THE ENLIGHTENMENT EPISTEMOLOGY AND ITS PRESENT BLURRED MIRROR[1]

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Abstract: The paper tries to demonstrate the hypothesis that the Enlightenment epistemology, synthetically represented by Kant, is the *unity* between the *epistemological criticism* or more precisely the epistemological (and not mathematical) constructivist approach of knowledge as mental processing of the tools of mind and the *ethical maximalism* of the categorical imperative. Actually, the ethical maximalism was conceived of and is conceivable only in tandem with and as a result of the epistemological constructivism that alone enabled the responsibility without which the ethical stakes remain an exterior normative speculation. The unity arose from and supported the development of the concept of *critique* as autonomous use of reason, of *education of the critical spirit*, and of *public* presence of critiques. Surveying Kant's *What is Enlightenment* and *Contest of Faculties*, the concepts and the logic related to the critical spirit are described, as well as their interpretations by Deleuze and Foucault. One conclusion of the article is that the *radical* character of Enlightenment is given not by its liberal political theories but just by the above mentioned unity. With Enlightenment, criticism became more than the critique of empirical facts and abstract theories: it became a *transcendental methodology* uniting the conditions of every type of criticism and advancing the logic of *self-criticism* and moral construction.
Keywords: Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *What is Enlightenment*, *Contest of Faculties*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, epistemological constructivism, critique, maximalist ethics.

1. Instead of *captatio benevolentiae*: the closing of Athens philosophical school and Enlightenment

Justinian's edict in 529 AD concerning the closing of the Neoplatonic school of Athens[3] is used here as a *metaphor*. Its meaning does not oppose

[1] This is the original paper whose very, very shortened version will appear in *Dialogue & Universalism*.
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to and does not contradict the selective continuity (and even integration) of Greek philosophy in the European Christian world, neither does it oppose the science and reason of the Greek thought to the faith based Christian one, and nor does it suggest that the edict would have been singular in the ante sixth century history (and only on behalf of Christians). Concerning the latter aspect, it rather warns that such caesura type phenomena can occur; even nowadays, but obviously in different manners. Anyhow, the metaphor signals here a break between the *dialogue* and *critical* spirit of philosophy and the *alignment* of philosophy to an, euphemistically said, post-critical pattern. Indeed, we could take into account a *pattern* of dialogue and critical spirit and another one of alignment of philosophical thinking to the dominant ideology of the day. Thus, the metaphor does not address a temporal/historical significance, but an epistemological one.

If we use the patterns of the two ways of thinking given by the above metaphor, we could advance the commendation of Enlightenment as the *spiritual movement putting forth again the dialogue and critical thinking*[4] *as coordinates of the human existence and creation*. More and this not as a taking over of the Greek tradition but as exceeding it and the entire pre-Enlightenment philosophy and intellectual work: the dialogue and critical spirit were not in Enlightenment a requirement directed only within and for a circle of learned people. Kant's urge of *sapere aude* was expressly directed to *both* the intellectual elite and the bourgeois common people[5]. The *anti-elitist* stance and the consideration of the explicit

[3] Edward Watts, "Justinian, Malalas, and the End of Athenian Philosophical Teaching in A.D. 529", *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 94, 2004, pp. 168-182.

[4] Kant used the concept of critique in the traditional Greek meaning (discrimination/differentiation/decomposition of a thing or idea in order to understand it beyond the simple appearance, thus, to understand their causes and, as the Greek use was followed, to control them – because the appearance simply taken for granted has generated or was linked to difficult contradictions). Accordingly, the modern critical spirit was a reaction of questioning the premises of definitely established ideas and institutions. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Gruyer, P. A. W. Wood (Trans., Ed.). Cambridge University Press, 1998, Preface, pp. 100–101.

[5] Or, in principle, even to "the populace" (*plebs*) that expresses thoughts through imitation, "speaking in proverbial clichés"; but in order to practice both witticism and profundity of reason, "The mightiest revolution coming from inside of *man* is "his departure from his self-incurred tutelage." Instead of letting others think for him, while he was merely imitating or allowing himself to be guided by others, he now dares to proceed, though still shakily, with his own feet upon the ground of experience" if we recall Kant's observation (1978/1996) in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*

educative and popularising role of philosophy, allowed by the raise of the middle class in the newly born capitalist system full of promises, were the other features of Enlightenment thinking[6], rather unnoticed by its critics.

We might use the historians' concept of "long century" in order to consider Enlightenment a movement specific not only to the 18th century but, somehow in a reversed manner to the original meaning of the formula, also to the previous ones: thus the metaphor is better as "long Enlightenment". Actually, Enlightenment ideas were promoted by thinkers once the modern system and the air of freedom were constituted[7]. Since we cannot bracket the consonant examples of Enlightenment before Enlightenment, we can again assume that the movement is not so much located in an exemplary space-time interval, but rather it is a set of philosophical ideas born in the long process of man's struggling with its own "self-incurred immaturity"[8]. However, if we may suppose a "long Enlightenment" –both in the upstream and the downstream of the 18th century (but the inverted comma signals that the formula is rather a metaphor of the *continuity* of its ideas) – we nevertheless must be rigorous in observing the *unity* of the mentioned four features of an "enlightened epistemology" (critical thinking, dialogue, universalism as anti-elitism, educative role of philosophy, all of these as manifestations of the qualitative transformation of epistemology and ethics), i.e., the fact that this unity could constitute only in a specific

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(1798). Victor Lyle Dowdell (Trans.), Hans H. Rudnick (Rev., Ed.), With an Introduction by Frederick P. Van De Pitte. Southern Illinois University Press, 121, 129 (my emphasis).

[6] See Kant's all the demonstrations of both the possibility of the deontological ethics and the respect of dignity of every rational being/person. But these demonstrations denote only a *theoretical* attitude that, actually, was the only one aimed by Kant. Obviously, the limits of his political liberalism had their role, but for Kant the *Sapere aude* slogan was enough, i.e., it *implied* the cohorts of citizens of the state, without further elaborations.

Concerning the educative and popularising role of philosophy, the *Contest of Faculties* highlights it.

[7] Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

[8] Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment*, in Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*. Pauline Kleingeld (Ed. and Introd.). David Colclasure (transl.). With essays by Jeremy Waldron, Michael W. Doyle, and Allen W. Wood. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 17.

fragment of its long gestation. In the present article, this unity constitutes the *paradigm* of the Enlightenment.

Also, we should not forget that we take the *philosophical* ideas out of the set of social, political and economic ideas of the age. And this taking out is not due to a restrictive professional philosophy standing but to the *methodological* difference between the methodological concepts of *dialogue*, *critical thinking*, *education of critical thinking and dialogue*, *universal education* of this kind, and on the other hand, the political concepts of reform, universal equality, toleration, freedom of expression, secularism, democracy, republicanism, which obviously are older and stronger from the standpoint of their familiarity; differently put, the methodological difference is that of the *type of universality* they represent. Another difference lies in the *reception and dissemination* of all of these ideas. Both the methodological concepts and the political concepts belong to intellectual technical thought. But not only their type of universality is different, but also their degree of connection to the immediate ardent problems of the real life. The political concepts were closer and thus, their reception and dissemination – earlier. Actually, only after a while of boiling of these concepts – and obviously, after the exposition of different accents in the philosophy – this one could critically reflect on the entire process. The critique of technical thought and the popular thought were/are not united: their convergence was a purpose of Enlightenment. Kant considered that the new metaphysics is and must be epistemology – as the critique of the existing metaphysics and the critique of knowledge acquisition, otherwise it not being "among the solid sciences"[9]. And although "metaphysics as a natural tendency of reason is real", this tendency must be freed from the reductionism which considers thinking only as a highlighting of contradictions[10]. In order to "discipline" the common thinking, thus make it more efficient, Kant proposed his metaphysics as critical examination of knowledge[11]. And even though the Romanticist philosophy seemed to be somehow opposed to the temperate optimism of Enlightenment, in fact it developed its diverse

[9] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena [= Preliminaries] to any Future Metaphysic that can Present itself as a Science* (1783), transl. Jonathan Bennett, 2017, http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/authors/kant, p. 74.
[10] Ibid., p. 73. See also p. 76.
[11] *Idem*: "Criticism relates to ordinary academic metaphysics exactly as chemistry does to alchemy, or as astronomy does to the astrology of the fortune-teller".

peculiarities just on the basis of the philosophical acquisitions of the 18th century.

Therefore, the methodological and the political ideas cannot be separated, because they strengthened each other in their common formation, and the political ideas were even the most obvious and ardent. At the same time, the type of universality of the Enlightenment core philosophical concepts allows the discussion of the *epistemological* significances of Enlightenment philosophy and more, of the Enlightenment ideas in general (e.g. what is the value of knowledge since it is about particular facts? how can the research of this knowledge reveal validity beyond the reflection of particular facts? how "applying pure concepts of the understanding to appearances in general" is possible?[12] how can criticism be not only a means of description of facts through experience but also a means of description of the process of knowing and, reciprocally, how can criticism be not only a means of description of the process of knowledge but also the way of understanding the facts?). In this respect, the reception and dissemination have no relevance. What is relevant is the internal logic of these core philosophical concepts, and also how/to what extent the concrete political, social and economic ideas are consistent with the Enlightenment core philosophical concepts.

Also, the epistemological analysis of the Enlightenment core philosophical concepts cannot ignore not only the history of Enlightenment ideas but also the social/class logic of the quite slow transformations of the European society in the 18th century (and before and after it)[13].

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[12] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 272.

[13] On the one hand, this methodological requirement to not ignore the class logic was given even by Kant who did not speak about classes, but about "the largest part of humanity" that was kept in a state of spiritual domination manifested as immaturity of mind. And this situation had, obviously, a strong "inertia" in the following centuries. On the other hand, the methodological requirement was seen by Kant through the lens of the utopian liberalism that in fact wanted to elide the concrete situations and relations framing the workmen whose energy supported the rising liberal middle class considered by him as the force that, surpassing its own immaturity, will bring the general betterment.

