

The Subject Facing Goodness

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Theoretical and Practical Reason

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The structural analysis of the cognizing subject conducted in the last chapter has led us to the following conclusion: the same mental faculties which enable the rational recognition of reality also constitute an inexhaustible potential, continually putting the subject 'on the road' toward unending, unlimited development. In other words, rational cognition is not only the passive discovery of the *logos* within the surrounding reality, but also – perhaps mainly – the process of gradually ordering the elements making up the diversity of the universe. Thinking is thus a power which allows reason to shape the outside reality according to its own rational criteria.

Of course, from the point of view of common sense, this idea might sound banal – what great discovery is it that man has an effect on surrounding world? Yet this statement is not entirely obvious. Within the modern philosophical tradition, with Kant playing a central role, the key issue is

the quality of this effect. The concept of a thinking subject that we tried to reconstruct in *Chapter One* leads to the idea of unending progress in creating an increasingly rational reality. But before we proceed to examine this characteristically modern idea in its generality, we must first show how this thought (of the rational subject's active role) develops within Kant's philosophy. In Kantian terms, to consider the problem of the acting subject is to proceed to the sphere of practical reason.

This is why in this section we are going to take up an analysis of the relation between theoretical and practical reason. As we will see, a proper understanding of this relation is not achieved easily and is connected with a number of serious problems in interpretation.

In the *Preface* to the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* Kant writes the following on the difference between theoretical and practical reason: "Now if reason is to be a factor in these sciences, something in them must be known *a priori*, and this knowledge may be related to its object in one of two ways, either as merely *determining* it and its concept (which must be supplied from elsewhere) or as *making it actual*. The former is the *theoretical*, and the latter the *practical* knowledge of reason."¹ What is being described here are two different types of knowledge, or rather two different ways of using reason. So far, our interpretation of Kant's philosophy was focused on reason as "determining the object," *i.e.* theoretical reason. The same reason "making objects actual" reveals an essentially different perspective – "It is quite different with the practical use of reason. In this, reason is concerned with the grounds of determination of the will, which is a faculty either to produce objects corresponding to ideas, or to determine ourselves to the effecting of such objects (whether the physical power is sufficient or not); that is, to determine our causality."²

In the context of the practical use of reason, which is supposed to "make objects actual" and thus to produce certain effects in the outside world, Kant introduces the idea of the will. He applies the term to this faculty of the subject that provides the power to act – and this faculty is only to be guided by reason. Hence, the idea of the will, together with the question of the relation between reason and the will, stands at the center of Kant's practical philosophy. But before we face the fundamental problem of the will, we need to point out several dilemmas and ambiguities which appear in Kant's philosophy together with the introduction of the division into theoretical and practical reason.

By distinguishing between theoretical and practical reason, Kant seems to be preparing the conceptual framework for the philosophical separation of the sphere of what is, from the sphere of what should be. The following quote points us in this direction: "For the purposes of this enquiry, theoretical knowledge may be defined as knowledge of what is,

¹ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, BX. (The e-text version based on the 1929 Norman Kemp Smith translation)

² I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, (The e-text version based on the Thomas Kingsmill Abbott translation)

178 practical knowledge as the representation of what *ought to be*.³ Our sense of being-in-the-world is one of the most basic human experiences and has been described by many philosophers. This experience is the source of the elementary conviction that my being-in-the-world is limited by what exists: I cannot, for example, jump up to any given height, because I have to overcome the force of gravity. Kant does not question this self-evident truth (theoretical knowledge refers to what is), but he outlines the intuition, or even advances the thesis, that reason is capable of leaving those limitations aside and – without concerning itself with what is – thinking toward what ought to be. Reason, according to Kant, has enough strength to free itself “from all empirically conditioned powers” and view “its objects exclusively in the light of ideas.”⁴

This turning away from the factual on the part of the subject can be understood as an escape into the world of fantasy and fiction, where the imagination is free to build proverbial castles in the air or to design utopias. Art is the field where this type of activity can be most freely performed, but it also finds its place in what is commonly known as “daydreaming.” Perhaps it might be mentioned, although this question is not a topic of our investigation, that it is possible to have an ambiguous attitude towards utopias. Certainly, a dreamer’s freedom has often lain at the heart of undertakings that later led to important inventions or revolutionary scientific discoveries. On the other hand, history knows many examples of political movements whose initiators tried to realize lofty ideals without taking reality into account. Needless to add, the implementation of all sorts of utopias usually ends in tragedy, causing no more than senseless loss of life.

But when Kant speaks of “viewing objects in the light of ideas,” the intuition he presents heads in an entirely different direction – practical reason, thinking directed at what should or ought to be, does not have anything to do with the frivolity of imagination. The originality of the Königsberg philosopher’s thought lies in the fact that, freeing theoretical reason from necessary conditioning by the empirically available reality, he leads practical reason into a sphere ruled by equally rigorous laws: “That our reason has causality, is evident from the *imperatives* which in all matters of conduct we impose as rules upon our active powers. ‘Ought’ expresses a kind of necessity and of connection with grounds which is found nowhere in the whole of nature.”⁵ Practical reason must follow moral norms, or, more precisely, is itself the source of those norms (“imposes imperatives upon active powers”), because it generates a specific type of necessary causality, which initiates the spontaneous actions of the subject.

It must be stressed that the Kantian idea of practical reason as the source of moral law, which remains entirely independent of the conditions connected with “hard,” empirically experienced reality, had an enormous, occasionally even revolutionary, influence on 19th and 20th century phi-

³ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 633.

⁴ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 547.

⁵ *Ibid.*

losophy. The problem of the relationship between what is and what ought ¹⁷⁹ to be remains one of the most discussed issues not only of neokantism⁶, but also of other philosophical movements which take up ethical questions. Without truly delving into the issue, we will only point out some difficulties and aporias appearing in Kant's philosophy in connection with the concept of practical reason. These will be highly relevant for the key problematic of this book, that is, for the question of the relationship between thinking and evil, and for our investigation into the connection between religious and political thought.

Kant's way of defining practical reason causes a permanent "rupture" within the universe of man. First of all, man discovers phenomena which are subject to unrelenting necessity, but on the other hand, he finds in himself a lasting will to create and inhabit a reality governed by different laws, where it is possible to think in terms of what ought to be. Unfortunately, Kant never presents a coherent theory unambiguously explaining the relationship between these two spheres. He writes of it most openly in the *Introduction* to the *Critique of Judgement*: "Now there are but two kinds of concepts, and these yield a corresponding number of distinct principles of the possibility of their objects. The concepts referred to are those of nature [*die Naturbegriffe*] and that of freedom. By the first of these, a theoretical cognition from a priori principles becomes possible. In respect of such cognition, however, the second, by its very concept, imports no more than a negative principle."⁷ The sphere of nature and the sphere of freedom are examined virtually independently, and it seems Kant's main aim is to prove the possibility of their non-contradictory co-existence: the unconditional necessity of natural laws, of which nature consists as a chain of explicitly determined cause-and-effect relationships (the sphere of phenomena), does not exclude the possibility of freedom (the sphere of things in themselves).⁸ To translate this thought into contemporary language, we should say that the universe can be interpreted without contradiction in the two following ways: firstly, as a sequence of elements where a given cause always entails the same, necessary effect; and secondly, as a sphere where undetermined and spontaneous processes can take place.

Kant is not pleased with the fact that his system contains an unremovable aporia – a constant "tension" between the order of nature and that of freedom. Yet he remains practically helpless in the face of this difficulty: his attempts to resolve the impasse are limited to formulating postulates. He

⁶ For more on the subject of this question in neo-Kantian thought see my book *Wartość i nicność* [Value and Nothingness].

⁷ I. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, (The e-text version based on the James Creed Meredith translation).

⁸ "For the concept of freedom just as little disturbs the legislation of nature, as the concept of nature influences legislation through the concept of freedom." Ibid. In the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant writes: "But if our Critique is not in error in teaching that the object is to be taken *in a twofold sense*, namely as appearance and as thing in itself;(…) then there is no contradiction in supposing that one and the same will is, in the appearance, that is, in its visible acts, necessarily subject to the law of nature, and so far *not free*, while yet, as belonging to a thing in itself, it is not subject to that law, and is therefore *free*." (B XXVIII).

