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“PHILOSOPHY CAN ALSO HAVE ITS CHILIASM.”
IMMANUEL KANT’S PREPARATION
FOR THE PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECT OF PERPETUAL PEACE

In 1786, Kant hypothesized that human history began when man first used his own reason to make a choice free from the constraints of natural instincts (*MAM*, AA 08:112).¹ Since then, none of these limitations have vanished; indeed, new ones have emerged, which man has imposed upon himself. It is precisely these new limitations that Kant had in mind when he uttered the most famous characteristic of his own era two years earlier: “Enlightenment

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¹ I cite fragments of Kant’s writings according to the English edition (*The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, 16 vols. [Cambridge: CUP, 1992–2016]), but the volume and page numbers are provided according to the German edition: *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Royal Prussian, subsequently German, then Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, 29 vols. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, subsequently Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1900–). I use abbreviations based on German titles: “*GMS*” for the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (AA 04)], “*IaG*” for the *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* [*Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (AA 08)], “*KpV*” for the *Critique of Practical Reason* [*Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (AA 05)], “*KrV*” for the *Critique of Pure Reason* [*Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (to be cited according to original pagination A/B)], “*KU*” for the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* [*Kritik der Urteilskraft* (AA 05)], “*MAM*” for the *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* [*Muthmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte* (AA 08)], “*MM*” for the *Metaphysics of Morals* [*Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (AA 06)], “*PG*” for a *Physical Geography* [*Physische Geographie* (AA 09)], “*RGV*” for the *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* [*Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (AA 06)], “*SF*” for *The Conflict of the Faculties* [*Der Streit der Fakultäten* (AA 07)], “*TG*” for the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics* [*Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch die Träume der Metaphysik* (AA 02)], “*WA*” for the *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* [*Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (AA 08)] and “*ZeF*” for the *Toward Perpetual Peace* [*Zum ewigen Frieden* (AA 08)].

is the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority. Minority is inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another." (*WA*, AA 8:35). The topos of man's liberation from the limitations of his own nature has been present in philosophy at least since the time of Plato. In Kant's interpretation, the idea of man's liberation is deeply in keeping with the spirit of the era in which Rousseau suggested that the "second nature" of human civilization was nevertheless limiting. It is not without reason that Kant, as a fascinated reader of Rousseau's *Émile*, mobilizes us to fight against superstition and encourages us to overcome immaturity in the sphere of religion, which "being the most harmful, is also the most disgraceful of all" (*WA*, AA 08:41). For this reason, many readers are ready to see Kant above all as a critic of religion. But this is only a partial truth about Kant's complex attitude to religion.

The unprejudiced reader will easily find affirmative statements against religion in Kant's writings (*RGV*, AA 06:129). Even if Kant presents religion as a means to achieve moral goals (*RGV*, AA 06:106, 116, 118; *ZeF*, AA 08:36n; *SF*, AA 07:37, 42, 44), these are goals that man cannot achieve by relying solely on his own strength. However, since, according to Kant, what we are obliged to do should also somehow be attainable (*KpV*, AA 05:125; *RGV*, AA 06:45), the fulfilment of even the maximum goals must somehow be guaranteed. This way of thinking was presented in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, where the realizability of the highest good was presented as guaranteed by God (*KpV*, AA 05:124–34). Certainly the concept of the postulates of practical reason is the best known example of what Kant understands as the practically necessary conditions for the realization of the highest good. For Kant, however, these conditions are not something whose efficacy we must be able to comprehend. On the contrary, Kant in various contexts reaches for the support of religious morally transcendent ideas (*RGV*, AA 06:53), although he realizes that these concepts never expand our knowledge.² As I argued in another article, they only provide us with the necessary complement to think of practical goals as achievable.³ That is why Kant eagerly reaches for the Bible, reflecting on the beginning of human history, the

² Assuming that *Religion...* (*RGV*, AA 06:52) and *Conflict of Faculties* (*SF*, AA 07:9) discuss the same issue, we could add to the list of "morally transcendent" ideas the religious idea of the source of the moral evil, where "[t]he absolutely *first* beginning of all evil is thereby represented as incomprehensible to us" and the religious idea of "hope of a return to the good from which he has strayed" (*RGV*, AA 06:44).

³ Tomasz KUPŚ, "How Does Historical Faith Complement Immanuel Kant's Philosophy of Religion," *Diametros* 18, no. 69 (2021): 1–19.

ultimate goal of human life, the end of human history, the source of evil or the attainment of the highest good.

