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Prophetism and Secularization: Kantian Hope as a Gnostic–Ebionite Synthesis

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Abstract: Kant's philosophy of history is one of the best examples to trace the remains of certain theological concepts that emerged during the Christian tradition, which are secularized in order to shape a philosophical history. This process of secularization involves hidden causes through the weakening of the doctrinal truths of Christianism. These threats come from two antithetical poles whose attempts to demolish the Christian faith have been noticeable since its beginnings: Gnosticism and Ebionism. This article seeks to trace the influence of both doctrines in Kant's philosophy of history. Based on his reinterpretation of certain theological concepts, it offers an adequate frame to understand the backgrounds that sustain Kant's hope when regarding history. His great hesitation between an ultimate, intra-historical consummation and an infinite aspiration never fulfilled on Earth can be explained well from the opposite Ebionite and Gnostic perspectives. In conclusion, the article proposes that the tension that inspires Kant's philosophy of history emerges from an unstable synthesis between Gnosticism and Ebionism.

Keywords: Kant; history; secularization; gnosis; Ebionism; prophetism; chiliasm

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1. Introduction

It is difficult to understand the modern belief in progress shared by all philosophies throughout history without going back to certain religious precedents. The great merit of studies such as that of Karl Löwith was "to show that philosophy of history originates with the Hebrew and Christian faith in a fulfilment and that it ends with the secularization of its eschatological pattern" (Löwith 1949, p. 2), discovering, in the genealogy of these modern philosophical elaborations, a transfer of theological content towards the immanent realm of secular history[1]. From this migration of categories, history "is conceived as an innerworldly chain of human events, while, at the same time, there is retained the Christian belief in a universal, meaningful order of human history" (Voegelin 1975, p. 7). Faith, in an ultimate end and the expectation of a future in which the believer finds his promised homeland, also directs the modern philosopher's gaze toward the future, stimulating their search for an ulterior meaning behind the tangle of events of the human drama in history. However, repatriating the ultimate goal in immanent terms transfigures the meaning of Christian hope, leading to the various modern attempts to reconstruct historical meaning. One of the most ambitious projects is that of Kant, who proposed a philosophy of history from which we intend to trace those components derived and transferred from the Judeo–Christian tradition, but not before reviewing the deepest, most latent causes of this process of secularization.

The philosopher Francisco Canals has studied the disruptive elements that have catalyzed the distortion of Christian hope in modernity and that have ultimately influenced

the formation of the different philosophies of history. If the modern interpretation of history is "Christian by derivation and anti-Christian by consequence" (Löwith 1949, p. 202), the origins of the secularization of Christian hope must be traced back to deep divisions that erode the Christian doctrinal core. These detachments or deviations are categorized as heresies, whose surreptitious influence on modern, secular, immanent formulations determines their non-Christian consequences. According to Canals, the heretical movements that most influenced the distortion of Christian hope are Gnosticism and Ebionism: "in anti-Christian modernity, a Gnostic-Ebionite synthesis triggers the dynamism of error and distorts radically the magical idea of Progress"[2] (Canals 2005, p. 153). This is an unstable compound due to the antithetical relationship that both doctrines have with each other (Abbate 2015, p. 363), which we will briefly explain in their most general principles.

On the one hand, Gnosis is permeated by a profound dualism marked by an axiological contrast between the material world that must be abandoned and the original spiritual reality to which one must return[3]. The starting point of all Gnosis is the distressing experience of estrangement from a deceptive world, maliciously created by a god usually attributed to that of the Old Testament. In this way, humanity is divided between those condemned to ignorance and slavery to the law of this world and the saved, who, through a process of asceticism and self-knowledge, attain the revelation of their divine origin. This knowledge as a means of self-redemption consists of the purification of the pneumatic aspect with respect to all contamination of the natural world, from whose constitutive evil it must separate itself. The ultimate goal is fusion with the hidden divinity as opposed to the Demiurge of the material world. Eric Voegelin has studied how modern progressivism underlies an operation of Gnostic immanentization of this teleological movement towards a stage of ultimate perfection: "when the teleological component is immanentized, the chief emphasis of the gnostical-political idea lies on the forward movement, on the movement toward a goal of perfection in this world" (Voegelin 2000, p. 299). However, he is aware that the Gnostic influence alone is not sufficient to trace the origin of the different modern derivations of the progressive view of history but must be combined with other influences outside Gnosticism to address the question from a multifactorial explanation: "the three types of derivation are rarely found in pure form in the individual gnostic thinkers, but usually in multifarious combinations" (Voegelin 2000, p. 299).

Regarding Ebionism, this heretical movement, which was encouraged by those Jews who, having converted to Christianity, sought to maintain certain doctrines and rituals belonging to the old law, provides the messianic scheme of a Judaising millenarianism attached to the carnal element and the earthly, immanent orientation of its hope[4]. This carnal millenarianism distorts the hope in the second coming of the Messiah due to its materialism by exclusively paying attention to its concretization on the political, secular level. The falsity of this pseudo-messianism derives from the erroneous consideration of the nature of the Messiah himself, which is close to the Jewish error even while admitting the messianic status of Jesus. Having been born carnally and humanly, He would later be adopted and deified for His merits in the scrupulous fulfilment of the law. The human concept of the Messiah prefigures His definitive coming as a liberation from oppression in a visible, earthly reign that, however, would remain a slave to flesh. The expectation of this millenarianism lies in the Jewish inability to free oneself from earthly love and spiritually direct one's hope toward a Kingdom that is not of this world. It is precisely the poor (*ebionim*) of this world who become worthy of redemption in the eyes of God due to their efforts in fulfilling the law in their condition as oppressed. Seeking secular redemption from their sorrows, their hope is carnally oriented toward a messianic Kingdom of great material abundance and political dominance. Jacob Taubes insisted that the revolutionary component of Western eschatology has a Jewish root: "Israel played a leading part in the

revolutionary movement because the transcendent, political concept of the nation was inevitably geared to the life of the world. It had the religious resources needed for the passion of revolution" (Taubes 2009, p. 19).

As can be deduced, between both heresies, there are opposing elements whose dialectic gives rise to an unstable conglomerate, resulting in the breeding ground from which modern philosophies of history would emerge, starting from the distortion of Christian hope. Hans Urs von Balthasar had already warned of the threat that these two tendencies posed to the traditional eschatology of Catholicism and its survival in modern rationalism and German idealism, referring to a chiliasm with an intra-historical perspective that pulls Heaven down to Earth and to a secularized Gnosis that places man at the absolute centre of the historical drama, gradually rising from Earth to Heaven (von Balthasar 1947, p. 26). As we will have occasion to discuss, Kant's philosophy of history is crossed by this tension between influences coming from Gnosis and Ebionism. However, in order to see how these assumptions are articulated with this secularized, philosophical variant of the history of salvation, it is first useful to briefly outline Kant's thinking on history.

