

BOOK SYMPOSIUM

SEMINAR O KNJIZI

BOOK SYMPOSIUM ON KANT'S POLITICAL LEGACY:

Human Rights, Peace, Progress (Luigi Caranti)

/ Edited by Bojan Kovačević

SEMINAR O KNJIZI KANTOVO POLITIČKO NASLEĐE:

Ljudska prava, mir i progres (Luidi Karanti)

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SUBJECTIVE UNIVERSALITY OF GREAT NOVELISTS AS AN ARTISTIC MEASURE OF HISTORY'S ADVANCE TOWARDS ACTUALISING KANT'S VISION OF FREEDOM

ABSTRACT

The main idea behind this article is that in order to understand the meaning that Kant's political philosophy is rendered to by the given socio-historical context of a community we need to turn for help to artistic genius whose subjective "I" holds a general feeling of the world and life. It is in this sense that authors of great novels can help us in two ways. First, their works summarise for our imagination artistic truth about man's capacity for humanity, the very thing that Kant considers to be the scientifically improvable "fact of reason". Second, works of great writers offer for our insight destinies of individuals who decide to pursue moral dictate in a society, thus actualising the potential that lies hidden in all of us, making us worthy of respect. As we lack objective scientific standard of measurement, artist's universal feeling of the world is impressed upon us through a narrative about a man who, in a given society and in a given moment, decides to exercise his autonomy and seek the divine in himself. Contemporary social scientists' attempts to prove historical progress is characterised by the very lack of humbleness. Referring to the great novelists' works in this article is aimed to remind scientists of restraint and self-control demanded from them by the citizen of Königsberg.

KEYWORDS

Kant, novel, freedom, peace, Tolstoy, genius, science, progress, history

History as Man's Moral Progress or an Eternal Search for Instruments of Passive Neutralisation of Social Conflict

Kant's hope for historical progress was inspired by his observation of the French Revolution.

The revolution of a spirited people that we have witnessed in our times may succeed or fail. It may be so filled with misery and atrocities that any reasonable person, if he could hope, undertaking it a second time, to carry it out successfully, would nonetheless never decide to perform the experiment at such a cost.—Nevertheless, in the hearts of all its spectators (who themselves are not involved in the show), I assert, this revolution meets with a degree of *sympathy* in wish that borders on enthusiasm, a sympathy the expression of which is itself associated with danger. This sympathy can thus have no other cause than a moral capacity in the human race (Kant 2006: 155).

One should bear in mind the distinction between being an actor and being a spectator, between engaging and judging, which Kant held important (Arendt 1992). Being an actor and being a spectator are based on two principles that differ in their essence. The principle of action tells the one engaged, and thus incapable of having a comprehensive insight into the consequences of one's actions, that no revolution, albeit one against the worst of tyrants, is justified. Spectator, on the other hand, must stay outside the game, impartial. Contrary to actor, spectator must remain autonomous in regard to the event. Kant observed affairs in France from the standpoint of a distanced spectator making a judgment about the event in a foreign country. It made him feel the true pleasure of man in face of a great work of art. "It is simply the spectators' mind-set, which reveals itself *publicly* in the face of this show of large-scale transformations and which makes known such a universal and yet unselfish sympathy with the players on the one side against those on the other, even at the risk that this partiality could become quite detrimental to them"(Kant 2006: 155). Convinced that his feelings of sympathy for revolutionaries aroused by this historic turmoil is shared among all spectators gifted with good taste, Kant concluded that the significance of the French Revolution lies in the fact that it serves as the historical indicator of the "moral tendency of the human race" (Kant 2006:155).

The world-historic events in France that inspired faith in historical progress in Kant were seen as an introduction into a continuous civil war by some other spectators. "Once virtue enters the arena of political action, then the moral dualism that, within the framework of the existing State, had guided the indirect assumption of power and made possible an overweening criticism, automatically justifies civil war. Civil war is an innocuous occurrence. Although it does lead to violence and murder, it is none the less shaped by political criticism" (Koselleck 1988: 180). Instead of Catholics and Protestants, today's civil war actors are liberals, socialists, conservatives, nationalists, social-democrats who have been provided with an excuse to assert their views of the world, politics and society upon the rest of the community by the outcome of the Revolution. As opposed to the war led by those participating in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre on the 1792 bloody Parisian August eve, in the civil war led under the guise of modern democratic state there is no blood and violence. Why? Intoxicated by Rousseau's appealing idea of *volonté générale* the French had decided to get rid of the monarch and destroy the Old Regime's institutions, but this fact alone did not make them up to the task of making an active political decision about their collective destiny (Burke 1910). The Revolution failed to lead the citizenship from the state of self-incurred immaturity, yet it paved the way for appearance of new mechanisms for depoliticisation and neutralisation of social conflicts as a substitute for an absolute monarch's sovereign decision. Passive neutralisation of social conflicts is focused on obscuring the issues of the source and origin of politics (Schmitt 2005, Schmitt 2007). Memories of the emergency, contingency, decision are to be sedated by liberalism, parliamentarism, reducing politics to administration, positive laws, ideology, material prosperity and civic security. Seen from this spiritual-historical point of view of decisionism, Kant's faith in historic progress is yet another instrument of depoliticisation and neutralisation of social conflicts.

These two opposed positions in regard to the French Revolution rest upon divergent views of man's nature.

Kant speaks of man in different terms (Arendt 1992: 22–27). In his ethics, man is a being with an inherent moral law and potentiality of acting in accordance with duty. “An action is said to be in accordance with duty only when every thought of advantage to be expected from it, every calculation of present or future pleasure likely to result from it, indeed every material aim of any other kind, is eliminated and only adherence to the universality of the law, which reins in all contingent and particular impulses, remains as the sole ground of determination” (Cassirer 1981: 244). However, when in his political writings he discusses man as part of humankind, Kant actually attempts to define conditions that could inspire people to act in accordance with the laws of practical reason. Man as part of humankind is seen by Kant as selfish, greedy, motivated by increasing material wealth, but at the same time possessing a capacity to learn from his own mistakes. “Those always who have their dear self before them as the sole focal point of their efforts and who attempt to make everything turn on the great axis of selfinterest are the most common, and nothing can be more advantageous than this, for these are the most industrious, orderly, and prudent people; they give demeanor and solidity to the whole, for even without aiming at it they serve the common good, supply the necessary requisites, and provide the foundations over which finer souls can spread beauty and harmony” (Kant 2011: 34). As a result of the “unsocial sociability” mechanism, this selfish man gifted with reason gradually perfects his institutions whose backlash teaches him to distance himself from his self-interest and refine his ambition.