Of course, neither Christian theology nor the Bible provides knowledge that could compete with rational scientific knowledge. Yet for Kant, as for many other thinkers of the 18th century, historical faith rightly says something about what should be accepted only for practical reasons (*KU*, AA 05:467). I think I will make no mistake if I reduce Kant’s approach to historical belief to confidence in the correctness of her answers to the extremely important question: “What may I hope?” (*KrV*, A 805/B 833). It would be a mistake, however, if we reduced all the possible answers to this question to a monologue of religion. The answer given by Kant to this question in writings published since 1784 is rather a polyphony supported by a philosophical interpretation of history, politics and, of course, religion.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Kant also engages religious and theological terminology in his search for the most adequate conception of the feasibility of the highest good. An example is the concept of chiliasm,⁴ which Kant tries to give much in line with his own philosophy. However, it would be a simplistic if, in the spirit of Carl Schmitt, we should consider that Kant merely secularizes theological concepts.⁵ Such an approach would be as inaccurate as the assumption still shared by many authors that Kant

⁴ Chiliasm (millenarianism) is a renewed Christian movement of followers of the Second Coming of Christ (parousia) and His Millennial Reign. The Chiliasts derive the doctrine of their faith from the Old Testament prophecies foretelling the coming and earthly reign of the Messiah, which will be a period of moral and religious perfection and the fullness of all temporal blessings. The Old Testament prophecies are also referred to in the Apocalypse of St. John, which speaks of the millennial reign of the righteous with Christ (Rev 20:1–7). Millenarianism, popular at the beginning of Christianity, was first condemned in 373 and recognized as heresy. In later times, however, chiliastic ideas came to life in various forms. In the Middle Ages, the millenarian tradition was referred to by Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202) and many radical apocalyptic movements. In modern times millenarianism was practiced by Anabaptists or Quietists. Chiliastic ideas were also shared by Isaac Newton (1642–1727), Charles Wesley (1707–1788) or Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). In the 18th century, chiliasm (millenarianism) was no longer a popular ideology, but still present in Prussia, as an element of widespread pietism. See Walter NIGG, *Das ewige Reich. Geschichte einer Hoffnung* (München: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1967).

⁵ While not sharing the moral reductionism of Sean Molloy, I agree with his thesis: “Kant does not secularize theological concepts in the style of Schmitt and Löwith, nor does he seek to reoccupy intellectual positions that have been vacated in the wake of the collapse of the Middle Ages in the manner attributed to modern thinkers by Blumenberg. Kant’s efforts are perhaps better understood as an attempt to translate previous concepts into forms compatible with his philosophy, e.g., from original sin to radical evil.” See Seán MOLLOY, *Kant’s International Relations: The Political Theology of Perpetual Peace* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 162.

simply reduces religion to ethics. It is better to take the basis proposed by Max Horkheimer when he stated that the key concepts of European thinking are simply connected with theology. In response to this fact, we need not feel compelled to reinterpret it in a secular spirit, much less to reject the religious heritage in its entirety. Kant neither simply secularizes theological concepts, nor is he content with moral reductionism. Kant encourages us to actively moralize political practice, rather than passively wait for a miracle.⁶

First, I will recall Kant's publications from 1784 and their importance in the philosopher's work. Then I will outline the context of the publication *Toward Perpetual Peace* and the reactions to Kant's involvement in commenting on the current political situation. On the examples borrowed from the history of the Polish reception of Kant's philosophy, I will point out the philosophical and political potential contained in Kant's writings, which did not directly deal with issues of politics but rather were devoted to issues of history or religion. Finally, I will reconstruct the way in which Kant modifies the theological notion of chiasm and gives it a new character in his attempts to explain the feasibility of the highest good in the world.

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In 1784, in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, one of the most significant periodicals of that era, Kant published two essays, *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?* and *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*. These texts ushered in a new era in Kant's work—a reflection on history, politics and religion; but they also confirmed that at the end of his long life, Kant had broken his own stereotype of the purely academic philosopher. In fact, Kant did not live in isolation from the modern world, he was interested in current political events, he commented on them with bold solutions, and above all he was involved in the actual discussion of the Enlightenment.

Of course, the most famous example of Kant's strategy to speak universal truth on the canvas of current events remains to this day the essay *Toward Perpetual Peace* from 1795. In fact, Kant continues in this text the same theme that he began more than a decade earlier in essays published in the *Berlinische Monatschrift*. Therefore, it is difficult to pinpoint a single im-

⁶ "Kant retains classical Christian language yet does not give a Christian account of politics," says Anna Wera WILMS in "Peace among states from Providence?" *Die Funzel*, June 28, 2021, <https://diefunzel.com/articles-in-english/peace-among-states-from-providence>.

pulse that mobilized Kant to write *Toward Perpetual Peace*. It is sometimes pointed out that the direct reason for the publication of this text was the conclusion of a peace treaty between France and Prussia at Basel on 5 April 1795. The Treaty of Basel certainly had symbolic significance, as it was the first time the monarchy recognized the right of the new republic to exist.⁷ However, Kant does not speak only on the current events of the French Revolution, but refers in general to the diplomatic practices that permeated the whole political life of Europe at that time. So if one looked for a commentary on the peace of Basel in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, he was disappointed, because instead of taking a stand on current political events, Kant formulated a strictly philosophical proposal. In other words, Kant most likely saw the Treaty of Basel as an opportunity to say something that he believed should have been if reason, not just politicians, ruled. Every reader of *Toward Perpetual Peace* was able to compare reality with the ideal presented by Kant. At the expense of historical timeliness, Kant’s trial has acquired timeless, universal value.⁸