Actually, the phrase of the text highlighting the necessity to relate the logical analysis of Enlightenment theoretical philosophy to their historical and social meanings is mine. Hegel felt the contradiction of the utopian liberalism and criticised Kant just from the standpoint of awareness of class differences. At the same time, we may presume that the Kantian categorical imperative moral was the way that Kant not only deduced from the

2. Kant's epistemological criticism

Let's remember: Kant displayed the *faculties* – or mental abilities and actions – of mind: from the lower – sense, apperception, intuition, understanding, imagination and reason – to the superior: knowing, desiring and judging. (Reason[14] was both superior to understanding – as the ability to synthesise consequences of/from the understanding, i.e. relating the concepts and deriving from them meanings – and a step toward the rational control of desires and a "means" of judging according to moral values, and not only to logical inferences). The distinctive criterion of demarcation between the lower and the superior faculties was a *combination* of *distance* between the mental tools and the sensual experience and the *moral reason to be* of the human intelligence. The aspect of distance allowed the theoretical decomposition – or *critique* – of "the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive *independently of all experience*"[15]. The moral reason to be of this faculty was the *hypothesis* that Kant developed alongside his entire critical period: that the existence itself of faculty of reason in general[16] is not devoid of its reason to be, because the faculty as such leads to higher conclusions beyond the inferences related to the

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epistemological analysis of knowledge acquisition but also thought as the only normative construction that could counterpoise the social problems he was not opaque to.

[14] It is not important here to criticise (from an epistemological point of view, of course) Kant's antinomic face of reason: that it is both an integral synthesis and a total lack of conditions or limits. Actually, this antinomy was for him both the cause to speak also about reason in general as faculty of thinking, and his insistence that he discusses only the cognitive basis of our understanding of the world. Clearer, he leaved the discussion of the antinomies of the world to his after-comers. He knew that the world was a unitary harmony (at least from Leibniz). But the world had, too, contradictions. He considered that his task was not to dissect them, but to explain the cognitive conditions of considering them. In this framework, he suggested that freedom is the manner to face contradictions, namely, to put order in the contradictory appearance of the world. Freedom – as theoretical concept – was, thus, superior to the spontaneity that corresponded to the harmony of the world. Freedom was, essentially, a peculiarity of the humans, i.e., the result of their understanding, including their discovery of contradictions.

[15] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface <A>, p.101.

[16] Kant spoke not only about the faculty of reason in general (or faculty of thinking), but also about the specific steps/faculties in general of this faculty of reason in general. In this sense, "*understanding* in general can be represented as a *faculty for judging*", Ibid., p. 205.

immediate ground, and that the moral values, created by the faculty of reason in general, are the *main criteria* of the human behaviour and, specifically, of the capacity to judge both one's own manifestation as a human and that of the others.

Kant underlined that his epistemology is not a neutral research of "'How is the *faculty of thinking* itself possible?', but "'What and how much can understanding and reason cognize free of all experience?'"[17]: this "free of all experience" did not mean only that the faculty of reason is "subjective", in the sense that it belongs to humans and the mental representations of things are not copies of the objective "unconditioned" but "appearances conform to our way of representing"[18], but also that the faculty of reason is free to develop from concepts principles which add not only greater generality than experience but also which express *necessity*[19], thus they are *a priori*, namely, they are able to make canons ("sum total of the *a priori* principles of the correct use of certain cognitive faculties in general")[20] and to develop according to the highest ends of man[21]. These ends are only "practical", thus moral.

In his care for the explanation of the ways / methodology of knowledge, Kant insisted that knowledge has levels according to the distance between or the relationships of mental tools to practice: there is, obviously, the level of sciences given intuitively by sensual and pure sensitive intuitions – where "practice gives rise to method" and where the use of intellect is logical, the whole development being rendered "immune" by intuitions in practice[22] – the level of formal sciences (like the "mathematical construct that has been invented only so as to deduce consequences from it"[23], thus ordered by pure intuitions that "lets us connect concepts with other concepts, but in their case the synthetic judgment is *a priori* certain and necessary"[24], while their "immunity" is

[17] *Ibid*., p. 103.
[18] *Ibid*., p. 112.
[19] *Ibid*.,p. 132.
[20] *Ibid*., p. 672.
[21] *Ibid*., p. 674.
[22] Immanuel Kant, *The Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World* (1770), transl. Jonathan Bennett, 2017, http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/authors/kant, 19.
[23] *Ibid*., p. 2.
[24] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena [= Preliminaries] to any Future Metaphysic that can Present itself as a Science*, p. 17.

given just by this logic of construction/ "the self-evident truth of its propositions"[25]), and the level of (pure) philosophy (Kant says this level is metaphysics), where there is no immunity at all and knowledge must be demonstrated/proved by the "method" that comes before all science[26]. Kant has developed the "method" – as the epistemological deployment of the conditions of knowledge – as "critique"[27].

As *epistemological criticism* of the conditions / ways of knowing, this critique was in fact synonymous to the explanation of *epistemological constructivism*: that there are *intuitions* (related to senses) – "for through these alone is an object given" – and then different types of *concepts*; that some are empirical, containing in themselves intuitions and thus first, the human mind must relate these concepts and the empirical intuitions in order to understand the objects; that other are non-empirical or *a priori* concepts; in their turn, they are *either* containing a pure intuition in themselves as in mathematics and thus they can be constructed or rather their *individual* objects are constructed in accordance with concepts thought as universal but which "are exhibited *a priori* in intuition" and only intuition guide the chain of inferences[28]; *or* consider the particular only in the universal / consider themselves as the universal and exhibit themselves in a "transcendental synthesis from concepts alone" concerning "thing in general, with regard to the conditions under which its perception could belong to possible experience"[29].

Consequently, the epistemological constructivism refers to the formation of knowledge in general and considers the mathematical constructivism as only a particular example or way. Why is the formation of knowledge a constructive process, in its turn emphasised by the epistemological constructivist theory? This is because even though the thinking refers to external objects to it – and certainly these external objects may be also the thoughts themselves – in fact it works with the many types of representations. "Because in thinking in general we

[25] *Ibid*., p. 45.
[26] Immanuel Kant, *The Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World*, p. 19.
[27] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena [= Preliminaries] to any Future Metaphysic that can Present itself as a Science*, p. 46: "My chief aim in the Critique was not only to distinguish carefully the various sorts of knowledge but also to derive from their common source the concepts belonging to each of them. I did this so that by knowing the origins of these concepts I could settle how they might safely be used".
[28] Immanuel Kant, 8. *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 631, 632.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 633.

abstract from every relation of the thought to any *objecta* (whether of sense or of the pure understanding), the synthesis of conditions of a thought in general is not objective at all, but merely a synthesis of thought with the subject, which is, however, falsely taken to be a synthetic representation of an object" [30]. Simpler, mind constructs knowledge because it deploys inferences from concepts (first these concepts being ideas already existing as a result of former judgements on intuitions, but then they becoming more general) and these concepts are the general criteria and "comprising systems" without which the intuitions and the empirical concepts, but also *a priori* concepts cannot really arrive to larger and deeper meanings; without the inferences from concepts a cognisance would be only a copy, therefore, knowledge as such, the human ideas would not be possible.

Finally, in order to understand the stakes of Kant's philosophy in the history of thinking, It would be useful to mention that Kant has called his theory, *transcendental idealism* ("transcendental idealism of all appearances the doctrine that they are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves"[31]). Why and what were the significances of this formula?

Kant's choice of the substantive – *idealism* – was a response to both the vulgar materialism (called by Kant transcendental realism that "represents outer appearances (if their reality is conceded) as things in themselves, which would exist independently of us and our sensibility and thus would also be outside us according to pure concepts of the understanding)" and the empiricism that considered knowledge, actually, what we know, as a copy of things resulted from the experience given and transmitted by the senses, thus not absolutely certain but the only one. However, he did not consider himself simply a rationalist, i.e., claiming that the certainty of knowledge would be given only by reason – if we want to simplify the historical empiricism – rationalism debate (that was rather a simplification at the level of a "generalist technical" philosophical analysis) –) Kant considered himself a "dualist" who "concede the existence of matter without going beyond mere self-consciousness and assuming something more than the certainty of representations in me, hence the *cogito, ergo sum*. For because he allows

[30] *Ibid*., p. 440.
[31] *Ibid*., p. 426.

this matter and even its inner possibility to be valid only for appearance - which, separated from our sensibility, is nothing - matter for him is only a species of representations (intuition), which are called external, not as if they related to objects that are external in themselves but because they relate perceptions to space, where all things are external to one another, but that space itself is in us"[32]. (And certainly, he considered that his idealism (or critical idealism) "overthrows ordinary idealism; and through it all a priori knowledge"[33]).

Anyway, the adjective – *transcendental* – was added in order to show that his theory[34] is fundamentally an *epistemological* one, explaining knowledge as a multi strata process where reason is cognition of "the particular in the universal through concepts"[35], so that "it never applies directly to experience or to any object, but instead applies to the understanding, in order to give unity *a priori* through concepts to the understanding's manifold cognitions, which may be called 'the unity of reason', and is of an altogether different kind than any unity that can be achieved by the understanding"[36]. This: because the metaphysical questions about objects cannot be solved without fathoming the conditions of knowledge. The adjective was a response both to the above-mentioned empiricism and the rationalist tradition of *a priori* sources of knowledge, and also to the traditional metaphysical form of philosophy that was, first and foremost, ontology.

Transcendental did not mean exterior conditions to the human being (the word ceased to be tantamount to "transcendent" in ontological sense, but obviously it signalled that the principles of reason are "transcendent in respect of all appearances, i.e., no adequate empirical use can ever be made of"[37]), but just the epistemological analysis / *meta* interpretations of the conditions of knowledge, conditions consisted of the inner ways of knowledge acquisition from senses to the ideas of reason; but knowledge is, letting aside the origin in intuitions generated by senses, different from this origin: it is the complex system of

[32] *Idem*.
[33] *Prolegomena*, p. 79.
[34] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 196: The difference between the transcendental and the empirical therefore belongs only to the critique of cognitions and does not concern their relation to their object".
[35] *Ibid*., p. 338.
[36] *Ibid*., p. 389.
[37] *Ibid*., p. 392.

development and deduction of ideas. The unity of the two words in the formula – *transcendental idealism* – pointed out the play of concepts and ideas, the philosophical perspective that conditioned ontology of epistemology, thus, the epistemological perspective where the conditions of knowledge – intuitions, concepts, categories, ideas – always referring to objects of experience, are related to each other and these relations are demonstrated.

