

IMMANUEL KANT
or
on “THE INTERNATIONAL PEACE PROJECT”

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Abstract: *The aim of our analysis is to bring into life a text from Kant's philosophical thinking, considered by most political thinkers and international law experts as an utopist, a philosopher of the transcendental idealism. What we focused on was the importance of a proper understanding of the Kantian message, in the today's global world, when a global ethics is desirable, based on universal norms admitted in a "society of states". Kant's plan of organizing the world foresaw a State Union, as the only way to prevent war and eliminate violence. Kant is, in our opinion, not only a thinker of the modern epoch; his ideas are still vivid nowadays.*

Keywords: *permanent peace, the public right, morals, politics, the civil constitution of states, equality, the free states federation.*

Kant's philosophy leads us to the introspection of “what actually may be interrogated, of what should be interrogated, of what became unsustainable, and which should be proved if that needs to be undoubtedly secured”.¹ Thus, Kant's philosophy “urges to criticism”, it is “the way to that perspective, in a philosophy generated by the human nature”.²

One could not get a proper idea on Kant without considering his historical and political works. In fact, his political theses were completed in a rather long period of time, mainly during his mature stage of creativity. “What is enlightenment?” and “Views towards a universal history with cosmopolite reasons” were published in 1784 after the “Criticism of the pure reason” (1781). The works with a stronger political significance followed the “Criticism of the reasoning capacity” (1790). The most important ones are: “Theory and practice” (1792), “The eternal peace (1795), “Metaphysics of morals” (1797), “The conflict of reasoning” (1798). Kant did never write a political thesis. Most of his works are short and are addressed to the large audience. They represent the German echo to the American and French revolutions, reflecting a hope towards Frederic the Great reformist and tolerant Prussian spirit.

Kant reached his political thinking much later. Only when being obliged by those who contradicted him to explain the changes generated by the French revolution did the Prussian philosopher engage into the consideration of power rights and peace fundamentals. Disappointed by the violence of Terror in 1793, he ceased being in the favour of the French republican ideal and decided to defend the rights and morals exigencies in politics, more as a protector of the critical rationalism of the 18-th century.

A famous expert in Kant's works used to meaningfully say, talking about Kant's “historical position”: “he concentrates, in a vivid entity, everything that had been seized before as active principles in the modern thinking”; “the great power of mastering the philosophical trend, first in his time, stays mainly in the incomparable dimension of his spiritual horizon, and in the certitude with which he could place, in a proper relation,

¹ Ebbinghaus, J., *Kant und das Jahrhundert*, in “Studium Generale”, H.7, 1947, p.524.

² Idem, p.525.

both the nearest and the farthest things, starting from his point of view. There is almost no issue in the modern philosophy which he did not approach, none whose solution did not get his spirit's touch, even if met occasionally. But this universality is just the exterior coat, not the core of his greatness consisting rather in his energy - to be fully admired - with which he succeeded to interconnect the multitude of the ideas, to interpret it and to integrate it in a system".³ The analysis of the historical and political texts indicates that Kant's great question was how to find out why a republican state may become possible, when the Man is an animal who needed a master, and although he had found him in Jesus Christ, he killed him. Another question was: what should authority consist of for a republic to become possible, in its legal forms as a monarchy, aristocracy or republic? *The Project to Eternal Peace* (Kant's first text translated into French) offered an ironical solution that Kant never considered possible, when the greed to honours and wealth (a monogram to passions), governed by self-pride, could not protect the great movements through which the people may reach the consensus, urged by their patriotic spirit. In the topics of the history philosophy, there are two major points of view: abderitism, which reduces history only at the display of human madness, and the critical philosophy sustained by the hope, the postulates, that mankind will grow from seclusion towards prospects, from curve towards straight, from finite towards infinite (the three historical correlations). Though, critical philosophy would throw the fulfilment of these three correlations into an indefinite future, yet not infinitely far.

Kant's political ideas are an extension of his moral philosophy. The novelty in Kant's political philosophy resides in the way he considered politics and ethics inseparable, the first mastered by the latter. The only worthy politics is that starting from morals, generated by its principles. The definite imperative secures the extension of Kant's moral theory towards the social and the political area. Also, the safety of autonomy needs a space for liberty, according to the moral law which, in Kant's works, meets several expressions; let's consider the one with regard to politics; "act as if through your maxims you will legislate inside a universal empire of finalities". This means relations with other people and a system of political principles to organize them. Thus, Kant's political theory derives from a moral theory, and politics is subordinated to the internal legislation developed in the moral theory.