Not only contemporary historians of philosophy, but also ordinary readers of Kant’s publications at the end of the 18th century had reason to see the content of *Toward Perpetual Peace* as a critique of the current political situation. It was for this reason that it was translated into French almost immediately, and soon after, into Polish as well. Given all this, it is surprising to us today that the philosophical and political work of Kant has only been in the field of interest of researchers since the middle of the 20th century.⁹

The examples that I will discuss later show that as early as the end of the 18th century, Kant’s writings had the potential to create a change in the way of thinking about political practice. *Toward Perpetual Peace* was published in 1795, the same year that the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to exist as a separate political body as a result of the annexation of Austria, Prussia and Russia. The Poles were strongly motivated to take an interest in what Kant, a loyal Prussian subject, wrote on the matter. It is therefore not

⁷ Gerhardt VOLKER, “Eine kritische Theorie der Politik. Über Kants Entwurf *Zum ewigen Frieden*,” in *Der Vernunftfrieden. Kants Entwurf im Widerstreit*, Kritisches Jahrbuch der Philosophie 1, ed. Klaus-Michael Kodalle (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 1996), 6; Georges LEFEBVRE, *The French Revolution*, vol. 2, *From 1793 to 1799*, trans. John Hall Stewart and James Friguglietti (New York: Columbia University Press), 153.

⁸ The way I see the relevance of this text I discuss in the article “Kant’s Project of Perpetual Peace Today,” *Studia Philosophica Kantiana* 1 (2024): 9–27.

⁹ Georg CAVALLAR, *Pax Kantiana. Systematisch-historische Untersuchung des Entwurfs „Zum ewigen Frieden“ (1795) von Immanuel Kant* (Wien: Böhlau, 1992), 79.

surprising that the treaty in which Kant acts as an ally of the Poles was almost immediately translated into the Polish language.

In a short time, two Polish translations of this treaty were produced. The first translation was published in 1797. The translator was Szymon Bielski (1745–1826), who used the French version of the Treaty of Kant from 1796. Soon after, a second Polish translation was made, this time from the German original. The translator was Józef Władysław Bychowiec (1778–1845), a student at the University of Königsberg, who, in addition to *Toward Perpetual Peace*, would translate into Polish two other treatises by Kant: *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* and *The Conflict of Faculties*.¹⁰ The selection of works that Bychowiec translated into Polish is not accidental.

All these works, to a greater or lesser extent, relate to current events, address political issues and reflect on possible solutions for the future. Bychowiec met Kant personally and it is possible that he acted on his inspiration.¹¹ It is certain, however, that Bychowiec was well acquainted with other Kant publications and had sufficient knowledge to interpret their content. This is confirmed by the translator's comment added in the Polish edition of *Idea for a Universal History [...]*. In it, Bychowiec explains the obvious, philosophical meaning of Kant's concept of chiliasm: "philosophy can also have its chiliasm" (*IaG*, AA 8:27). The Polish translator added: "There were heretics in the 17th century who believed that J. Christ with his chosen ones would reign for a thousand years before the final judgment, they called themselves the Chilias of a thousand. Thus, the Chilean epoch of the Philosopher is the point of association of nations, where people will achieve the greatest perfection and happiness."¹²

The annotation seems to be a banal explanation of the meaning of the concept of chiliasm. In fact, it confirms two important points. First, Bychowiec knew the content of *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Rea-*

¹⁰ To this day, only a translation of *Idea for a Universal History [...]* (*Wyobrażenie do historii powszechnej we względzie kosmopolitycznym* [Königsberg, 1799 / Breslau, 1832]) remained. The translation of *Toward Perpetual Peace* prepared by Bychowec has not survived to this day. Recently, fragments of the translation manuscript *The Conflict of Faculties* were found. See Kinga KAŚKIEWICZ and Tomasz KUPŚ, "The First Polish Translation of Kant's *The Contest of the Faculties* in the Collections of Vilnius University Library," *Problemos* 94 (2018): 134–43.

¹¹ Tomasz KUPŚ, "Kant about Poles, Poles about Kant. The hidden reception of German philosophy in Poland in the early 19th century," *Studia Philosophica Kantiana* 11, no. 1 (2022): 20–21.

¹² Immanuel KANT, "Wyobrażenie do historii powszechnej we względzie kosmopolitycznym," trans. Józef Władysław Bychowiec, in *Recepcja filozofii Immanuela Kanta w filozofii polskiej w początkach XIX wieku*, part 1, "Józef Władysław Bychowiec, Anna z Zamoyskich Sapieżyna, Jan Śniadecki, Franciszek Wigura," ed. Tomasz Kupś (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2014), 84.

son, where Kant first stated what he meant by philosophical chiliasm (*RGV*, AA 06:34). Secondly, the translator believes that the theological idea of the millennial reign of Christ has its counterpart in Kant’s philosophy in the philosophical project of federalism of states. This project, as commonly known, was developed by Kant only in *Toward Perpetual Peace*. Thus the theological concept of chiliasm was linked to the political project of international order, first announced in *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784), then confronted with the religious idea of the Kingdom of God in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793) and finally presented in *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795) as philosophical chiliasm.