If we synthesise the processes of these relations, as well as their analysis (as *transcendental exposition* of space and time, as *transcendental use* of categories, as *transcendental theory* of elements – intuitions, concepts, categories, principles –, as *transcendental schema* of the concepts of intellect as a mediating representation between the sensible and the intellectual, as *transcendental method* determining the formal conditions of a complete system of pure reason), we can formulate this analysis as *epistemological constructivism*: theory of the conditions of knowledge as mental processing, where knowledge is both re-*presentation* and re-*production*, we giving to these words a metaphorical meaning of copy and mental processing, the *re* prefix signalling both the role of senses and the mental constitution and "interpretation". Actually, the epistemological constructivism as analysis refers to both the *logical* or formal interpretation "without objects" / irrespective of the contents (somehow the "external" level of constructivism) of types of inferential relations – consecution, inclusion, intersection, deduction, induction, division, subtraction and multiplication, similarity, equivalence, identity, inequality, difference, complementarity, junction, disjunction, union, negation, jump, circularity, composition, nexus, implication etc. – and the deep, "critical" interpretation that relates the logic of inferences to contents. This deep level divides, as Kant develops, in the level of understanding (relating the objects and their representations) and the level of reason, relating the concepts of understanding and thus, never ignoring the world of experience. Thus, the concepts of reason giving the logic of reason do not reveal a particular logic (of experience and its concepts of understanding), but a universal one.

Although Kant uses the word *understanding* for the intellect – this one being the ability to relate things to concepts and to see their immediate logic[38], and only reason being the capacity to see their universally valid

[38] *Ibid*., pp. 268-69, 394.

logic, explained beyond the particular examples, from concepts[39] – actually, the understanding is a concept that can be used, as it is in practice, as the "real" or "true" knowledge: namely, an ordered grasping of meanings of the multiple inferences of knowing, thus of its relationships to objects.

The epistemological constructivism described by Kant ("One can place all illusion in the taking of a subjective condition of thinking for the cognition of an object… Because in thinking in general we abstract from every relation of the thought to any object (whether of sense or of the pure understanding), the synthesis of conditions of a thought in general is not objective at all, but merely a synthesis of thought with the subject, which is, however, falsely taken to be a synthetic representation of an object"[40]) is the ancestor of at least some topics of the contemporary philosophy of mind, and it is the epistemological ground of the formal constructivism in mathematics and the lucid theory about the construction of scientific theories after measuring the world.

To finish this explaining note, it is worth to mention that Kant focused on the contradictions between the elements of knowledge and, related to the problem revealed by *What is Enlightenment*, between ideas.

The importance of epistemological criticism was for Kant – and is for us – so obvious that a rule in the critical method was not only to *not* consider legitimate the ontological description of the world without epistemology, but also to not confuse the sensitive knowledge as "moving over"/demonstrating highly mediated intellectual knowledge, and vice versa[41]. But if the problem of the assumption of metaphysics as epistemology was considered by Kant difficult "for the learned public", it was *connected* to the problem of general "working together for the common interest of an ever more enlightened reason"[42]. The critical method in philosophy ("metaphysics") *qua* epistemology was thus related to the critical attitude not only in mathematics, natural science, arts, but also in law and "even morals etc."[43]. Thus, what was important was that the "deserving men"[44] become able to thinking independently

[39] *Ibid*., p. 127.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 440.
[41] Immanuel Kant, *The Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World*, p. 20.
[42] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena*, 83.
[43] *Idem*.
[44] *Idem*.

of the existing prejudices and clichés. Critique was the unifying factor of the Enlightenment model of cognitive attitudes towards the complexity of existence and knowledge. At the same time, this critique was conceived of as *limited* by the social/class logic forbidding any questioning of the internal social order. For this reason, the enthusiastic call to *Sapere aude*, no matter how much it seems to us that it is universally addressed, was reduced in fact to domains that did not derange fundamentally the social architecture but on the contrary converged with the policy of reforms initiated from above. And ultimately, the call ought to restrain itself to the free time of those who held positions in the state and who, during the fulfilment of their functions, had to respect orders without questioning them. Kant thought that his utopian liberalism can respond this impossibly contradictory situation.

3. Limits and openness in the worldly Kantian critical thinking

This chapter does not detail the Kantian image about the critical thinking, but it reminds two moments and stakes, at the same time, in the formation of that image: the ideas of *What is Enlightenment* (1784) and of the *Contest of Faculties* (1798).

The first, foundational for the Enlightenment, advances, in a *utopian liberal* spirit, not only the value of the use of reason *autonomously* from those who think for others, but, in order to overcome the contradiction between the requirement of universal autonomous use of reason and the general social order based on submission, the means of weighted critique that can be integrated in the political reforms initiated from the top[45]. The weighted critique was possible, Kant said, on the basis of distinguishing between the *submitted* use of reason in private and the *free* public use of reason. The first correspond to the duties issuing from the different social functions within the public institutions, while the second is the transposition of the ideal model of a scholar freely promoting high level reasoning in the free community of scholars, into a citizen model of thinking. Both types of use of reason are considered as possible – and necessary – at the same individual citizen who could, *after* fulfilling his

[45] Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment*, in *op. cit*., p. 18: "it is the most harmless sort of freedom that may be properly called freedom, namely: to make *public use* of one's reason in all matters".

duty as an official, an officer or a priest, express publicly, "as a scholar", "his thoughts against…" "the mistakes" of those services, and to submit "these remarks to judgment by the public"[46]. Because, on the one hand, there is no fundamental contradiction between reason and the rules one must obey[47], and on the other hand, the criticism made "as a scholar", so publicly, shows the "unrestricted freedom" and the way "the guardians of the people (in spiritual matters)" prove to be mature[48].

However, through this supply, the contradiction is even more emphasised. Because it is very difficult to conceive of the full compliance with rules, ends and means in the social services and functions and, on the other hand, to be critical towards them. The difficulty results fundamentally not from the self-restraint of those who follow the rules but from their psychological need to avoid cognitive dissonances[49]. Certainly, one is "tamed" to not exit from the enclosure of rules, but if one is used to assume them, he cannot / does not need to imagine other rules[50]. This reference to psychology is not superfluous: even Kant explains, first that idleness and cowardice are the general causes of cognitive and moral immaturity of the large segment of humankind and, then, that this situation is self-feeding: "it is so comfortable[51] to be

[46] *Ibid*., p. 19. But see p. 20: "But as a scholar he enjoys full freedom and is even is called upon to communicate to the public all of his own carefully examined and well-intentioned thoughts…As a scholar, on the other hand, who, through writings, addresses the true public, namely, the entire world, (he), when making *public use* of his reason, enjoys unrestricted freedom in making use of his reason and in speaking from his own person".

[47] *Ibid*., p. 20: "in any case, however, nothing can be found in it that fundamentally contradicts the inner religion. For if he believed to find such a contradiction therein he would not be able to execute his office in good conscience and would have to resign from it".

[48] *Idem*: "For to claim that the guardians of the people (in spiritual matters) should themselves be immature, is an inconsistency that would amount to a perpetuation of inconsistencies".

[49] *Ibid*., p. 18: "the public that had previously been placed under this yoke may compel its guardians themselves to remain under this yoke, if it is incited to such action by some of its guardians who are incapable of any enlightenment".

[50] *Ibid*., p. 18: "Statutes and formulae, those mechanical tools of a rational use, or rather misuse, of his natural endowments, are the shackles of a perpetual state of immaturity".

[51] Let's insert here the John Fitzgerald Kennedy's utterance: "The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie — deliberate, contrived and dishonest – but the myth, persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic. Belief in myths allows the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought*", Commencement Address at Yale University*, June 11 1962.

immature", immaturity became "second nature" [52]. This general psychology is the result of a long-lasting lack of habit with the freedom of movement (as freedom of thinking), since the ordinary citizen of "the largest part of humanity (including the entirety of the fairer sex)" "has never been allowed to try it"[53].

The logical inference is that only the elite or a tiny part of the citizens of a country can be either already enlightened – "to claim that the guardians [54] of the people should themselves be immature is an inconsistency" [55] – or, together and led by an enlightened Prince, in course of generating enlightenment; *gradually*. The gradual improvement of both the rules and institutions and the right (and responsibility, Kant insists) of every citizen to know and to publicly submit his opinions for the betterment of institutions and rules is again mined by a contradiction. On the one hand, the citizens must publicly express their opinions; on the other hand, since it is only about some aspects of the existing rules and institutions, the "coalition" of public opinions can be presented to the throne that obviously will accept them. On the third hand, as the public opinions must not shake the fundamental social order, so the Prince must not oppose the decent public expressions of the citizens. In only few phrases, Kant proves to be a good descendant of Machiavelli[56]: "if he only looks to ensuring that all genuine or supposed improvement is consistent with the civic order, then he can for the rest just let his subjects do that which they themselves find necessary… he would even diminish his own majesty if he were to interfere…"[57]. But it is not only a question of "minimalism", that is the constitutional monarchy; it is also, and accentuated, about the care to support the existing order, the "best of all possible", and not to jolt it by adventurously supporting some

[52] Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment*, p. 17.
[53] *Ibid*., pp. 17, 18.
[54] Kant has taken over the term from Plato, *The Republic. In Kant it is clear that the guardians (Vormünder*) are the intellectual work layers developed as those which will be characterized later, after the development of the new modern rules rather after 1848 and especially after the unification of Germany, as an anonymous and strictly rule observing bureaucracy.
[55] *Ibid*., p. 20.
[56] This not meaning Machiavellianism in the vulgar – negative – and incorrect meaning of this word.
[57] Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment*, p. 21.

dissident voices: this would be tantamount to supporting "spiritual despotism"[58].

Kant started his answer through a large perspective of *freedom of the publicly expressing one's own opinion about social matters*. Then, as he underlined, he reduced the view to religion matters. Since the social matters regarded the attitudes towards the "super-structural" order – if this latter term is allowed – and since the attitudes were encircled within the limits of keeping both the structural order and the formal political one, then what remained as domain to which the freedom of public expression be exercised was only religion: i.e. the freedom of religion equated with freedom of conscience[59].

Reducing the public expression to the super-structural area, Kant argued that in this area only in matter of religion are the state officials acting as guardians: in matter of science and arts, the rulers have no interest to do that[60]. Therefore, the problem of immaturity of reason and of freedom of public expression depends on the domination-submission relations, on the role of "*guardians*" of the ruling strata[61]. The general immaturity is the result of the ruling strata's confiscation of public voice and will. When one is forbidden to speak, one adapts not only by not speaking, but also by not thinking. One cannot think without clarifying one's own thoughts by speaking.

Thus, the public use of reason can be defined as public expression of one's own opinions about public problems. Kant is very lucid: the enlightened Prince he dreams of – and he thinks he found – is the personification of the "paradoxical" cluster of contradictions:

- that, on the one hand, the modernising society requires freedom of expression but, on the other hand, this freedom of expression is reduced to some "super-structural" aspects, since "a free state may not dare say: *argue as much as you want and about whatever you want, but obey!*"[62];

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[58] *Ibid*., p. 22.