2. Elements of Secularization in Kant's Philosophy of History

According to Kant, an initial glance at the number of phenomena that take place on the great stage of history cannot but arouse dismay and indignation (*Unwillen*) in the spectator, revealing a certain Gnostic experience of anguish and alienation when referring to the surrounding empirical world:

> One cannot but feel a certain disinclination when one observes their activity as carried out on the great stage of the world and finds it ultimately, despite the occasional semblance of wisdom to be seen in individual actions, all to be made up, by and large, of foolishness, childish vanity, and, often enough, even of childish wickedness and destructiveness (Kant 2006, p. 4).

However, this indignant reaction to a nature that seems to constantly play is already, it seems, indicative of an empirically unrequited longing: the hope for a regular plan in history that brings humanity closer to the full development of its original dispositions. We venture to argue that Kant's thinking on history aims to substantiate such hope, subverting the sense of despondency in order to mobilize the spirit towards the legitimate, inalienable ends of practical reason. To this end, Kant proposes a new transcendental method, a change in perspective that considers history philosophically and no longer merely as an observation or narrative exposition of phenomena: "but hand in hand with this manner of proceeding there must be another, through which their significance is revealed totally differently from the way it is in the empirical, sequential arranging of facts" (Cassirer 1981, p. 226). It is no coincidence that, in order to exemplify this revolutionary shift in the approach to events in which new horizons of meaning are opened, Kant finds himself in the same position as Newton or Kepler in their respective contributions in considering the apparently confusing, chaotic movement of physical objects as being regulated by laws (Kant 2006, p. 4). This new perspective for thinking about history according to ideas required by practical reason constitutes a philosophical history (Aramayo 2018, p. 114) in which phenomena are reconsidered under a new horizon of rational significance, as if they were ordered according to a global plan. Kant discovers "an end of nature behind this absurd course of human activity, an end on the basis of which a history could be given of beings that proceed without a plan of their own, but nevertheless according to a definite plan of nature" (Kant 2006, p. 4). He postulates a plan of nature hidden behind the chaotic succession of events that orders them according to a guiding thread toward the general end of humanity. To understand the heuristic fiction that he uses to make history appear to be oriented toward an end, it is useful to recall the regulatory function played by the concept

of a guiding thread as it appears in the study of teleology in the *Critique of Judgement*, since "Kant's philosophy of history constitutes only one component of his universal system of teleology" (Cassirer 1981, p. 226). In the field of teleology, the guiding thread is a regulatory principle that gives order to nature as if it were organized according to ends, bearing in mind that "the standard cannot be borrowed from experience and cannot be derived from outside" (Arendt 1992, p. 76). In short, the question of finality in history and of progressive development towards this goal cannot be resolved by experience and, therefore, is not a subject of scientific knowledge, but is an idea postulated by reason whose cognitive value cannot be admitted, as it goes beyond experience, but which has inestimable practical value as an ideal that drives the primordial interests of humanity: "Kant carefully avoids presenting the teleology of history as the conclusion of a scientific proof. It remains a postulate, though one that he considers in principle [. . .] needed for the understanding of rational beings" (Dupré 1998, p. 814).

Taking into account this particular transcendental method as a new way of thinking of history as a complex drama oriented rationally towards an end, we can highlight the notable influence of theological components and concepts forged throughout the Judeo–Christian tradition that subsist in a secularized form in his reflections on history. Although modern philosophies of history displace theology in constructing an order of immanent meaning for the historical course, these new secular forms do not renounce the need to postulate an absolute frame of reference, a centre of universality around which the materials of empirical history are organized. Voegelin studied how this process of constructing the philosophy of history involves a kind of synecdoche, taking one part of history for the whole, sacralising it and relating the profane remainder to the whole in a plot. It is what he calls the "thesis of generality: that the sequence of evolutionary phases, selected as sacred history, is the general pattern of the history of mankind into which all empirical materials can be fitted in a satisfactory manner" (Voegelin 1975, p. 12). In this way, the model of relationship between profane and sacred history is inherited from the Christian tradition, although the sacred centre of the entire historical drama is immanentized such that hope loses its supernatural, transcendent orientation in these modern secularized sacred histories. In Kant's case, the methodological basis for establishing the absolute centre is his peculiar Copernican turn, supporting his peculiar philosophical history on a higher transcendental perspective than that of the empirical historian. The sacred to which this philosophical history refers is no longer God or the profane things of this world. Rather, the absolute centre is the spiritual drama of humanity as a moral species. According to von Balthasar, this history is led to its own apocalypse or revelation: the self-knowledge of the sanctity of man as a moral subject, replacing traditional metaphysical eschatology with a new transcendental eschatology (von Balthasar 1947, p. 92). Here, we see how the ancient categories of eschatology are reformulated in this new secularized variant of the history of salvation developed by Kant: "in his critical philosophy the truths of the Christian faith and its view of history are secularized by being interpreted as philosophical truths" (Bultmann 1957, p. 66). Recently, some authors have discussed this statement, softening its scope. Although it is quite clear that Kant employs religious and theological terminology to sustain his philosophical essays, for Tomasz Kupś, "it would be a simplistic if, in the spirit of Carl Schmitt, we should consider that Kant merely secularizes theological concepts" (Kupś 2024, p. 201). Seán Molloy also distinguishes a genuine politico-theological reading of Kant's writings from a strict, specific sense of the secularization concept: "Kant does not secularize theological concepts in the style of Schmitt and Löwith, [. . .] Kant's efforts are perhaps better understood as an attempt to translate previous concepts into forms compatible with his philosophy" (Molloy 2017, p. 172). Nonetheless, both authors would agree that what is taken from theological concepts in this process of translation is their practical function for

reason, revealing Kant's fundamental teleological ideas of his transcendental eschatology as being dependent on Christian religious tradition, a heritage that the philosopher does not reject in its entirety (Kupś 2024, p. 202). Therefore, we can legitimately speak of a process of transposition of Christian theological concepts and structures that is perfectly compatible with a broader sense of the ambiguous term *secularization*:

> Whether the process is one of secularization or metamorphosis, the implication is clear: Kant derives the bases of his thought from theology. A political-theological reading restores God to the center of Kant's project in the sense that belief in God acts as a foundational part of his practical philosophy (Molloy 2017, pp. 25–26).

It is clear that Kant's critical philosophy polemizes against the former theology in order to inaugurate a new kind of faith that is compatible with reason but in no way renounces the essential matters of Christian tradition, since they concern the fundamental requirements of practical reason. The critical transformation of faith, the transition from a historical faith to a pure rational faith, does not depend so much on the contents but rather on the form or sources related to that matter (Kant 1998b, p. 161). Since the former is based on revelation and empirical belief and the latter is grounded in pure a priori principles of practical reason, what is removed by this transcendental turn is the transcendent way by which conscience refers to the contents of faith. As previously mentioned, Kant's transcendental eschatology does not renounce the hope of salvation of mankind but is reoriented secularly and postulated a priori as a need of practical reason. Based on these requirements, the philosopher recreates the history of salvation as a rational, philosophical history:

> Kant therefore combines both Weltgeschichte and Heilsgeschichte in a compelling and powerful manner. Kant's eschatological rendering of both the fate of human beings and the destiny of humanity provides a position and a yardstick from which to critically assess mankind's progress, which is revealed from this perspective to be necessarily the history of salvation (Molloy 2017, p. 139).