Today, when reading Kant’s works, we often tend to isolate individual themes and view them as distinct topics. Not only does it seem to us that separating the philosopher’s statements about religion, history, and politics is the right approach, but we even believe that Kant also made such a separation. However, there is much evidence to the contrary. Even early readers of Kant’s writings shared this holistic perspective. This allowed them to read religious writings without prejudice and unconventionally perceive their political potential. If the first example of a Polish translator of Kant’s works is not enough, perhaps the second example, an anonymous commentator of political events at the time, will prove more convincing.

The anonymous treatise *Untersuchung über die Rechtmässigkeit der Theilung Polens*¹³ is unique in the contemporary polemical literature of the late 18th century. It is, so far, the only example of using arguments drawn from Kant’s writings to defend the interests of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth against the imperial policy of Russia, Austria and Prussia. The anonymous author of the essay *Untersuchung über die Rechtmässigkeit der Theilung Polens*, published in 1793, could not refer to *Toward Perpetual Peace*, which was published two years later. Nevertheless, he found an argument in another then published treatise of Kant, in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*:

I admit that I am not comfortable with this way of speaking, which even clever men are wont to use: “A certain people (intent on establishing civil freedom) is not ripe for freedom”; “The bondmen of a landed proprietor are not yet ripe for

¹³ The essay was published twice in 1794 and 1795. In both editions Warsaw was chosen as the place of publication. Previously, the authorship of this text was attributed to Józef Kalasanty Szaniawski (1764–1843). This hypothesis was never confirmed, as were the rumours circulated by Szaniawski that he studied at Königsberg with Kant. It is credible, however, that the text was written in the Jacobin cluster, to which Szaniawski himself initially belonged.

freedom”; and so too, “People are in general not yet ripe for freedom of belief.” For on this assumption freedom will never come, since we cannot *ripen* to it if we are not already established in it (we must be free in order to be able to make use of our powers purposively in freedom). To be sure, the first attempts will be crude, and in general also bound to greater hardships and dangers than when still under the command but also the care of others; yet we do not ripen to freedom otherwise than through our *own* attempts (and we must be free to be allowed to make them). I raise no objections if those in power, being constrained by the circumstances of the time, put off relinquishing these three bonds far, very far, into the future. But to make it a principle that those who are once subjected to them are essentially not suited to freedom, and that one is justified in keeping them from it for all time, this is an intrusion into the prerogatives of Divinity itself, which created human beings for freedom. It certainly is more convenient to rule in state, household, and church, if one succeeds in imposing such a principle. But is it also more just? (*RGV*, AA 06:188n)

Here Kant develops a thought concerning the broadly understood relationship between authority and subjects. This division seems to reflect a natural disproportion between people. Those who find the courage to think freely and act themselves become leaders in the eyes of others who do not find the courage to gain similar independence. Of course, Kant does not comment here on political practice, but on the conduct of religious innovators and reformers who, in their own eyes, consider themselves “ennobled” compared to those who remain “under a slavish yoke of faith” (*RGV*, AA 06:188). It is this thesis that Kant completes with the above footnote, developing an analogy between the relationships that unite people in the family, the state and the church. The author of *Untersuchung...* saw the political potential of *Religion...* and without misinterpreting Kant’s critique of paternalism in relations between states. In 1795, in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, he wrote, “No state shall forcefully interfere in the constitution and government of another state” (*ZeF*, AA 8:346). Kant, presenting his opinion on imperial practices, explains what the recommended caution would entail in this case: “But as long as this internal conflict is not yet critical, such interference of foreign powers would be a violation of the right of a people dependent upon no other and only struggling with its internal illness; thus it would itself be a scandal given and would make the autonomy of all states insecure” (*ZeF*, AA 08:346). These words are an accurate description of the situation in which Poland found itself at the end of the 18th century. Kant observed with satisfaction the positive political reforms carried out in Poland. They confirmed

that “this internal conflict is not yet critical,” which is why Kant believed that external intervention was unjustified and ultimately harmful.¹⁴

However, this is not only Kant’s kind gesture towards Poles. Kant firmly opposes paternalistic practices in international relations and only allows them when they are deeply justified. On the other hand, in everyday human relations, Kant recommends expanding our readiness to treat people as adults (that is, as free and reasonable). Therefore, Kant excludes the possibility of extrapolating the authoritarian relationship between father and children to the relationship between ruler and subjects—here all should be treated as adults.¹⁵ However, it is different in international relations, where countries often seem to behave as if they were still children.¹⁶ It is clear that the metaphor of immaturity, introduced in the essay on enlightenment, is also applicable to the description of the relationship between peoples, where strict (and therefore more paternal than maternal) care can only be provided by “the great artist nature (*natura daedala rerum*) from whose mechanical course purposiveness shines forth visibly, letting concord arise by means of the discord between human beings even against their will” (*ZeF*, AA 08:360).