180 writes, for example, that “nature must consequently also be capable of being regarded in such a way that in the conformity to law of its form it at least harmonizes with the possibility of the ends to be effectuated in it according to the laws of freedom. There must, therefore, be a ground of the unity of the supersensible that lies at the basis of nature, with what the concept of freedom contains in a practical way.”⁹ This postulate, however, only outlines a field of study not taken up in Kant’s critical philosophy.

The “rupture” within the universe described above does not present itself as a merely intellectual problem: it is more than a logical aporia that cannot be properly resolved. The lack of continuity appearing between theoretical and practical reason – between what is and what should be – also has its existential consequences for man. Man himself turns out to be a being living on the borderline between “two worlds.” On the one hand, he is obviously subject to biological and physical laws, and he has certain abilities and predispositions which very strictly determine his actions. On this plane he is forced to understand himself as an element of the world of nature governed by laws that oblige. On the other hand, man also finds inside himself something which can take him into a completely different reality. For example, Kant writes: “Man’s natural endowments – not merely his talents and the impulses to enjoy them, but above all else the moral law within him – go (...) far beyond all the utility and advantage which he may derive from them in this present life (...) and so feels an inner call to fit himself, by his conduct in this world, and by the sacrifice of many of its advantages, for citizenship in a better world upon which he lays hold in idea.”¹⁰ Practical reason and the consciousness of moral law made manifest in it carry the idea of a “better world” which man still needs to create. For now, we can only guess that this other world is closer to what ought to be, than to what really is. We could ask, however, whether placing one’s hopes in some “foggy” – perhaps only imaginary – reality, which is to come true in the future, is what man is truly meant to do. We will suspend this question for the present, although the project of political and religious thinking will probably form a tentative answer.

Speaking of the ambiguities found within the relationship between theoretical and practical reason, we must draw our attention to one more aspect of the issue. Among the conclusions that we reached while analyzing Kant’s theoretical philosophy in *Chapter One*, there was the conclusion that knowledge, as a set of valid and properly grounded propositions, does not answer all the questions raised by the human mind. Beyond the limits of ascertainable knowledge, a number of problems are to be found which we can treat only in a hypothetical way – there are things which can be learned scientifically and those which we can only believe in. The establishment of the borderline between these two spheres is considered by Kant to be one of the important achievements of his theory.¹¹

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 426.

¹¹ To recall his well-known statement: “I have therefore found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room *for faith*.” (Ibid. B XXX).

It turns out, however, that in developing his system Kant allows more and more for practical reason to enter the regions closed off to theoretical reason. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, while considering the problem of the discipline of reason in forming hypotheses, Kant writes: “But as will be shown, reason has, in respect of its *practical employment*, the right to postulate what in the field of mere speculation it can have no kind of right to assume without sufficient proof. For while all such assumptions do violence to [the principle of] completeness of speculation, that is a principle with which the practical interest is not at all concerned.”¹² Thus practical reason has “greater freedom” in formulating hypotheses, but this entitlement applies only to “practical employment,” i.e. employment consisting in “the determination of the will in respect of the final and complete end.”¹³ Keeping in mind the final goal which motivates the activity of reason, some of the rigors imposed by theoretical reason on the process of scientific inquiry may be somewhat relaxed in the practical activity of reason. Kant develops this intuition in recognizing – in the final part of the *Critique of Practical Reason* – the primacy of practical over theoretical reason. The description of the nature of this primacy is very imprecise, and the degree of complexity of the text where he gives this description is quite exceptional. Yet his intention seems clear enough: even though the theoretical faculty of reason is itself “incompetent to establish certain propositions positively,” reason can – under certain conditions, the chief of which is the avoidance of contradictions – accept them, “as soon as these propositions are inseparably attached to the practical interest of pure reason.”¹⁴ The message expressed here can be generally interpreted in the following way: on account of its “practical employment” – i.e. on account of the goal which reason has to realize and effectuate – reason should be assigned a special ability or right. The question of what this ability should exactly consist in must be left unanswered for now. Later on we will have the opportunity to make this matter less vague.

While pointing out the differences between theoretical and practical reason, it is important to note a certain logical characteristic reflected in the formal structure of Kant’s critique of both types of reason: the direction of the analysis in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is exactly the opposite of that followed by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹⁵ The starting point of theoretical philosophy is the fact that man in a very natural way experiences the things that make up the surrounding reality – as Kant put it, “Experience is, beyond all doubt, the first product to which our understanding gives rise.”¹⁶ Man is capable of connecting these diverse experiences into a system, and the critique of reason is supposed to show

¹² Ibid. A 776.

¹³ *Critique of Practical Reason*

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ For a very precise analysis of this asymmetry of the two critiques see W. Metz, “Das Gefühl der Achtung in Kants Kritik der praktischen Vernunft,” in *Normativität und Faktizität*, ed. G. Schönrich.

¹⁶ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 1.

182 how this is possible – how cognition and science are possible. This is why the investigation starts with the forms of intuition (sensibility), then proceeds to concepts (of understanding), and finishes with principles (of reason). On the other hand, the basic experience of practical philosophy has nothing to do with man’s so-called “everyday life,” but consists in discovering moral law as a “fact of reason.” This moral factuality remains entirely beyond the sphere of what is available to the senses. The *Critique of Practical Reason* is first meant to show how moral law is at all possible, and then to analyze its influence upon the specific actions of man. Hence Kant organizes this critique “top-down,” that is, starting from the highest principle of morality, then presenting concepts, and finally examining their influence on sensibility.

After indicating the difficulties connected with the distinction between theoretical reason and practical reason, our next task is to outline the idea behind Kant’s ethics (practical philosophy). At its basis we will find the concept of goodness.

Ethics as the philosophy of goodness

It can be stated without much risk that the most common moral intuitions are expressed in the following two basic convictions. First, that the greatest good that a human being can achieve in life is happiness, and that the pursuit of happiness is the main, if not the only, motivation behind human actions. And second, that this pursuit of happiness is realized in the effectuation of particular goals, which are beneficial for the human being. Thus the degree of fulfillment of intended goals seems to constitute the most obvious and objective criterion for evaluating the quality of human actions. In short, morally justified behavior is useful behavior.

This common intuition found its expression in most traditional systems of ethics, and especially in that of Aristotle. The Stagirite wrote in the opening sentence of his classic work, *Nicomachean Ethics*, that “every action and pursuit is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim.”¹⁷ And later on in his considerations he arrived at the conviction that happiness is a human being’s highest goal, “for this we choose always for self and never for the sake of something else.”¹⁸ A continued development of this basic intuition is to be found – with the awareness of some important differences – in traditional Christian ethics, as well as in many other modern systems.

Kant questions the self-evident nature of moral intuition understood in this way. To be sure, goodness remains a central concept of his ethics – as we will show, its importance grows there even higher – but its character changes fundamentally. He explicitly identifies goodness with the concept of good will. He writes of this in the famous opening sentence of *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*: “Nothing can possibly be

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. (The e-text version based on the W. D. Ross translation).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a good will.”¹⁹ Even a superficial comparison of this sentence and the opening statement of *Nicomachean Ethics* reveals deep differences between the two philosophers’ ways of thinking. For Aristotle, “good exists” – the world (being) is good – and goodness is, in a sense, an object unto itself, which attracts the attention of man. In this sense all human wishes, thoughts, and desires are directed at the good as a goal to be achieved. For Kant, goodness “does not yet exist” – reality as such is neither good nor bad. It is human action that gives value to the world: goodness may appear in the world as the result of appropriate human activity, or it may never appear, if such activity never takes place. Thus the essence of goodness is to be found inside the human being – goodness at its source is “good will,” that is an appropriately formed structure of the human as a rational being.²⁰

In comparing further these key texts of western ethics we come across another difference. Kant goes against the common belief – shared to some extent also by Aristotle, and to an even greater extent by the philosophical tradition he initiated – that the moral quality of the will is to be measured by its effectiveness in achieving goals: “A good will is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition; that is, it is good in itself.”²¹ This statement clearly undermines Aristotle’s thesis that the good is the aim of all activity – Kant proposes a completely different basis for ethics.