The political action and rationalism of the State Constitution should be tested according to the formal and universal criteria of the moral law. Legality is thus the common point of politics and morality. The difference between the political and moral policies (although they have a common origin), as it emerges from the "Foundation of the metaphysics of morals"⁴ is that the political law settles only the exterior aspects of the people's actions, no matter the interior motivation of law, that is its respect as a moral law. The political and ethical duties deriving from the legal regulations are not superposed. A legal person may work on a duty required by a political law (an obligation without a moral motivation). Thus, our obligations in the civil society of the state may be accomplished "by even a devil's nation as far as it possesses understanding".

In his last works (*Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, 1797; *The Conflict of reasons*, 1798), Kant accomplished his reflection on society, stressing the necessity of subduing politics to the moral exigencies. Thus, Kant distinguished between the "moral" actions, characterized by goodwill and the search for good, and the "legal" actions which respect the civil laws settled to organize society. He definitely stated that an absolutely moral society could not be built on the earth, this being just an ideal. A society of straightforward people would be a perfect society, but the social life could not be founded

³ W. Windelband, (1911), *Die Geschichte der neuen Philosophie*, II, 5. Aufl., Leibniz, p. 1-2.

⁴ Imm. Kant, (2006), "*Foundation of the metaphysics of morals*", Humanitas, București.

on its individuals' virtues. He who would not admit the moral law with himself, would have to respect it at least, as an external constraint. Thus, morals might serve as a legislation guide. The legal justice must get some directions from here, mainly when promoting peace with a view to the "republican" state. With Kant, the junction between rights and morals is met in the reverse way, too, as, in his opinion, the legal justice generates favourable goodwill conditions. In fact, it is just this fundamental link between the moral ideal and the legal life which leads to the avoidance of wars and to the protection of human freedom.

To defend the fundamental place of morals, Kant insisted on the goals of the political reigning. He stated that Man should be considered as the aim of his political actions, not a tool of the state, and he found two totally different contexts: war and peace. In war, people are used as tools, for goals they are not aware of, like the search for the state power and for external hegemony. What leads then in politics is the legal order, not the morals. In peace, people should be able to condition the state choices, and thus politics is led by the moral aims. Kant founded the philosophical famous project of eternal peace under the sign of subordinating audience to morals and justice.

By stating the morals superiority and by stressing the Machiavellic character of the present politics, Kant tried to subordinate politics to morals and justice: the "real politics, he wrote, could not advance, without an initial homage to morals, and even if politics is a hard art in itself, yet its junction to morals is no art, as morals unloosens the knot that politics could not do when in a conflict. The right of people is sacred, no matter how great the sacrifice of the leading power. All politics should kneel in front of rights". (Kant, 1968:243, 244).

With Kant, the goal of the State should be only the protection of rights; the state should provide its citizens the opportunity to enjoy their rights, and should not get involved in people's individual activities, nor be concerned about individual facts. It accomplished its responsibility when it provided freedom for everybody; this is the State of right. In many political works, he stated his clear option for the order in the form of rights: a powerful state is better, as it provides its leader the power to guarantee the rights, than a weak state that leads to chaos." There is no people's legitimate resistance against the supreme legislator, because there is no other legal way than by subduing to everybody's legislative will. So, we cannot admit at all the right to uprising, or even less, to rebellion (...). The legislation should contain a regulation to cease its sovereignty, for the people to have rights to resistance (...)."⁵

Kant considered Montesquieu's ideas and admitted the three powers of the state (the legislative, executive, and legal), but he considered that the triad should be seen as a fiction: it reminded that any excessive power concentration becomes a cradle of despotism. It should not deny though the right unity. The three powers are not separated, they are complementary, and they more clearly form a hierarchical system: the executive and the legal power start from the legislative, which represent the "supreme" power. Apart from this, Kant refused to give a verdict with regard to the institutional organization of the state. Each of the three forms of power (monarchy, aristocracy or democracy), could be good or bad, depending on the leader's attitude. So, the main factor is not the organization of power, it is the respect of rights.

