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## **THE ISSUE OF MORAL PROGRESS IN KANT'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

### **Zagadnienie postępu moralnego w filozofii politycznej Kanta**

**Słowa kluczowe:** wolność słowa, Kant, postęp moralny, filozofia polityczna, prawa

**Key words:** freedom of speech, Kant, moral progress, political philosophy, rights

#### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł analizuje zagadnienie postępu moralnego oraz jak on może być osiągnięty w świetle filozofii politycznej Kanta. Główne osie argumentacji obejmują wolność słowa, uznanie i ochronę praw oraz przemiany historyczne i społeczne, które miały miejsce w systemach politycznych. Równie istotne jest pytanie, czy można w sposób uzasadniony sformułować naukową teorię, która pozwoliłaby zidentyfikować i przedstawić oznaki postępu moralnego. Ponadto zostanie przedstawiony argument, że pojęcia ideału regulatywnego oraz teleologii nie są jedynie chimerycznymi koncepcjami, lecz muszą być utrzymywane w mocy jako istotne standardy, wyznaczające aspiracyjne wzory w nieustanym dążeniu ludzkości do postępu moralnego.

#### **Abstract**

This article investigates the issue of moral progress and how it might be achieved through Kant's political philosophy. Core axes of argumentation include freedom of speech, the recognition and safeguarding of rights, the historical and social transformations that have taken place within political systems. Equally central is the question of whether a scientific theory can be legitimately formulated to identify and articulate signs of moral progress. Moreover, it will be argued that the concepts of the regulative ideal and teleology are not mere chimera but must be upheld as meaningful standards and aspirational models in humanity's perpetual pursuit of moral progress.

## **Introduction**

In this paper, I aim to investigate in a historical and systematic manner the issue of moral progress and how it might be achieved

through Kant's political philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Chapter One explores the very concept of moral progress, seeking to determine whether, and where, such progress can be discerned. So, if progress in the sciences is widely acknowledged, can we, by analogy, construct a scientific theory capable of demonstrating that humanity is also advancing morally? Chapter Two builds upon the acceptance or rejection of this possibility, examining the role of teleology and the regulative ideal in addressing this question. The third chapter will turn to the Kantian conception of the political order, investigating how political structures and institutions might contribute to the moral cultivation of humans. The fourth chapter will focus on socio-political transformations within political regimes, both through Kant's own historical lens and through the interpretations of his philosophical commentators. This section will also engage with contemporary issues related to governance – particularly within the Greek context – and international relations. Finally, the last chapter addresses the central role that freedom of speech plays in Kantian philosophy, especially within the realm of political life.

Before addressing these issues, I will refer to a confession that Kant wrote in 1765, which he did not intend for publication. In it, he admits: "My natural inclination is to be a scientist. I know what it means to thirst for knowledge, as well as how great the satisfaction is that every achievement provides. There was a time when I believed this alone could constitute the honor of humanity and I despised the rabble who knew nothing. Rousseau has set me right. This blinding prejudice vanishes, I learn to honor human beings, and I would feel by far less useful than the common laborer if I did not believe that this consideration could impact a value to all others to establish the rights of humanity" (Kant 2011: 20:44, p. ix).

In the announcement for the organization of his lectures during the winter semester of the 1765/1766 academic year, Kant states that in

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<sup>1</sup> The question of progress is one of the most significant challenges faced by scholars of Kantian philosophy, as it relates to various domains such as law, politics, anthropology, psychology, education, and the philosophy of history; mainly Yovel (1980), Anderson-Gold (2001), and Kleingeld (2012). I will focus primarily on the fields of political philosophy and the philosophy of law. This is the central question explored in my PhD thesis (University of Crete), entitled: *The Issue and Question of Moral Progress in Kant's Philosophy*. In the context of the international conference "Immanuel Kant in Research and Educational Space", I focus primarily on the fields of political philosophy and the philosophy of law.

his approach to ethics, he always begins with a historical and philosophical examination of what occurs before demonstrating what ought to occur (Kant 1992a: 2:311, p. 298).<sup>2</sup> In his Review of Herder's Ideas, Kant asserts that the greatest possible degree is the product of a state constitution ordered in accordance with concepts of human right (Kant 2007e: 8:64, p. 141). I mention these thoughts to clarify that the issue of moral progress and the foundation of politics and law (considering human rights) preoccupied Kant from the pre-critical period and continued to do so until the end of his life.