First of all, his ethical theory marginalizes the significance of the effects of human actions. The moral quality of an act is not determined by whether or not it allowed for the intended goal to be effectively achieved. The deciding factor is simply “volition,” that is, the principle which determines the will to act. To use more modern language, what decides whether an action is morally justifiable is the quality of the motivation, and not the achieved results. The most serious consequence of such a turning away from the outside world to focus on internal motivation is that happiness is no longer to be understood as the final aim of human activity. In Kant’s ethics the traditional question of “How to live in order to achieve happiness?” loses its significance. Practical philosophy is not concerned, at least not directly, with questions of how to benefit man or society, but with something much more important – as we shall see, this is the realization of goodness, which is identified with rational order, with

¹⁹ I. Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, First Section. (The e-text version based on the Thomas Kingsmill Abbott translation).

²⁰ To be fair to Aristotle, it must be noted that he did – despite the fact that he understood goodness to be an objective goal which human action is aimed at – take into consideration the aspect pointed out by Kant. In considering how a human being can really achieve goodness, he wrote, “human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue” (*Nicomachean Ethics*). Here we can see that the idea of goodness remaining closely connected with man’s inner life and being, in this sense, a by-product of the human soul, is not foreign to Aristotle.

²¹ *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*. First Section.

184 rationality as such. Paraphrasing the basic question of classical ethics, Kant formulates his own question in the following way: How to live in order to be “worthy of happiness?”²²

The premise justifying this position is the utterly serious treatment of the fact that man has the power of reason at his disposal. According to Kant, it would simply be preposterous if such a perfect instrument as reason served such an ultimately banal end as happiness: “If the proper object of nature were its conservation, its welfare, in a word, its happiness, then nature would have hit upon a very bad arrangement in selecting the reason of the creature to carry out this purpose.”²³ The ability to use reason is something that ennobles man greatly – it makes him capable not only of actions motivated by his inclinations and needs, but of disinterested behavior as well. For the effective fulfillment of the intended goals, instinct would suffice – reason is much too subtle and complicated a mechanism. The strongest expression of this “depth of reason” is the generation of an internal sense of duty, which is self-evident to any rational being, and which necessarily obliges us to do what is right, regardless of the benefit to oneself. The product of reason’s activity is supposed to be goodness, which, at its source, takes the form of good will: “Its [reason’s] true destination must be to produce a will, not merely good as a means to something else, but good in itself.”²⁴

In this way ethics – much like theoretical philosophy – takes the form of a critique of reason: it will be dealing with a particular form of “apperceptivity” of reason, that is, its relation to itself. In practical philosophy, this relation takes the shape of the interaction between reason and will. Our attention must now focus on the laws according to which reason determines the will to act.

The concept of law plays a particularly significant role in Kant’s philosophy. He understands nature, or the universe in the broadest sense of the word, to be “the existence of things under laws.”²⁵ In this sense, all that exists is connected with some law. Yet within this law-governed mechanism man holds a unique place – “Everything in nature works according to laws. Rational beings alone have the faculty of acting according to the conception of laws, that is according to principles, i.e., have a will.”²⁶ Man is not governed by the law automatically, but, in a sense, he mediates this law – he has a will – the faculty of somehow evaluating the law which is presented to him by reason.

What is the nature of the law appearing in the “space” between reason and will, and by what means does reason actually influence the will?

At the very beginning of the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant introduces this problem in the following way: “Supposing that pure reason contains in itself a practical motive, that is, one adequate to determine the

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *Critique of Practical Reason*.

²⁶ *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*. Second Section.

will, then there are practical laws; otherwise all practical principles will be mere maxims.”²⁷ The activity of the will can be based on two significantly different schemes: the means of determining the will to act can either take the form of a law or of a maxim. What does this mean precisely?

We have already said that the will is a faculty with a certain creative power; its actions can bring specific results into actual existence. The will is influenced by many factors, which try to give direction to its energy. Perhaps the most obvious determinants – at least when it comes to the will of man as a “finite rational being” – are inclinations or desires connected with the senses. They determine the will to act by presenting a specific goal that needs to be achieved. In the case of sensual determination, the goal, as the effect of action, most commonly fulfills a specific human need. The imperative addressed to the will is only hypothetical here, limited to this single case – it says: if you want to achieve the desired result, use these specific means. If we wanted to subsume all the imperatives of this type under one formula, we would have to say that they all hold happiness as the prime aim of all human activity.²⁸ There is just one problem: happiness cannot be defined precisely – and so these hypothetical imperatives can only be analytical-practical judgements, which do not pretend to the status of necessary judgements. If we agreed that the will is determined in this way, then practical principles would only be maxims. Maxims are principles applied subjectively – only to certain isolated cases; they cannot be said to have an objective, universal relevance. Ethics based on maxims would be a collection of “words of wisdom,” which would suggest – on the basis of experience both individual and collective, passed down from generation to generation through tradition – the most pragmatic solutions, effectively leading to the desired goal.

Kant, however, is primarily interested in ethics based not on maxims, but on necessary laws. Yet these are possible only on the condition that reason determines the will directly, without any mediating elements. This would mean that reason contains in itself the basis of this determination, and so does not have to present the will with any ends to be achieved through its actions. This ordering by reason also takes the form of an imperative – the will has to be forced to act – but this imperative is categorical rather than hypothetical. Its specificity lies in the fact that, disregarding all possible effects, it defines only the means of determining the will, that is, the form of the principle according to which the will shapes its volition. There is only one such imperative according to Kant: “Act so that the maxim of thy will can always at the same time hold good as a principle of universal legislation.”²⁹ It could be said that the formula of this imperative crystallizes the idea of man as a rational being, who in his behavior is guided not by his own interests, but by the requirements

²⁷ *Critique of Practical Reason*.

²⁸ “There is one end, however, which may be assumed to be actually such to all rational beings (...), and this is happiness” (*Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, Second Section).

²⁹ *Critique of Practical Reason*.

186 of what is universally right. The task of a rational being is to contribute to universal rationality – so that everything is subject to universal laws.

This basic moral principle is available to every rational being; it manifests itself as a “fact of reason” given directly, as a consciousness which makes itself felt as soon as the subject begins to think – “We may call the consciousness of this fundamental law a fact of reason, because we cannot reason it out from antecedent data of reason (...) but it forces itself on us.”³⁰ In this way the problem posed at the beginning of the *Critique of Practical Reason* – whether there is a necessary law determining the will, or whether it functions only in accordance with maxims – finds its solution remarkably quickly. The conclusion reads as follows: “Pure reason is practical of itself alone and gives (to man) a universal law which we call the moral law.”³¹

On the one hand, this thesis has the character of a “philosophical truth,” since it was discovered through the critique of reason – a transcendental study of the moral structure of the subject. On the other hand, it finds its reflection also at the level of common moral intuitions, which is shown in the reference made to man in the conclusion quoted above – the law dictated by reason is addressed not only to a “pure subject,” but simply to man. A basic experience which reveals to us the strength of the moral law inscribed in reason is our sense of duty. The obligation to take or to abandon certain actions – such as the belief in the duty to be a witness to the truth – independent of any benefit or harm it may bring us, but only on account of duty (“because that is the right thing to do”), seems indeed to be a fundamental experience, even if it is often forgotten in practice. According to Kant, this experience is available even to the most ordinary minds.