2.1. Providence

One of the elements that Kant most clearly recovers from the theological tradition, as it is explicitly mentioned in various texts, is the concept of a providence that governs the world and directs men towards the realization of a universal purpose. This providence is understood as "the underlying wisdom of a higher cause which is directed toward the objective final end of the human species and which predetermines this course of events in the world" (Kant 2006, p. 85). However, Kant avoids referring this providential administration to an infinitely transcendent divine being that completely exceeds the limits of sensibility, which is already indicative of the secularized use of such a notion. Instead, as a guarantee of the realization of a universal plan, he alludes to an immanent teleological system like that of nature that, analogously related to art (*natura daedala rerum*), we must think of as imprinting a regular order on phenomena as if they were organized according to ends:

> The use of the word nature is also, when speaking here merely of theory (not of religion), more appropriate for denoting the limits of human reason (as reason, regarding the relation of effects to their causes, must confine itself within the limits of possible experience) and more modest than the expression of a providence that is knowable to us. With an expression such as Providence one presumptuously fits oneself with the wings of Icarus, in order to approach the secret of its inscrutable intention (Kant 2006, p. 87).

Since Kant attributes providential government to nature in other texts, we must understand the meaning of the above quote in accordance with Kant's reservations about

addressing religious questions that go beyond the limits of reason, avoiding the use of the idea of a transcendent, personal God to give it a naturalistic, immanent twist in its role as guardian of the meaning of the historical course (Mayos 2004, p. 148). Indeed, in the ninth proposition of his *Idea for Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective*, the providential plan refers to the hidden intention of nature, which guides or drags men by using their antagonism in order to achieve its universal purpose: "such a *justification* of nature, or rather of *providence*, is no insignificant motivation for choosing a particular point of view when regarding the world" (Kant 2006, p. 16). Here, we can already intuit the reason why Kant revives the idea of providentialism[5]. In his new transcendental method as the foundation of a philosophical history, Kant resorts to the need for a supraindividual instance to contemplate historical events from a higher general perspective than the particular views of individuals and peoples: "from providence alone can we expect a success that affects the whole and from there the parts. Human beings, by contrast, proceed with their plans only from the parts" (Kant 2006, p. 63). By postulating a hidden universal plan for agents who seem to act without any plan, the philosopher transcends the chaotic play of phenomena in order to justify his particular concept of history, leaving to the impersonal mechanism of nature the function of progressively carrying out his a priori pre-established script. Kant thinks about history by transcending the confusion of the phenomenal course of events offered by experience, rising to a universal, impartial point of view that is separate from the play—represented by actors and individuals—in order to be able to contemplate history as a whole (Arendt 1992, p. 58). While the actor is too involved in the flow of events to be able to abandon his particular, partial perspective, Kant reflectively judges history (and detachment is key to reflection) from the general perspective of the human species, discovering a meaning ignored by the actor:

> Such an examination will reveal a consoling outlook on the future, in which the human species is represented at a remote point in the distant future where it is finally working itself toward the condition in which all the seeds that nature has planted within it can be fully developed and its vocation here on Earth can be realized (something that one cannot reasonably hope for without presupposing a plan of nature). Such a justification of nature, or rather of providence, is no insignificant motivation for choosing a particular point of view when regarding the world (Kant 2006, p. 16).

Transcending the empirical point of view and considering the arguments based on this perspective as inoperative, man is not only given to hope for the progressive development of a hidden plan in history, but even has the duty to approach with all his strength, in an infinite aspiration, the attainment of the ultimate goal by becoming worthy of the supreme good that nature prepares for the species: "I rely here on my innate duty to affect posterity such that it will become better (something the possibility of which must thus be assumed) and such that this duty will rightfully be passed down from one generation to another" (Kant 2006, p. 62). And according to the task imposed for practical reason, the individual should not pay so much attention to the impossibility of achieving fruits reserved for posterity but rather to being a worthy recipient of them, proposing goals that coincide with those of the hidden intention as a moral duty. This aspect of Kant's thought, which focuses on the subject's meritoriousness in order to be worthy of the final reward of a communitarian redemption, has a notable resemblance to the Ebionite perspective. Nevertheless, as previously stated, a provident nature reoccupies the void left by the idea of a personal God as a guarantor of the universal plan's gradual realization throughout history. Indeed, the guarantee of the success of the great enterprise of human progress is, as Kant states in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, the work of nature which, as a destiny, directs men towards the realization of this end, whether they want it or not: "*fata volentem ducunt,*

nolentem trahunt" (Kant 2006, p. 90). Success "depends not so much on what we do [. . .] as it does on that which human *nature* will do in us and with us in order to *compel* us onto a track which we will not ourselves easily follow" (Kant 2006, p. 63). It is nature, through the particular actions of men, that is the great architect of the universal plan for the development of the species. What Kant discovers behind the apparent chaos of conflicts motivated by particular interests—which are incapable of ascending to a comprehensive perspective–is the secret plot of a higher plan, the realization of which is not in the partial intentions of individuals:

> Individual human beings and even entire peoples give little thought to the fact that they, by pursuing their own ends, each in his own way and often in opposition to others, unwittingly, as if guided along, work to promote the intent of nature, which is unknown to them, and which, even if it were known to them, they would hardly care about (Kant 2006, pp. 3–4).

How does nature succeed in dialectically harmonizing the individual actions of men with its universal plan? Through the confluence of two contrary inclinations of human nature, whose antagonism sets in motion the dynamic of progress towards self-perfection: unsociable sociability. Despite the natural predisposition to coexist with one's peers in harmony without the contrary tendency to disintegration motivated by selfishness and ambition—for whose satisfaction ingenuity and the rest of the talents are awakened by the sting of competitiveness—the original dispositions would sleep in the conformism of an Arcadian, peaceful subhuman life. For the development of all man's dispositions and culture, nature has brought man out of his lethargy through struggle and contradiction. However, its ultimate goal is not isolation. Kant was aware that natural dispositions can only be fully developed in society and so nature directs the human race towards unity in a perfect civil society through a reciprocal limitation of disintegrative impulses so that men are mutually forced to submit under coercive laws in order to maintain their freedom (Kant 2006, p. 8). Conflict is the prelude to social unification: even if particular, selfish ends go in completely opposite directions, they will eventually neutralize each other. This enlightened confidence in the ultimate abolition of evil because of its self-destructive nature is a shared belief of the Enlightenment and Pietism, according to von Balthasar (1947, p. 39)[6]. Indeed, according to Kant, the mutually contrary effects of selfish inclinations end up nullifying themselves, promoting a good that they did not intend: "For precisely the opposition of the inclinations among one another from which evil arises, provides reason with free play to subjugate them altogether and, rather than evil, which destroys itself, to make the good, which, once it exists, preserves itself, dominant" (Kant 2006, pp. 64–65).