The notion of man possessing a capability to learn from historical mistakes and perfect his social institutions is foreign to those spectators who see French revolutionaries’ enlightened promises as nothing more than a dangerous illusion (De Maistre 2006). In the world where the church has lost its monopoly on interpreting the image of the world, there is no one who can tell man’s real nature. On the ruins of medieval order grew a world marked by radical lack of meaning. In such a world, citizens will never be up to the task of deciding on common issues through public discourse. To convince them that the foundations of their communality can be determined by everyday plebiscite (Renan 1996) meant letting their ambitions run wild, giving them false hope, which always results in eventual violence and disorder. Peace and security that absolutistic monarchy once gave them together with the freedom to contemplate the issues of good, beautiful and just in the quietude of their private sphere is the most that citizens can expect from history.

Even Kant himself believed that citizens are not to be given the right of active re-examination of postulates underlying obedience to the state immediately. “For many affairs that serve the interests of the commonwealth a certain mechanism is required, by means of which some members of the commonwealth must play only a passive role, so that they can be led by the government in the pursuit of public ends by means of an artificial unanimity, or at least be kept from undermining these ends” (Kant 2006: 19). Should a tax payer publically question his obligation to pay the tax, a civil servant challenge the grounds of his superiors’ orders, and priests refuse to adhere to church rules, that would certainly jeopardise the order, warned cautious Kant. Order must be stable, however, to provide scientists with an environment where they can contemplate in peace and present their insights to the literary public. This kind of freedom that Kant calls the “public use of reason”

must not be limited in any way. It is preconditioned by peace based on civil obedience to sovereign's orders (Ciaran 2003). And vice versa, the unlimited public use of reason is necessary so that the decisions of those who decide upon common good would gradually grow to result in such reform of social institutions that would be aimed at actualisation of republican ideals. Refinement of political institutions will be followed by a development of civic ability to decide upon common interest issues in the spirit of republicanism. Over time, man will learn to observe the problems of communal living independent of his confession-, class-, profession- or nation-specific interests. Man's state of not being engaged in the game will extend to envelop more domains of social life and spill over to wider and wider communities. Thus, the idea of humankind, present in each one of us, will gradually become the principle not only of our judgements but of our actions as well, and actor and spectator will become united (Arden 1992: 75).

Today's authors who have given credence to Kant's vision of nearing eternal peace point to empirical indicators of historical progress. "Liberal democracies – the political systems we have are closest to Kant's republics – are wealthy and peaceful (at least towards one another). International organizations (global and regional) have been developed and play a role that was unthinkable in Kant's time. A culture of human rights is rapidly taking hold of the global community. These may not be good enough 'signs' of the direction in which we are moving for the sceptic, but it is quite likely more than Kant himself would have hoped for two centuries ago" (Caranti 2017: 230). Others, however, who have conjoined Kant in his belief that the principles of democracy and human rights are so attractive that ultimately no people will be able to resist the temptation, have reached completely different conclusions by observing legal and political tendencies of our time (Maus 2015). They warn of the changes that constitutional democracies and international organisations are going through in the globalised world, showing features of historical regression and deviation from the path delineated by Kant in his political writings.

Instead of deciding which of the two opposing positions to embrace, this article questions the very grounds of attempting to measure historical progress scientifically. It is erroneous to expect objective empirical proof of humankind's progress from social scientists as they are not up to this task. Powerless to take a scientifically unbiased position on this matter, social scientists who in our time seek evidence of historical progress often unawares charter their ethics to serving the purpose of preserving the existing order, taking on the role of "political moralists". Kant viewed the French Revolution as a great artwork of history. Willingness of people to sacrifice their safety, property and lives to translating the ideas of freedom from philosophical books into history arouse in him a feeling of sympathy and inspired his reveries on eternal peace. On the contrary to this, today's scientists see empirical evidence of Kant's dream coming true in proliferation of externally liberal features of national and international institutions.

The main idea behind this article is that in order to understand the meaning that Kant's political philosophy is rendered to by the given socio-historical context of a community we need to turn for help to artistic genius whose subjective "I" holds a general feeling of the world and life. "The work of art is something singular and apart, which is its own basis and has its goal purely within itself, and

yet at the same time in it we are presented with a new whole, and a new image of reality and of the mental cosmos itself” (Cassirer 1981: 307). It is in this sense that authors of great novels can help us in two ways. First, their works summarise for our imagination artistic truth about man’s capacity for humanity, the very thing that Kant considers to be the scientifically improvable “fact of reason”. Second, works of great writers offer for our insight destinies of individuals who decide to pursue moral dictate in a society, thus actualising the potential that lies hidden in all of us, making us worthy of respect. As we lack objective scientific standard of measurement, artist’s universal feeling of the world is impressed upon us through a narrative about a man who, in a given society and in a given moment, decides to exercise his autonomy and seek the divine in himself thus becoming “qualified members, or, perhaps more modestly, qualified applicants to another kingdom” (Caranti 2017: 27). Can society accept such a member? Does history really change in this respect at all?

In the works of artists belonging to different times and societies we find conclusions that are contradictory to those arrived at by today’s social scientists lost in their quest for objective indicators of historical progress. Writers of great novels tell us that society cannot tolerate an individual who decides to act in accordance with duty or questions with his reason the social norms, laws and customs built into the foundations of the existing order. To defend its rules, society banishes or condemns to a tragic end the one who dares to choose the freedom to seek meaning despite grave consequences of his decisions. Great novelists manage to recognise Kant’s philosophical idea of human nature that contains the kernel of potential for a meaningful development towards laws of freedom in the concrete, individual and particular. Hence their recurring rebellion against society that denies to man of their era a possibility to achieve humanity, reducing him to the banal, empirical, earthly, immersed in calculating the costs and benefits of his acts.