[59] From a historical standpoint, the focus on religion/the rejection of religious authority and the deduction of human rights as freedom of conscience were the elements characterising the Radical Enlightenment, according to Jonathan I. Israel.

[60] Letting aside here the Princes' role of *patron* even during Kant's life, we can smile in front of this big difference between the Kantian picture and the situation of science and arts nowadays.

[61] Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment*, p. 22.

[62] *Ibid*., p. 23.

- that, on the one hand, one must describe in a transparent manner – since *transparency* is a constituent of the freedom of expression or, more correctly, of the conditions of freedom of expression – the social logic and on the other hand, one should be silent about this logic and act as a critique/pretend to criticise only phenomena which do not disturb fundamentally this logic;
- that, on the one hand, the "intellectual freedom" – that glorified *public use of reason* and *human emancipation from self-incurred immaturity* – seems to be the basis (in any case, the philosophical and psychological basis) of the civic freedom, but on the other hand, the civic freedom is the concrete ground of the development of intellectual freedom; negatively put, on the one hand, no or lesser civic freedom generates anarchy, namely, "room for the people to extend itself in accordance with all its powers"[63]; but, can we speculate, does not this extension of the people according to its own powers imply the development of the free use of its thought?;
- thus, on the one hand, the civic freedom is beneficial to the intellectual freedom, on the other hand, it is limited.

This is the perspective of the idealist, benevolent and liberal intellectual of those times. However, as a philosopher, Kant could signal more than a political position: the clear position of confronting the *contradictions* of facts. And he did it, indirectly but fundamentally at the level of *epistemological analysis of conditions of thinking*.

At the same time, the insistence on the *autonomous* use of reason as the main feature and proof of the intellectual – and moral – maturity of the human being, opposing to the real heteronomous use, imposed from external and oppressive institutions and relations, is not the mark of the strong connection of philosophy to psychology but of the new *paradigm* already signalled by Kant: the *interdependence* of the two specific features of man (reason and moral), the *mutual* foundation and justification of cognition and ethics[64], the understanding of *criticism* as necessity to

[63] *Idem*.

[64] The moral and reason are interdependent, Kant highlighted already before the 1785 and the 1797 writings on moral which demonstrated this interdependence.

The critique of reason showed the *heuristic* character of the ideas of reason and the principles of intellect, because they point out how to proceed in investigating the objects of experience.

Also, pointing the difference between ideas and ideals, Kant considered the *ideals* as "even though one may never concede them objective reality (existence), are nevertheless

exceed the stereotypes and to strain one's efforts to think about both oneself and the impersonal of institutions. To the huge "paradoxical" situation of *coexistence* of the use of reason – be it autonomous or heteronomous – and of violent means to suppress it when it jeopardises "the public peace"[65], Kant could only hope that the future will see the gradual extension of effects of the *calls of free thinking*, these effects manifesting as the citizens' *capability of freedom of action* that, in its turn,

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not to be regarded as mere figments of the brain; rather, they provide an indispensable standard for reason, which needs the concept of that which is entirely complete in its kind, in order to assess and measure the degree and the defects of what is incomplete (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 552).

Also, Kant spoke about *freedom* as, first of all, *the result of cognitions as a proper product of reason* (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 396). Thus, the judgements of morals are possible only according to the *ideas* of virtue, and not according to empirical models/archetypes. And (650) "there also belongs the freedom to exhibit the thoughts and doubts which one cannot resolve oneself for public judgment without thereupon being decried as a malcontent and a dangerous citizen".

More, "every approach of moral perfection" is based on these universal ideas of morality: because "reason is the faculty of the unity of the rules of understanding under principles… it never applies directly to experience or to any object, but instead applies to the understanding, in order to give unity *a priori* through concepts to the understanding's manifold cognitions" (ibid., p. 389).

Also, Kant mentioned the "constitution providing for the *greatest human freedom* according to laws that permit *the freedom of each to exist together with that of others* (not one providing for the greatest happiness, since that would follow of itself)"as "at least a necessary idea, which one must make the ground not merely of the primary plan of a state's constitution but of all the laws too" (ibid., p. 397). And „the idea of this maximum is nevertheless wholly correct when it is set forth as an archetype, in order to bring the legislative constitution of human beings ever nearer to a possible greatest perfection"(idem). Simpler, "in morality" "human reason shows true causality, and …ideas become efficient causes (of actions and their objects)" (idem; but see also p. 403, especially "The rule says something universal under a certain condition. Now in a case that comes before us the condition of the rule obtains. Thus what is valid universally under that condition is also to be regarded as valid in the case before us (which carries his condition with it)").

Also (p. 674), Kant mentioned the "pure practical laws whose end is given by reason completely *a priori*, and which do not command under empirical conditions but absolutely, would be products of pure reason"; (p. 675) "laws that are imperatives, i.e., objective laws of freedom, and that say what ought to happen, even though perhaps it never does happen". There are larger mentions of the theory of highest good generated/demonstrated by reason; (pp. 676, 680) "the ideal of the highest good, as a determining ground of the ultimate end of pure reason". In *Prolegomena*, p. 3, he revealed "(reason's) most important vistas—which it needs if it is to mark out for the will its highest goal in all its endeavours".

[65] Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment*, p. 23.

will induct a change in the *principles of government*[66]. Why is this change necessary? It is because otherwise the paradoxical situation cannot end; and the autonomous use of reason is all the more both natural and necessary because man is "*more than a machine*"[67]; while to treat (every) human being "in accordance with his dignity" [68] is not a simple humanistic wishful urge but the requirement of an efficient governance. Kant's model was certainly the monarchy of the enlightened Prince Frederick, but if he could say nothing about the strict social and labour discipline in that time – and was not his intention to say – he nevertheless considered that the religious freedom concentrating the need of civic freedom in the modernising state can be shielded by the Prince as a means to enhance his own the "majesty" [69]. Thus, Kant promoted the autonomous use of reason (concerning the domain of religious freedom) with both "good governance" arguments and with logical inferences about the progress of enlightenment as a law of the human nature[70]. Thus, the expression of Kant's hope suggested a mixture of liberalism and its openness. Concretely, the criticism of *man*'s heteronomous thinking suggested the implicit disclosure of the heteronomous social organisation itself. In Kant's time, this organisation was not as clear as today; it opposed only the individual and the dominant power, constituted and baptised in modernity as the state. But the logical, inherent development of this organisation led to the absolute dependence of humans' needs on heteronomous structures. These structures do not simply configure the social division of labour, but the *subordination of this division to the domination-submission logic*[71].

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[66] On the one hand, Kant gave only general deductions because he considered them as enlightening the further political developments. On the other hand, he showed the contradictions of the liberal spirit: for instance, he both praised the humanistic potentiality of the French Revolution and he considered revolutions as rather unnecessary because they create new prejudices, see 18.

[67] Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment*, p. 23. Kant underlined.

[68] *Idem*.

[69] *Ibid*., p. 21.

[70] *Ibid*., pp. 20, 21.

[71] *Ibid*., p. 18: "It is thus difficult for any individual to work himself out of the immaturity that has almost become second nature to him. He has even become fond of it and is, for the time being, truly unable to make use of his own reason, because he has never been allowed to try it… the public that had previously been placed under this yoke may compel its guardians themselves to remain under this yoke".

A huge philosophical problem raised by Kant was that of responsibility and, more precisely, of the relation between the *ontological* status of man as a *universal* and the human *responsibility*. Obviously, philosophy has always spoken of man in general, but also understanding it through the lens of specific belonging to some social classes and communities. Concretely, in Kant, man is the modern one, the citizen of a modern/modernising state. Thus, it has the ontological status of a *person*, enjoying rights but, insisted Kant, having *moral* responsibility, something more and in any case different from duties within the system of mutual duties and functions. The ontological status of person means – and requires – both "the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects"[72] and, thus, the capacity to avoid (or, at least, control) our instrumentalisation through domination: to substitute it with the interdependence of mutual duties and functions, isn't it? Concerning this substitution, it belongs to the distant future, has Kant showed. But what does responsibility mean?

Is it again only the fulfilment of one's own duties, as many thinkers and ordinary people thought before and always think? *Responsibility* is a hard philosophical problem. It was *ab initio* a relational concept: the others are the ones who evaluate if you are responsible, and your responsibility is visible through your behaving towards others. Obviously, in the ancient thinking, men were responsible towards others, but in fact not the burden of responsibility was central, but the extent to which people wanted what was rational. Later, responsibility was dissolved within the absolute dependency of man on divinity. The first duty was faith, but faith is not responsibility, it is an obligation.

In Kant, on the one hand, responsibility is posited as *concrete*/as concrete duties according to men's functions. On the other hand, however, that concrete responsibility has no human significance if it remains within the confines of mutual services. Kant has put the *maximalist* sense of responsibility: the exit from its own immaturity, namely the permanent exercise of the human ability of self-awareness, self-critique and critical examination of facts. The hard characteristic of the problem of responsibility appears just from the coexistence of these

[72] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment" (unpublished manuscript in French), pp. 32-50, in Paul Rabinow (Ed.), *Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, p. 43.

two aspects that can be adverse. Because the concrete fulfilment of duties involves obedience, submission to unquestioned rules [73], while *responsibility* means to use one own reason, without prejudices, and thus even to question the rules.

The *model* of Kant's solution is, obviously, historical. His utopian liberalism consists in the hope/thesis that people can critically reason after/in parallel with the fulfilment of their obedience. And within some limits this could be real. While the dominant layers have learned to control the *obedience - use of one's reason* contradiction, in favour of the restriction of responsibility to functional obligations, clearer, to functional obligations through obedience. On the other hand, Kant's model is involuntarily and unconsciously cynical: but this cynicism does not belong to Kant. Rather, this involuntary cynicism was transformed by the same layers in biased dominant answers to the first question arisen from the above contradiction (what happens if people reason critically) and to the wonder generated by it (how can people critically reason if their whole mind is arranged for obedience).

Kant gave the answer to what is Enlightenment after writing significant pieces of scientific analysis and philosophical remarks and especially after the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*. The other *Critiques* and the groundbreaking works of normative ethics and of concretisation of critical deconstruction of concepts and systems of concepts followed the interesting year 1784 focused on social facts. Fourteen years later, *The Contest of Faculties* enlarged the perspective of Enlightenment (without using this word), by showing that the *freedom of conscience* is both the end and the means of the critical spirit and the development of humanity: and vice-versa, the critical spirit is the founding means of the future enlightened age that will translate into new institutions the freedom of conscience without which these institutions cannot be realised.