2.2. Chiliasm

One of the elements most closely linked to eschatological motives, inherited from the millenarian tradition, is the notion of chiliasm. Millenarianism, as a misleading term that brings together the various interpretations of the messianic promises of the consummation of the Kingdom of God on Earth, has historically been the subject of discussion between Christian and Jewish thinkers. Secularized versions that distort the Kingdom to come into a final historical stage of perfection that culminates the ascending progress of humanity by its own forces, disregarding the supernatural action of Christ, have also intervened in this discussion as heirs to a hope of a Judaizing nature with an exclusively earthly and worldly orientation (Canals 2005, p. 163). Although much more cautious than most of the enlightened in hoping for the imminent realization of the reign of reason on Earth, Kant cannot renounce the perspective of the approach towards the end of history without rescinding all his practical principles (Mayos 2004, p. 208). Thus, he is granted the desire for a philosophical chiliasm as a driving ideal that guides all human endeavours,

however remote and infinitely distant the realization of such an end may be: "one sees that philosophy, too, can have its chiliastic beliefs, but this is a chiliasm the idea of which, although only from very far away, can itself promote its realization, and which is, for that reason, anything but fanciful" (Kant 2006, p. 13). The idea of chiliasm, rather than an empty chimera (for it is only vain for speculative knowledge, but not therefore empty in all respects) has value in its practical use proposed by legislative reason, for it can (and should) be thought of in accordance with the moral principles of the action of men directed towards the ultimate end of all things (Kant 1998b, p. 200). The main problem here lies in the prospect of the ultimate accomplishment of this chiliastic ideal on Earth in a visible, intra-historical way. We see embedded within Kant's hope a radical tension between an empirical materialization of the messianic promises and the indefinite transcendence of a never-fulfilled ideal, which resembles the vague condition of Gnostic delusions. To what extent is the visible development of civil institutions related to the moral progress of the human species? Apparently, Kant proclaims that a perfectly just constitution is an indispensable condition to attain the final stage of human history, a perpetual peace: "the greatest problem for the human species to which nature compels it to seek a solution is the achievement of a civil society which administers right universally" (Kant 2006, p. 8). Therefore, external law emerges as an essential component of the desired chiliasm (Aramayo 2017, p. 186).

According to Kant, the development of all the original dispositions of the species is accompanied by a progress in legal institutions, because without their necessary coercion on the external conduct of men, the latter would tend to their mutual destruction and no progress of the arts, customs or morality would be possible in such a state of insecurity: "the human being is an animal which, when he lives among others of his own species, needs a master. This is so because he will certainly abuse his freedom with regard to others of his own kind" (Kant 2006, p. 9). However, far from conforming to any type of despotism that annuls the freedom of citizens and aware that such a form of government is contrary to the principles of law, Kant argues against Thomas Hobbes by considering that subjects have inalienable rights and that the sovereign commits injustice when he violates them. Indeed, wherever a just civil union is found, apart from the obedience resulting from the coercive laws that govern the external conduct of men, there must be (according to the law) "a spirit of freedom since, as concerns general human duties, everyone requires, to avoid self-contradiction, to be convinced by reason that this coercion is consistent with one's rights" (Kant 2006, p. 58). Therefore, state constitutions must approach the ideal of the republican form of government in which the maximum degree of citizen freedom is guaranteed without precipitating the common being to dissolution. This is the form of a perfectly just civil constitution:

> Nature's highest intent for humankind, that is, the development of all of the latter's natural predispositions, can be realized only in society, and more precisely, in a society that possesses the greatest degree of freedom, hence one in which its members continually struggle with each other and yet in which the limits of this freedom are specified and secured in the most exact manner, so that such freedom of each is consistent with that of others. Nature also wills that humankind attain this, like all the ends of its vocation, by its own efforts. Thus a society in which freedom under external laws is connected to the highest possible degree with irresistible power, that is, a perfectly just civil constitution, must be the highest goal of nature for the human species, since it is only by solving and completing this task that nature can attain its other goals for humankind (Kant 2006, p. 8).

Through coercive laws that ensure the maintenance of social order, the antagonism between individuals is maintained without its destructive effects, "defining the freedom

of the individual in such a way that it discovers its own limits in other people" (Cassirer 1981, p. 225). The question of establishing a peace that succeeds in neutralizing the mutual hostilities between individuals and nations as a condition of possibility for human freedom is of vital importance in Kant's philosophy of history. A republican civil constitution, which is closest in nature to the idea of law, not only maximizes the degree of freedom of citizens—as long as it is mutually compatible—but is also closest to the objective of social peace that every nation must establish so that man can abandon his natural state of war: "only such a constitution of a people is in accordance with right and morally good in itself which, in its nature, is made such that wars of aggression are avoided as a matter of principle. This can be none other than the republican constitution, at least in its conception" (Kant 2006, pp. 155–56). As civil constitutions progressively move towards a republican form, a gradual decline in warmongering can be expected. However, this evolution of the constitution at the domestic level is closely linked to external interstate relations, since the abolition of all wars is a problem that must be solved on a global rather than a national scale: "the problem of establishing a perfect civil constitution is dependent upon the problem of a law-governed external relation between states and cannot be solved without having first solved the latter" (Kant 2006, p. 9).

In order to achieve the goal of perpetual peace, which ultimately poses a problem to be solved on an international scale, Kant assumes a certain analogy between the state of the nature of constant threat between individuals, which civil society puts an end to by establishing social peace (Kant 2006, p. 73), and the situation of mutual hostility between individual states, the abandonment of which depends on the imposition of mutual obligations through interstate ties:

> Peoples, as states, can be judged as individual human beings who, when in the state of nature (that is, when they are independent from external laws), bring harm to each other already through their proximity to one another, and each of whom, for the sake of his own security, can and ought to demand of others that they enter with him into a constitution, similar to that of a civil one, under which each is guaranteed his rights (Kant 2006, p. 78).

This constitution between states—analogous to the civil one and which does not entail the disappearance of the particular unity of each state but rather guarantees it—is a federation of peoples. Kant's hope for the establishment of a perpetual peace that overrides the destructive effects of selfishness among individuals and peoples depends on the guarantee of a society of nations capable of administering international law, Kant's ultimate political ideal. In the final stage of history, the progress of legal–political institutions will reach the level of a cosmopolitan society in which humanity will be united through the links of economies and law (Mayos 2004, p. 352). This society of nations, which aims to guarantee a state of peace, is rational according to its conformity with the idea of law, which condemns war as an unjust form of action in interstate relations. Because of the legitimacy of this idea as being in accordance with the principles of law, reason demands as a duty the approximation towards a universal agreement between peoples to form a federation of peace (*foedus pacificum*) "to end *all* wars forever" (Kant 2006, p. 80). Despite the empirical evidence of political practice that seems to distance people from the ideal of perpetual peace, Kant does not give up on his hope of achieving or at least asymptotically approaching this goal, which is sufficient to make it a duty to work towards this end.