Artistic genius reports with sorrow that history so far confirms the insights of philosophers belonging to the spiritual-historical sphere of decisionism. In the civil society whose foundations were set in the late 18th century by the French and American Revolutions, man has failed to polish the facets of his ambitions against historical mistakes. Stability in modern states survives as long as citizens, lulled by economic prosperity and semblance of constitutional democracy, cheerfully accept the condition of self-inflicted immaturity and witlessly adapt to the existing social norms. Yet, when loss of civil security and material wealth shake them awake from the state of passive apathy forcing them to pose the question of political power’s source and origin, violence, chaos and non-order of the natural condition return to the stage once again.

On Curability of Human Contingency

“Is there a remedy for the contingent state of man? Is his life incurably accidental, as Lucretius thought and as existentialists maintain today, or has man, despite his duality, preserved some discoverable link with non-accidental and non-contingent Being, so that he may entertain a hope for self-identification? Or, in other terms, is he summoned or destined to return a state of completeness and non-contingency?”

(Kolakowski 1978:12–13) This question has been nagging at philosophers since time immemorial. Philosophical trouble is rooted in the assumption, hope, faith, that man is not what meets the eye, that there is more to him than merely his banal empirical existence. It is a faith that there is something in man that can elevate him to divine heights.

The transition from medieval to modern epoch was accompanied by a triumph of the idea that man is the sole creator of what he is to become in this world. The idea that man is “the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer” (Mirandola 1998: 5) has exited humanistic thinker Pico della Mirandola. It is the fact that God left it to man to choose his own appearance and gifts for his adornment that makes man admirable. This Adam who can choose to crawl the earth like an animal or become a philosopher, even “a divinity clothed with human flesh” (Mirandola 1998: 6), for Mirandola is a miracle. The human capacity to determine his own unsteady, changeable and varied nature is the foundation of man’s dignity. “The seeds that each man cultivates will grow and bear their fruit in him. If he cultivates vegetable seeds, he will become a plant. If the seeds of sensation, he will grow into brute. If rational, he will come out a heavenly animal. If intellectual, he will be an angel, and a son of God. And if he is not contented with the lot of any creature but takes himself up into the center of his own unity, then, made one spirit with God and settled in the solitary darkness of the Father, who is above all things, he will stand ahead of all things” (Mirandola 1998: 5).

Kant spent his philosophical life seeking the answer to the question of what man can know (Kant 1998). The quest led him to conclude that contingency of human existence is impossible to overcome. Cognition cannot overcome the inexplicable experientiality of facts, we can merely acknowledge it, it is a given. Any attempt at enveloping wholeness of the world with thinking unavoidably leads to antinomies of the mind. Nonetheless, at the same time, man cannot resist thinking about that which is in the focus of his interest, yet incomprehensible – about God, freedom and the immortal quality of soul. Hence, for Kant these ideas become the unattainable limit that must be the goal of our ambitions. They point to where the endless road of self-development that man treads in search of the divine in him leads to. “Kant opens a new chapter in the history of philosophy’s attempt to overcome the contingency of human existence, setting up freedom as man’s realization and establishing the independence of the autonomous reason and will as the ultimate goal of man’s unending pilgrimage towards himself, a self that will then be divine” (Kolakowski 1978: 50).

Unwillingness to accept the banal contingency of human condition will determine the direction and result of the search for an idea, which would, following in the footsteps of Mirandola and Kant, provide a philosophical justification of attachment to human rights in today’s world (Caranti 2017: 57–104). Endeavour to provide a firm base for human rights in the notion of human dignity have resulted in shifting the discussion from the field of geopolitics and legal positivism to the field of philosophy, which is its greatest merit. Human rights are protected by the existing national and international treaties because of the overwhelming conviction that humans have dignity. “We assume that one of the major tasks of philosophy,

applied to the tricky field of human rights, is the attempt to spell out what lies behind the intuition – taken for granted in all major human rights treaties – that humans have dignity” (Caranti 2017: 62). Although inspired by the work of the great humanistic thinker, for the new concept of dignity Mirandola’s proposition that it is his chameleon-like nature that earns man his respectability is insufficient. Man deserves his rights to be protected not because he is left with an ability to choose his own life path, but because moral decision is always close at his hand regardless of the circumstances surrounding him (Caranti 2017: 61). Man is a being worthy of dignity due to his capacity to “silence all natural impulses, even the strongest instincts of survival, and act from our conception of duty” (Caranti 2017: 57).

Such foundation of human rights is inspired by Kant, yet it is not Kant’s. Indeed, the novelty in comparison to Kant introduced by this attempt is that duty does not necessarily result from the too strict and rigid categorical imperative, but from a version of moral law. “For example, one may believe that morality’s source is in Good and still adhere to divine commands not out of fear of divine punishment or similarly heteronomous motives, but because one endorses those commands and makes them truly one’s own” (Caranti 2017: 64). What is important is man’s cognition that we have a certain commission, absolutely independent from what this commission can do for our lives. Man’s capacity to act following dictates of duty is the very thing that comprises dignity. It is the thing that makes human beings worthy of respect.

In Search of an Artistic Proof of Man’s Capacity to Find the Divine in Himself

What links the philosophical attempt to provide foundations for human rights in today’s world with Mirandola and Kant is the belief that in man lies a hidden purpose, whose actualisation can lead him to the point where the individual and the universal, freedom and necessity, reconcile. “The true philosopher does not accept the conditions under which life has been given to man” (Arendt 1992: 22). Besides philosophers, this feeling of human purpose is also ingrained in artists, authors of great novels included.

The transition from the epoch of epic into the modern epoch of novel was made at the moment when the medieval worldview, which maintained that human evil nature was determined by the original sin, crumbled. “The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality.” (Lukacs 1971: 56) Man who, hoping for redemption and earning his place in heaven, lives in compliance with external dictates of the church was replaced by Mirandola’s chameleon with an inner potential for both divine and animalistic. It was only this kind of man that could become a hero of novel. Writers are not interested in the banal kinds who, out of habit, fear or indifferent dullness, submit to small-town rules of living, whose predictable lives can be subsumed under the laws of experiential perception. Novel as a work of art holds “a specific sharpness, a gravity all its own, in face of which nothing that is merely lifelike--which is to say nothing that is dramatically trivial--can survive” (Lukacs 1971: 57).