In this way, Kant identified two possibilities. The unjust power is the "despotic" reign, which denies the right and leads to the separation between the state interest and the individual freedom. The power to meet justice is the "republican" reign, that is a reign in which the idea of the right prevails, and the state interest corresponds with the individual freedom. In this Kantian republic, the subject is the "citizenship", which is

⁵ Kant, Imm., *Metaphysics of morals*, op. cit., Part I: *The right doctrine*, p.46

neither servitude nor absolute freedom. It is seen as the individual's agreement with the power, in a deliberate way. With this one can find Kant's inspiration from Rousseau, which involves the citizens' impact in the political life and their necessary obedience towards the laws settled in the name of the whole community.

In 1795 when the war between the Christian monarchies and the revolutionary France started, Kant expanded his meditation to the rights regarding the relations among the states. *The Project Towards an Everlasting Peace* envisaged a humanity reconciled with itself, due to the settling of a legal order extended to international level. The aim of the Project is more than an ambitious one: the war which is a permanent menace for the people must be replaced by a rule of freedom, a rule in which all human beings should live in peace. To envisage peace is not a political illusion, Kant reminded his potential detractors; it is an ideal towards which mankind should strive for. "On the everlasting peace", a work published by Kant in 1795, presented the philosophical principles of the international law. Kant stressed that the vocation of mankind is to form a unique state; the moment when the peoples of the world would unify in this way is still much far away in time, but one cannot deny the tendency which goes to this direction, and the goal will be reached some day. In this case, it is about the regulative principle, that is a rational criterium, serving as a landmark of reality. Kant stated that the formation of the international right is in a certain way similar to the internal right of the State. The present State is the effect of a synthesis of elements, once discordant: the individuals fought for a long time until it became possible to set up a unitary power over the isolated elements in opposition. According to the terminology of his time, Kant said that as the natural state was excelled by the individuals, because the imperative need to associate in a civil life together, similarly there comes a time when the states excel that condition because they are subject to the same imperative in force; this will be the end of any war, as the State Constitution meant the end of the individual fights. The States may, at last, leave their natural form, a quasi pre-legal one, in which they are now, and constitute a cosmopolitan state, to follow a definite imperative: "Wars should not exist any more". Kant did not only indicate that far away dream of legal unification of mankind, he also wanted to show the means which might hurry its accomplishment. Thus, he stated the articles of a sort of international treaty, which should the perpetual peace to mankind. Apart from the "preliminary articles" of this treaty, he also worked on a series of principles addressed to avoid the international conflicts, and to provide them a certain legal character. Actually, Kant left a real structure of "international politics", demonstrating that peace prevents a future war: a state, no matter which, could not be conquered through exchange, heredity, selling, or offering. Ready to fight armies should cease their existence in time, because they represent a danger for other states. No state, no matter which, is allowed to mingle in the regulations and reigning of other states. If they start a war, the states should not commit deeds to prevent the hope in a future peace.

Kant considered these conditions available only in the case of the republican constitution of a state. "Peoples' rights" ought to be founded on the free states federalism. In his opinion, "the federative situation of the states is the only legal condition compatible to their liberty. The agreement between politics and morals is not possible unless there is federative union (ibidem:249). The federal model is the best solution, as it supports the independence of each state and maintains the natural divisions among people. Also, it encourages the private trade, which is a natural obstacle against wars. All these reasons convinced Kant to refuse the idea of a "universal republic" (or a unified state at global scale). To this goal, the international legislation should prove realism and modesty. The cosmopolitan right should not ignore the war realism. It should not constrain the civil internal constitutions of the states. More modestly, it should only settle the conditions to a universal coexistence of peoples. Under these

conditions, the international peace would strengthen the internal good understanding of the republics, and the promotion of the freedom.

Kant also stated the opinion about the tendency towards malice and hatred of the human nature. The universal rights should be limited through a general hospitality. Starting from the premises that nature was concerned that people from everywhere may live, Kant considered that its wish was that they had lived.

Kant ended that very realistic paper⁶ by reminding that only a republican constitution is the unique and the proper one, according to the Man's rights, though it is hard to be accomplished.