Having addressed the question of the progress of institutions in the legal and political sense, the intricate relationship that such evolution has with the ideal of perfection of the human species in the moral sense can be raised. As mentioned before, the eschatological tension which arises in Kant's use of the term chiliasm brings the philosopher to a critical moment. It is clear that, when considering the final stage of humanity as a perpetual peace,

"Kant gives the theological concept of the millennial reign of Christ a new shape to the political project of federalism of the free states" (Kupś 2024, p. 208). Taking into account its institutional, visible condition, it seems clear that this ultimate stage is conceived as having an earthly, intra-historical fulfilment. Nevertheless, there remains an infinite aspiration of humanity that aims for a supreme ideal that cannot be satisfied externally, as it belongs to the moral realm. Therefore, "in order to avoid the mistakes of religious dreamers and visionaries, Kant had to distinguish between the external order of law and the internal morality" (Kupś 2024, p. 213). For in the difference between the two areas we can glimpse the tension that underlies the whole of Kant's philosophy, a tension that lies between a practical, regulatory ideal that guides human behaviour as a moral imperative through the concept of duty, and the field of concrete realization of an objective situation in accordance with this idea. The latter, as we have had occasion to discuss in the final stage of perpetual peace, can be achieved despite evil inclinations, that is, according to principles not derived from morality or good intentions:

> For it is not precisely how to attain the moral improvement of the human being that we must know, but rather only how to use the mechanism of nature on human beings in order to direct the conflict between their hostile intentions in a people in such a way that they compel each other to submit themselves to coercive laws and thereby bring about the condition of peace in which laws are in force. In the case of actually existing, however imperfectly organized states one can also observe this, in that in their external conduct they already closely approximate what the idea of right prescribes, although an inner morality is certainly not the cause of this conduct (and it should not be expected that a good state constitution would arise from an inner morality, but rather conversely that the good moral education of a people would follow the former) (Kant 2006, p. 91).

A good constitution can also arise for a people of demons, provided that the destructive effects of their evil inclinations are counteracted through coercive laws that force men to be good citizens, a condition for which law only looks to their external conduct and not to the purity of their intentions.[7] According to Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, these actions are performed in accordance with duty, since they are not in contradiction with what men should do according to the a priori principles of reason when forced to do so by coercive laws. However, an action in accordance with duty does not necessarily imply that its agent subjectively intends to do it out of duty. It is not therefore in the objective result of the action that we estimate its moral value, as this depends on the formal principle of internal determination of the will, i.e., of the intention, and even though a public behaviour is objectively and outwardly in accordance with duty, it does not follow from this that the agent's intention is good, a question that cannot be resolved by experience, since it belongs to the subjectivity of the will: "in fact, it is absolutely impossible by means of experience to make out with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an action otherwise in conformity with duty rested simply on moral grounds and on the representation of one's duty" (Kant 1997, p. 19). In a political constitution in which men are constrained to act publicly and outwardly as if they were good in accordance with duty, there is no conflict from the objective point of view (which is that of law) with morality:

> There is therefore objectively (in theory) no conflict at all between morality and politics. Subjectively, on the other hand (in the human being's propensity toward selfishness, a propensity which, however, need not be called practice, since it is not based on maxims of reason), this conflict will and may remain in force, because it serves as the whetstone of virtue (Kant 2006, p. 103).

Therefore, political progress—understood as the evolution of just legal institutions, despite favouring the development of morality by enabling the objective conditions by which the externalization and publicity of actions in accordance with duty is not impeded—does not necessarily or automatically imply the moral conversion of men towards good, but rather provides the opportunity to act as if they were good (Mayos 2004, p. 322). Coercive laws can, at most, guarantee the public practice of morality without external impediments, guaranteeing a space for free expression of possible good intentions that, however, always remain masked behind action. From the cultural progress of customs and institutions, we can expect the following:

> Not an ever-increasing quantity of morality in its disposition, but rather an increase in legality through actions performed in accordance with duty, whatever the actual motivations for these actions might be. That is to say, the yield (the result) of this cultivation of humankind toward the better will take the form of an increase in the good deeds of humans, hence in the phenomena of the moral quality of the human race, which shall become ever more numerous and better (Kant 2006, p. 161).

The political goal of perpetual peace, which humanity approaches by considering the externality of its actions in accordance with the law, is not identical to the perfect realization of the Kingdom of morality: "history as the external process of human development never enters the moral sanctuary itself. The struggle to realize the moral ideal begins for each person anew and will not be concluded before the end of time" (Dupré 1998, p. 827). Kant clearly distinguishes between the gradual progress of institutions and customs and the moral reconversion of hearts, which requires an inner revolution in the intentions of men:

> However, that a human being should become not merely legally good, but morally good (pleasant to God) i.e., virtuous according to the intelligible character [of virtue] (virtus noumenon) and thus in need of no other incentive to recognize a duty except the representation of duty itself -that, so long as the foundation of the maxims of the human being remains impure, cannot be effected through gradual reform but must rather be effected through a revolution in the disposition of the human being (a transition to the maxim of holiness of disposition). And so a new man can come about only through a kind of rebirth, as it were a new creation (Kant 1998b, pp. 67–68).

In short, we can affirm that Kant's philosophy of history is marked by the tension between the infinite aspiration demanded by the practical ideas of reason—projected asymptotically as the regulatory ideal of human efforts—and the hope in the concrete, earthly realization of the end of history. The counterbalance between both attitudes gives rise to a certain irresolution in Kant's position. Although the historic–political goal of perpetual peace raises the spirit by directing it towards a final chiliasm, this optimism is tempered by Kant's harshness in considering men, so prone to selfishness and disobedience, as definitively moralized: "indeed, its perfect solution is impossible: nothing entirely straight can be fashioned from the crooked wood of which humankind is made. Nature has charged us only with approximating this idea" (Kant 2006, p. 9). The tension illustrated by Kant's ambiguous attitude can be well explained by the dialectical interaction of two antithetical influences: Gnosticism and Ebionism. But this is a matter that will be discussed later.