Far from proving Kant's weakening intellectual power and even far from being an assemblage of texts of unequal philosophical interest, The *Contest of Faculties* suggested, through the discussion about the prestige and freedom of the superior Faculties (theology, law and medicine) and

[73] See the references in Rod Driver, *Psychology: Pretending There Is Nothing Wrong*, February 02, 2021, https://www.globalresearch.ca/psychology-pretending-nothing-wrong/5736181.

the inferior Faculty of philosophy, a coherent system of concepts related to their *common* aim, to obtain knowledge, and thus to contribute to the moral and institutional transformation even of humankind and not only of a certain nation/state.

Because the state needs the education of people so as they can accomplish their obligations, the prestige and importance of the Faculties of theology (focused on the salvation of the human soul), of law (centred upon the compliance to rules and laws), and of medicine (taking care of the physical health of people as the basis of the fulfilment of social functions) are the greatest: towards the Faculty of philosophy in this system of education seemed to bring rather supplementary historical and rhetorical cognisance. However, things are just opposite. The superior Faculties are framed within the limits of their concrete scopes, and these scopes cover their entire educational effort, the Faculties having at the same time full freedom to fulfil their scopes. But, once more, their autonomy/freedom is confined by their "technical" scopes that are fully consonant with the requirements of the state authority. Thus, the scientific freedom all the way, namely, to searching for truth beyond "technical" limits, and thus even to revising the accuracy of particular "technical" reasoning, is higher at the level of philosophy, and the freedom of philosophical thinking and of the Faculty of philosophy are and should be the greatest; although now – during Kant's life – the philosophical scientific freedom, authority and prestige are the least.

This is not at all a *pro domo* pleading, and the book is not of particular interest only for philosophers. Kant pointed out both the idea of conflict between the need of the state to have a docile multitude of ruled and its need to have institutions (the Faculties/the University) aiming the scientific truth, and the idea of contradictions between the specific "technical" freedom of knowledge and the philosophical freedom of *meta* assessment of both the means and *telos* of knowledge and the *telos* of the human being. This philosophical freedom and this *meta* assessment are not excrescent towards the circumscribed scientific knowledge. The latter seems to be the only productive and lucrative, but this appearance is linked only to the authority needing docile subjects.

The role of philosophy – as *both epistemology and ethics* – is demonstrated everywhere, but in the discussion of religion it shows, like in the *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (1793), that the salvation of the human soul, task of theology and religion, depends not on the simple

conformity to the letter of scriptures but just on the *intellectual rational autonomy that explains the moral stakes of religion*, the integrity of the human moral conscience as helped by religion.

In its turn, if the Faculty of law develops the observance of rules as generating and creating a frame of rights, the legitimacy of all of these is given by the development of the *idea of justice* as regulatory synthetic force: leading to the enhancement of morals, to "progress". Actually, the conflict between the Faculty of law and that of philosophy can be expressed as the questioning of progress, the outcome of the observance of rules. The answer is suggested as *trust in progress*, realised *if* the idea of justice is gradually fulfilled: this idea itself being conceived of as the result of freedom of criticism.

In this respect, the progress is, obviously, gradual and faces many obstacles, but it is the result – as the French Revolution revealed, Kant suggested – of the possible *manifestation* of the human *rational and moral* thinking of what is just, fair, reasonable, equitable[74].

This manifestation is only an *indication* of the path of possible progress ("*signum rememorativum, demonstrativum, prognosticum*"), welcomed with a "disinterested, universal interest", an "enthusiasm" that can be understood only according to the criterion of "what is ideal and sure, what is pure moral" (that concept of justice)[75].

The *free and public use of reason*, and concretely, the duties and rights of people in front of states, must be *publicly* taught[76] (therefore, debated). Thus, this task does not belong to the jurists but to the philosophers who

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[74] Immanuel Kant, *Le conflit des facultés; en trois sections*. (1798). Traduit de l'allemand avec introduction et notes par J. Gibelin (1935), Cinquième édition, Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1997, p. 101 : the people (in the political meaning of this term) / the spectators (we may translate them as "public opinion") "with all the danger of the serious inconveniences that bias in the revolution might attract them, nonetheless manifest a universal, disinterested interest... thus demonstrating (because of universality) a character of humanity in general and also (because of disinterest) its moral character, at least in its substance, which not only allows us to hope for progress for the better but also constitutes such progress, insofar as it can be achieved today".

Nevertheless, in *What is Enlightenment*, p. 18, Kant pointed out that, with all these significances, "A revolution is perhaps capable of breaking away from personal despotism and from avaricious or power-hungry oppression, but it can never bring about a genuine reform in thinking; instead, new prejudices will serve as a guiding rein for the thoughtless masses".

[75] Immanuel Kant, *Le conflit des facultés; en trois sections*, pp. 100, 101, 102.

[76] *Ibid*., p. 106.

have and master the *freedom of conscience in both its epistemological and ethical meanings*. However – Kant couldn't stop to reveal – just the philosophers are "objects of disgrace and defamation as lights propagators", although they share the lights absolutely respectful for the state that wants only to dominate[77].

The contradictory character of Enlightenment is already a common knowledge: meaning, it should no longer be idealised, but only analysed and, by precisely showing which features are removed from the whole and considered emblematic for the process of further emancipation of man, pointed as a source of this emancipation. The becoming of man as an emancipated and morally responsible being was a clear-cut feature of the Kantian representation of Enlightenment, rationally demonstrated and closely related to epistemological criticism as a *methodological* condition for the coherence of the practical process. Consequently, Kant opened up both the path of speculatively demonstrated historical and moral optimism and glorification of progress, and the liberal reserve towards excessive accents in both optimism and pessimism. However, if the path is fruitful just because it is speculative (see the categorical imperative as possible), the liberal reserve rather narrows it.

In *present* terms, progress cannot be reduced to punctual optimistic statistics about some victories related to the decrease of death from hunger, since other numbers show dramatic situations in too many areas. Nor can the progress and the phenomena challenging it – as social inequality and war – be discussed only from the standpoint of attitudes surveys, without revealing their social meanings and consequences. Kant argued that the advance in the human presence on the Earth is *systemic* and given by the general moral enhancement, by the general "Enlightenment"[78] that consists in the rigorous judgements and use of concepts and can be taught just on this basis.

4. The avatars of the critical spirit

The essence or specificity of the Enlightenment epistemology is *criticism*. Methodologically, it is an analysis "all the way", but this feature was achieved according to the historical meanders of thinkers.

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[77] *Ibid*., pp. 106, 107.

[78] In this respect, the *preventive* feature of medicine and the necessary philosophical *meta* look on it (in *The Contest of Faculties*) is a sign of Enlightenment processes.

Nevertheless, if we unfold the meanings of criticism, we may grasp its modes or characteristics: *epistemological constructivism* – as the theory that what we know about the existence is the result of its *re-presentation* as ideas reflected and concocted in the human mind, or as knowledge "as *the synthesis of that which is presented*"[79], the *logic of analytic-synthetic possibility, interdependence and necessity* – and the *maximalistic unity and interdependence of epistemological requirements and accuracy and ethics*. These modes are unitary and converge, suggesting the *dissolving of the supposed neutrality of methodological technical analysis of knowledge*. They constitute the synthetic feature of capabilities or power allowing – even in moral, as Aristotle pointed[80] – the exemplary and maximalistic fulfilment of tasks and ends.

Actually and not forgetting the Greek original meanings of critique, the "maturity" of thinking – as Kant metaphorically called the independent thinking or, again metaphorically, its "enlightened" form – was (and is) not only a question of social causality[81] and enlightenment of princes, but first of responsibility towards the thinking as such and the understanding of its rigours. For example, the fact that people generalise only from their inevitably narrow direct and book experience (today we say "from their information") and consider it as the archetype of the problem, that, in its turn, would be "the universal proof" of the Truth of their point of view, is the result, as Kant showed, of their education by the "guardians". Thus, the education of both guardians and common people must include the understanding of both the concepts of understanding as "cognition and determination of an object"/"as unity of reflection on appearances" always applicable in experience, and the concepts of reason, "of which the empirical is only one part" but which serve to the comprehension of the relationships between concepts of

[79] Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties* (1963). Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. London: The Athlone Press, 1984, p. 8.

[80] Ana Bazac, "Aristotle, the Names of Vices and Virtues: What Is the Criterion of Quantitative Evaluation of the Moral Behaviour?". *Dialogue and Universalism*, Volume 27, Issue 4, 2017, pp. 175-188.

[81] According to Kant, causality is the mutual dynamic influence and action of elements in a relationship; not a simple generation or establishment of effect, not a simple formal relationship (cause-effect), but a community (*commercium*) of the elements in the relationship.

understanding[82]. The *necessity* of things (in fact, their causality) – and not only their existence – is highlighted by universal cognitions (through concepts of reason)[83]. The way to not confuse the simple existence with its necessity – through a comprehensive education of logic and epistemological approach of contents – is a scope and part of criticism[84]. It is expressly a weapon against obedience in thinking: because this comprehensive education[85] helps people to treat the theses of "necessity" with the same caution with which they treat the decreed existence.

Let's interpret the critical spirit in our present understanding: based on Kant but going further.

In order for a human to behave well and fruitful/generously towards his fellows, he certainly needs (or needed) advice and rules, as well as clarity in the understanding of the *consequences* of his behaviour, and with all of these the result was or should be a *high level of the human power to act humanly*. In this line, the *moral law was and should be logically demonstrated*. This moral law is a concept of reason, and thus it must be demonstrated: because otherwise, neither reason nor its requirements are taken seriously. Or, the Enlightenment spirit brought about just the necessity of these requirements. *Reason as the judge of reason* was the huge burden put by Kant on the shoulders of humanity in its movement. Criticism became more than the critique of empirical facts and abstract theories: it became the *transcendental method* emphasising the epistemological constructivism and uniting the conditions of every type of criticism and advancing the logic of *self-criticism* and moral construction[86].