However, despite the agreement we find here between philosophical and popular thinking, which should only be natural when it comes to moral questions, there is a serious problem to be faced. The inner consciousness of moral law and the natural sense of duty are not reflected in or confirmed by the actual human behavior. If we observe the surrounding world and the human actions in it, we might fall under the impression that the duty which reason teaches us is all but a fantasy. Everyone seems to be ceaselessly running after their own interests and indulging their inclinations, without any regard for anything connected with the duty dictated by reason. This situation makes it necessary to find a solid basis for commonsensical moral intuitions, and this – according to Kant – can only be provided by philosophy: “Thus is the common reason of man compelled to go out of its sphere, and to take a step into the field of a practical philosophy, not to satisfy any speculative want, but even on practical grounds, in order to attain in it information and clear instruction respecting the source of its principle.”³² Hence, the task now before us is that of thoroughly justifying

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*. First Section.

the claim that the categorical imperative is necessarily and objectively valid. 187
Kant fulfills this task using two basic types of argumentation.

The first argument is connected with the concept of purpose. A certain weakness of the categorical imperative lies in the fact that, going against the natural intuitions telling us that all activity pertains to some goal, it deliberately disregards the sense of purpose and stresses disinterestedness. Is it in any sense possible to point out the purpose served by the categorical imperative? Kant's claim is that this purpose is simply man himself: "Man and generally any rational being exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will."³³ Man has dignity, while all other objects and creatures have their value. The nature of this value is such that it can have an equivalent – it can be subject to trade: an object of a certain value can be exchanged for something else without regret. Dignity, on the other hand, cannot be exchanged or replaced; its worth is intrinsic and unique. On this basis the formula of the imperative is modified, its content becomes more specific and it loses some of its formality: "Act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only."³⁴

This distinction introduced by Kant, which today is already considered classic, has played a vital role in contemporary philosophy and culture, and we will refer to it again. For now, what is most important is that from this perspective man (a thinking subject) is a "place" where some extraordinary good exists or will come to exist. A human being is a good-in-itself – this thesis is something primordially self-evident, it requires no proof. This good is the foundation of dignity, thanks to which a human being is to be the end and not the means serving to achieve some end. This good can also be seen as the basis of an argument for the reality of moral law, since Kant interprets the dignity of a person as, among other things, the ability to be a universal lawgiver. Man, as everything else in nature, is subject to the law, but at the same time, as a rational being, he establishes this law himself. Only a scheme of this sort can guarantee the protection of the extraordinary good to be found inside a person – moral law actually constitutes a condition of the possibility of human dignity.

The second point by means of which Kant wants to argue for the reality of the categorical imperative is connected with its source. The true and only source of the categorical imperative is the autonomy of the rational being: "Autonomy of the will is that property of it by which it is a law to itself. The principle of autonomy then is: 'Always so to choose that the same volition shall comprehend the maxims of our choice as a universal law.'³⁵

In referring to the autonomy of the will we touch upon the concept of freedom, which is one of the most ambiguous and difficult concepts in Kant's philosophy. Let us recall that within theoretical philosophy freedom

³³ Ibid. Second Section.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

188 was understood as independence from “the natural law of phenomena in their mutual relation, namely, the law of causality.”³⁶ Freedom is something that leads us beyond the sphere of the binding laws of nature. All the elements of the natural world, i.e. phenomena, remain in necessary cause-and-effect relationships. They form sequences, so to speak, each element of which is at once an effect and a cause of others. There is no room for freedom in these relations: “Among the causes in the [field of] appearance there certainly cannot be anything which could begin a series absolutely and of itself.”³⁷ Freedom can never be part of appearance; it cannot be experienced in any way. This is because freedom is the ability to absolutely and independently “begin a series” of other events. Hence the existence of freedom cannot be proved theoretically, but it cannot be definitely ruled out either.

In the field of practical philosophy, on the other hand, we have a kind of a “dialectical relation” between freedom and law. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* we find the following statement describing this dependence: “Thus freedom and an unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other.”³⁸ If we could experience or prove the reality of one of these, then it would also be possible to deduce the reality of the other concept. The problem is that we have no such possibility. That is why we sometimes seem to be stuck in a vicious circle. Kant writes of this: “In the order of efficient causes we assume ourselves free, in order that in the order of ends we may conceive ourselves as subject to moral laws: and we afterwards conceive ourselves as subject to these laws, because we have attributed to ourselves freedom of will.”³⁹ This way of reasoning does not yet lead to anything constructive, but it does point in a certain direction – the existence of freedom can be postulated without contradiction, so we should think as if the rational subject possessed free will. Kant writes along these lines: “Every being that cannot act except under the idea of freedom is just for that reason in a practical point of view really free.”⁴⁰

In the next step of this reasoning, in which Kant tries to prove the possibility of the existence of freedom and moral law, he uses the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves, which he had already introduced in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The experientially available reality is subject to necessary laws. Kant proves, however, that this is only a phenomenal reality, shaped by the rational structures imposed on it by the subject. As to things-in-themselves, which remain independent of our mode of representation, we simply do not know what they look like. But as we have already discussed, man can be understood as a being functioning in-between the intelligible world of things-in-themselves and the sphere of appearances available to the senses. Kant draws from this the following

³⁶ *Critique of Practical Reason*.

³⁷ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 543, B 571.

³⁸ *Critique of Practical Reason*. In the same work Kant also writes, “we might define practical freedom as independence of the will on anything but the moral law.”

³⁹ *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*. Third Section.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

conclusion: “And thus what makes categorical imperatives possible is this, ¹⁸⁹ that the idea of freedom makes me a member of an intelligible world, in consequence of which, if I were nothing else, all my actions would always conform to the autonomy of the will; but as I at the same time intuit myself as a member of the world of sense, they ought so to conform.”⁴¹ Man as a rational being is free and subject to the moral law dictated by reason, but as a sensual being he functions in the world determined by the necessary laws of nature, where moral law is no more than a duty.

We are not capable of removing this dialectical tension. Even though we understand and postulate the inevitability of the existence of freedom, we cannot demonstrate its reality – in this sense, “freedom is only an idea.”⁴² This leads to another problem: “The subjective impossibility of explaining the freedom of the will is identical with the impossibility of discovering and explaining an interest which man can take in the moral law. Nevertheless he does actually take an interest in it.”⁴³ These questions mark the limit of all moral research. The human mind cannot and should not try to reach beyond this limit, because no speculation will provide an answer to those questions.

It is worth stressing that in Kant’s opinion these complicated and ambiguous results of a most subtle philosophy – the critique of practical reason, which mark out the limits of our cognition, are in their essence in keeping with the common moral intuitions. Every man, even the criminal breaking moral principles, has a sense of extraordinary significance – even sanctity – connected with moral law. Even though the source of this law, as well as its specific message, remains to a large extent beyond our comprehension, in no way does this lessen its gravity or its power to influence man. And if human beings had the opportunity to free themselves from sensory limitations and move into the intelligible world of freedom and morality, according to Kant they would do so without a moment’s hesitation.

Let us summarize briefly.

The relation of the subject to itself, which we recognized as the basic element of the subject’s structure and called “apperceptivity,” takes on a new form within practical philosophy. The subject of practical thinking, in turning to itself, discovers moral law – the source of an absolute dictate. This categorical imperative orders the subject to function in such a way that the principles of his behavior would fulfill the requirement of universal validity. Reason is an autonomous lawgiver and at the same time it is subject to its own, yet universal, law. This somewhat abstract formula of the imperative is made more specific in the relationship between reason and will – the will, which has the power to make objects actual in the outside world, is to submit fully to the law dictated by reason. Then the will becomes good will, and hence the one absolute good, not limited in

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ any way. It is characteristic of Kant that he distinguishes between the perfectly good will as an ideal and the good will of a finite rational being (man), which is formed through a specific process. In the case of the former, speaking of the dictate of reason in relation to the will “is here out of place, because the volition is already of itself necessarily in unison with the law.”⁴⁴ Perfect (“holy”) will is the will practically identified with reason. The human will, on the other hand, is also determined by bodily inclinations, as it is this will that is to be transformed into good will under the influence of the categorical imperative. In this possibility of absolute good coming to be within the subject, Kant sees the basis for the unique dignity of human beings, and also perhaps the only tangible sign of human autonomy.