## 1. What is progress according to Kant?

What does Kant consider to be progress? Can progress be found in science? It can, because there is an increase in scientific knowledge. Regarding the progress of the empirical sciences – such as Astronomy and Chemistry – Kant argues that their historians have already been found (Kant 2002b: 20:259, p. 334). Philosophy owes its improvement partly to the greater study of nature, partly to the combination of mathematics with natural science. According to Kant, natural philosophy is in the most flourishing condition; on the contrary, in moral philosophy we have not come further than the ancients (Kant 1992c: 9:31–32, pp. 543–544). A key feature of this Kantian perspective is the parallel it draws with the positivist view of Kelsen, who argues that the most important question facing humanity – “what is justice?” – has led to bloodshed and tears and has been pondered by philosophers such as Plato and Kant. Yet, despite these efforts, it remains unanswered to this day (Kelsen 2015: 7–9). Moreover, Kant wonders: if metaphysics is a science, why is it that it cannot, like other sciences, attain universal and lasting acclaim? He points out that it seems almost laughable that, while every other science makes continuous progress, metaphysics, which desires to be wisdom itself, and which everyone consults as

<sup>2</sup> Parenthetical references within the text refer to the edition of Kant's Collected Works published by the German Akademie-Ausgabe. The first number indicates the volume of the Academy edition, while the number following the colon refers to the page. As an exception, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, references are made to the first edition of 1781 (A) and the second edition of 1787 (B). Furthermore, the page number of the English translation is provided (I follow the translations in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) along with its year of publication; to find full titles, the reader should refer directly to the year of publication in the references.

an oracle, perpetually turns round on the same spot without coming a step further (Kant 2002a: 4:255–256, p. 53).

However, can there be a corresponding history for moral progress? In contemporary literature, the concept of moral progress remains disputable. Progress demands a change for the better. The fundamental question, then, is: how can a change be deemed progressive (Severini 2021: 88)?

The question at hand is twofold: first, what does Kant consider moral progress to be? Second, is humanity progressing? What are the signs that prove it is taking place? Kant points out that no theory allows us to demonstrate that the world is evolving for the better. There is no objective reality from a theoretical standpoint; this is based on the fact that we do not have access to our motives, as “the depths of the human heart are unfathomable” (Kant 1996j: 6:447, p. 567). Furthermore, even moral progress remains perpetually incomplete because, in the concepts of the relationship between cause and effect, we are limited to temporal terms (Kant 1996b: 6:67, p. 109). Furthermore, notes that has no insight as to *how* such a perfect human being could be possible; for he cannot cognize whether in the synthesis (the composition) of all human realities the effects of one perfection would contradict the effects of another. In order to have this insight I would have to be acquainted with all the possible effects of all human realities and their respective relationships (Kant 1996d: 28:1025, p. 368).

Nonetheless, as he states, all progress in culture, from which humans learn, aims to apply acquired knowledge and skills to practical action in the world; but the most important object in the world to which these insights can be applied is the human being, because the human being is the ultimate purpose of himself (Kant 2007h: 7:119, p. 231). It is noteworthy that Saner and O’Neill explore political themes in his central epistemological work, *Critique of Pure Reason* (see Saner 1973; O’Neill 1990). In the Architectonic of pure reason, Kant distinguishes between the scholastic concept and the cosmopolitan concept of philosophy. In the first case, philosophy is the scientifically organized system of knowledge, while in the second, it pertains to the essential purposes of human reason, wherein the philosopher is not merely an artist of reason but the legislator of human reason (Kant 1998: A 838/B 866-A 840/B 868, p. 694). Based on this passage, the conclusion is that knowledge is always a matter for the few. On the other hand, the good-

ness of the will is the concern of all. As Kant contends, one may ask: Are men in general destined for learning, and should everyone try to become a scholar? No, because life is too short for that; but it is part of the vocation of humanity that some should dedicate themselves to learning and offer up their lives in its service. Nor is life long enough to be able to make use of the knowledge acquired. If God had willed that man should go far in the advancement of learning, He would have given him a longer life. Why must Newton die, at a time when he could have made the best use of his learning, and another have to start again from the ABC (see also, Kant 2007f: 8:117, p. 170), and progress through every class, till he has again reached that point? (Kant 1997: 27:461–462, p. 214).