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[82] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 268-69, 394.
[83] *Ibid*., p. 127.
[84] *Ibid*., p. 101: "critique of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive *independently of all experience*".
[85] See *ibid*., p. 651.
[86] *Ibid*., pp. 627-28: By the transcendental doctrine of method, therefore, I understand the determination of the formal conditions of a complete system of pure reason… and will accomplish, in a transcendental respect, that which, under the name of a *practical logic*… negative judgments, which are negative not merely on the basis of logical form but also on the basis of their content, do not stand in high regard: one regards them as jealous enemies of our unremitting drive straining for the expansion of our cognition, and it almost takes an apology to earn toleration for them, let alone favor and esteem… But where the limits of our possible cognition are very narrow, where the temptation to judge is great, where the illusion that presents itself is very deceptive, and where the disadvantage of error is very serious, there the *negative* in instruction, which serves

Further, the critical spirit is not only analytical or logical disentanglement of ideas but also conscious *ideological* deconstruction of their suppositions. Accordingly, there are two ways to manifest the critical spirit: one is the "technical", i.e., deployed at the level of professional analysis of the coherence of theories, and the other is the explicit or implicit *ideological*. (Namely, man always thinks from the social place and point of view where he is or thinks he is). These two ways confuse the problem of criticism: some consider that the professional analytical focus would be enough and has nothing to do with ideological (inherently ethical) preoccupations which would not even be respectable from the standpoint of the scientific character of the work; other ones believe that the ethical peroration would be enough to demonstrate one's own awareness in front of the existing results of thought in society. However, as we saw, the critical spirit is *comprehensive*, and it consists also in the "vigilance" towards all the aspects (no matter how technical or technically presented they are). Consequently, and since the critical spirit never forget the whole or some different aspects because it would focus on the "main target", it cannot cohabit with obedience (eventually related to "collateral aspects" and, as is the most widespread, with fear); because fear paralyses it.

If the critical approach empowers the human thinking this is because the critical approach itself is fuelled by both the inherent construction of the human mind and the social altruistic, so moral ends. This last condition – the moral ends – is translatable into and as the language of reason or rationally examined and proven goals. As a result, the critical spirit – and inherently, its moral motivations and contents – is not a mechanical manifestation of the "natural" construction of the human mind, although the humans exist and develop just because they ask "why?". The critical spirit is educated, and also it can be stopped and deviated to false criticism and moral goals. In order to combat this last alternative, Kant considered as cardinal to develop the practical reason as a well-founded theory legitimising the moral good for all. This *maximalist* ethical theory gives the track to the critical thinking.

The interdependence between the technical and the ideological facets of criticism considers the concrete social conditions of thought, the

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merely to defend us from errors, is more important than many a positive teaching by means of which our cognition could be augmented".

concrete time and space coordinates of theories and actions. Without knowing the concrete context of thinking it is difficult to really use Kant's epistemology in order to substantiate the knowledge about society. And first, there are the founding suppositions of theories, be they tacit or explicit "axioms", those which must be questioned. From the standpoint of the critical spirit, not only the logical arguments of theories but also, and even first and foremost, the "axioms" must be analysed. Otherwise the theories as such are insecure, lame, while their bases are systems of prejudices.

By defining the classical literature as mature, T S Eliot put *maturity* according to the society to which literature was written. The maturity of mind needs the maturity of manners, he said[87], the stake and the purpose being, in his analysis, the maturity of language. But if we translate "the manners" in our scientific terms, it's clear that throughout history the rules and institutions, the social organization as a whole, were so aggressively marked by the domination-submission pattern[88], so as rare minds were disposed to be mature, to critically approach them even during their spare time, as Kant has suggested in *What is Enlightenment*.

The "maturity" of the critical spirit – corresponding to that enlightened age dreamed of by Kant but seen only as a future achievement – is a conscious questioning and deconstruction of all the ideas and theories, thus of all the *practical* positions and *clichés*; and especially it is the conscious understanding of the *stakes* and *consequences* of their questioning and deconstruction.

Because that "maturity" was not achieved long after Kant, T.S. Eliot described that state as "provincialism": "distortion of values, the exclusion of some, the exaggeration of others, which springs…*from applying standards acquired within a limited area to the whole of human experience*; which confounds the *contingent* with the *essential*, the *ephemeral* with the *permanent*".

Psychologically, we know that this immaturity consists in the *prevalence of the convenience of conformism*. This prevalence is showed by either considering the traditional ideas – and all the traditional ideas, out of any doubt about them – as absolute truth and proof of reason of the

[87] T.S. Eliot, *What is a Classic?* An address delivered before the Virgil Society on the 16th of October 1944. London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1944.
[88] Not only between classes, but also in other social relationships.

existing conformism, or by completely erasing the complexity of past and considering only *simplified* elements as being the truth of historical continuity and discontinuity.

The poet envisaged this last situation: "In our age, when men seem more than ever prone to confuse wisdom with knowledge, knowledge with information, and to try to solve problems of life in terms of engineering, there is coming into existence a new kind of provincialism which perhaps deserves a new name. It is a provincialism not of space, but of time; one for which history is merely the chronicle of human devices which have served their turn and been scrapped, one for which the world is the property solely of the living, a property in which the dead hold no shares. The menace of this kind of provincialism is that we can all, all the peoples on the globe, be provincials together"[89].

Before underlining this last phrase, it is worth to mention that it is not about "men", but about *concrete social classes* and about the main role of those intellectual classes at the top of society in keeping and strengthening a general immaturity. Julien Benda, a "classicist" but not a naïve idealist, made a philosophical critique of the intellectuals who betrayed the intellectual commitment to *universalistic* values and *rationalist criticism*[90]. The post WWI intellectuals – and not only those – took over and enthusiastically embraced particularistic values and standpoints: the Kantian unity of reason and moral was abandoned.

But this lack of intellectual "virtue" materialised into tragic social consequences. And, turning back to the last phrase of the above citation, the consequences are lasting, infesting even the *future*. Kant showed that the faculty of knowledge, when simply empirical, finds its law in the objects; I add, *as if* knowledge would be their simple copy. By the way, just for this reason the philosophical interpretation of things is more and requires more than phenomenology. But, Kant continued, when the faculty of knowledge finds its law in itself, through the *a priori* synthesis[91], it is a (rational) interpretation. When simply empirical,

[89] T.S. Eliot, *What is a Classic?*, p. 30.

[90] Julien Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (1927). (Translated by Richard Aldington (1928), Introduction by Roger Kimball). New Brunswick (U.S.A.) and London (U.K.): Transaction Publishers, 2006.

[91] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 196, 198, 210- 211, 211, 220, 235, 261, 444: (p. 196) the "not every *a priori* cognition must be called transcendental, but only that by means of which we cognize that and how certain representations (intuitions or concepts) are applied entirely *a priori*, or are possible (i.e., the possibility o f cognition

or its use *a priori*). Hence neither space nor any geometrical determination of it *a priori* is a transcendental representation, but only the cognition that these representations are not of empirical origin at all and the possibility that they can' nevertheless be related a priori to objects of experience can be called transcendental"… "In the expectation, therefore, that there can perhaps be concepts that may be related to objects *a priori*, not as pure or sensible intuitions but rather merely as acts of pure thinking, that are thus concepts but of neither empirical nor aesthetic origin, we provisionally formulate the idea of a science of pure understanding and of the pure cognition of reason, by means of which we think objects completely *a priori*"; (p. 198) "when the faculty of knowledge measures the truth of its findings with the general logic"; "general logic abstracts from all content of cognition, and expects that representations will be given to it from elsewhere, wherever this may be, in order for it to transform them into concepts analytically"; (pp. 210-211) "Transcendental logic, on the contrary, has a manifold of sensibility that lies before it *a priori*, which the transcendental aesthetic has offered to it, in order to provide the pure concepts of the understanding with a matter, without which they would be without any content, thus completely empty… Only the spontaneity of our thought requires that this manifold first be gone through, taken up, and combined in a certain way in order for a cognition to be made out of it. I call this action synthesis. By *synthesis* in the most general sense, however, I understand the action of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition. Such a synthesis is pure if the manifold is given not empirically but *a priori* (as is that in space and time). Prior to all analysis of our representations these must first be given"; (p. 211) "the synthesis alone is that which properly collects the elements for cognitions and unifies them into a certain content; it is therefore the first thing to which we have to attend if we wish to judge about the first origin of our cognition… to bring this synthesis to concepts is a function that pertains to the understanding, and by means of which it first provides cognition in the proper sense… pure synthesis, generally represented, yields the pure concept of the understanding. By this synthesis, however, I understand that which rests on a ground of synthetic unity *a priori*… is a synthesis in accordance with concepts… Transcendental logic, however, teaches how to bring under concepts not the representations but the pure synthesis of representations. The first thing that must be given to us *a priori* for the cognition of all objects is the manifold of pure intuition"; (p. 220) "Among the many concepts, however, that constitute the very mixed fabric of human cognition, there are some that are also destined for pure use *a priori* (completely independently of all experience), and these always require a deduction of their entitlement, since proofs from experience are not sufficient for the lawfulness of such a use, and yet one must know how these concepts can be related to objects that they do not derive from any experience. I therefore call the explanation of the way in which concepts can relate to objects *a priori* their transcendental deduction, and distinguish this from the empirical deduction, which shows how a concept is acquired through experience and reflection on it, and therefore concerns not the lawfulness but the fact from which the possession has arisen"; (p. 225) "the synthesis of this manifold by means of the imagination is the second thing, but it still does not yield cognition. The concepts that give this pure synthesis unity, and that consist solely in the representation of this necessary synthetic unity, are the third thing necessary for cognition of an object that comes before us, and they depend on the understanding"; (p. 235) "the concept of a cause is nothing other than a synthesis (of that which follows in the temporal series with other appearances) in accordance with concepts; and without that sort of unity, which

knowledge has no great responsibility: the objects, instances outside it, command. But when knowledge interprets them with all the anterior intellectual analysis, including with the decomposition of prejudices, the power, as well as the responsibility, belong to the human subject.