But this ideal may be possible, because it depends on "only a proper organization of the state", not on morality. Policy and morality, deeply analyzed, may coexist in a mutual relation. The idea of the peoples' rights means the existence of states, independent from one to another.

Kant made an absolute distinction between republicanism and despotism. He raised against the "colonial policy" of the states that used to sell negro slaves to America, and robbed and exploited the South American peoples. He noticed that the "colonization" was only used by the colonist powers. Kant called that "immorality", stating that the things mentioned by him led to the conclusion of the contradiction between politics and morality.

Kant thought it was possible to defeat the selfishness of those states. The "idea of the peoples' rights implies the separation of many neighbour states, their right to the independence of some of them towards the others. This will lead to the universal morality".

Kant stressed the idea that the moral law does not to exceed the Man's possibilities. The strictness, sometimes critical of the ethical and legal Kantian conception did not ever deny happiness. Kant's conviction was that virtue, and the effort to fulfil duty could be well harmonized with Man's common dream to happiness. Secondly, the exigent responsibilities Kant suggested to the free man were, at the same time, a Renaissance value of Man, as a human being.

E. Boutroux, the French philosopher, stressed that⁷, with Kant morality is not a privilege reserved only to some selected persons. The Kantian democracy expands to morality, too, and what might be called rigor is actually the aversion towards the moral of the selfish pleasure dominating the aristocratic society. The key to the Kantian conception is his statement in the "Criticism of the practical reason": The Man, and together with him any other rational being, is not the means, he is the goal in himself⁸.

In the context of this analysis of the Kantian criticism, the programmatic work on "Towards the eternal peace" got a double significance: a) an application of the rational principles to history and politics, and b) a permanent source of inspiration for new projects of collaboration among states to ensure peace and free affirmation of each people. Kant wrote: "As far as the reason of the supreme morally legal power, is definitely against war as a means and considers peace a direct duty, this could not be founded or provided without an agreement of all people; that is why there should be union of a certain kind, which might be called the peace union and it might differ from the peace agreement by the fact that the latter only ceases a war, while the mentioned union might cease all the wars for ever".⁹

Kant's project was placed in the context of several searches of the kind. In the 17-th and the 18-th centuries they used to strongly believe in the power of reason and in its

⁶ Imm. Kant, (1943), *To the eternal peace*, Bucharest, Casa Școalelor, pp.115-174.

⁷ E. Boutroux, (1926), *La philosophie de Kant*, Paris, Vrin.

⁸ Imm. Kant, (1999), *The Criticism of the practical reason*, ed. Iri, Bucharest.

⁹ Imm.Kant, "*To the eternal peace*", op. cit., p.211.

benefic effects, and first of all in the progress of culture and civilization. Here are some of the most well known projects: B.de Saint-Pierre, *Le projet de paix perpetuelle* (1713), W.Penn, *The peace of Europe*.

One should add here one of J.J. Rousseau project. Different from these, Kant considered the project a regulative idea, achievable through a “progressive approach for ever”. Yet, as I.Petrovici wrote, “Kant’s project remained in actuality not only as a regulative idea, but also as a concrete endeavor to represent something similar in reality. The Nations’ Organization in Geneva would be a ‘grosso modo’ model to Kant’s ideas: a free states federation, agreeing on their conflicts without a war resolution”.¹⁰

Thus, the ideas of this project of eternal peace” will always be linked to the present moment, made to provide an order of the world in which the wars and their consequences should be avoided. Such a “peace order’ could be achieved through three fundamental conditions: 1) Each state Constitution should be a republican one, and the citizens should agree on war and peace; 2) a free states’ “union of peace” should be founded; 3) the directions to the international law to settle the relations among states should be worded. The cosmopolitan right should be limited to the conditions of the universal solidarity. Two more documents and an appendix accomplish this text which offers the a priori way of the public rights. “All actions regarding others’ rights which should not become public, are unjust”¹¹ The permanent peace is the future reign of the public right, in which morals and politics will reconcile”.