Artistic genius is inhabited by a spiritual archetype, a subjective feeling of purposefulness against which experiential facts of the world are formed. Kant's work demonstrates that it is impossible to envelop the wholeness of the world experience scientifically, with theoretical mind, by thinking. At the same time his insight reveals that artistic genius is gifted with the capacity to bring forth the principle of historical development upon which the entirety of nature rests in the singular and the particular (Kant 2000: 187–197). "Genius is the talent (natural gift) that gives the rule to art. Since the talent, as an inborn productive faculty of the artist, itself belongs to nature, this could also be expressed thus: Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art" (Kant 2000:186). Therefore, art is quite a special kind of connecting singular with the whole. Artist's talent enables him to find the way to present fruits of his imagination to all people who are given the gift of good taste. When man finds himself in front of a work of artistic genius he remains within his own self but feels at the same time relieved from all contingency, as an agent of a universal feeling. Thus, artistic genius manages to capture the very thing that eludes scientist. Artist succeeds in revealing the secret and the power of "universal communicability" thus conveying to spectators his intuition of the wholeness of the world, encapsulating it and feeding it to our imagination. "Genius and its act stand at the point where supreme individuality and supreme universality, freedom and necessity, pure creation and pure lawfulness indissolubly coalesce" (Cassirer 1981: 321).

This article inspired by the philosophical attempt to position the notion of dignity in the core of human rights could not feature any random writer, but the one who matches Kant's definition of genius, Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy. This literary great wrote the novel "Resurrection" (*Voskreséniye*, 1899). It is a book about the nobleman Nekhlyudov, who lazily gets up from his bed, listlessly washes his face in his luxurious bathroom, puts on his elegant clothes with boredom, and reads, with resigned contempt, a letter from a wealthy countess who wants to lure him into a promise of marriage. His spirit, weary of meaninglessness of living, remains insensitive to joys of the beautiful spring day while leaving for the court, in bad humour, where he is called to serve as a juror in a hearing of a prostitute who is accused of murdering a brutish patron of hers.

However, once he sees the face of the wretched girl, the soul of the lazy nobleman disappointed with life is shaken from the very bottom. He recognises the girl who used to work on his aunt's estate and whom he, a handsome wealthy young lord, seduced and took before leaving to go to the army once upon the time. The unfortunate accused Maslova was left with a child after that night, losing the child to illness, while her life went astray, landing her in brothel where she was brutalised by miserable men of various ages and affinities, until the moment when she fell a victim of deceit and, unaware of what she was doing, poisoned a patron, consequently ending up in prison accused of a cruel murder. The revelation of the woman's sad destiny removes the layers of selfishness, self-absorbedness, laziness and apathy covering Nekhlyudov's divine sparkle. Suddenly he catches a glimpse of something beautiful in his own self. The decision to help poor Maslova leads him more and more to become aware of the light still simmering within. He gives a fortune on lawyers, does his best to keep her out of prison; the fact that she is

just disdainfully repulsed by him does not deter him from his intention to follow her to Siberia to help her, tend to her, protect her... In the inhumane conditions of prison life, far away from society and its banal rules, Nekhlydov manages to reach the heights of the divine in himself.

On the Republic yet to Be Created

So, Mirandola, Kant and Tolstoy believe that man has the capacity of making a moral decision. This conviction serves as the basis of philosophical attempt to found human rights on man's dignity. We are assured of the existence of that which is improvable, not the subject of scientific knowledge, by philosophers and Tolstoy in different ways. Awareness of the fact that every one of us possesses "an inescapable authority of the moral law" (Caranti 2017: 82) for Kant is a "fact of reason". Would we be capable of doing the right thing if monarch forced us by a death threat to give false testimony against an innocent man? The answer to this question is impossible to give beforehand, but what Kant finds certain is that each one of us would know what the right thing to do is and that it could be done (Caranti 2017: 82). This thought experiment is not a scientific proof, as there is no proof that moral decision is close at hand to each one of us in all situations. Yet, Tolstoy tells us in "Resurrection", by his ability to impress the universal view of man and society upon our imagination intuited by his subjective feeling of the world, that the basic proposition of Kant's ethics is no illusion after all.

At first sight, however, it can appear that Kant and Tolstoy arrive at different conclusions about the conditions necessary for man's pursuit of freedom. The society that Tolstoy knows, the society of banal conventions, hypocrisy and boredom, just buries ever deeper Good's light given to him at birth. "The aimlessness and insubstantiality of the life he describes expresses itself not only objectively, for the reader who recognises it, not only as the lived experience of gradual disappointment, but also as an a-prioristic, established, agitated emptiness, a restless ennui" (Lukacs 1978:149). Nekhlyudov gains his dignity in the train to Siberia, travelling together with prisoners convicted for the most serious crimes. Can people who have buried their light deep inside, who, unlike children, birds and insects, are incapable of recognising the beauty of a spring day, judge, punish and imprison each other according to their own laws at all without causing an even greater evil? In *War and Peace* (Voyná i mir, 1869), Bolkonsky discovers the truth about the beauty of the world mortally wounded on the battlefield, while hungry and bare-foot Pierre Bezukhov finds it in the image of the simple peasant Platon Karataev in prison. Tolstoy's man succeeds to find humanity only by escaping the world of conventions, society and culture.

As opposed to Tolstoy, Kant and his interpreters today believe that peace and stability of civil society offer encouragement for a gradual moral perfection of people. However, one must exercise caution here. Kant does not claim that man can act in accordance with duty only in a certain civil society. Quite on the contrary, Kant and his philosophical disciples maintain that each man in every situation can find humanity in himself by following the categorical imperative. Even in inhumane circumstances, man still has the freedom to use his reason and make

a decision independent of the direct or indirect interests. “An individual can be autonomous even if she is deprived of external freedom. Think of the case of a slave” (Caranti 2017:30). Thus, the difference between the great philosopher and genius writer lies not in their divergent understanding of the society and man of the time they lived in. On the one hand Tolstoy says: the society I know does not encourage man to perfect his *nisus*. Moreover, this society eradicates humanity in man. The decision following the dictates of duty unavoidably means an escape from society, rejection of culture and return to nature, harmony, consonance and simplicity. On the other hand, Kant argues in his political writings that society is capable of changing, developing, of perfecting its institutions. With history’s advancement towards actualisation of the ideals of the republic, society will generate more and more impetuses for actualisation of human potentials. In other words, writers speak of a specific society in a specific moment. Reflecting on specific in them spawns subjective feeling of the universal. Therefore, it would be wrong to wonder which one is right – Kant or Tolstoy.¹ Kant writes about a republic that is yet to appear. The philosopher writes about a process, a journey. From novelists writing in different epochs we can learn how far we have gone on this journey. Kant tells us how far we could go.