Given that the answer the question is affirmative – that is, that humans are capable of improvement – what, if any, are the signs of moral progress? Why does Kant speak of moral progress on a collective rather than an individual level? Kant believes that in humans, as the only rational beings on Earth, the natural predispositions intended for the use of reason are meant to develop fully only within the species, not within the individual (Kant 2007d: 8:19, p. 109; 9:445, p. 440; 1996i: 8:307, pp. 304–305).<sup>3</sup> However, reason does not act instinctively; it requires attempts, practice, and instruction to gradually progress from one level of understanding to another. Kant argues that if we approach the issue of moral progress on an individual basis, it becomes an endless account (Kant 2007d: 8:22, p. 112).

## 2. The Regulative Character of Moral Progress

Kant does not approach the progress of the human species as a fact that can be scientifically known, but rather as a regulative ideal, a matter of faith and hope (Kant 2002b: 20:307, p. 394). The regulative character of Kant's historical-philosophical writings is evident in

<sup>3</sup> Kant defends the unity of the human species. Despite the differences observed among races, he attributes these variations to climatic factors, arguing that they arose as adaptations to specific environmental conditions (Kant 2007b, 2:429–430, pp. 84–85). This passage could be interpreted as a response to accusations regarding the presence of racist tendencies in his thought. As the philosopher himself maintains, a revolution in moral disposition (and, one might add, in views and attitudes) is essential.

works such as “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim”, “On the Common Say: That May be Correct in Theory, But It Is of No Use in Practice”, “The End of All Things”, and *Critique of Judgment*.<sup>4</sup> Practical reason posits moral progress as a hypothesis or possibility that can be conceived.

Kant argues that the history of humanity can be seen as the completion of a hidden plan of nature to create a constitution that is both internally and externally flawless. This constitution is necessary for the full realization of all the potentialities innate to human nature. A philosophical endeavor to process universal history according to a plan of nature, aiming at the perfect political union within the species, should be considered both feasible and beneficial for this purpose of nature (Kant 2007d: 8:27–29, pp. 116–118).

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant addresses the philosophy of history and civilization, asserting that “only civilization can be the ultimate purpose that we have reason to ascribe to nature with respect to the human species” (Kant 2000: 5:430–431, p. 298).

In *Perpetual Peace*, Kant attempts to explain how humanity is progressively moving toward a cosmopolitan ideal, and that nature itself guarantees the eventual predominance of justice and peace (Kant 1996i: 8:360–368, pp. 330–337). Given that humanity is advancing towards improvement, he hopes that war will be abolished, and a polity based on principles of law will be established. In this polity, institutions will be created to ensure peace, which requires republican institutions, a federalism of free states, and cosmopolitan law.<sup>5</sup>

Although no teleology can compensate for the absence of theory, where we cannot rely on theoretical principles, we must begin with a teleological principle (Kant 2007g: 8:157, p. 195) to reconstruct and ground our idea through the lens of practical reason. But are not these

<sup>4</sup> According to Hannah Arendt, this work already contains key elements of Kant’s political philosophy (Arendt 1992).

<sup>5</sup> I addressed the topic of Kantian philosophy and international relations at the International Conference “The European Union as the Realization of Kant’s Idea of Perpetual Peace”, held at the University of Zadar. My contribution focused on the fundamental principles of Kantian thought that have influenced – and continue to inspire – the project of the European Union, with particular emphasis on the definitive articles of *Perpetual Peace*. In parallel, and due to the close connection between these issues, I also examined the role of the public use of reason and the regulative character of Kantian philosophy as essential guiding frameworks for both political institutions and civic discourse.

ideas (such as Plato's idea of a republic, for example) all mere figments of the brain? By no means. For I can set up this or that case to accord with my idea. Thus a ruler, for example, can set up his state to accord with the idea of the most perfect republic, in order to bring his state nearer to perfection (Kant 1996d: 28:993, p. 341).<sup>6</sup> Regulative ideals that pertain to the teleology of Kantian philosophy include both the *Kingdom of Ends* (Kant 1996f: 4:437, p. 86) and the *Invisible Church* (Kant 1996b: 6:152, p. 176). Both refer to an intelligible moral community, an ideal to which we ought to aspire and within which we are called to consider ourselves as members. According to Kant, *holiness* (emphasis added) is a) an idea that can be contained only in an endless progress and its totality, and hence is never fully attained by a creature and b) a perfection of which no rational being of the sensible world is capable at any moment<sup>7</sup> of his existence (Kant 1996g: 5:122–124, p. 238–239).<sup>7</sup> In times of moral disorientation and confusion, we are in greater need than ever of utopia and the regulative ideal. In *The Law of Peoples*, John Rawls draws upon Kantian principles of Perpetual Peace (Rawls 1993: 46), reworking the Kantian regulative ideal through his notion of realistic utopia. He underscores the vital role of having a guiding thread – an aspirational yet grounded framework that can orient our political and moral thinking, even amidst deep uncertainty.