In the past, the lack of intellectual analysis – that is both "technical" (logical/professional), and ethical – led to what later was called (certainly, also taking into account historical social interests and not only the lack of intellectual analysis) the "banality of evil" (Arendt). Epistemologically explained, the process relativising the evil started, continued and expanded just because reason applies to theoretical and empirical objects of experience, and the relationship with these objects is *not neutral*: it is "topological", namely ideological. The objectively determined class and social position bias and the subjectively coloured ideological feature of the relationship is the cause of both positive and negative attitudes towards the objects and, accordingly, of opposition to criticism in the last situation. These objective aspects of the social relations and these subjective ideological manifestations are the reason of not only the continuation but also the transposition of the evil in a future that deprives the future generations from life and deprives the present generations from responsibility. The tragic worldwide examples of dramatic reduction of biodiversity, of dramatic treatment of matter in both its input and output moments towards the human activity, of dramatic treatment of the value of the human life are illuminating. When

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has its rule *a priori*, and which subjects the appearances to itself, thoroughgoing and universal, hence necessary unity of consciousness would not be encountered in the manifold perceptions"; (p. 261) "the possibility of cognizing *a priori* through categories whatever objects may come before our senses, not as far as the form of their intuition but rather as far as the laws of their combination are concerned, thus the possibility of as it were prescribing the law to nature and even making the latter possible… if the categories did not serve in this way, it would not become clear why everything that may ever come before our senses must stand under the laws that arise a priori from the understanding alone"; (p. 444) "Reason is the faculty of principles…those predicates which, if they exist, ought to determine the object in itself independently of experience, hence through mere reason. Thus they would properly have to be grounded on principles and universal concepts of thinking nature in general. Instead, it turns out that one single representation, "I am," governs them all which, just because it expresses (indeterminately) what is purely formal in all my experience, proclaims itself as a universal proposition, valid for every thinking being, and which, since it is individual in all respects, brings with it the illusion of being an absolute unity of conditions of thought in general, and thereby extends itself farther than any possible experience could reach".

thinking is made to become dependent on *exterior* programmes – quite opposite to the idea of Enlightenment – and thus the critical spirit being annulled, when the ubiquitous techno-surveillance of states and supra-state private institutions dispossesses the autonomy of the human person and the self-determination of the human thinking, the results concern not only "us", the present generations, but also the future and its possible generations. Both the huge potentiality of the human thinking and its historical endeavour to develop its analytical/critical power are massively endangered.

The decay of the critical thinking, an unequal tendency in the last two centuries, was a result of both the *epistemological* and the *social* conditions, and a cause of their deepening. Actually, the epistemological conditions – concretised in the development of science – led to the development of criticism, but they were and are socially framed and determined. The biased science, subordinated to lucrative interests exterior to science, constitutes a tragic example of the distortion of the rational thought[92].

If we dissect this decay, we can mention some aspects. One is the induced fatigue of thinking in front of practically two opposite facts: the rise of the systematic and founded *scientific* thinking on everything (even on supra-sensible phenomena), thus the research starting from this everything to theories/conclusions/principles, and the *speculation* starting from principles to conclusions. Because both the research and the speculation are determined from outside (and not only from their inherent inner logic) and because they are based on tacit ideological suppositions (as well as they are promoted on ideological grounds), and not only on honest cognitive interest, the meta-conclusion of uncertainty in the case of both mentioned facts, became loud in the spiritual atmosphere influencing both the intellectuals and the common people[93]. Today also flourishing, one of the main epistemological arguments against the autonomous use of reason is the limited character of the

[92] See the critique of this distortion from Naomi Oreskes, Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt, How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010, to Kamran Abassi, "Covid-19: politicisation, 'corruption,' and suppression of science", *BMJ* ;371:m4425, November 2020. http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m4425.

[93] There are examples of negative (and not positive) messages of scepticism in science by scientists (Emile du Bois-Reymond, 1872) and in reason and science by philosophers (Bergson, Burke, Pareto).

scientific research[94] and the existence of "something more" than that which is scientifically studied and determining a thinking based on feelings of the abstract depth[95].

5. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the complexity of Enlightenment epistemology

Let's remember the Enlightenment principles. The French *Encyclopédie* explicitly and expansively promoted the idea of *spiritual rising of the people by knowledge*, and knowledge meant *science*[96]. And apart from the scientific way to approach life, knowledge meant *sensitivity and artistic imagination, acquired together with science*[97]. But does this high cognitive level not lead not only to the "ennobling" of ordinary people but also to the radical betterment of their morals? The enlightenment was *both scientific and moral*. This was also Kant's position, as it demonstrated especially in *Critique of Pure Reason*.

The object of science is *nature*, said the writers of *Encyclopédie*: certainly, they were not original in that, they continued the old philosophy of nature. But the concept of nature was complex: it signified the whole system of physical things as the new "miracle" and generative force, substituting for the Christian divinity[98]; it meant also the state of

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[94] This argument is aided by the narrowness of sight of some scientific attitudes and theories, as well as a professional vanity. These attitudes are practical, while the *model* of scientific attitude involves modesty and the sense of limits, as well as the spirit of collaborative work, beyond any non-scientific differences.

[95] These last words are important in order to not confuse them with the feelings of the pain of other beings. Just in order to feel this pain and to act accordingly, the scientific spirit is necessary. Empathy without well-founded rational arguments, given by science, is powerless, ineffectual.

But for "something more", see *Manifesto for a Post-Materialist Science*: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264463775_Manifesto_for_a_Post-Materialist_Science.

[96] Its reason "is to change the common way of thinking" (Diderot) in Alain Cernuschi, Alexandre Guilbaud, Marie Leca-Tsiomis, Irène Passeron, *Oser l'Encyclopédie: Un combat des Lumières*, EDP Sciences, 2017, p. 57. But see also until p. 67.

[97] *Ibid*., pp. 68-72.

[98] We can grasp a line between Spinoza's *Deus sive natura* and the deism of some Enlightenment philosophers as well as its transposition into the political decrees of the bourgeois revolutions. See Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 43-50, 155-161, 457-470, 867.

man outside society, i.e., that forming the exterior and interior appearance and "impulses" [99] of man and founding the human's inalienable rights; nature was the explaining factor of society, science and religion, the individual freedom and the human rights.

But the Enlightenment movement as a whole *did not neglect the spiritual sides*. First of all, Kant did not reduce the moral world to material determinism and neither did he reduce reason, knowledge and sentiments to biological determinism. But still in the French space, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a leading representative of the Enlightenment *esprit de finesse*. The prevalence of the spiritual in the explanation of the world of man manifests everywhere in his work: from *Discours qui a remporté le prix de l'Académie de Dijon; en l'année 1750; sur cette question , imposée par la même Académie: Si le rétablissement des sciences et des arts a contribué a épurer les moeurs*[100], where science is considered as a main cause of the decay of morals/virtues (through the luxury it produced), or from *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne* (1771-72; posthumous in 1782) where the modern knowledge generated a European uniformity of superficial and rather vicious morals, but where the solution is *not the return to an ancient simplicity* but the construction of such a modern social organisation that the evils of modernity (inequality, in essence) disappear and an atmosphere nearer to the state of nature constitute[101], to the "religion of the heart" grasped through introspection in *La Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard* (1762) and the splendid psychological analyses from *Les révéries du promeneur solitaire* (1776-78).

Anyway, insisting on the possibilities opened by science, education and knowledge, the Enlightenment writers were critical in *many* ways, at the same time considering that a main reason of philosophy is to *analyse the existing worldviews, even contradicting them*. Because – let quote from Rousseau's *Discours*: "There will be in all the times men made to be subjugated by the opinions of their century, of their country, their society"[102].

Anyway, we do not elaborate here the Enlightenment principles, like the anticlericalism (opposition to the power or influence of the clergy) related to the substitution of God with nature.

[99] This concept is later; it belongs to the 19th and the first decades of the 20th centuries.

[100] In Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, tome I. Paris: Firmin Didot frères, libraires, imprimeurs de l'Institut de France, 1866.

[101] *Ibid*., pp. 706, 728.

[102] *Ibid*., p. 463.

5. 1. A word about the present opposition to the Enlightenment spirit

Just the above-mentioned Enlightenment "profession of faith" is the main reason of the present cynical stance that it is "out-of-date". In the 18th century philosophy, reason was not the only origin of man's uniqueness, but Enlightenment insisted that if science and reason are despised, it is lying and deception that substitute them (as Mefisto proclaimed to Goethe's *Faust* (1772-75; 1790).

But the present opposition to the Enlightenment spirit is not so much against the European rationalism that started much earlier: it has in view the express *critical* manifestation of rationalism, namely, the *substantiation* of both the epistemological approach of ways of thinking and the maximalist ethics that, au fond, was the logical result of the epistemological consistency. Enlightenment was the period and movement that developed a harsh social critique. This critique corresponded to the rise of liberalism as ideology of modernity. Liberalism was contradictory, as it is well-known, and the present mainstream ideology, by focusing on its historical framing, does not rejects liberalism as such. But on philosophical level, thus beyond the exposition of both lucid and limited political liberalism[103], just the Enlightenment overcoming of political liberalism through epistemology and ethics conferred to this movement the specific theoretical greatness that cannot be granted automatically to any movement or works.

The incrimination of Enlightenment as "obsolete" denotes the nowadays' mainstream *opposition to its earnestness to warn that knowledge means systematic and long-drawn effort*. Or the features developed by the present dominant ideology are just *the reduction of intellectual effort and mastery of intellectual tools* as criticism, logics, analysis, comparison, criteria, consequences, short-term and long-term evaluation of goals, stakes: briefly, the reduction of rational tools of the human being[104]. But Enlightenment warned against clichés, prejudices and "facts as definitive

[103] And economic, of course. But not all the Enlightenment writers were interested in economy.

[104] Bernard Stiegler, *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the Twenty-First Century* (2012). Translated by Daniel Ross, Cambridge, UK; Malden, Ma.: Polity Press, 2015. Less philosophical, Larry Romanoff, Substandard Education in America, Global Research, November 08 2019, https://www.globalresearch.ca/brief-look-substandard-education/5694267.

data", i.e. the taking for granted of appearances[105]. One such fact today is the dependence on the devices produced by science, but not on science as such. The systematically lowering of the mass scientific and rationalist knowledge involves the absolute dependence on *devices* and at the same time on *entertainment*, on a permanent "vacation of thinking". Enlightenment insisted on the search for truth, while the present's most famous ideological product of "study" is the mastery of rhetoric or, with a modern word, of "communication". The questioning of the dominant ideas is considered by the dominant ideologies as a spiteful and unacceptable way of thinking: in the best case, outdated, in the worst case dangerous and blameworthy; both in common and scientific thinking[106].

6. Instead of conclusions

The Enlightenment spirit, continuing the old rationalism and the common people's need of knowledge and understanding, has been continued until today, despite its interruptions caused by the attacks of irrationalism and the ideological-political pressures. It is noteworthy that the Enlightenment epistemology was realistic and not utopian: it answered to the societal crisis as well as to the crisis of knowledge with both *social critique*, doubled with the *epistemological founding* of this criticism, and a *minimalist* but *sine qua non* solution, that of systematic (mass) *education*. This solution was consonant with the already present or upcoming industrial revolution, so that not the minimalist "enlightenment" as such was and is rejected by the anti-Enlightenment

[105] Actually, the critical stance was older than the Enlightenment (just for this reason, the metaphor of "long Enlightenment" is not absurd). We remember Francis Bacon's *The New Organon or True Directions Concerning the Interpretation of Nature*, 1620 (copyright Jonathan Bennett, 2017): the idols of the human mind" that are "empty beliefs" (Book. I, 23., p. 6) are preconceptions that become prejudices, and they are used as a basis in any knowledge and assessment by people who were not educated to think rationally. Enlightenment continued the rejection of *idola*, by demonstrating both the possibility of this rejection by the constitution of mind and the ways opened up by the scientific research.