The hope of the moral progress of humankind has informed the political writings of Königsberg-based philosopher. At the beginning there are just republican institutions that keep in check the destructive passions of individuals. In order to establish such institutions no moral transformation of people is necessary. Institutions that set selfish desires, interests and attitudes of individuals against one another, preventing them to take over the place of public good, would be suited equally to the devil’s people. A bad man establishes a state and becomes a good citizen after that. Moreover, perhaps human selfishness and pursuit of self-interest is necessary for creating a base one day “over which finer souls can spread beauty and harmony” (Kant 2011: 34).

Nevertheless, as opposed to the American Founding Fathers, who held that man’s selfishness and egocentrism are ineradicable, Kant proposes a possibility of moral perfection of men. In civil society individuals gradually perfect their ambitions. “The justice of institutions gradually permeates individuals’ souls, and they in turn adhere more authentically and steadily to the principles on which their government is based, thereby generating further institutional progress” (Caranti 2017: 126). Citizens gradually come to learn to distance themselves from their own self-interest and view problems through the eyes of others. When war disasters and suffering finally teach entire nations to see problems through the eyes of others, they enter into agreements and gradually transition into the state of eternal peace, preserving their republican institutions.

Like freedom, Kant’s republic is indeed an ideal to be constantly sought but never completely attained. “No existing republic can be satisfied with the level of normative and institutional development achieved” (Caranti 2017: 201). The same goes for the idea of citizen. To be a citizen in Kant’s republic means to be able to distance ourselves from our own interests and implies a high level of freedom from indirect and direct pressures. Kant’s citizen is the one in whom actor engaged in the

1 I am thankful to Caranti for this important suggestion.

game and unengaged spectator coalesce, the one who feels at home in the world. They are still non-existent in the empirical reality of Kant's time. Man's lifespan is too short to actualise all of his potentials. A full development of the seeds planted in man by nature can be achieved only at the end of the historical road delineated by Kant in his essay "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective" (Kant 2006: 3-16). In it, Kant attempts to reveal natural purpose in the senseless current of human reality.

Hannah Arendt notices a tone of irony in Kant's political writings, drawing the conclusion that Kant himself did not take them too seriously (Arendt 1992: 7). She reminds us of the fact that Kant called the most important among them, Perpetual Peace, "reveries" (Arendt 1992: 7). The German philosopher discovered significance of the political as distinguished from the social rather late in life, when he was woken from his snooze by the French and American Revolutions. Therefore, his political writings should be understood more like "play with ideas" or "mere pleasure trip" (Arendt 1992: 7) than as serious theses that the social science of the future is to prove.

Today's philosophers dedicated to study of Kant's political thought disagree with that (Caranti 2017: 207-256). What our time requires is to clean Kant's plan of the human history's development from dogmatic deposits. Once this is done, revealed before us will be the reasons why "non-linear progress towards the cosmopolitan constitution, rather than regress or stagnation, is the most likely development of human affairs" (Caranti 2017: 210). This thesis rests upon the faith that people are relatively benevolent and capable of learning from experience over time to understand their true interests. Owing to the mechanism of "unsocial sociability" people will, in time, learn lessons from their social conflicts, which will force them to reform their national and supranational institutions towards actualisation of the republic and eternal peace. Does the expansion of institutions of representative democracy and strengthening of the international institutions' power truly mean that humankind has progressed and that citizens have learned their lessons from wars, misery and conflicts? Is Carl Schmitt right when he argues that institutions of liberal democracy are instruments of passive neutralisation of social conflicts that can only postpone, more or less, the return of chaos, violence and wars on the stage of history? Do peace and stability in civil society, contrary to what Kant and those who continue in his footpath today think, require an individual in the state of self-inflicted immaturity, blind adherence to the decisions of authorities, national narrow-mindedness and lack of interest in the world problems? Do we still live in the same civil society whose artistic truth was offered to us by Tolstoy, a society that does not encourage but discourage people's actualisation of their human potentials? Who should we believe? Where to look for confirmation of Kant's theses?

A Search for Objective Evidence of History's Progress – Science in the Service of Preserving Order

By positioning freedom as a fundamental principle, while eternal peace as a duty derived from this principle, Kant presented all future interpreters of historical progress with a conundrum. For Kant republic and peace go hand in hand. Internally ordered form of government and peace are equally important. Until both

legally needed elements, peace and freedom, are united, the solution is not found (Maus 2015).

The main problem with the authors engaged in theory of democratic peace is the fact that they have tried to simplify Kant's conundrum in such a way to enable empirical measurement of speed on the road of historical progress. Those contemporary authors who can be credited with rerailing the debate back to the field of philosophy, show where even the best of democratic peace theorists have failed in their ambitious attempt to empirically confirm the thesis that democracies never engage in war between each other (Caranti 2017: 177–181). They always miss something in their attempts to measure the degree of human history's progress. So, instead of objective scientific insights, their works too often feature an arbitrary subordination to the ruling ideology and servicing interests of the most powerful world's state.

It must, however, be admitted that our time poses a very difficult task before those researchers who dare make the claim that history is on the track of finding a solution to Kant's conundrum. This includes references to strengthening of international organisations and declarative advocacy of democracy and human rights all over the world as empirical evidence of Kant's "reveries" turning into historical reality. We live in the time of illusions. Observed from the outside, liberal democracies are truly scattered all over the world. But liberal democracy's institutions are almost everywhere devoid of their fundamental philosophical and historical sense.

