistance against it, we understand through it, on the one hand, a criticism of the private interests served by public means (state power taken over by private circles – politically incorrect, hence, secret), on the other, the criticism of secret resistance, a resistance understood as a self-censorship of those who wish to express themselves, but do not dare to do so publicly.

And if we transpose this criticism unto the background prepared by Gerhardt, with the note that the writing passed censorship – an event of great surprise for the contemporaries! – we may declare that the author has won an actual battle, he has opened, through performatively presented philosophy, a space of public expression, and has even won, through mobilizing to dialogue, a battle against those who have resorted to obscure methods when trying to participate in the enlightenment effort.

NOTES

- ¹ Cf. Foucault, Michel: Introduction à l'*Anthropologie*, in E. Kant, *Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*, Paris, Vrin, 2009. The publishing of Foucault's translation and introduction has been a novelty of the late years of research, lacking a canonical literature as yet. Thus, it remains an important goal of further study, especially in the context of a renewed interest in the meaning of the Anthropology lectures.
- ² Simon, Josef: *Kant. Die fremde Vernunft und die Sprache der Philosophie* Walter de Gruyter, Berlin - New York 2003. Although criticized for an idiosyncratic interpretation, Simon's work remains one of the examples of a great interpretive tradition – via the *oeuvre* of Kaulbach. Its primary merit is bringing together the social-philosophical and language-philosophical aspects of Kantianism – in a novel understanding.
- ³ Kaulbach, Friedrich: *Studien zur späten Rechtsphilosophie Kants und ihrer transzendenten Methode*, Königshausen und Neumann, Würzburg, 1982. The work of a classic author, this book offers clear insights into the continuity between Kant's theoretical and legal-political philosophy, in a highly systematic manner.
- ⁴ Gerhardt, Volker: *Immanuel Kant. Vernunft und Leben*. Reclam, Stuttgart 2002. The culmination of Gerhardt's revolutionary interpretive activity, his essay-styled book is a constant source of fruitful reconceival of Kant in the age of globalization and ecology. Not well seen by the scholarship, his argument is still a demonstration of high talent and insight.
- ⁵ Himfy József: *Kanttal, Kant ellenében. A világköztársaság mint a világbéke garanciája* (With Kant, against Kant: the World Republic as a Guaranteed of World Peace) Kellék, Kolozsvár / Cluj, nr. 24. 2004). The Kant issue of the Hungarian-language philosophical journal is a collection of weighty articles stemming from Hungarian Kantianism, having both German and Anglo-Saxon influences, adding a sense of critical canonicity lacking from many philosophical cultures.
- ⁶ cf David Held in Brock, Gillian and Brighouse, Harry (eds.), *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism*, Cambridge University Press, 2005. A seminal volume, the Cosmopolitanism collection serves as a point of departure for those who wish to understand contemporary cosmopolitanism – with the name of Kant always lurking in the background.
- ⁷ Höffe, Otfried: *Kant's Cosmopolitan Theory of Law and Peace*, trans. Alexandra Newton, Cambridge, 2006. Höffe's work has been most influential and appreciated in contemporary cosmopolitanism insofar it – unlike most others – brings a systematic grounding of his own cosmopolitan political theory in the Kantian, the early modern and the Aristotelian traditions.

- ⁸ Rapport, Nigel: *Anthropology as Cosmopolitan Study* in *Anthropology Today*, 2006. Rapport is just one of the many voices from outside philosophy calling for a cosmopolitan regrounding of the human sciences.
- ⁹ cf Foucault, Michel: Introduction à l'*Anthropologie*, in E. Kant, *Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique*, Paris, Vrin, 2009. See above (note 1).
- ¹⁰ Wilson, Holly L: *Kant's Pragmatic Anthropology, its Origin, Meaning and Critical Significance*. SUNY, Albany, 2006
- ¹¹ Cf Brandt, Reinhardt: *The Guiding Idea of Kant's Anthropology and the Vocation of the Human Being* in Jacobs, Brian and Kain, Patrick (eds.): *Essays on Kant's Anthropology*, Cambridge UP, 2003. The collection of essays is a starting point in the research of Kant's Anthropology, encompassing viewpoints from very different-minded scholars. However, it is the first necessary step towards canonizing an agreement.
- ¹² Meld Shell, Susan: *Kant's "True Economy of Human Nature": Rousseau, Count Verri, and the Problem of Happiness* in: in Jacobs, Brian and Kain, Patrick (eds.): *Essays on Kant's Anthropology*, Cambridge UP, 2003. A highly informed article, Meld Shell's study draws on dynamic changes in Kant's thought, opening the possibility for a grounded interpretation of the controversial issue of the Anthropology.
- ¹³ Kühn, Manfred: *Kant. A Biography*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001. Having himself an interest in Kant's Anthropology, Kühn is first of all a source of an imaginative revival of Kant's intellectual life, on the background of the historical events of his era and his personal history.
- ¹⁴ Kühn, Manfred: *Kant, o biografie*. Polirom, Iași, 2009. A late translation, it is still highly welcome.
- ¹⁵ Kim, John Namjun: *Kant's secret article: irony, performativity, and history in Zum ewigen Frieden*. The Germanic Review, June 22, 2007. I would like to thank the author for privately sending me his excellent article.

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