<sup>6</sup> A particularly illuminating passage on the idea of the Platonic *Republic* is found in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant sharply criticizes Johann Jakob Brucker (1696–1770) – often regarded as the father of the history of philosophy and author of *Historia Critica Philosophiae*. Brucker dismissed Plato's ideal as absurd. In contrast, Kant defends it, asserting that: constitution providing for the greatest human freedom according to laws that permit the freedom of each to exist together with that of others (not one providing for the greatest happiness, since that would follow of itself) is at least a necessary idea, which one must make the ground not merely of the primary plan of a state's constitution but of all the laws too (Kant 1998, A 316/B 373, p. 397). Like Kant, Plato employs regulative ideals – for the perfect human being, for the idea of justice, and for the notion of a just and virtuous *Republic*: So when we asked what sort of hing justice was by itself, and looked for the perfectly just man, if he existed, and asked what he would be like if he did exist, what we were looking for was a model. [...] Can't we claim to have been constructing a theoretical model of a good city (Plato 2000: 472c5–e1, p. 174)?

<sup>7</sup> Russell acknowledges the ideal of perfection – an ideal that life does not allow us to fully attain – yet insists that we must preserve our reverence for it. The ideals to which we do adhere are not realised in the realm of matter, but we must adhere to them (Russell 1917: 13).

### 3. Moral Progress and Politics

In the second part of “The Conflict of the Faculties”, Kant addresses the question, “Is the human race continually progressing toward the better?” He identifies law as the guiding thread of moral progress: not an ever-growing quantity of morality with regard to intention, but an increase of the products of legality in dutiful actions whatever their motives (Kant 1996c: 7:91, p. 307). Kant does not ignore any of psychological and social factors which contribute to subject formation.<sup>8</sup> Law is not directed towards a society of angels but towards human beings, who are finite creatures subject to inclinations and personal reasons. It is founded on the equality and autonomy of the person, regulating only external behavior. When Kant compares humans to “crooked wood” (Kant 2007d: 8:23, p. 113; 1996b: 6:100, p. 135), this occurs from the perspective of a “pragmatic anthropology”. From this perspective, Kant approaches humans not according to what they have done and continuously do, but according to what they can do as free agents (Henckmann 2004: 779).

How can moral progress be achieved? When examining the reasoning presented by Kant in *Perpetual Peace* regarding the nation of devils, it becomes evident that even self-centered individuals can experience moral progress and refinement. How is this accomplished? When two devils agree to follow the law, acknowledging that they both gain advantages from their collaboration, they develop a strong desire to stick to it (Voutsakis 2022). Hence, we expect that a well-governed society will foster the ethical development of its citizens (Kant 1996i: 8:366, p. 335). Nevertheless, Kant asserts that the greatest problem faced by the human species is the achievement of a civil society that uniformly upholds the principles of justice. This problem is at the same time the most difficult and the latest to be solved by the human species (Kant 2007d: 8:22–24, pp. 112–114).

But is there any tangible evidence that humanity is, in fact, progressing? Kant, while referring indirectly to the French Revolution,

<sup>8</sup> The empirical factors determining rational subjects pertain to the non-rational (or impure) aspect of ethics. In order to clarify the term “non-rational”, it is important to emphasize that the present study does not imply that the subjects in question are irrational or non-rational, but rather that they are not entirely clear or *a priori*, as they include empirical elements. For a more comprehensive analysis of this issue (see Louden 2000). The areas of impure ethics developed in Kant’s work can be found in the first footnote.

offers a compelling suggestion. Although he condemns the atrocities and the reign of terror, he argues that the Revolution has penetrated the souls of its spectators, awakening in them a moral interest so profound that it borders on enthusiasm. This moral response, he believes, reveals a universal capacity for moral progress, as it reflects a shared hope for a just political order, even among distant observers.

This moral cause exerting its influence is twofold: first, that of the right, that a nation must not be hindered in providing itself with a civil constitution, which appears good to the people themselves; and second, that of the end (which is, at the same time, a duty), that the same national constitution alone be just and morally good in itself, created in such a way as to avoid, by its very nature, principles permitting offensive war. It can be no other than a republican constitution, republican at least in essence; it thus establishes the condition whereby war (the source of all evil and corruption of morals) is deterred; and, at least negatively, progress toward the better is assured humanity despite all its infirmity, for it is at least left undisturbed in its advance (Kant 1996c: 7:85–86, pp. 302–303).