Kant's hope for actualisation of republican ideal was sparked under a great influence of the revolutions in France and the USA that marked the historical moment in which he was writing his political texts. American and French constitutions yielded by the two revolutions rely on two essentially different principles of freedom (Arendt 1973). Kant criticised the American Constitution, which reflects the Founding Fathers' distrust of the people and democracy. Convinced that the existing American States provide a better framework for the appearance of the future republic than a large federal state where the will of the sovereign people is structurally limited, the German philosopher sided with the antifederalists (Maus 2015: 77). History would validate the claim showing that the American *demos* has only on rare and exceptional "constitutional moments" – such as the 1861–65 civil war and the 1930s New Deal reforms – managed to leave the Madison's federal prison to reach an autonomous decision on their collective destiny. Moreover, American historical experience speaks of a constant progress in finding original constitutional and political mechanisms that will leave the population in a permanent state of dull passivity in regard to public affairs (Wolin 2008). To spectator not engaged in the game today's world where the American model of democracy and human rights is externally imposed upon other countries by military interventions, can hardly seem to be coming closer to Kant's ideal of putting eternal peace in service of freedom.

Kant pinned more hopes on the promise of freedom given on the ruins of the French Revolution than on the federal Constitution of the USA. Experts on his thought claim that for Kant there was only one republic, and it was the French Republic (Maus 2015: 78). How far has Europe gone in actualising republican principles announced by the Revolution? It is important here to bear in mind that for

Kant, states were the only true guardians of the place where the future republic was to appear. State sovereignty is to be maintained at all costs for its very capacity to one day become people's sovereignty. On the one hand, European states built into their constitutions the principles of the French Revolution, while engaging in wars for territories, supremacy, resources, on the other. For many of today's speculators, the peace guaranteed by the European Union is a proof of Europeans' capacity to learn from their historical mistakes and gradually come closer to actualising Kant's ideal. Their mistakes lie in the fact that they have left out from Kant's eternal peace formula the key element of freedom. The fundamental belief of the French revolutionaries that each authority must have its source and origin in the people is almost completely forgotten in Europe today. Peace in Europe today results from the process of putting democracy under control, stripping it of meaning and neutralising it.

The existential crises that hit the EU after the soaring of the member states' debts in 2009 offered to spectators an opportunity to grasp the idea underpinning the European integration (Kovacevic 2017). As it turned out, integration represents a "hidden technocratic revolution" depleting the states' democracies of more and more decisions without transferring the framework for actualising the republican principle to the European level. Despite peace, human rights and institutions of representative democracy at national and European levels, dull apathy has nested in the souls and minds of European countries' citizenry instead of republican ideals. Lulled in material prosperity and safety the member states' citizens have indifferently accepted cancellation of the possibility of social learning and self-enlightenment. It has been done by politicians, governments, courts, the European Commission, Court of Justice, social scientists, whom Monnet's artful method of integration put into service of actualising revolutionary goals of Europe's political unity and creation of a governing system that will structurally separate the will of the people from the decision-making processes. Thus, over time, the European integration process disarmed all the potential guardians of state sovereignty, bringing crumbling down the only framework for the appearance of the future republic available so far. The peace in Europe where the republican principle has been sacrificed for the sake of prosperity and security today resonates with the silence of a graveyard.

Great Novels in The Service of Measuring the Speed of Progress on the Historical Road to Moral Perfection of Men

Revealing contradictions and misconceptions in the works of today's social scientists seeking empirical evidence of the historical progress are insufficient in solving the dilemma whether the hope of moral perfection of humankind and improvement of social institutions is justified. Are social scientists up to the task of finding the answer to this question at all?

A negative answer to the latter question was suggested by Kant himself. The one who would attempt to offer a scientific proof that social conditions for the development of human potentials have been improved would have to envelop the entirety of historical experience. That would unavoidably lead into to the labyrinth of commensuring causes and consequences from which it is impossible to find a

way out by applying cognitive processes. The notion of the entirety of experience is scientifically unattainable, showed Kant with conviction. For this reason, we suggest, following in the footsteps of what the German philosopher wrote in *The Critique of Judgment* about the problem of reconciling the beautiful and the teleological, to seek the measure of historical progress in works of artists. More accurately, in the novels of great writers who wrote what the time and society they lived in whispered into their ears about the relationship between an individual and order.

A writer seeks neither evidence nor unbiased objectivity. Artistic feeling is an “I”-feeling. But it is this very “I” that holds the universal feeling of the world and life. It seems that this artistic feeling always tells the same: society cannot tolerate an individual who defies its banal conventions and sets off on an autonomous search of meaning and dignity. For this, he is doomed to exile, excommunication, misery, tragic death. Such a destiny, which befell Socrates, Hegel found justified. “The spirit of this people in itself, its constitution, its whole life, rested, however, on a moral ground, on religion, and could not exist without this absolutely secure basis. Thus because Socrates makes the truth rest on the judgment of inward consciousness, he enters upon a struggle with the Athenian people as to what is right and true. His accusation was therefore just, and we have to consider this accusation as also the end of his career” (Hegel 1892: 426). By dooming to failure those who question its customs, beliefs, value system, society has been trying to defend its boring order since antiquity.

The artistic truth about the Athenian society that condemned Socrates to his tragic end was conveyed to us by Euripides in his tragedies. This society cannot stand Hippolytus who, staying true to this oath of preserving his chastity, refuses to accept manly and sovereign duties imposed on him by the society (Hippolytos, 428 BC). Having acted in accordance with the feeling of his inner duty, heedless of consequences, he makes a moral decision to keep quiet and preserve honour of Phaedra, his father’s wife who was inspired by Aphrodite to fall in love with her stepson in order to exact vengeance on Hippolytus who denies her worship refusing to transition from the world of boyish innocence into the world of adult men. Making his horrible death under the hooves of frightened horses inevitable in the sequence of events, Euripides’ artistic genius offers us the truth of his times about the relationship between polis and an individual who decides to defy its rules.