The autonomy and dignity of the human subject, which are so emphasized within Kant’s philosophy, can also be interpreted in the following way: the lawgiving reason is the carrier of rationality and at the same time is the source of motivation for disseminating this rationality. The realization of rationality happens through law – the rational being is supposed to enact a universal law, thanks to which reality would be transformed into a rationally ordered unity. Clearly, what we are dealing with here is the idea of the development of rationality, even if perhaps it is not precisely defined. The development consists in the more and more complete subordination of everything to the law. This idea – at least in Kant’s view – is synonymous with the idea of the realization of the highest good, constituting the conclusion and the message of the philosophy of the subject presented here. However, this idea also entails great difficulties, which we will try to present in the next section.

The imperative to realize the good and its controversiality

The first obvious conclusion of Kant’s practical philosophy is the postulate of the moral self-improvement of man as a rational subject. The realization of the absolute good – i.e. the generation of a good will – can be achieved through the inner, individual effort of reason to subordinate the will completely to moral law, discovered in the sphere of thought. Essentially, good will consists in the ability to fulfill a moral duty without any regard for one’s own inclinations, or even at the cost of the natural yearning for happiness. If we applied to this ability the traditional term “virtue,” then virtue would by no means provide the rational being with the possibility of acting effectively in the real world. This is where we come across a serious problem. In Kant’s philosophy, and more broadly – in the philosophy of the subject discussed in this work, where elements of both Christian and Enlightenment traditions come together, there is a strong conviction that this good, the true and fundamental source of which is “the human heart,” also has the power to transform the world. The same mechanism which establishes the mutual harmony of the faculties of the

⁴⁴ Ibid. Second Section.

subject – i.e. the consistency between the maxim of the will and the law¹⁹¹ dictated by reason – and forms the fundamental good, is also supposed to determine the transformation of the outside world and the realization of the ultimate and complete good. How is this to happen in the face of the actual “helplessness of virtue”? In Kant’s ethics, the general vision of fulfilling the imperative to realize the good is for the first time given concrete form in the discussion of the connection between the ability to generate virtue and the possibility of achieving happiness.

On the one hand, and Kant stresses this a number of times, the achievement of virtue lies within reach of every human being and does not even require any special skills, because goodness in the strict sense consists simply in the proper attitude of the subject to itself: “It is always in everyone’s power to satisfy the categorical command of morality; whereas it is seldom possible, and by no means so to everyone, to satisfy the empirically conditioned precept of happiness.”⁴⁵ Virtue (or good will), the essence of which is expressed in a certain inner stance, can be described in different ways, such as the identification of will and reason, the proper motivation for action, or the readiness to selflessly fulfill a duty. All these definitions are based on Kant’s fundamental thesis – the quality of the will is not determined by the effects of its actions – and stress the fact that good will is completely independent of the events taking place in the outside reality.

On the other hand, however, the expectation that a man having good will *does* in fact have some good influence on what is going on in the surrounding world is something quite natural, both on the level of commonsensical moral intuitions and on the level of the claims of pure reason. The former find their expression in the fact that, in imagining the final results of the activity of a good will, the finite rational being is not capable of disregarding the question of happiness, whereas the claims of reason find their expression in the concept of the highest good, a concept reaching beyond the sphere of inner relations within the subject. Kant writes: “In the *summum bonum* which is practical for us, i.e., to be realized by our will, virtue and happiness are thought as necessarily combined, so that the one cannot be assumed by pure practical reason without the other also being attached to it.”⁴⁶ But reason is not able to simply effectuate or even to design such a combination. What this would require is the capability to influence reality – i.e. the ability to determine certain cause-and-effect relations, leading to the realization of desired goals. Such abilities have nothing to do with good will: good will simply consists in the compliance of the maxim determining the will with moral law, and can at most give us the right to feel worthy of happiness⁴⁷, while the above-mentioned abilities require strength, cunning, and knowledge of the rules governing the natural world. This is why “we cannot expect in the world by the

⁴⁵ *Critique of Practical Reason*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

192 most punctilious observance of the moral laws any necessary connection of happiness with virtue adequate to the *summum bonum*.⁴⁸

Is it then at all realistic to expect an unambiguous answer to the question concerning the essence of the final good which can be realized by a rational being? Kant finds that a lack of clarity in this case could undermine the validity of moral law, and thus also the results of his critique of reason: “If then the supreme good is not possible by practical rules, then the moral law also which commands us to promote it is directed to vain imaginary ends and must consequently be false.”⁴⁹ Yet Kant’s texts do not provide the solution to this dilemma – in this matter human reason is doomed to a permanent state of uncertainty. Using Kant’s terminology we can say that in facing the question concerning the possibility of the realization of the highest good, we are dealing with an unsolvable antinomy of practical reason.

In his theoretical philosophy Kant has shown that reason is dialectical in nature, i.e., that it inevitably faces problems which it cannot resolve. The question of realizing the good turns out to be one of such problems. But while the antinomies of theoretical reason (such as the question of the world’s beginning in time or the question of the divisibility of matter) pose only intellectual problems and can essentially be justified by the limitations of human cognition, the antinomy of practical reason also has its “existential weight” – it can shake the conviction about the absolute validity of moral law and hence introduce a dangerous kind of chaos into the life of the individual and of the entire community of man. This is why the discussion over the possibility of realizing the good takes on a particular significance.

Two parallel strategies connected with this antinomy of goodness can be interpreted out of Kant’s writings on ethics: the aim of the first is to prove the lack of contradiction, or even a kind of necessity, for the postulate which demands the reality of goodness and makes it hypothetically possible; with the second, the problem of realizing the good is no longer a concern of the individual subject, but of the whole community of rational beings.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason* we come across elements of the first strategy. They are to be found in the section which aims at finding the “critical solution of the antinomy of practical reason.”⁵⁰ The analysis conducted there limits the concept of the highest good to just one context – to the relationship between virtue and happiness, since the highest good is understood as their combination. According to Kant, two elements can be combined into one concept either analytically or synthetically. In the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Ewa Nowak-Juchacz’s commentary seems particularly pertinent: “The good cannot be reduced to moral law, even though moral law can help in its realization: it requires that man should not only rise toward the good himself, but also that he should build the best possible world with others.” (*Autonomia jako zasada etyczności* [Autonomy as the Principle of Ethics], 86).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

first case, this connection would have the nature of an identity – then “the endeavour to be virtuous and the rational pursuit of happiness are not two distinct actions, but absolutely identical.”⁵¹ From what we have said earlier about moral law, it explicitly follows that happiness and virtue are two elements of goodness which are completely qualitatively distinct, and so their joining cannot be analytical in character. Therefore, what remains is the possibility that they form a synthetical unity: “consequently either the desire of happiness must be the motive to maxims of virtue, or the maxim of virtue must be the efficient cause of happiness.”⁵² And once again it is clear and obvious that happiness cannot be the cause of virtue. What Kant will be trying to prove is that the claim that virtue necessarily causes happiness only appears to be false. This claim “is not absolutely false, but only insofar as virtue is considered as a form of causality in the sensible world, and consequently only if I suppose existence in it to be the only sort of existence of a rational being.”⁵³ Therefore the antinomy of practical reason emerges when we try to demonstrate a simple causal relationship between actions based on moral law and happiness as the result of these actions. This cannot be effectively achieved, since causality based on moral law – “causality from freedom” – belongs more to the intelligible world than to the real world. Yet Kant maintains that in spite of this, such a relationship is not contradictory in itself: “it is not impossible that morality of mind should have a connection as cause with happiness (as an effect in the sensible world) if not immediate yet mediate (viz., through an intelligent author of nature), and moreover necessary; while in a system of nature which is merely an object of the senses, this combination could never occur except contingently.”⁵⁴ In Kant’s terms, the relationship between virtue and happiness is a relation between a thing-in-itself and an appearance. And even if this observation does not explain the essence of the relation we are trying to analyze, it does allow us to accept, without falling prey to contradiction, that virtue is the cause of happiness, despite the fact that we are not able to identify this causality. The existence of such causality can be consistently postulated – this postulate is equivalent to assuming “the existence of a cause of all nature, distinct from nature itself and containing the principle of this connection. (...) It follows that the postulate of the possibility of the highest derived good (the best world) is likewise the postulate of the reality of a highest original good, that is to say, of the existence of God.”⁵⁵

It turns out that the elimination of the antinomy of practical reason – and thus the realistic expectation that the highest good will be realized – is only possible on the assumption that God exists. Theoretical reason is not capable of determining whether God indeed exists, but practical reason can formulate the postulate of God’s existence without contradic-

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

194 tion. This opens up a new perspective, explored by Kant in his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. We will take a closer look at this religious perspective further on in the present book.⁵⁶

The second strategy, according to which the realization of the highest good is supposed to extend its scope beyond a single subject, is outlined only briefly in Kant's texts on ethics. The idea of the "kingdom of ends," which appears in the *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, seems to point in this direction. There is, however, a basic difficulty contained in this strategy: as we have clearly seen up to now, the good has its source in the structure of the *individual* subject – passing on to the level of "community thinking" cannot happen without controversy.