2.3. Prophetism

Another issue to highlight is Kant's position vis à vis history, tracing a priori the script to follow for the course of time. The new Kantian perspective for contemplating history, supported by a priori principles that cannot be renounced by practical reason, opens a new

field for hope that transcends mere experience, since from the phenomenal observation of the fluctuation of events that have no apparent ulterior meaning, the spectator can only react with a paralyzing uneasiness of the spirit. This issue, of such great importance for the interests of reason, is taken up again by Kant in the second part of *The Contest of the Faculties*, one of his last works in which he reiterates the question of whether the human race is working in constant progress towards the better. Here, Kant compares the task of the philosopher with that of the prophet (*Wahrsager*), who founds the possibility of an a priori history by setting out future events in advance: "when the one divining the events himself brings about and arranges the events that he announces in advance" (Kant 2006, p. 150). Kant's elaboration of a philosophical history from a universal point of view that transcends experience is understood as a prophetic task, anticipating and arranging future events according to the fundamental interests of practical reason: "by telling a divinatory history of that which is to come in the future, thus by giving a portrayal of events to come that is possible a priori" (Kant 2006, p. 150). However, and as is generally the case when he recovers references from religious tradition, secularizing them and referring to objects that go beyond the field of experience, Kant attempts to adapt these prophetic visions to the limits of reason. Nevertheless, the scientific impossibility of predicting future events is admitted, since these transcend experience and cannot be determined by a cause-and-effect mechanism due to the peculiarity of the subject who undertakes such actions, who is endowed with a freedom that makes such actions unpredictable and resistant to any historical determinism. This prediction, as a theoretical object, could only be given if we ascended to the perspective of a providence that exceeds all human wisdom: "for that would be the perspective of *providence*, which lies beyond the grasp of all human wisdom and which also extends to the free actions of human beings" (Kant 2006, p. 154). Kant's prophetic task in the construction of historical hope is more a matter of founding it on a practical certainty than on a scientific one (Aramayo 2018, p. 204), placing before the eyes of men a goal as a pure moral object whose aspiration is demanded as an inalienable, unquestionable duty by reason. Even so, there remains an unfathomable gulf between this a priori ideal postulated by practical reason and the unfolding of events: between philosophical history and the course of empirical history there must be a way that indirectly shows, not in the manner of a direct, intuitive presentation of the object but rather as an indication that reveals, that humanity is the cause of its progress towards the better (Lyotard 2009, p. 26). In order not to fall into despair resulting from the disappointing course of events and to effectively establish the hope that humanity is progressing for the better, it is not only necessary to draw up a teleological plan in advance for creatures that seem to pursue no end, but also to isolate, in history, an event (*Begebenheit*) that has the value of a sign (Foucault 1984, p. 37). The sign appears in historical experience and has a factual basis collected in the empirical history of historians. However, the ultimate meaning that constitutes its extraordinary value as a sign is removed from the tangled chain of causes and effects to be captured in a different horizon of significance by Kant, who isolates the event as the starting point of a prophetic history in accordance with his most intimate hope, that of discovering the tendency of progress and development of humanity as a moral species. It is this bidirectional nature of the sign that allows us to build a bridge along which historical experience unfolds to show its affinity with the guiding thread presupposed by Kant. It is this dual condition of the sign, which enables the combination of empirical evidence and transcendental free causality, which led Aramayo to designate it as an ontological centaur (Aramayo 2017, p. 174). The event is not the cause itself of progress, but rather is the sign of the existence of such a cause, which, as a driver of the progress of the human race with a constant tendency, cannot be confined to a specific phenomenon in time. For this reason, according to Kant, the cause indicated by the event remains indeterminate with

respect to time: "that event must not itself be considered to be the cause of this progress, but rather only to be indicative, as a historical sign (*signum rememorativum, demonstrativum, prognostikon*), and thereby prove the *tendency* of the human race as a *whole*" (Kant 2006, pp. 154–55). One might expect to discover such a historical sign in the great event that occurred just a decade before the writing of *The Contest of the Faculties*, namely, the French Revolution. However, Kant focuses not so much on such great enterprises whose success or failure is subject to the contingencies of the times but rather on the disinterested reaction of those spectators who, by publicly revealing their judgement on the events that occurred, manifest a moral character. The sign of history is this enthusiasm brought about by the shock of such a spectacle[8]:

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

Thus, the enthusiasm publicly manifests what Kant had already formulated a priori: that humanity is in continuous progress towards the better. It is an experience given in the empirical course of events which, nevertheless, constitutes an exceptional occasion in which a new horizon of significance opens up in time, the point of contact with philosophical history. According to Kant, it is the actual event (*Begebenheit*) of history, the emergence of a decisive discontinuity, that condenses and reconcentrates the historical course, tensing time towards a vanishing point where the selfless hopes and desires of humanity as a moral species converge: "for that event is too great, too bound up with the interest of humanity, and too widespread in its influence throughout the world, that favourable conditions would not occasion peoples to remember it and make renewed attempts of this kind" (Kant 2006, p. 158). In these decisive moments of humanity, time is lived with such intensity that this experience can never be forgotten. The enthusiasm experienced is the inextinguishable heritage of all humanity as an event that has no comparison with other contingent phenomena, which are prone to be buried by the course of history. It is through this intensity, which seizes men to the point of enthusiasm, that an opening to a higher world, that of morality and the Kingdom of ends, bursts into history. We are speaking, in a certain sense, of messianic times.

Rising above the rest of humanity and the historical actors to reach the global vision of providence, the prophet–philosopher possesses the ultimate meaning of events, judging and isolating the main events of the historical flow to construct a sacred philosophical history distinct from the empirical, profane course of events. This opening of a new horizon of meaning strains time and charges it with messianism, directing the hope of men towards the vanishing point of a superior world that the prophet already glimpses, not through a direct presentation given to intuition but "according to the free, analogical presentation" (Lyotard 2009, p. 25) in historical signs indicative of ideals not offered to the immediate experience of other mortals. This hidden knowledge allows Kant to reverse the desolate perspective of a chaotic succession of phenomena initially presented to experience by evoking the regulatory principle of a guiding thread that orders the drama represented in "the great scene of the most supreme wisdom" (Kant 2006, p. 16) according to a regular course.

By recreating history a priori according to the guidelines of a rational plan, the prophet–philosopher occupies a preeminent place in the development of the enlightenment of

humanity. Not only because he offers a consoling perspective to inspire the spirit of men and direct their hope toward the legitimate ends of practical reason but also because his public function is fundamental to the progress of culture. Just as the prophets of the Old Testament reminded rulers with uncompromising severity of their duties towards Yahweh and his chosen people, the philosopher is the leader of the progress of peoples insofar as he prescribes to their leaders the duty to safeguard the sacred rights of humanity:

> Yet both kings and king-like peoples (those which rule over themselves in accordance with laws of equality), should not allow the class of philosophers to diminish or fall silent, but rather should have them speak publicly, for this enlightens the business of government, and, because by its very nature it is incapable of forming mobs and clubs, this class is beyond suspicion of being mere propagandists (Kant 2006, p. 94).