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In his essays from 1784, Kant presented a whole range of new subjects, which he would then develop in his writings published over the next two decades. Certainly Kant was looking for a particular language to express new ideas and testing how to think through the key problems of the moral progress of mankind without falling into dreaming (*Schwärmerei*) and utopi-

¹⁴ Mirosław Żelazny cites credible arguments for such an interpretation, see Tomasz KUPŚ, “Kant about Poles, Poles about Kant. The Hidden Reception of German Philosophy in Poland in the Early 19th century,” *Studia Philosophica Kantiana* 11, no. 1 (2022): 17–18.

¹⁵ “Die Regierung hat nicht die Gringste Ähnlichkeit mit der Väterlichen autorität, welche die aller uneingeschränkteste unter allen ist. Der Vater muß das Kind ernähren und an seiner Statt Brod verdienen. Beym Regenten ist es umgekehrt. Der untertan mag sein interesse selbst besorgen, aber nur was wechselseitige Rechte betrifft, ist das Volk unmündig imgleichen in Ansehung der Staatsverhältnisse.” Immanuel KANT, vol. 6, *Moralphilosophie, Rechtsphilosophie und Religionsphilosophie*, in *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 19, ed. Erich Adickes and Friedrich Berger (Berlin–Leipzig: Walter De Gruyter & Co., 1934), 506–7.

¹⁶ Kant inaccurately quotes David Hume’s essay *Of Public Credit* based on a German translation (*Vermischte Schriften*) of 1766: “‘If, at the present time,’ he says, ‘I see the nations on the point of war with one another, it is as if I were seeing two besotted fellows beating each other about with cudgels in a China shop. For not only do they have to recover slowly from the bruises they administered to each other, but afterwards they must pay for the damages that they have done.’” *SF*, AA 07:94.

anism. The strategy chosen by Kant is a special kind of dialogue with tradition, especially with religious tradition.

I propose to follow Kant's few direct references to chiliasm in the same chronological order as they appear in the philosopher's publications. Kant uses the theological idea of chiliasm as a guiding thread in the search for an answer to the question of the feasibility of the idea of the highest good. In the end, Kant gives the theological concept of the millennial reign of Christ a new shape to the political project of federalism of the free states.¹⁷ In this way, religion, history and politics form an alliance for the realization of a common goal—the highest good in the world. Kant first expressed this thought in 1784, in his essay *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*:

One can regard the history of the human species in the large as the completion of a hidden plan of nature to bring about an inwardly and, to this end, also an externally perfect state constitution, as the only condition in which it can fully develop all its predispositions in humanity.... One sees that philosophy can also have its chiliasm. (*IaG*, AA, 08:27)

The first Polish translator of this text added a commentary explaining that Kant was not referring to the belief in the millennial reign of Christ, popular among 17th-century heretics, but to the political project of the federalization of free states. Kant, though, did not develop this project here, but only rejected utopian religious heresy and expressed the supposition that a different understanding of the millenarian idea is not excluded. Kant did not present what he meant by philosophical chiliasm until ten years later, first in *Religion...* and then in *Toward Perpetual Peace*.

In the first part of *Religion...*, Kant explains what he means by stating that “the human being is by nature evil.” By the way, it gives empirical examples of human actions that confirm this thesis, including behaviour in relations between states. It turns out that, despite some success in organizing interpersonal relations, international policy apparently still has little to do with morality. States treat each other with distrust and sometimes hostility, often at odds with the high level of civilization and culture of their internal system. Commenting on the reality of international politics, Kant states:

¹⁷ Walter NIGG, *Das ewige Reich*, 270–71.

Civilized peoples stand vis-à-vis one another in the relation of raw nature (the state of constant war) and have also firmly taken it into their heads not to get out of it, and we shall become aware of fundamental principles in the great societies we call *states* directly in contradiction to official policy yet never abandoned, principles which no philosopher has yet been able to bring into agreement with morality or else (what is terrible) suggest [how to replace with] better ones, reconcilable with human nature: So *philosophical chiliasm*, which hopes for a state of perpetual peace based on a federation of nations united in a world-republic, is universally derided as sheer fantasy as much as *theological chiliasm*, which awaits for the completed moral improvement of the human race. (*RGV*, AA 06:34)¹⁸

For Kant, this is a truly challenge he has been working on for at least a decade. An interesting addition to this text, which was added in the footnote to the second edition of *Religion...*, confirms that Kant is working tirelessly to solve the problem of philosophical chiliasm:

If we look at the history of these simply as a phenomenon of inner predispositions of humanity for the most part concealed from us, we then become aware of a certain machinelike progression of nature according to ends which are not theirs (the peoples’) but nature’s own. So long as a state has a neighboring one which it can hope to subdue, it strives to aggrandize itself by subjugating it. It thus strives for a universal monarchy—a state constitution in which all freedom would necessarily expire, and, together with it, virtue, taste and science (which follow upon freedom). Yet after this monster (in which the laws gradually lose their force) has swallowed up all its neighbors, it ultimately disintegrates all by itself. It divides through rebellion and factionalism into many smaller states which, instead of striving after a union of states (a republic of free federated peoples), in turn begin the same game all over again, so that war (that scourge of the human race) will not cease. Although not so incurably evil as the grave of universal despotism (or even as a federation of nations pitted against the relaxation of despotism in any state), war, as an ancient said, nonetheless creates more evil men than it takes away. (*RGV*, AA 06:34n)