Kant derives the idea of the "kingdom of ends" directly from the idea of a rational being: "The conception of the will of every rational being as one which must consider itself as giving in all the maxims of its will universal laws, (...) leads to another which depends on it and is very fruitful, namely that of a kingdom of ends."⁵⁷ The concept of "kingdom" (*Reich*) does not have any political connotations here. It simply refers to a community of rational beings, or, even more broadly, to a structure where individual elements make up a certain unity by being subject to the same laws. This is clear from the fact that Kant uses the same term, "*Reich*," to refer to both the union of rational subjects and the world of nature,⁵⁸ and draws, as we will see later on, far-reaching conclusions from this analogy. In forming the links between individuals (elements of the system) the law plays a vital part: "By a kingdom I understand the union of different rational beings in a system by common laws."⁵⁹ The "kingdom of ends" is made possible by common legislation; it is a system governed by rational laws, and its uniqueness lies in the fact that the rational being, as a member of this "kingdom of ends," is both the lawgiver and the subject – at once establishes the laws and is subject to them: "A rational being must always regard himself as giving laws either as member or as sovereign in a kingdom of ends which is rendered possible by the freedom of will."⁶⁰ What we find here is an appeal to the same principles on which

⁵⁶ What needs to be particularly stressed at this point is that Kant did not intend for the postulate of God's existence to change in any way the autonomous character of his ethics. Reason remains the only source of moral law. Kant writes of this a number of times, for example: "Moreover, it is not meant by this that it is necessary to suppose the existence of God as a basis of all obligation in general (for this rests, as has been sufficiently proved, simply on the autonomy of reason itself)." (Ibid.).

⁵⁷ *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Second Section.

⁵⁸ In the new Polish translation the translator rightly uses two different terms for "*Reich*": "*Reich der Zwecke*" is translated as "państwo celów" [the "state of ends"]; "*Reich der Natur*" as "królestwo przyrody" [the "kingdom of ends"]. Speaking of "królestwo celów" [the "kingdom of ends"] would open up the political perspective and as such would go against the intentions of Kant, who was far from being a monarchist. On the other hand, "państwo przyrody" [the "state of nature"] does not work as a collocation in Polish. (Translator's note: The Thomas Kingsmill Abbott translation into English followed here *does* render "*Reich der Zwecke*" as the "kingdom of ends", which makes Bobko's argument for the apolitical character of this phrase all the more important.)

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

the theory of morality was based. The source of the law is the autonomy of the subject; freedom gives the rational being its unique dignity, by which the individual as a person is always supposed to be the end, and not the means of achieving some end. 195

But the category of the “kingdom of ends” reveals a dimension which in principle is already contained in the idea of a moral lawgiving subject – in establishing the law which obliges me as a rational being, I appeal to reason only, to what is universal, and so essentially I address every rationally thinking being. The role of the sovereign (lawgiver) and that of the subject, abiding by the law, merge together: “Therefore every rational being must so act as if he were by his maxims in every case a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends.”⁶¹

Kant claims further that the structure of the “kingdom of ends” is, in a purely functional sense, quite close to that of the “kingdom of nature” – that there is a clear analogy between the two. Both have rational laws as their basis, although in the “kingdom of ends” these laws do not function mechanically, but they are presented to the will of a rational being. From this observation comes the third formulation of the categorical imperative: “Act on maxims which can at the same time have for their object themselves as universal laws of nature. Such then is the formula of an absolutely good will.”⁶² Thus the community of rational beings, although without nullifying the freedom of the individual subject as the lawgiver, should function analogically to the world of nature: it should be a perfectly rational universe, where everything happens in accordance with universal laws. It seems that only in such a rational space of the “kingdom of ends” the highest good can be realized.

We have already said that the “kingdom of ends” is only an ideal, meant to inspire a certain way of thinking about the rational being, its dignity and its calling to realize the good in a community with other rational subjects. Kant does not work out its details with the kind of meticulousness we are used to in other areas of his philosophy; at most, he refers to it in a variety of ways in his lesser works concerning history and politics. It is even difficult not to get the impression that the transition from the level of the individual subject to the level where a certain form of a collective subject appears (community of rational subjects) happens somehow “in passing” or “between the lines.” The thinking of an individual subject has been explored by Kant in an in-depth theory – the critique of reason; the thinking within a community suggested by the idea of the “kingdom of ends” has only been outlined on the basis of a somewhat vague platitude. Yet the question of this subtle transition is of primary importance, for it will turn out that it is exactly within the community – and so within the sphere of political thinking – that the Kantian vision of man’s realization of the highest good reaches its highest degree of fulfillment. According to the author of critical philosophy, the final product of rationality, and

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

196 the most mature external form of the good rooted in the structure of the thinking subject, is the “political good” of perpetual peace.⁶³

Political thinking as the sphere of realizing the good

It is hard not to notice that Kant devoted little attention to political questions in comparison with metaphysical, epistemological, logical, ethical, aesthetic, and anthropological issues. What, compared to the *Critique of Pure Reason* alone, is one part of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the sketch *Perpetual Peace*, and a few small articles – the sum total of Kant’s contribution in this field? On the other hand, the political message of the philosopher from Königsberg – contained in such concepts as the dignity of man, civil society, the rule of law, and peaceful cooperation between nations – being the essence of the best of the Enlightenment, seems more alive today than numerous theses taken from disciplines he investigated on a much wider scale.

This context already makes it worthwhile to consider the phenomenon of Kant’s political thought and its influence on contemporary culture. Yet interpreting this part of the Kantian legacy presents many difficulties, and many commentators go so far as to question the existence of any significant connection between his political and social writings – as less serious, more journalistic than scientific – and his “hard” critical philosophy.⁶⁴ Here we will not attempt a broader discussion on the subject of Kant’s political philosophy and its true influence on the political doctrines of the 19th and 20th centuries. We will, however, decidedly treat it as a continuation – if not carefully drafted, then at least consistent – of the concept of reason promoted in the critical writings. What remains of primary importance for us is, of course, the question of the realization of goodness in the real world – in our opinion, the answer to this question crystallizes in the sphere of political thinking.

From this point of view, the way Kant defines the essence of “the highest political good” seems particularly significant – this good is *Perpetual Peace*.⁶⁵ The perspective of realizing this good is outlined very

⁶³ To sum up this issue let us once again quote Ewa Nowak-Juchacz’s commentary: “Kant’s practical philosophy is in itself proof of the fact that human reason is capable of thinking up a political order which would have universal legislation as its basis.” (op.cit. 128).

⁶⁴ A systematic survey of the positions and arguments concerning this issue is to be found in Manfred Zahn’s article, *Kantowska teoria pokoju w świetle najnowszych dyskusji* [Kant’s Theory of Peace in View of the Most Recent Discussions] in M. Siemek (ed.), *Filozofia transcendentalna a dialektyka* [Transcendental Philosophy and Dialectics] 3-39. [original German text: *Kants Theorie des Friedens und die Schwerpunkte der jüngeren Diskussion über sie.*, published in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* (Berlin) 38, 1, 508-520.] The author refers mainly to the discussion between Hermann Timm (defending the thesis about the lack of cohesion between Kant’s political and transcendental philosophy) and Günter Freudenberg (willing to remove possible aporias in Kant’s theory of peace), which took place on the pages of *Zeitschrift für evangelische Ethik*, 1967, 2. On this issue, but from a different perspective, see also the introduction by T. Kupś to the recently published collection of Kant’s writings, *Rozprawy z filozofii historii* [Treatises in the Philosophy of History].