However, while the denunciations of the biblical prophets were the cause of multiple seditions and civil conflicts, the public use of reason must be limited, according to Kant, to the gradual reform in the way of thinking without precipitating the people into rebellion. This distinction is one of the central questions of Kant's short pamphlet *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?*, in which the public use of reason is emphatically promoted as a guarantee of the development of the enlightenment process, separating it from a private use of reason. The latter consists of the obedience of the individual as a member of a machine whose proper functioning requires his passivity, by which he does not reason freely but merely obeys (Foucault 1997, p. 307). On the other hand, in a different dimension corresponding to the public sphere, the *Aufklärung* is at stake, which demands nothing from man other than freedom "to make *public use* of one's reason in all matters" (Kant 2006, p. 18) without external supervision, i.e., autonomously. Therefore, the right to free publication of ideas is the sacred right whose violation through censorship constitutes the greatest obstacle to the development of the enlightenment of society and the cultural progress of humanity: "*popular enlightenment* is the public instruction of the people in its duties and rights with regard to the state to which it belongs. [. . .] The *prohibition* of publicity therefore hinders the progress of a people toward the better" (Kant 2006, p. 159). Since the public use of reason is guaranteed to be limited to its legitimate realm without leading to the *hybris* of promoting the rebellion and dissolution of the *Gemeinwessen*, the demands of the *Aufklärung* project are fulfilled, as proclaimed by Frederick II: "*argue* as much as you like and about whatever you like, *but obey*!" (Kant 2006, p. 19). Kant's idea that "a revolution is perhaps capable of breaking away from personal despotism and from avaricious or power-hungry oppression, but [. . .] can never bring about a genuine reform in thinking" (Kant 2006, p. 18) is comparable to Spinoza's criticism of the excesses of the prophets, the source of constant civil unrest: "they could, indeed, remove a tyrant; but there were reasons which prevented them from doing more than setting up, at great cost of civil bloodshed, another tyrant in his stead" (Spinoza 1966, p. 236). Taubes has explored in depth the revolutionary potential that Jewish apocalypticism entails (Taubes 2009, pp. 15–22).

Thanks to the free expression of his ideas, the prophet–philosopher becomes a speaker for the hidden intention of nature and a champion of the primordial interests of humanity. In the first part of *The Contest of the Faculties*, Kant longs for the day when philosophy carries the torch of enlightenment to guide governments towards the end to which nature will eventually lead them anyway, either with their own free cooperation in allowing themselves to be guided by the advice of philosophers on what they should do or dragged coercively by force through great torments and wars, which they could have avoided if they had allowed themselves to be enlightened. The voice of the philosopher, expounding the duty to conduct oneself according to rational ends, is not only uncomfortable for those rulers who do not want to renounce their ambition and selfishness but also for the people who wish to

follow their natural inclinations without the sacrifice that the exercise of freedom entails. They prefer the deceptions and artificial means of demagogues and miracle workers to the sincere criticism of the philosopher. This contempt is analogous to that suffered by the biblical prophets, who were ostracized from society for their uncompromising reproaches to a people who had forgotten their duties to the law. These despised proclamations are, at the same time, an announcement of calamities as punishment for the irreverent conduct of men and the anticipation of the Kingdom to come, which finally triumphs over evil and the catastrophes that scourge the people. Once the script that providence has established for history and the prophetic revelation of this plan by the philosopher synchronously converge, time undergoes a messianic acceleration precipitated by the latter's public action, the diffusion of lights being the auroral prelude to the dawn that men are already entering.

2.4. Moral Sanctity

According to a secularized reading of the role of God in Kant's practical philosophy, the Christian idea of divinity is immanentized as the unswerving inner voice of conscience (Aramayo 2018, p. 200). The ideas of theology are reclaimed by Kant as the foundation of the possibility of realizing the necessary, ultimate object of practical reason, supreme good (von Balthasar 1947, p. 116). This is the total, perfect good that constitutes the highest ideal to which man is permitted to aspire, the conceivable synthesis between the maximum effort through moral behaviour according to the concept of duty and the hope of a happiness of which the moral subject is worthy as a requirement of practical reason. While it is within the power of man to strive for sanctity in order to be worthy of happiness, the attainment of final bliss appropriate to the observance of duty is only conceivable according to the idea of a being superior to man and nature as the moral sovereign of the world through whom this end is possible: "he finds himself driven to believe in the cooperation or the management of a moral ruler of the world, through which alone this end is possible" (Kant 1998b, p. 141). The idea of God, extremely transcendent and empty in theoretical speculation, becomes immanent as a practical postulate whose thought is demanded by practical reason.

To understand how Kant transfers the ideas of theology to the realm of morality, it is necessary to start from the premise that religion is, for him, closely linked to the moral behaviour of man. Religion gives the commands of duty a sacred sanction, presenting moral law as a divine commandment. Indeed, pure rational religion must be founded on morality, "not in dogmas and observances but in the heart's disposition to observe all human duties as divine commands" (Kant 1998b, p. 98). Strict observance of moral law sanctifies man by making him worthy of the goods of redemption and pleasing to God, or rather to the inner divinity that dwells in the sanctity of every moral subject. The transgression of the law is, on the other hand, the sin that leads men away from this inner holiness. It requires an inner revolution of the heart and the creation of a new man to purify his intentions and direct them towards good, disregarding his natural inclinations that distance him from pure respect for duty. But this conversion towards the good that deifies man by making him a participant in a Kingdom of morality that transcends the order of nature, rather than being achieved by the supernatural intervention of a grace external to human efforts, results from the use of human forces themselves to reverse the inner foundation of the maxims and restore the original disposition towards good through a new foundation of character: "the power of ethical action must itself be sufficient witness on this score. Every foreign and external impulse joined to it would necessarily enfeeble it and introduce confusion into it and its peculiar energy" (Cassirer 1981, p. 265). To try to make up for the absence of moral effort with the hope of a divine intervention that will guide man towards good constitutes the degeneration of moral religion into a superstitious illusion that masks the bad faith of the intention to circumvent the sacred prescriptions of

moral law. Grace cannot be a substitute for virtuous action, but a higher cooperation that the virtuous man may hope for once he has proven himself worthy due to his scrupulous following of duty. Hope in the cooperation of a higher being, as we have already seen, cannot supplant the responsibility of man's work, nor constitute a motive for moral action, for the exercise of virtue demands the selflessness of adopting the representation of pure duty as the maxim of action independently of the happy or unhappy consequences of that action: "the right way to advance is not from grace to virtue but rather from virtue to grace" (Kant 1998b, p. 191). Thus, the idea of a Kingdom of grace as opposed to the Kingdom of nature is only operative in Kant's moral theology as a future world that the man worthy of happiness is permitted to hope for: "thus to regard ourselves as in the realm of grace, where every happiness awaits us as long as we do not ourselves limit our share of it through the unworthiness to be happy, is a practically necessary idea of reason" (Kant 1998a, p. 681).

The law of duty of the Kantian realm of morality, held like a yoke over the natural inclinations of men, gives rise to certain Old Testament reminiscences (Taubes 2009, p. 149). Both share a legalistic relationship between God and men, which leads to a justification of the latter once he has proven himself righteous through his meticulous obedience and respect for his duties. The requirement of *religatio* with divinity is carried out by a strict *relegere* of the divine commands, in the sense of Cicero's etymology (Cicerón 1982, p. 151). The conversion of the holy into the moral due to the absolutely sacred character of the norms and precepts, which must be obeyed with reverential rigour, led Hermann Cohen to consider the relationship between Kant's ethical formalism and the rigorous Jewish respect for the law as a divine commandment:

> Even according to Kant's teaching, man is not a volunteer of the moral law, but has to subjugate himself to duty. Thus, the Israelite also must take the yoke upon himself; but with this yoke of the laws he also takes upon himself the "Yoke of the Kingdom of God". There is but one yoke: that of the laws and the Kingdom of God. There is no other Kingdom of God but the kingdom of the laws. What other kingdom could there be? The kingdom of morality perhaps? But this is exactly the kingdom of law (Cohen 1995, p. 345).