This is one of the parts in which Kant is explicitly critical of the establishment of a universal monarchy (*RGV*, AA 06:34n, 123n; *ZeF*, AA 08:367) and rejects the world state as a project whose realization should be the goal

¹⁸ Kant almost literally repeats here the content of the eighth thesis of an essay *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (*IaG*, AA 08:27) published ten years earlier.

of human efforts. It becomes clear that Kant cannot accept the threat to liberty that would surely suffer in such a case.¹⁹

It has not yet been established to which ancient author Kant ascribes the thesis that a greater evil than war is the despotism of indivisible power. Kant shares this view. All of Kant's controversial statements about war must be considered in the light of Kant's fears of despotism. "Grave of universal despotism" has its literal counterpart in the image of the graveyard from the witty innkeeper's sign (*ZeF*, AA 08:343), mentioned at the beginning of *Toward Perpetual Peace*. The peace we seek cannot mean the death of human freedom. If the price of freedom is war, it's worth paying. The peace is not worth any price. If the price of peace is freedom, war is the better option. No doubt the same way Kant reasoned in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, as he claims that: "with increasing culture and the gradual approach of human beings to greater agreement in principles, leads to understanding in a peace that is produced and secured, not as in such a despotism (in the graveyard of freedom), by means of a weakening of all forces, but by means of their equilibrium in liveliest competition" (*ZeF*, AA 08:367).

According to Kant, the biggest threat to the realization of moral goals is stagnation, immobility, inaction. Kant points to some examples of such stagnation: "the spirit of mere commerce" (*KU*, AA 05:263), the innate laziness of the inhabitants of the tropics (*PG*, AA 09:316), the favourable geographical location, as in the case of China (*MAM*, AA 08:121). This is why it is so easy for Kant to see war as a training ground on which virtue is forged: "and only after a (God knows when) completed culture, would an everlasting peace be salutary, and thereby alone be possible for us" (*MOM*, AA 08:121). Indeed, Kant's position on this matter is complex and has certainly evolved over time.²⁰

¹⁹ Yoram Hazony completely mistakenly and one-sidedly presents Kant as a supporter of universalist morality and individual autonomy, who must consequently also be an opponent of the national state; see Yoram HAZONY, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2018). In fact, Kant is a consistent objector to what Hazony calls the "universal state". For Kant, the only option is the federalism of free states; see Patrick RILEY, "Kant as a Theorist of Peace Through International Federalism," *World Affairs*, 136, no. 2 (1973): 121–51. If we take this into account, it will not seem paradoxical to us that Kant defends the plurality of languages and religions (*MAM*, AA 08:121; *RGV*, AA 08:367n; *ZeF*, AA 08:367). Something that may seem contrary to Enlightenment universalism and rationalism is, in fact, a serious safeguard of freedom. It is freedom, according to Kant, that is the value in which man is supported by nature itself.

²⁰ Ernst KATZER, "Kant und der Krieg," *Kant-Studien* 20, nos. 1–3 (1915); Pauline KLEINGELD, "Kant über Freiheit und Frieden," in *Immanuel Kant 1724-2024. Ein europäischer Denker*, ed. Volker Gerhard, Matthias Weber, and Maja Schepelmann (Oldenburg: De Gruyter, 2022), 117–24.

Thus, when Kant writes of “equilibrium in liveliest competition” (*Gleichgewicht im lebhaftesten Wetteifer*), he is undoubtedly referring to the same thing that a decade earlier he called “unsociable sociability” (*IaG*, AA 08:20), which, on a practical level, is the equivalent of the reciprocal interaction of the forces of attraction and repulsion, thus maintaining the physical world of bodies endowed with mass. Just as the world of inanimate matter could not exist if one of these Newtonian forces gained the upper hand, so it is also impossible to arrange any lasting interpersonal relations by relying only on one of the forces of the social world, forgetting the other.

Anarchy, for instance, as the complete disintegration of all mutual relations, would probably be the equivalent of the thermal death of the physical world in unstoppable entropy. Similarly, the absence of interpersonal relations is a source of deformation and destruction of social life. In Kant’s time, the disastrous effects of prolonged isolation from society were reported through descriptions of wild, mad shipwreck survivors found on uninhabited islands. Therefore, writing about the foresight of nature, which condemned us to incessant rivalry, Kant even mentions the globularity of the earth as a safeguard against the continual separation of people from each other (*MAM*, AA 08:352–53).

On the other hand, the striving for a despotic monarchy would thus have its counterpart in the force of gravity compressing all the matter of the universe at one point. In international politics, the domination of sociability would lead to the creation of a global empire that, for fear of its own security, would absorb its neighbours, deprive them of their freedom and condemn them to despotism. And yet, Kant believes, even if such a universal monarchy were to come into being, it would still be exposed to the effects of never completely eradicated non-sociability, which would lead to internal strife, anarchy, and the eventual disintegration of this monster (like Hobbes’ *Leviathan*). It is not without reason that dictatorships do not tolerate any form of free association of people.