No doubts, Immanuel Kant’s work marks the most important stage in the history of the peace doctrine. “Zum Ewige Frieden” represents the practical conclusions of his sociological concepts on war and peace. It stands for the creation of a State Congress, sharing the idea that peace will be definitely settled along with the peoples’ won liberty and the war would be ceased for ever. Kant’s plan to organize the world foresaw a State Union, that being the only way for him to prevent war and terminate violence. Kant thought that wars could be replaced by arbitrage. In fact, all his principles settled in “The eternal peace” are recognized almost internationally. This indicates that such doctrines are not only dialectical exercises, they are actually historical factors what accompany and settles the real progress.

Kant believed in the progress of mankind, in an epoch in which others considered that, on the contrary, it was only the individual that could progress, not the human race. To this opinion, Kant opposed a characteristic reason. If we, he said, have the duty to work together for the greatest well-being of mankind, then we have to get the faith that our efforts were not in vain. Thus, as a corollary of our duty, we have to accept the belief in the perfectibility of the human race. And, of course, it would be a non sense to be linked to a duty, if we would not believe in the efficiency of its accomplishment, be it even possible in a long period of time.

The Kantian arguments in this direction are either of Aristotle’s or Plato’s philosophy. From Aristotle, Kant borrowed the idea that nature worked only on syllogism bases, updating the human essence. Plato, through Diotima, presents the perpetuation of the human race as the supreme good. The Kantian synthesis foresees the upgrading of the human race through a historical process whose unit of measure is the whole human race, not the individual. The source of this upgrading process is the human moral essence, and our duty is to keep it upgraded, thus becoming rational. The engine of this process is what Kant called “asocial sociability” of the individuals, a phrase to define the balanced and a full of conflicts nature of the human race. From the political point of view, the tension which is characteristic for men is exemplified by the republican constitution of the civil society, which guaranteed the social harmony by restraining the

¹⁰ I. Petrovici, (1994), *Twelve Universal Lectures on Imm. Kant*, Ed. Agora, Iași, p. 210.

¹¹ Imm. Kant, *Towards the Eternal Peace*”, op.cit., p. 115-174.

tendency to usurpation of others' liberty. Antagonism becomes nature's favorite tool, through which this one emphasized the best human qualities and approximated the supreme good. From the political point of view, the supreme good is found in the republican constitutionalism and in the eternal peace.

Such ideas deeply influenced posterity, less the immediate one. The representatives of the Romanticism and Hegel were the first to reject the Kantian political and moral philosophy, although that their own philosophical and political interrogation took place in the framework of theory and terminology created by Kant. Herder, Kant's contemporary, attacked him repeatedly in the name of historicism, while Kant replied him by showing the ridiculous lack of the universal and necessary principles of Herder's work, as well as the logical defects of the author's argumentation. Schiller and Humboldt reproached his lack of attention towards psychology and the human character, while Fichte, Schelling and Novalis emphasized the rational character of the Kantian program, insisting on the feeling of life, structure, individual experiences, positive moral ontology, etc. Probably, the most significant critics of the moral philosophy, and the Kantian policy is owed to Hegel and to his remarks with a view to the lack of substance of the moral law and the insufficient Kantian negative liberty. (see Hegel, *Lectures on the philosophy of law*)¹².

After a long period of deflation, the interest for Kant raised since the totalitarian collapse of the 20-th century. K. Popper's concept of civil society, the negative liberty discussed by Issaia Berlin or the liberty of the economic market towards the political interference sustained by Fr. Hayek are typical examples of the Kantian political vocabulary. The contemporary Anglo-American liberalism, as seen in Jh. Rawls, R. Nozick, was substantially inspired by the Kantian philosophy. Kant played a considerable part in both the post Kantian trend philosophers and even later, at the end of the 19-th century, and the first decades of the 20-th, with the neo –Kantian trend.

Despite the evident differences, all the philosophical and political programs mentioned above have in common ideals of liberty, rationalism, and civility as reflected in the Kantian philosophy. The Kantian philosophic project on "The eternal peace"¹³ despite its unrealism and utopia on the surface proves to have a double action, mainly after the foundation of the "Nations' Society", which is still in force in the human relations structure of the contemporary world.

¹² Hegel, G.W.F., (1969) *Lectures on the philosophy of law*, Ed. Academiei, p. 18.

¹³ Kant, Imm., *Political Moral Works*, Ed. Științifică, Bucharest, p.388-429.