⁶⁵ I. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*. (The e-text version based on the William Hastie translation entitled *The Philosophy of Law: An Exposition of the Fundamental Principles of Jurisprudence as the Science of Right*).

clearly. In the conclusion to the “Science of Right” in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, we read that the highest political good can be achieved “if it is not forced in a revolutionary and sudden way by violent overthrow, (...) but if the idea is carried forward by gradual Reform, and in accordance with fixed Principles.”⁶⁶ Kant also gives expression to his understanding of perpetual peace in a different context, in the final part of the third book of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*: “Such, therefore, is the activity of the good principle, unnoted by human eyes but ever continuing – erecting for itself in the human race, regarded as a commonwealth under laws of virtue, a power and kingdom which sustains the victory over evil and, under its own dominion, assures the world of an eternal peace.”⁶⁷ The realization of the “highest political good” must be a long and painstaking process, which nevertheless unwaveringly heads in one direction – toward goodness. It should be remarked at this point that numerous fragments are to be found in Kant’s texts where he himself is doubtful concerning such an optimistic vision of a humanity perpetually perfecting itself, and where he points out counterarguments which urge caution, or even pessimism, in this matter.⁶⁸ But ultimately he does seem to express a faith and a conviction that “the human race has always been on the road to progress and will continue to do so, which (...) opens up before us a perspective unlimited in terms of time.”⁶⁹ What, then, is the reality in which this process of progress, so open to doubt, takes place? And what is the point of departure for this process, which is supposed to culminate in the establishment of perpetual peace?

In describing the sphere of political action, Kant refers to the classic model of the modern tradition: “A state of Peace among men who live side by side with each other, is not the *natural* state. The state of Nature is rather a state of War; for although it may not always present the outbreak of hostilities, it is nevertheless continually threatened with them.”⁷⁰ What we have here is a view of the state of nature close to that of Hobbes – the egoism of individuals is the source of a natural conflict of interests, and only

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ I. Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, (The e-text version based on the Greene and Hudson translation), Book Three, 114.

⁶⁸ See, for example, I. Kant, *Wznowione pytanie. Czy ludzki rodzaj stale zmierza ku temu, co lepsze?* [A Renewed Question. Is the human race continually progressing?] in *Rozprawy z historii filozofii* [Treatises in the Philosophy of History], 211-213; and *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Book One.

⁶⁹ *Wznowione pytanie*, 217. He writes similarly in his essay *The Saying: That a Thing May Be Right In Theory, but May Not Hold for Practice*: “I will, therefore, venture to assume that as the human race is continually advancing in civilisation and culture as its natural purpose, so it is continually making progress for the better in relation to the moral end of its existence, and that this progress although it may be sometimes interrupted, will never be entirely broken off or stopped”. (The e-text version of Part III based on the William Hastie translation entitled *The Principle of Progress considered in connection with the Relation of Theory to Practice in International Law.*), to be found in *Rozprawy z historii filozofii*, 147.

⁷⁰ I. Kant, *Perpetual Peace. A Philosophical Essay*. (The e-text version based on the William Hastie translation), also to be found in *Rozprawy z historii filozofii*, 170. See also *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Book Three.

198 taking some joint action can somehow remedy this unfavorable situation. But unlike most political thinkers, Kant sets an extremely demanding goal for the process of creating an artificial, political reality – political action is not only supposed to prevent conflicts on a short-term basis, but also to work constantly towards the establishment of eternal peace.⁷¹ In this sense we can distinguish two parallel levels of Kant’s political thought: the first is realistic (based on observing what is) – consciousness of human weakness and belief in the inevitability of conflicts dominate here; the second is idealistic (invoking what ought to be) – it treats man as a rational being.

This ambivalence is noticeable in his attitude towards war. Kant does speak of peace as the highest good, but he is far from being a pacifist. For him, conflicts and war are not something explicitly evil – on the contrary, he sees their positive effects on the shaping of both people and culture. In his discussion of the concept of the sublime, we read: “War itself, provided it is conducted with order and a sacred respect for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it, and gives nations that carry it on in such a manner a stamp of mind only the more sublime (...) On the other hand, a prolonged peace favours the predominance of a mere commercial spirit, and with it a debasing self-interest, cowardice, and effeminacy, and tends to degrade the character of the nation.”⁷² Conflicts not only have an educational part to play, but also – as in Hegel’s works – they are a vital factor in historical progress, used by nature to its own ends. Kant writes: “The means employed by Nature to bring about the development of all the capacities of men is their antagonism in society, so far as this is, in the end, the cause of a lawful order among men.”⁷³ War is therefore one of the means by which perpetual peace can be brought closer to realization, since during wartime people mature and can, in the long run, become more rational beings.

How does Kant imagine this perpetual peace in which the highest political good consists? Through what actions can humanity come closer to the realization of this dream goal?

We can draw some conclusions on the basis of his definition of humanity’s highest aim: “The greatest problem for the human race, to the solution of which Nature drives man, is the achievement of a universal civic society which administers law among men.”⁷⁴ Elsewhere Kant

⁷¹ On the question of what philosophical considerations can contribute to the issue of war and peace see Z. Kuderowicz, *Filozofia o szansach pokoju* [Philosophy on the Chances of Peace]. Kuderowicz takes a look at the views of authors who wrote during the inter-war period.

⁷² *Critique of Judgement*. (The e-text version based on the James Creed Meredith translation).

⁷³ I. Kant, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*. (The e-text version based on the Lewis White Beck translation), also to be found in *Rozprawy z historii filozofii*, 34. Similar statements are to be found in the *Critique of Judgement*, where Kant notes that war, despite the most horrific losses, can serve as preparation for “conformity to law amid the freedom of states, and with this a unity of a morally grounded system of those states.” (The e-text version based on the J.H. Bernard translation).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

writes: “It may be said that the universal and lasting establishment of Peace ¹⁹⁹ constitutes not merely a part, but the whole final purpose and End of the Science of Right as viewed within the limits of Reason.”⁷⁵ The means by which to realize this political good is the law – the gradual establishment of peace can happen only through the enactment of rational laws. The place where this can happen, where the abstract and “intangible” moral law of reason becomes something concrete – an “embodiment” of the imperceptible rationality – is the community of man. It follows that the true means of enacting the political good consists in community building. A community of rational beings must be based on a contract: This contract is “merely *an idea of Reason*; but it has undoubtedly a practical reality. For it ought to bind every legislator by the condition that he shall enact such laws as might have arisen from the united will of a whole people; and it will likewise be binding upon every subject, insofar as he will be a citizen, so that he shall regard the Law as if he had consented to it of his own will.”⁷⁶ The basic mechanism behind the functioning of a political community is based on the scheme which we have discussed as part of practical philosophy, and the clearest expression of which was the idea of the “kingdom of ends”: the subject is the source of the law (he has to agree to the law in effect within the community), and at the same time he is necessarily bound by it.

The new element is the fact that the good, earlier connected with the structure of the individual subject, is now somehow transposed to community level: “In man (as the only rational creature on earth) those natural capacities which are directed to the use of his reason are to be fully developed only in the race, not in the individual.”⁷⁷ The intuition expressed here seems to suggest that the potential power of reason finds its full form not so much in the individual as in a qualitatively new subject. Humanity understood as the community of rational, individual beings is such a subject. But reason remains the basic force behind the formation of the community and the realization of the political end, reason whose legislation is essentially moral: “There must be something moral in the basic principle itself, something which reason demonstrates to be pure and also, because of its great, epoch-making influence, to be something that is the universal duty of the human soul and refers to the entire unity of the human race.”⁷⁸

Hence, what can and needs to be done in order to contribute to the gradual realization of the political good is to create rational laws establishing specific communities. In *The Metaphysics of Morals* Kant analyses the structure of such laws functioning on many different levels, from private

⁷⁵ *The Metaphysics of Morals*.