The considerations which I have narrowed here to the years 1784–1798 should probably be extended to what Kant wrote in the pre-critical period of his work. In fact, it cannot be excluded that he already considered some of the issues that he began to address more intensively only from 1784 onwards. In particular, Kant’s willingness to go beyond the metaphysical dream

Ultimately, Kant accepts that war is always illegal and that it is never a form of competition, but a denial of it (*ZeF*, AA 08:345). See also Steven PINKER, *Enlightenment now* (New York: Viking, 2018), 163.

(Schwärmerei) and take into account the completely objective conditions of human existence as something that is our ally in the realization of perhaps the highest good:

A secret power forces us to direct our will towards the well-being of others or regulate it in accordance with the will of another; although this often happens contrary to our wills and in strong opposition to our selfish inclination. The focal point at which the lines which indicate the direction of our drives converge, is therefore not merely to be found within us; there are, in addition, other forces which move us and which are to be found in the will of others outside ourselves. This is the source from which the moral impulses take their rise. These impulses often incline us to act against the dictates of self-interest. I refer to the strong law of obligation and the weaker law of benevolence. Each of these laws extort from us many a sacrifice, and although self-interested inclinations from time to time overrule them both, these two laws, nonetheless, never fail to assert their reality in human nature. As a result, we recognize that, in our most secret motives, we are dependent upon the rule of the general will. It is this rule which confers upon the world of all thinking beings its moral unity and invests it with a systematic constitution, drawn up in accordance with purely spiritual laws. We sense within ourselves a constraining of our will to harmonize with the general will. To call this sensed constraining “moral feeling”, is to speak of it merely as a manifestation of that which takes place within us, without establishing its causes. Thus it was that Newton called the certain law governing the tendencies inherent in all particles of matter to draw closer to each other the gravitation of matter, not wishing to entangle his mathematical demonstrations in possible vexatious philosophical disputes concerning the cause of those tendencies. Nonetheless, he did not hesitate to treat gravitation as a genuine effect produced by the universal activity of matter operating on itself; a for this reason he also gave it the name ‘attraction’. Are we, then, to suppose that it would not in the same way be possible to represent the phenomenon of the moral impulses in thinking natures, who are reciprocally related to each other, as the effect of a genuinely active force, in virtue of which spirit-natures exercise an influence on each other? If the phenomenon of the moral impulses were represented in this way, the moral feeling would be this sensed dependency of the private will on the general will: it would be an effect produced by a natural and universal reciprocal interaction. (*TG*, AA 02:334–35)

I am, however, unable to continue this topic here. More on the analogies and metaphors drawn by Kant from Newtonian mechanics is intriguingly and originally described by Monika Tokarzewska. The interested reader will find in her book numerous examples of borrowings from the language of science,

particularly physics and cosmology, which Kant employs to express his philosophical ideas.²¹

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The extensive quotation I referred to above comes from an early essay, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, published in 1766. Kant considers how to express the unity of the moral world by analogy to Newton’s description of nature through the universal laws of mechanics. An attentive reader will easily recognize the well-known “unsociable sociability” (*IaG*, AA 08:20) in what is here presented as “the strong law of obligation and the weaker law of benevolence” (*TG*, AA 02:234). The key to this analogy, however, is not the symmetry of moral and physical forces, but Kant’s belief that their interaction must ultimately lead scattered rational beings to form a “moral unity” and a “systematic constitution”. This belief seems to motivate Kant to rethink the chiliastic utopia in the years to come.

But in order to avoid the mistakes of religious dreamers and visionaries, Kant had to distinguish between the external order of law and the internal morality. In practice, this meant limiting religion only to its function as a tool against evil in human nature and a means to create an inclusive society based solely on the rights of virtue. From this perspective, the third part of *Religion...* is essentially an interpretation of theological chiliasm, but as a project which is realized not within the framework of the “political community” but only as an “ethical community” (*RGV*, AA 06:94–95), that is as a people of the God, which is formally and in a very imperfect way recreated in the institutional world by the church (*RGV*, AA 06:100–102, 122). Much of what Kant writes at the end of the third part of *Religion...* about the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth (“ethical state on earth”) is equally true with regard to the philosophical project of federalizing the free states (“the actual setting up of this state is still infinitely removed from us” [*RGV*, AA 06:122]). Reconciling conflicting interests in a harmonious communion seems as impossible in politics as reconciling ecclesial unity of faith with freedom in matters of faith: “It is the same here as with the political idea of the right of a state, insofar as this right ought at the same time to be brought into line with an international law which is universal and endowed with power” (*RGV*, AA 06:123n).

²¹ Monika TOKARZEWSKA, *Rettung vor Bodenlosigkeit. Neues Anfangsdenken und kosmologische Metaphern bei Locke, Leibniz, Kant, Fichte, Novalis und Jean Paul* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 113–86.