Centuries after Euripides’ tragedy had been written, the malign excommunication would be the destiny of Moliere’s *Misanthrope*, too (*Le Misanthrope ou l’Atrabilaire amoureux*, 1666). Refusing to accept hypocrisy, banality and superficiality of Parisian society, Alceste engages into a conflict with the monarchist society, refusing to succumb to its “*honnête homme*” norm. The society, which finds Alceste’s ridiculing and subversion of banal norms of behaviour and human relationships dangerous for its survival, exiles and dooms to miserable loneliness this rigid moral puritan, who refuses to “silently adopt the spirit of the time”. Shakespeare’s Hamlet (Hamlet, 1602) will share Hippolytus and Alceste’s destiny. The bitter rebellion of the Danish prince against the society founded on hypocrisy, lies and betrayal will end once Shakespeare’s hero, unlike Kant, concludes that the world is impossible to change and put back on the right track. Hamlet will disdainfully reject the maturity heralded by such a conclusion and, thus resigned to his fate, go to meet his death.

One philosophical interpretation of Dostoyevsky suggests that he foretold a historical quake, a creation of a new man, society and world. "He belongs to the new world. Only formal analysis of his works can show whether he is already the Homer or the Dante of that world or whether he merely supplies the songs which, together with the songs of other forerunners, later artists will one day weave into a great unity: whether he is merely a beginning or already a completion" (Lukacz 1971: 152-153). If the Russian literary genius is observed from this point of view, similarity between the protagonist of his *The Idiot* (*Idiot*, 1869), Prince Myshkin, and Socrates comes as no surprise. Socrates' enquiry of the beautiful, the virtuous and the good, coupled with encouraging an unbound curiosity in the youth, jeopardised the foundations of his Athens' order. Myshkin's truthfulness of an innocent child will wrack chaos with the souls and minds of the members of the society whose artistic truth is delivered by Dostoyevsky. Myshkin's presence alone, his child-like questions and goodness help people to recognise, if only for a moment, the divine, the light, the spark lying hidden under the layers of hypocritical and rotten society, the very spark that Tolstoy's Nekhlyudov finds on the train to Siberia. Myshkin's boyish spirit, however, at the same time stirs the selfish, banal, passion-blinded and the vengeful that the existing social customs and rules inspire in man. Perhaps Dostoyevsky was truly a man of the coming age, but his answer to the question of the relationship between an individual and order was the same as Euripides', Moliere's and Shakespeare's. Defending the order, the narrow-minded society eventually dooms Myshkin to lunacy and sends him back to the same Swiss sanatorium for mental patients from which a train brought him to Russia at the beginning of the novel.

German experience holds special importance for testing Kant's vision of the moral progress of humankind that learns from horrible war experiences.

So, in his novel *The Tin Drum* (*Die Blechtrommel*, 1959), Gunter Grass writes about a boy who refuses to grow up and starts to speak in order to avoid engaging in the world of adults and sinking into brutality of World War II.

Heinrich Boll has left to the world a book about a lonely clown who roams the trains and towns of post-war Germany (*Ansichten eines Clowns*, 1963). This twenty-seven-year-old boy from Bonn is haunted by a clear memory of his mother's voice passionately telling her children at the dinner table: "everyone must do his bit to drive the Jewish Yankees from our sacred German soil!" Haunted by this voice, he tries to escape the society in which this same woman has come to preside over the Executive Committee of the Societies for the Reconciliation of Racial Differences and regularly goes to the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. Boll's clown remains a pure and innocent boy who refuses to engage in the hypocritical world of adults showing its face from the war ruins of Germany. Perhaps this hypocrisy is necessary for modern society to function at all, for people to enjoy security and material prosperity. Perhaps hypocrisy is a necessary element of the passive neutralisation of social conflicts written about by Carl Schmitt. In such a society, there is no place for Boll's hero. He remains a lost clown who performs his sad act about coming and going at railway stations.

In his books, Peter Handke roams alone the gloomy global society of today searching in people's eyes for a spark that testifies to the existence of human

potential for the beautiful and the sublime that Kant and Mirandola pinned their hopes on. In his novel *The Moravian Night* (*Die morawische Nacht*, 2008), he finds it by mere chance in the eyes of a girl reading a book on a bus in Denmark or a boy who, holding a ball, stands in the midst of a destroyed cemetery in Kosovo.

The foregoing is not to lead one to conclude that Kant was wrong. It is important to understand that Kant's freedom, republic and citizen are ideals the world constantly comes closer to, yet never reaches. However, these are not ideals detached from reality or above it. Kant recognised the grain of purposeful historical progress in the reality he knew. Therefore, the question is not whether or not Kant was right. The question is how to measure how far society has come in cultivating the grain of humanity captured by Kant's philosophical imagination in the world of his time. In contrast with today's social scientists, writers of great novels say from their respective epochs: not an inch.

Social Scientist as a "Political Moralist"

Kant's philosophy has always attracted artists whose vivid imagination found in it all kinds of inspirations and giving it a plethora of interpretations. Indeed, the fate of philosophical ideas is determined by mirrors these ideas will reflect in, regardless of the protests of philosophical schools or experts for certain thinkers. One of the most wonderful mirrors to reflect Kant's thought was Goethe's poetic soul (Cassirer 1970). The views of the philosophical and poetic geniuses differed in many ways. While for Kant the beautiful and the good, genius and scientist, art and nature must stay apart, Goethe does not accept a sharp division between science and art (Cassirer 1970: 85). Therefore, Kant would perhaps frown upon the humble intellectual experiment conducted in this article, which looks for a measure of historical progress in the works of the great novelists. Goethe might approve of it. Or he might not. We cannot answer this question with any degree of certainty, however disdainful Kant experts might find it. This article, indeed, was not aimed at offering yet another in the long series of "correct" interpretations of Kant's political philosophy. The humble aim of the paper was to create yet another in the endless series of small mirrors for reflecting the great German philosopher's thought, using history of ideas, political theory and history of literature.

Kant's gift that Goethe wholeheartedly embraced is setting limits to that which can be grasped by mind. Goethe was grateful to Kant for calling scientists on humility, warning them not to probe into that which cannot be known. The greatest German poet saw Kant's philosophy as something liberating, something that by setting the clear limits on the experiential knowledge clears the field where artistic imagination will freely seek the truth. Everything that science is unable to prove is left to artistic genius (Cassirer 1970: 78).