⁷⁶ *The Saying: That a Thing May Be Right In Theory, but May Not Hold for Practice* (The e-text version of Part II based on the William Hastie translation entitled *The Principles of Political Right Considered In Connection With the Relation of Theory to Practice In the Right of the State*), to be found in *Rozprawy z historii filozofii*, 136.

⁷⁷ *Idea for a Universal History*...

⁷⁸ *Wznowione pytanie*, 216.

200 law to public law; on the basis of such laws communities are established: the state, the nation, and finally, humanity as a whole. Let us leave aside the details of these analyses in order to turn our attention to the essentials: the source of law is the same everywhere, and it is reason. There is also only one mechanism through which reason influences man, stimulating him to disseminate the laws of reason, and it is duty. This “rationalistic monism” expresses the basic law of pure practical reason, the formula of which is the categorical imperative: act so that the individual subject can consider himself the author of the principle of universal law. Reason demands only one thing – consistency between the subjective maxims determining the will and universal law. The sense of duty, which tells us that in every situation we should act according to that principle and remain faithful to the universally valid rational laws even if it is not to our own advantage, is, according to Kant, the most fundamental experience of man as a rational and free being. So politics, as the establishment of the rule of law, is ultimately built on a rock-solid foundation of morality. Politics constitutes the fulfillment of the moral imperative on a more general, community level, and so in this sense it creates a higher degree of rationality.

Confirming this interpretation is the fact that within the sphere of political thinking we are once again dealing with the requirement of disinterestedness, which was so characteristic for Kant’s moral philosophy. Going against the modern liberal tradition, Kant does not treat the introduction of political order as a process which is supposed to benefit the citizens and ultimately contribute to their happiness. In writing “*salus reipublicae*” Kant asserts: “By this is not to be understood merely the individual *well-being* and *happiness* of the Citizens of the State; for—as Rousseau asserts—this End may perhaps be more agreeably and more desirably attained in the state of Nature, or even under a despotic Government. But the Welfare of the State as its own Highest Good, signifies that condition in which the greatest harmony is attained between its Constitution and the Principles of Right, — a condition of the State which Reason by a Categorical Imperative makes it obligatory upon us to strive after.”⁷⁹ The sole task of man is really the realization of rationality, i.e. the shaping of the surrounding world according to the law dictated by reason. Kant remains faithful to this principle in all branches of his system, both in theoretical and practical philosophy. The highest level of rationality – and this may sound strange if we consider the style of politics today – is to be attained within the sphere of politics. Politics is the introduction of the rule of law; it is the gradual capturing of reality into the rational structures extracted from reason. The principal idea of humanity is therefore pure rationality, and not welfare or happiness.

On the other hand, as a political realist Kant admits that in the context of specific, concrete actions the pure imperative of reason might not be effective enough – reason or nature have to use other means as well: “The question next arises as to the means by which this continuous prog-

⁷⁹ *The Metaphysics of Morals*.

ress to the better may be maintained and even hastened. When carefully ²⁰¹ considered, we soon see that as this process must go on to an incalculable distance of time, it cannot depend so much on what we may do of ourselves (...) or on the method by which we may proceed in order to realise it, as on what human *Nature* as such will do *in* and with us, to compel us to move in a track into which we would not readily have betaken ourselves.”⁸⁰ In this sense political thought and action are a kind of a game – at the level of actual events, where emotions, ambitions and the conflicts of interest dominate, it is difficult to find some final aim of these struggles among men. From the perspective of pure reason these seemingly accidental events can be interpreted as a means leading to the concretization of the law, to the replacement of chaos by rational order, and in the end, to the establishment of perpetual peace as the prime good.

This highest level, where eternal peace can finally be made concrete, is the sphere of international relations: “The problem of establishing a perfect civic constitution is dependent upon the problem of a lawful external relation among states and cannot be solved without a solution of the latter problem.”⁸¹ The law which applies at this level is described by Kant with a word that is difficult to translate: “Weltbürgerrecht.” It can be rendered as: cosmopolitan law, law of the citizens of the world, or worldwide civic law. The word “cosmopolitanism,” which seems the closest in meaning to the original and which is used in the most recent Polish translations, is slightly different in character and does not convey an important element of Kant’s thinking. In Polish, a “cosmopolite,” especially in its colloquial meaning, refers to somebody who is not bound by any commitments (to his own nation, for example), and, retaining perfect freedom, follows only his own inclinations. A “citizen of the world” in Kant’s meaning is somebody completely different. He is bound by his sense of duty to act according to the laws of reason and he is responsible for this before the whole of humanity.

How is this “law of the citizens of the world” supposed to function? For now we can only imagine, or draw only a philosophical – or rather, semi-dreamy – outline (as Kant does in one of his last dissertations, *Perpetual Peace. A Philosophical Essay*) of such a worldwide civic society, which so far is only a teleological idea. It would be a society where conflicts are solved by appealing to the law and not by resorting to force, where thinking wins over emotions and desires, and where the sense of duty is more motivating than the thought of one’s own benefit. Thus the concept of a worldwide society is not some closed category, formed as a result of a finite synthesis. It is an idea, and so it opens up the perspective of an infinite synthesis,

⁸⁰ *The Saying: That a Thing May Be Right In Theory, but May Not Hold for Practice.* (The e-text version of Part III based on the William Hastie translation entitled *The Principle of Progress considered in connection with the Relation of Theory to Practice in International Law*), to be found in *Rozprawy z historii filozofii*, 148. We can interpret such assertions as a kind of prototype for the idea, later developed by Hegel, of the “cunning of reason,” which must apply different means in order to achieve its goals. See for example G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (John Sibree’s translation), 47-70.

⁸¹ *Idea for a Universal History...*

202 which – in view of our limited cognitive capacities – we understand as some partial notions and postulates coming under one unifying principle – the universal law of reason.

We also have to be aware that the potential realization of this project of the highest good – of a fully rational political system where eternal peace prevails – is something extremely complex and for now should be understood as possibly taking place at some distant point in the future. Kant writes: “This problem is the most difficult and the last to be solved by mankind.”⁸² Establishing a rational society is the most sophisticated masterpiece that humanity (the species of rational beings) could create.

This “rational ideal” outlined by Kant naturally begs the very same question that came up in connection with the issue of the highest good within moral philosophy: Is its realization at all possible? Isn’t it a complete misunderstanding and simply utopian thinking to attempt to base politics on some abstract rational mechanism, obliging man to act altruistically in the name of the universal right? Is perpetual peace, as the goal of the existence of man and of humanity as a whole, real in any sense? Trying to answer these questions is similar to trying to solve the dialectical issues of critical philosophy – the problem of perpetual peace fits well within this specifically Kantian logic of hypothetical thinking “as if” (“als-ob”).

Kant asserts that when we, for example, consider the small probability of humanity giving up war, and consequently we do not take seriously the duty which obliges us to be acting on behalf of world peace, then “the morally practical Reason utters within us its irrevocable *Veto*: ‘*There shall be no War.*’ (...) Hence the question no longer is as to whether Perpetual Peace is a real thing or not a real thing [*ein Ding oder ein Unding*], or as to whether we may not be deceiving ourselves when we adopt the former alternative, but we must *act* on the supposition [*als-ob*] of its being real.”⁸³ We can therefore accept the idea of eternal peace as a justified hypothesis, the reality of which should be assumed for practical reasons. If this was Kant’s last word on the subject, we would have to admit that what we are dealing with is only some kind of a “rational utopia.” This can in turn inspire us to reflect on whether political thinking may really be treated as the fullest expression of the rationality rooted in the subject, and on whether political good is the highest manifestation of goodness, to the realization of which man is called as a rational being. Thus it cannot be ruled out that thinking should open up to a new perspective, and that the political project, which was founded solely on the rationality of the thinking subject, will have to find support in something different.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ *The Metaphysics of Morals*.