Kant considers this issue to be an ancient wish – who knows how long it will take until perhaps it is fulfilled – that in place of the endless manifold of civil laws, their principles may be sought out; for in this alone can consist the secret, as one says, of simplifying legislation (Kant 1998: A 301/B 358, p. 338).

#### 4. Social Changes and Moral Progress

Societies are marked by change: same-sex rights, the abolition of slavery, the inclusion of animals in legal systems, and universal suffrage – do all these developments constitute moral progress (Sauer, Charlie Blunden, Eriksen, Rehren 2021: 1–2)? A wide range of disciplines engage with this question (e.g., philosophy, psychology, biology, anthropology, sociology, and political theory).

What is the Kantian perspective on these themes? Let us begin with the issue of slavery. In a passage from *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*,<sup>9</sup> Kant asks whether serfs are ready for freedom. The

<sup>9</sup> The issue of moral progress from the perspective of *Religion* is wonderfully examined by Buddeberg (Buddeberg 2019).

answer he gives is that to claim they are incapable of freedom is contrary to the will of the Deity,<sup>10</sup> who created human beings to be free (Kant 1996b: 6:188, p. 204).<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, we cannot overlook certain elements in Kant's corpus that contain racial, homophobic, and sexist assumptions. Appiah argues that the Enlightenment served as the seedbed for modern racism and imperialism, citing various examples of Enlightenment thinkers – such as Voltaire, Hume, and Kant himself – whose writings include racist views and are of particular interest to us in this case. More specifically, he refers to Kant's observation regarding the employment of a Black carpenter, stating that “the fact that he was black from head to toe was proof that what he said was stupid” (Kant 2007a: 2:225, p. 61).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that Kant's views appear to have evolved over time. This is supported by the work of Pauline Kleingeld (Kleingeld 2012), who compellingly argued that, during the 1790s, Kant distanced himself from hierarchical conceptions of human differences. During this period, he issued a clear critique of slavery, colonial conquest, and the domination exercised by imperial powers.<sup>13</sup>

Another issue concerns the inclusion of non-rational beings – namely, members of the animal kingdom – within the scope of legislation and the recognition of rights. Regarding this matter, as his ethics is anthropocentric, Kant contends that mankind has direct moral responsibility only to rational agents. On the contrary, non-human animals are not moral agents, ergo they do not have fundamental worth, and they are treated merely as a means. Nonetheless, Kant argues that our duties to animals are indirect duties to humanity; if people are ac-

<sup>10</sup> For the philosophy of religion as part of social philosophy (see Wood 1999: 191).

<sup>11</sup> This specific issue is directly related to freedom of speech, as we will see below. If we refer to Kant's essay on Enlightenment, we observe that state institutions and their respective authorities consolidate their power by ensuring the immaturity of the people (e.g., military, clergy, economists, etc.). How could the people break free from the bonds of guardianship and strive for their intellectual maturity? Kant believes that this could only be achieved through the free use of their reason and publicity.

<sup>12</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the issues of philosophy and racism during the Enlightenment period, particularly of Kantian thought, where it is argued that by teaching slimmed-down versions of these thinkers – the so-called 'real Kant' rather than the historical Kant – we contribute to the illusion that all that matters is the annunciation of fine principles (see Bernasconi 2003: 20).

<sup>13</sup> Kleingeld defends Kant's “line of reasoning” against accusations of racism in numerous works of hers (Kleingeld 2007: primarily Kant's second thoughts 586–592; 2019).

customed to being cruel to animals (animal testing and experiments, meat consumption, as well as the treatment of elderly companion animals), they will also abuse people. In contemporary theory, Christine Korsgaard, building on Kantian ethics, attempts to reconstruct a moral theory that includes non-human animals within its scope (Korsgaard 2011; 2012; 2018).<sup>14</sup>

The right to vote is also a major issue. Kant states that a citizen's independence, beyond being self-governing and owning property, must also satisfy a natural criterion: one must not be a child or a woman (Kant 1996h: 8:295, p. 295).<sup>15</sup> It is reasonable to infer, without needing to cite specific passages (though Kant addresses these matters in the *Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Lectures on Ethics*, that his views on homosexuality were likewise far from progressive.