Perpetual peace is a philosophical project that is the continuation of what Kant expressed first as the state of goals (*GMS*, AA 04:433–34, 438), and later as an ethical community (*RGV*, AA 06:98–100), the form of which is imitated by the real church on earth. None of these projects of human coexistence, based on freedom, is something that man himself can effectively realize, or even fully understand, how this process takes place. Nevertheless, man must not abandon faith in the righteousness of the effort put into the realization of this ideal: “Faith (simply so called) is trust in the attainment of an aim the promotion of which is a duty but the possibility of the realization of which it is not possible for us to have insight into (and the same goes for the only conditions of this that are conceivable for us)” (*KU*, AA 05:472). From this perspective, Kant’s innovation is to move away from the orientation towards the realization of the highest good, the utopianism of which has poisoned every chiliastic plan of the kingdom of God on earth known to us so far. Instead, Kant places his trust in the reasonableness of the order of nature, which Kant believes gives us small but sufficient signs that the human race is on the way to the better (*SF*, AA 07:85–87).

What Kant writes about the highest good can probably still be considered as a theological and not a philosophical interpretation of the idea of the Kingdom of God (*KpV*, AA 05:127–128). The change takes place only when Kant reinforces his concept of the highest good, involving both nature and politics in its realization, although he still regards religion as an ally in upholding the very idea of morality (“...Kant supplements moral thought with the dimension of the prospect of a better world for the sake of morality itself, to reinforce its confidence in itself and to preserve it from defeatism”²²).

Commenting on Kant’s enthusiasm for the Christian concept of the highest good (the Kingdom of God) in *Critique of Practical Reason*, Jürgen Habermas writes:

The eschatological notion of a God who acts in history, an idea that goes beyond all Platonic ideals, makes it possible to transpose the idea of the “kingdom of ends” from the transcendental insubstantiality of the intelligible world into an inner-worldly utopia. Human beings thereby gain the assurance that, by acting morally, they can contribute to realizing the “ethical community” which represents Kant’s philosophical explication of the metaphor of God’s dominion over the earth.²³

²² Jürgen HABERMAS, *Between Naturalism and Religion. Philosophical Essays*, trans. Ciara Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 221.

²³ HABERMAS, 222–23.

However, if we go beyond the imposed theological perspective of *Critique of Practical Reason*, it turns out that Kant was at the same time developing a strictly philosophical concept of the realization of the highest good in the world (philosophical chiliasm). Kant first revealed this intention in *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784), and then elaborated on it in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793–1794). The result of reflections on philosophical chiliasm was finally presented in *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795).

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"PHILOSOPHY CAN ALSO HAVE ITS CHILIASM."

IMMANUEL KANT'S PREPARATION FOR THE PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECT
OF PERPETUAL PEACE

Summary

In the following article I will discuss the context in which Kant used the theological concept of chiliasm. Kant introduced the concept of chiliasm to reflect the complexity of the feasibility of the idea of the highest good in the world. To achieve this, Kant made an effort to liberate chiliasm from an exclusively theological meaning and gave it a meaning consistent with his own philosophy. The introduction of the concept of "philosophical chiliasm" represents an alternative to the strategy of the realization of the idea of the highest good presented in *Critique of Practical Reason*. We need not think of the feasibility of the highest goals of morality as those guaranteed by God alone. Since at least 1784 Kant has made it clear that the feasibility of these goals is also conceivable on the basis of the guarantees of nature itself. Philosophical chiliasm is thus Kant's original answer to the question of the feasibility of the idea of the highest good in the world. The final answer is given in *Toward Perpetual Peace*.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant; chiliasm; philosophy of religion; philosophy of history

„FILOZOFIA BYĆ MOŻE MA RÓWNIEŻ SWÓJ CHILIAZM”.
IMMANUELA KANTA PRZYGOTOWANIA
DO FILOZOFICZNEGO PROJEKTU WIECZNEGO POKOJU

Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule omówię kontekst w jakim Kant posłużył się teologicznym pojęciem chiliazmu. Kant wprowadził pojęcie chiliazmu, aby oddać złożoność realizowalności idei najwyższego dobra w świecie. Aby tego dokonać, Kant zdobył się na wysiłek uwolnienia chiliazmu od wyłącznie teologicznego sensu i nadał temu pojęciu znaczenie zgodne z własną filozofią. Wprowadzenie pojęcia „filozoficznego chiliazmu” oznacza alternatywę wobec strategii realizowalności idei najwyższego dobra, prezentowanej w *Krytyce praktycznego rozumu*. O realizowalności najwyższych celów moralności nie musimy myśleć jako o gwarantowanych tylko przez Boga. Przynajmniej od roku 1784 Kant daje do zrozumienia, że realizowalność tych celów jest do pomyślenia również w oparciu o gwarancje samej przyrody. Filozoficzny chiliazm jest więc oryginalną odpowiedzią Kanta na pytanie o realizowalność idei najwyższego dobra w świecie. Ostateczna odpowiedź zostaje udzielona w eseju *Do wiecznego pokoju*.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant; chiliazm; filozofia religii; filozofia historii