Contemporary social scientists' attempts to prove historical progress is characterised by the very lack of humbleness. Today's interpreters of Kant's thought have a task to show them where they are wrong, to remind them of the limits of what can be known. Refereeing to the great novelists' works in this article about

Kant was actually aimed to remind scientists of restraint and self-control demanded from them by the citizen of Königsberg.

To disagree with the authors who see tendencies of historical progress in today's world does not mean to reject their understanding of "moral politician" (Caranti 2017: 235–255). Even if coming closer to the idea of republic and establishing the state of eternal peace is accepted, moral politician can contribute to facilitating the process leading towards attainment of this goal. His task is to carefully manipulate facts of the empirical world into compliance with the universal law of righteousness. But, to achieve this, it is impossible to follow a scheme, applying rules given beforehand to reality. Politics cannot be reduced to science. A politician's skill cannot be learned. The world where politics is possible at all cannot be a closed and predictable world of given facts combined and recombined following the rules derived from scientific observation. "She must be endowed by nature with a talent to know how and when scientific and moral norms of various kinds are to be applied" (Caranti 2017: 255). It is for this reason that talent, which only few are gifted with, is needed for both politics and art. What is needed is imagination, creativity. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that it is "more likely to meet a good man than a good politician" (Caranti 2017: 255), the interpreters of Kant's political philosophy remind us.

However, they claim that besides talent, a politician needs knowledge, the kind of knowledge that the best social science today can give him. "She must have acquired solid and wide knowledge of the empirical laws relevant to her decisions, that is potentially all those of the social sciences plus history" (Caranti 2017: 255). The question we pose at the end of this article is: Can a social science that sees the legal and political tendencies of today's world as proofs of historical progress bring a politician to the right path?

Amid the European public debt crisis of the early 2010s, two important thinkers wrote books that attracted great attention. One comes from the world of social sciences, while the other is a novelist. They are Jürgen Habermas and Michel Houellebecq. In Habermas' book, the systemic crisis that has led to a suspension of democracy and collapse of the previous way of life in the countries of Southern Europe is just a necessary step on the path towards the development of a republican Constitution of Europe, which is merely an introduction into actualisation of Kant's ideal of a world civil society (Habermas 2012). On the other hand, Houellebecq in his *Submission* (*Soumission*, 2015) writes about the lost French literature professor left without references points that used to be provided to European man by profession, religion and family. Terrified by such a freedom of a child left alone in the cradle, professor eventually submits to the new worldview offered by Islam for the sake of comfort.

So, the question is who Kant's "moral politician" is to believe? Habermas, who provides the gloomy European reality with a philosophical justification uttering the words of comfort: everything is going as planned, exactly as it is supposed to, reforms are supposed to be modest and limited in their reach? To Houellebecq, who wakes him up from his stupor with a scream and warns: historical regression is at work, even the little autonomy and dignity whose respect a European had won since the French Revolution in his national state has now vanished; unless you

want Europe to slip into dark despotism, something major must be done quickly and society radically changed?

The answer can only be given by a true “moral politician”. A political theorist must satisfy himself with an insight that the conclusions of the most influential European philosopher and artistic truth have found themselves on the warring sides in today’s European society. The theorist can claim with certainty that Habermas will not share the destiny of Socrates, who brought the constitutional foundations of his polis under question with his unbridled and truth-seeking curiosity. The theoretician can also conclude that Habermas has ignored Kant’s requirement for scientific humbleness in his attempt to find in the development of a supranational governing system of the EU scientific indicators of historical progress. The French Revolution kindled the spark of the sublime in Kant as an unengaged spectator and encouraged him to dream of an eternal peace. The European integration, as a hidden revolution, has derailed European nations from the path of gradual self-enlightenment and learning through historical experience. It is hard to believe that this wearisome process led by technocratic logic can inspire an unengaged spectator to dream of making the idea of freedom true. Sympathies of the unengaged spectators might have been awakened for a short while by the rebellion of the citizens from southern states in the height of the public debt crisis (Douzinas 2013). If such sympathies really existed, they must have turned into disappointment quickly when the Greeks, French, Spanish, Italians and Portuguese were discouraged by fears of losing material security from rebellious demands for freedom. Yet, even though the European Union does not encourage dreaming of freedom, it has so far managed to secure peace. That explains why philosophers who see before their eyes the horrors of war suffering from the previous European epochs place their work into the service of preserving the present supranational order. The legitimate fear of new conflicts on European soil overwhelms their faith that autonomous learning and self-enlightenment of Europeans is possible, leaving them with nothing else to do but to take upon themselves the role of “political moralists”.

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Bojan Kovačević

Subjektivna univerzalnost pisaca velikih romana kao umetnička mera napredovanja istorije ka ostvarenju Kantove vizije slobode

Apstrakt

Osnovna teza članka jeste da bi za razumevanje smisla koji Kantova politička filozofija zado- bija u konkretnom društveno-istorijskom kontekstu određene zajednice trebalo iskoristiti pomoć genijalnih umetnika u čijem se subjektivnom „ja“ smestilo opšte osećanje sveta i ži- vota U tom smislu, pisci velikih romana mogu nam pomoći na dva načina. Prvo, njihova dela sažimaju za našu uobrazilju umetničku istinu o čovekovom kapacitetu za ljudskost, onome što za Kanta predstavlja naučno nedokazivu „činjenicu razuma“. Drugo, u delima velikih pi- saca možemo posmatrati sudbinu pojedinaca koji u određenom društvu odluče da deluju u skladu sa moralnim zakonom, ostvarivši tako mogućnost koja leži u svakome od nas i čini nas vrednim poštovanja. U odsustvu objektivnih naučnih merila, umetničko opšte osećanje sve- ta prenosi nam se kroz priču o čoveku koji u konkretnoj zajednici u određenom vremenu od- luči da ostvari svoju autonomiju, potraži božansko u sebi. Odsustvo skromnosti ono je što odlikuje pokušaje današnjih društvenih naučnika da dokažu istorijski progres. Pozivanje na dela pisaca velikih romana u ovom članku o Kantu ima za cilj da opomene naučnike na uzdr- žanost i samograničavanje koje je od njih zahtevao građanin Kenigsberga.

Ključne reči: Kant, roman, mir, Tolstoj, genije, nauka, progress, istorija