Nevertheless, contemporary scholarship has seen the emergence of thinkers who draw on Kantian theory to support the right to inclusion. A notable example is Helga Varden (2012; 2017; 2018), who advances Kantian arguments in defense of marginalized groups.

What is the appropriate method for bringing about political change? Kant explicitly rejects revolution as a legitimate means of altering the constitution of the state. He is a proponent of reform – when necessary – through the representatives elected by the people in Parliament (Kant 1996j: 6:321–322, p. 465). I will approach this issue by referencing two prominent figures of modern Greek political life who sig-

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Nagel's analysis (Nagel 2019) is particularly interesting, as he highlights the divergence in the arguments of Korsgaard and Kant regarding the treatment of animals. Notably, utilitarianism is well-suited for including animals into ethical consideration, as its moral framework is based on promoting pleasure and minimizing pain for all sentient beings. The title of Nagel's book review, *What We Owe a Rabbit*, is a play on words, as Kantian duties are directed only at rational beings. However, it is fascinating that even some Kantian scholars are attempting to reconstruct Kantian thought on major issues and possibly bridge the gap with utilitarian theory.

<sup>15</sup> According to the philosopher, a self-sufficient citizen of a state is one who possesses the necessary means of autonomy regarding their livelihood and property rights. However, we must consider the historical context of the era in which Kant lived and wrote, namely the social, political, and cultural framework of 18th-century Prussia. It is noteworthy that women's right to vote was gradually secured in the late 19th century, while most Western countries extended suffrage to women during the interwar period and beyond. Although Kant was one of the pioneers of the Enlightenment movement, certain remnants of his time persist in his views. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the political and social conditions of his era when interpreting his ideas.

nificantly contributed to the shaping of the state through their groundbreaking work: Evangelos Papanoutsos and Konstantinos Tsatsos. The former played a crucial role in the educational reform of 1964 under the government of Georgios Papandreu, where he introduced the demotic (vernacular) language as the exclusive language of instruction in primary schools and as equal to katharevousa<sup>16</sup> in other levels of education. Among his further contributions were the implementation of free public education, the addition of modern subjects such as Sociology and Principles of Economics, the enhancement of natural sciences and mathematics, and the exclusive use of translated ancient texts in the three years of lower secondary school.

The latter served as President of the Hellenic Republic and chaired the parliamentary committee for drafting the 1975 Constitution during the government of Konstantinos Karamanlis (a Constitution that, with some amendments, remains in force to this day).

What unites these two figures, despite their affiliation with different political parties? Beyond the fact that both were distinguished academics, statesmen, and philosophers (for their philosophical contributions, see Androulidakis 2010; 2012), they both exhibited a strong Kantian influence in their intellectual and political work.<sup>17</sup>

One of the most important contributions of the 1964 educational reform in Greece – and of its principal architect, Evangelos Papanoutsos – was the establishment of free public education, an ideal also extolled by Kant. Notably, Kant praised the Philanthropinum, an educational institution that operated in Dessau (1774–1793) under the direction of Johann Bernhard Basedow,<sup>18</sup> for the freedom it granted educators

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<sup>16</sup> Katharevousa (Greek: *Kaθarevousa*), literally “purifying [language]” is a conservative form of the Modern Greek language conceived in the late 18th century as both a literary language and a compromise between Ancient Greek and the contemporary vernacular, Demotic Greek.

<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that Papanoutsos translated Kant’s major essays into Greek (Kant 1971) and published studies on Kantian philosophy, while Tsatsos wrote numerous articles and books focusing on Kantian political philosophy, besides identifying himself as a Platonic neo-Kantian.

<sup>18</sup> B. Basedow (1723–1790) was an educator and philanthropist who founded the Philanthropinum Institute in Dessau. According to Kant, it is the only experimental school that, despite its mistakes, provided its teachers with the opportunity to work according to their own methods and curricula, ensuring them freedom and flexibility in terms of the educational program they would follow. Regarding Basedow’s contribution

to shape the curriculum in collaboration with intellectuals from other countries. Its objective was the universal participation of all citizens of the world, thus contributing to the flourishing of humanity. Kant even urged wealthy individuals to fund the project, criticizing contemporary governments for prioritizing military expenditures over investment in education (Kant 2007c).

As for state governance, the Greek Constitution of 1975 – drafted under the leadership of Konstantinos Tsatsos – established a parliamentary republic with a ceremonial presidency, effectively realizing the Kantian ideal of a republican form of government grounded in law. What, then, of international relations?