[106] See Pierre Bourdieu, Luc Boltanski, « La production de l'idéologie dominante ». In: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. Vol. 2, n°2-3, juin 1976, pp. 3-73; doi : https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1976.3443

writers, but some *values* promoted by the 18th century philosophy, the *contents* of education according to these values[107].

The Enlightenment values were from *freedom* (including freedom of mind) as both resonance of liberal politics and realisation of natural propensities in a specific social way (through discipline) to the *categorical imperative* (that implied the moral education through maxims (and not through discipline), because maxims come from inside, said Kant in his notes on pedagogy. The maximalist stake of education, the categorical imperative, was considered by many as a rigid imposing on a historical and socially generated moral, as if the moral principles would be simple empirically generated reproductions/reflections. Or, the categorical imperative is *rationally constructed*, it is "transcendental" or methodological, *meta*, exterior perspective on moral relations: it is a part of the conditions-criteria of assessment of morals, irrespective of their historical forms[108].

Thus, the evaluation and picture of values are not only a question of axiology but at the same time of epistemology: of awareness of the levels of abstract thinking, of their evolution from hypothesis to well-founded theory, of the relations between their contexts and their evolution. More and letting aside the technicalities of specific analyses: the axiological analysis cannot – can no longer after Enlightenment – be understood in an isolated manner from the analysis of the epistemological conditions of knowing. The categorical imperative as a constructed[109] *telos* corresponds to both the realm of transcendental conditions of knowledge (and practical transposition of knowledge) and to the practical domain of moral. The human *telos* is consciously constructed, all the more the moral *telos*, it is not (only) a natural disposition similar to *conatus* (the will to live): the humans want to live *well according to the moral values*. Kant

[107] These values and their relations with the Enlightenment critical epistemology, in Ana Bazac, "The Enlightenment Epistemology and its Warning against the Instrumentalisation of Science", *Noema*, XIX, 2020, pp. 29-75, http://noema.crifst.ro/ARHIVA/2020-02.pdf.

[108] Besides the above, see Ana Bazac, "The philosophy of the *raison d'être*: Aristotle's *telos* and Kant's categorical imperative", *Biocosmology – Neo-Aristotelism*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2016, pp. 286-304. http://en.biocosmology.ru/electronic-journal-biocosmology---neo-aristotelism.

[109] Thus any imputation of a dogmatic teleology promoted by the Enlightenment philosophers – and by their followers! – is baseless. Ontologically, the moral *telos* is only *possible*. The human responsibility is that which can transform it in actuality.

showed that this moral *telos* itself is "naturally" determined by and through the human mind[110]. But at the same time, he underscored that the human soul does not translate this naturally determined propensity automatically: this one, and just because it involves reason, is the result of the thinking and choices made by people. Actually, it is a manifestation of freedom.

The epistemologically analysed conditions of knowledge constituted the basis to surpass the 18th century social critique: to understand that only from individual examples one cannot conclude universal theories, because there are always other opposite examples. By focusing on the universality (given by inferences from concepts), Kant grounded the methodological questions arisen later (and nowadays) in the scientific / rational research: in order to fructify the individual examples, one needs to know *why*, in which conditions, what was caused by randomness, when the randomness did generate losses/marginal phenomena outside the ordering tendencies etc; while the abstract universal – the decreeing of "facts" and laws of phenomena – is equally insufficient and deceiving. For example, as an oral history cannot substitute the theoretical understanding of the narrated facts, so the decreeing of situations does not substitute for their theoretical understanding: in fact, it does not substitute the necessity to *question the premises* themselves as well as *all the elements* of situations.

Enlightenment is fundamentally *radical* at the level of what already been demonstrated: the epistemology-ethics complex. As we saw, even *telos* and maximalism do not resonate only with ethics, but also with epistemology: with its demonstration of the power of reason. The subsequent developments in logic and epistemology were fuelled by the questioning of this power and its limits, as well as the multi-facets relationships between forms and contents.

Further, the moral criteria cannot be understood, and thus, met without taking into account the "whole", i.e., the *structural relations* that constitute their canvas or warp and weft. Actually, Kant has suggested this causation. Nowadays, the tendency to transpose the isolated moral

[110] See an indirect demonstration of this naturalness in the phylogenetic analysis of the natural selection of proximate mechanisms evolved as psychological motives that, ultimately, become ethical values, in Elliot Sober, David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior*. Cambridge, Mass.; London; Harvard University Press, 1999.

criteria (considered as normative dreams, not linked to the real life) into cost-effectiveness measurement led to strange assertions like that when the (very low) cost of eradication of smallpox "saved more lives per year than are lost due to war, while saving money for both donors and recipients, paying back its entire costs every few months"[111]. If the goal is only "to move our funding" of health care interventions so as we save more lives when we do this than when we do not[112], without questioning the causes and results of the post-war history of health care funding, this well-meaning cost-effectiveness theory is far enough from the Kantian maximalist moral. We are equally far from the logic of contents suggested by Kant through his development of control of antinomies. In the above model of philanthropic funding, the given – that generated not simply the huge disparities between the health care in rich and poor countries but the silencing of analytical decompositions of the logic or reasoning of these disparities – is not questioned: this given is "the best of all possible" and/but needs some improvement. Also, the above liberal philanthropist theory does not question why the donors fund the war at all, and with huger amount of money. Thus, if we do not have the moral maximalism *and* logic as stake of our theories, they move rather in the field of impotence than of a "minimalist" ethics.

The main feature of Enlightenment is the *convergence* of the social critique – both naïve and conscious of the (opposite) class relations – and the ethical theory. More precisely, the social critique led to the perception of class differences, thus before the first decades of the 19th century, and required and funded the ethical theory; while the ethical theory, in its highest form, as the categorical imperative construction, signalled au fond the class social causes and relations.

We can interpret that the *categorical imperative* was the maximalist response of Enlightenment to the empirical class "antinomies" and thus, the proof of the social critique – ethics convergence: and the suggestion toward radical resolution of the class relations, beyond the immediate political liberalism. Obviously, this resolution required first of all, and consisted in, the theoretical explanation of this complex problem. Therefore, we may consider a line of paradigm shift, from Kant to Marx.

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[111] Toby Ord, *The Moral Imperative toward Cost-Effectiveness in Global Health*, Center for Global Development, 2013, www.cdev.org, p. 4.
[112] *Ibid*., p. 7.

The present situation when people are made to be dependent on devices[113] is related to their exclusive *instrumental* education, focusing on functions and their lucrative aspect.

The Enlightenment epistemology was a "radical supply" without which the further development of knowledge would not have taken place. If we transpose this radical pattern in the present-day situation, the line Enlightenment ethical theory and Marxian economic-social-political theory does not seem eccentric. This line is that of a radical *ethical* criterion and radical comprehension of the *social* fabric so as to *annul the equivalence of humans with instruments*. Actually, only this line allows the understanding of the mixture between progress and regress in the modern world. The present technophile approaches that put their hopes in the artificial enhancement of humans influencing society for good[114] are positioned outside this line. The technophile enthusiasm ignores that the artificial enhancement and the overwhelming technology seeming to connect people do not change the *causes* which led to new and somewhat more perilous human alienation[115]. And paradoxically, since it is a "worshiper of science", it is linked with the drastic decrease

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[113] This generating an "industrial artificial stupidity", Bernard Stiegler, *Artificial Stupidity and Artificial Intelligence in the Anthropocene*, 23 November, Institute of Ereignis, Shanghai, 2018, pdf., p. 4.

But see Bernard Stiegler, "*Die Aufklärung* in the Age of Philosophical Engineering", M. Hildebrandt et al. (Eds.), *Digital Enlightenment Yearbook 2013*, IOS Press, 2013, pp. 29-39, where the development of digital society is contemporary with the increase of mental disorders and multiple social crises.

[114] See for example A. H. Eden, J. H. Moor, J. H. Soraker, E. Steinhart, *Singularity hypotheses: A Scientific and Philosophical Assessment*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2012.

[115] T. Toivonen, V. Norasakkunkit, and Y. Uchida, "Unable to Conform, Unwilling to Rebel? Youth, Culture, and Motivation in Globalizing Japan", *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2011, 2: 207, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2011.00207; T. A. Kato, N. Shinfuku, N. Sartorius, S. Kanba, "Loneliness and Single-Person Households: Issues of Kodokushi and Hikikomori in Japan". In Okkels, N., Blanner Kristiansen, C., Munk-Jørgensen, P. (Eds.), *Mental Health and Illness in the City*, Springer, 2017; *Japan appointed 'ministry of loneliness'. Want to know why?*, February 23, 2021, https://www.newsnownation.com/japan-appointed-ministry-of-loneliness-want-to-know-why/; Christophe Guilluy, *No Society. La fin de la classe moyenne occidentale*. Paris: Flammarion, 2018.

But see also the policy of systematic reduction of culture in order to transform people in more dependent on devices and the "unique truth" of given official information. Indeed, in this policy only a "law" "that finally imposes compulsory illiteracy and the return to exclusively oral communication" is missing for now, as ironically commented the well-known Italian classsicist and historian, Luciano Canfora, **"**E ora abolite la classista distinzione tra maiuscole e minuscole", *Corriere della serra*, 17 marzo 2021.

of logical thinking just at the level of "influencers"[116]. How can the irrational stance be annulled in other way than a radical one? Irrationality – manifesting in all the aspects of social and environment-society relations – cannot be covered by the increased rationalisation / control of society. Not only because this rationalisation is in tandem with "functional stupidity" even at work[117], but also because even with the full development of instrumental *functions*, the "unreason" caused by both lack of integrated logical and theoretical thinking (or lack of high stakes in education) and lack of ethical[118] maximalist values transposes as shrinking of the human *faculties*.

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[116] *In order to not refer in a vulgar manner to "politicians and mass media", let's mention the logical shortcomings of some theorists, as they were excellently analysed in Peter E. Gordon,* Why Historical Analogy Matters, *https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/01/07/why-historical-analogy-matters/ and Samuel Moyn,* The Trouble with Comparisons, *https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/05/19/the-trouble-with-comparisons/.*

[117] Mats Alvesson, André Spicer, *The Stupidity Paradox: The Power and Pitfalls of Functional Stupidity at Work*, Profile Books, 2017.

[118] This meaning also social altruistic values (as dialogue and universalism, for instance).

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