On one hand, Jacques Derrida argues that the revised 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the legal notion of “crimes against humanity” established in 1945 form the normative horizon of globalization and international law. As Derrida suggests, these transformative developments mark, in Kantian terms, signs that human progress is indeed possible (Derrida 2005).

On the other hand, Jürgen Habermas highlights that Enlightenment, within the Kantian framework, has a dual meaning: at the individual level, it signifies a subjective principle of action – namely, the courage to think for oneself. As to humanity, it signifies an objective tendency: the progress toward a completely just order. However, in both cases, Enlightenment must operate through the mediation of the public sphere (Habermas 1991: 104).

## 5. The Freedom of Speech as a Tool for Progress

Kant argued that the purpose of his philosophy is to serve the restoration of human rights. The human being, as a subject of law who possesses rights, should not be treated as a means but as an end-in-itself. In his final work, the *Opus Postumum*, Kant repeatedly emphasizes that the human being is a person, meaning a being who has rights that

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to the educational system, he played a pivotal role in promoting more progressive and innovative approaches to teaching, which allowed for greater autonomy and creativity in the classroom, a significant step forward in educational theory (see Louden 2020 and Kant's essays regarding the *Philanthropinum* (1776/1777) [Königsberg Learned and Political Journal, March 28, 1776, and Königsberg Learned and Political Journal, March 27, 1777]) (Kant 2007c).

can be acknowledged (Kant 1995: 21:38, p. 239; 22:57, p. 215, etc.). However, I wonder: How, then, can these rights be claimed? Not only against others but also against state sovereignty.

According to Derrida, one of the most powerful means of countering state sovereignty lies in the university architecture Kant envisions – particularly through the special status he assigns to the Faculty of Philosophy in *The Conflict of the Faculties* (Kant 1996). By granting it autonomy from all external authority, especially from the State, Kant seeks to preserve its capacity for free and independent judgment (Derrida 2002: 40). Beyond the academic sphere, Kant maintains that the subjectively indispensable criterion for the soundness of our judgments – and, by extension, for the health of our reason – is their comparison with the reasoning of others.<sup>19</sup> The most effective and practical method for refining our thoughts, he argues, is to submit them to public discourse, thereby testing their validity against the judgments of others (Kant 2007h: 7:219, p. 324).<sup>20</sup>

According to Kant, “Reason must subject itself to critique in all its undertakings and cannot restrict the freedom of critique through any

<sup>19</sup> According to Kant, the criteria of the common human mind are the following:

1. To think for *oneself*.

2. To think *oneself* (in communication with human beings) into the place of every *other person*.

3. Always to think *consistently* with *oneself*.

The first principle is negative and refers to freedom *from constraint*; the second is positive, the principle of *liberals* who adapt to the principles of others; the third is the principle of the *consistent* way of thinking (Kant 2007h: 7:228–229, p. 307; 2000: 5:294, p. 174).

<sup>20</sup> In his early work *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, Kant expresses the idea that our instincts lead us to depend on the judgment of others. He sees their approval and acceptance as essential to forming our self-opinion. We compare everything we perceive as good and true with the judgments of others, striving to reconcile the two. In this way, we may come to feel that our judgments align with the universal human mind, creating the possibility of a rational unity for all thinking beings. Consequently, we recognize ourselves as subject to the rule of the general will, from which a moral unity emerges within the world of rational beings. If one wishes to characterize this compulsion to harmonize our will with the general will as an ethical sense, it can be understood as an innate phenomenon within us, though its causes remain undetermined (Kant 1992b: 2:334–335, pp. 321–322). This passage reveals that as early as 1766, Kant’s philosophy was already gestating the concept of a moral community. I believe the influence of Rousseau’s work, especially his notion of the general will, cannot be ignored here. In his later works, we find a reimagined version of the moral community – first in the context of his ethical philosophy, as the kingdom of ends, and then in his philosophy of religion, as the ethical community.

prohibition without damaging itself and drawing upon itself a disadvantageous suspicion. Now there is nothing so important because of its utility, nothing so holy, that it may be exempted from this searching review and inspection, which knows no respect for persons. The very existence of reason depends upon this freedom, which has no dictatorial authority, but whose claim is never anything more than the agreement of free citizens" (Kant 1998: A 738/B 767-A 739/B 768, p. 643).

As Kant suggests, no one should deny the people the freedom of the pen (Kant 1996h: 8:304 p. 302). While freedom of speech or writing may be taken by superior force, the freedom of thought can never be taken away. Therefore, it is reasonable to question whether, and with what justification, it is possible to think if we do not think collectively with others, to whom we communicate our thoughts and who, in turn, share theirs with us (Kant 1996a: 8:144, p. 16). One of the most significant topics addressed by philosophy during the Enlightenment period pertains to freedom of the press and political tolerance. In his renowned essay, "Of the Liberty of the Press",<sup>21</sup> Hume played a pivotal role in shaping Kantian thought by extolling the virtues of freedom of the press, asserting that it is "Nothing so effectual as the liberty of the press, by which all the learning, wit, and genius of the nation may be employed on the side of freedom, and everyone be animated to its defence" (Hume 1987: 30).

Hence, what is the concept of political freedom? "Sapere aude!" (Kant 1996e: 8:35, p. 17) urging individuals to have the courage to think independently and rely on their own reasoning abilities. Rawls believes that the publicity condition is clearly implicit in Kant's doctrine of the categorical imperative insofar as it requires us to act in accordance with principles that one would be willing as a rational being to enact as law for a kingdom of ends (Rawls 1971: 115). Any actions related to the rights of others, whose guiding principles are not compatible with publicity, are unjust. This is because all principles that require publicity to achieve their purpose must align with both justice and politics (Kant 1996i: 8:386, p. 351). Non-deception and non-coercion constitute the concept of freedom. As Wood argues, based on his interpretation of adopting the purposes of the categorical imperative, the human dig-

<sup>21</sup> The role played by the freedom of the press and the fact that public opinion is closely intertwined with the press, especially in England, was presented by Habermas (Habermas 1991: 93).

nity of an individual is used as a mere means if the individual is unable to adopt the purpose of the one who uses them (Wood 2007: 153). The touchstone of whatever can be decided upon as law for a people lies in the question: whether a people could impose such a law upon itself (Kant 1996e: 8:39, p. 20). A necessary condition is the concept of the citizen as free and equal, from the perspective of republicanism. Through subjects who publicly use their own reason, even on legislative matters, Kant believes that improvements in state constitutions and reforms for better political institutions can be achieved. But for those who did not bring their own understanding, or had no desire to use it, or, if not deficient in either, still acted as if theirs could only be supported by that of another, to understand such a great man was a difficulty which has hitherto prevented the formation of a durable constitution and which will remain an obstacle for some time to come (Allison 1973: 8:247, p. 157).

## Conclusion

As we have discussed in previous chapters, both Kant and Kantian scholars who have revisited, reconstructed, and expanded his theory share the belief that societies not only change but must change in order to improve and include the *Other*. A key point in Kant's philosophy is that we should not judge individuals based solely on what they are, but on what they ought to become. Furthermore, Kant, as a strong advocate for freedom of speech, understanding, and the defense of citizens' rights, goes beyond merely accepting the positive laws of his time. He views his critical philosophy as a guiding framework (Kant 1998: A 855/B 883, p. 704) that must evolve and expand, rather than becoming just another dogmatic philosophical system.

Another fundamental element of Kantian reasoning is the regulatory ideal that he sets as a model. If political philosophy cannot assume that the human species is progressing, then the entire transcendental philosophy risks remaining a wonderful but impractical idea.

In conclusion, I would like to revisit the question of progress that has been the focus of this study. On one hand, we have the positive sciences, where progress can undeniably be defined and measured over time. On the other hand, we encounter the moral progress of humankind, where

it is more challenging to define a concept that historically proves the progress made in human morality. However, as Louden asserts, the eye of true philosophy lies in an expanded way of thinking – being able to adopt the perspective of the other. Those who focus solely on the advancement of the sciences, without considering morality, are akin to the one-eyed Cyclops in Homer's *Odyssey*. Thus, even the one-eyed scientists need, and must, broaden their perspective by adopting the humanistic way of thinking: the one promoted by Kantian philosophy, which is closely linked to its cosmopolitan outlook (Louden 2021: 44–45).

Furthermore, Derrida, in his article *The Right to Philosophy from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*,<sup>22</sup> considering the progress of science and shouldering its burdens, asserts that in this regard, he remains Kantian. His desire is to bring forward the discussion that the political right to philosophy for all is not just a politics of science, but a politics of thought. This politics does not succumb to either positivism or scientism but pertains to an experience that encompasses mutual respect and the Other (Derrida 1994).

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<sup>22</sup> Derrida explicitly states that he alludes to Kant's essay *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (Derrida 1994).

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