2.5. The Secularized Church

Kant's transcendental eschatology is not directed exclusively to the spiritual revealing of the ultimate end of man in his individuality but rather has a marked final communal orientation: "in Kant's philosophy individual eschatology is inextricably linked to the eschatology of the whole community" (Taubes 2009, p. 146). According to Kant, it is a communal duty of the human race to gather in a spiritual society of saints under moral laws of virtue, thus founding an ethical community: "an association of human beings merely under laws of virtue, ruled by this idea, can be called an *ethical* and, so far as the laws are public, an *ethico-civil* (in contrast to a *juridico-civil*) society, or an *ethical community*" (Kant 1998b, p. 106). As can be noted, Kant establishes a crucial contrast between this ethical community and the juridico-political one, alluding to the difference stated before between the inner realm of morality and the external one of legal institutions. While the latter, through a gradual change in customs, can force a people of demons to act as if they were good by increasing the phenomenal manifestations of virtue (*virtus phaenomenon*), the realm of morality (or ethical community) is constituted by men of almost angelic character united by the common aspiration to good without the need for coercive laws due to the sanctity of their moral character. First, this ethical community differs from a legal or political community in the form of its legislation or constitution, for it is free from all coercion and is more concerned with the inner morality of actions than with their external legality: "a *juridico-civil* (political) *state* is the relation of human beings to each other inasmuch as they

stand jointly under *public juridical laws* (which are all coercive laws). An *ethico-civil* state is one in which they are united under laws without being coerced" (Kant 1998b, p. 106). The development of legal institutions can give rise to coercive laws that administer the law justly, guaranteeing freedom among men in their external actions. However, the morality of such actions is not resolved in this public realm of legality, but in the interiority of the intention, a secret only accessible by a higher entity capable of scrutinizing hearts and which is the true supreme legislator of the moral world through non-coercive laws of virtue. In a pure community of saints there is no room for coercion, which is necessary because of the evil of men. Moreover, both communities differ due to the scope of their extension: "since the duties of virtue concern the entire human race, the concept of an ethical community always refers to the ideal of a totality of human beings, and in this it distinguishes itself from the concept of a political community" (Kant 1998b, p. 107). Representative of this idea of ethical community is the notion of *church*, another category that Kant inherits from religious tradition. Due to the spiritual principle of its constitution and its universal aspiration, we clearly see that Kant presents this moral community as a secularization of the Christian idea of church:

> An ethical community under divine moral legislation is a church which, inasmuch as it is not the object of a possible experience, is called the church invisible (the mere idea of the union of all upright human beings under direct yet moral divine world-governance, as serves for the archetype of any such governance to be founded by human beings). The church visible is the actual union of human beings into a whole that accords with this ideal (Kant 1998b, p. 111).

The invisible church is the idea of a moral Kingdom of God that serves as a model for all approximate representations of it that wanders on this Earth. The infinite aspiration to this ideal is a communal duty of every moral union of men in this world, for every well-intentioned person acts with the utmost of their moral energies as if the Kingdom of God and the empire of His Divine Will were to come to pass on Earth. The approximation to the exemplary truth of the archetypal ideal consists of following certain regulatory guidelines that guide the conduct of men in a moral community: the aspiration to the universality of the union of all men, the purity of intentions, freedom in mutual relations, and the immutability of the constitutive principles of such a community. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had already revived the theological idea of the *corpus mysticum* as a symbol of the intimate, spiritual union of the faithful with divinity, applying it in a secularized form by establishing it as a model of a community systematically united by the universal laws of morality: "the idea of a moral world thus has objective reality [. . .] as an object of pure reason in its practical use and a *corpus mysticum* of the rational beings in it" (Kant 1998a, p. 679). According to Kant, the divine foundation that articulates the mystical moral body is, rather than God made Man by the kenosis of the Incarnation continued through his pleroma poured into his earthly members, Man made God in an infinite process of theosis through his immanent moral action (von Balthasar 1947, p. 105) through which he aspires to rise to the spiritual pleroma discovered in the sacred interior of every man: "the transcendental pneuma of Christ is replaced by the intramundane spirit of man, [. . .] the *corpus mysticum Christi* has given way to the *corpus mysticum humanitatis*" (Voegelin 1975, p. 10).

According to Émile Mersch, the use of the idea of *corpus mysticum* to describe a merely spiritual, invisible moral union between men converts the church into an abstract ideal that lacks the realism of the empirical, visible aspect of this union. The author also traces the influence of Gnosticism as background for this kind of spiritual community, as an invisible, vital atmosphere that constitutes a reality of moral and ascetical order permeated by a radical dualism that no doubt emphasizes the spiritual component, but in detriment to the empirical, bodily reality (Mersch 1938, p. 253). Kant is well aware of the infinite

distance between the idea of a pure invisible community of saints and the earthly attempts to institute a society among men according to this supreme ideal. Although the tension between both kinds of community is not surmountable in the realm of experience, the aspiration to a higher synthesis between the two constitutes an object of thought as a practical ideal that every man must strive for with his maximum efforts: "Kant admits the failure of attempts to create an ethical community or church in the past, but insists it is a duty for human beings to follow until the ideal is achieved or approximated" (Molloy 2017, p. 127). Therefore, the idea of a people of God, united morally to a supreme divine ruler through obedience to the law (Kant 1998b, p. 110), remains the archetype for every free association instituted among men on Earth. In general, this is the secularized way the theological ideas function in Kant's moral philosophy of religion and history.

3. The Gnostic–Ebionite Synthesis in Kant's Philosophy of History

Having examined the elements of the Christian tradition that we find most notably secularized in Kant's philosophy of history, we will now discuss to what extent certain remote influences of Gnosis and Ebionism have acted as catalysts of this process of distortion of the hope in a supernatural consummation of history. As we have already highlighted from Canals' intuition, the unstable mixture of the components of both tendencies has led to the dialectical unleashing required to erode true Christian doctrine on the theology of history and the ultimate end of all things. In order to see how this hypothesis is fulfilled in the particular case of Kant's reflections on history, let us see to what extent there is a certain affinity between certain aspects of his philosophy with Gnosticism and Ebionism.

Regarding the Gnostic aspects that surreptitiously influence Kant's philosophy of history, it is worth highlighting first of all the central role that the philosopher occupies on the stage of history, possessing a kind of wisdom hidden from other mortals. Recall that in Kant's perspective for elaborating a philosophical history, the thinker is able to scrutinize an ulterior meaning that grounds his hope of redemption. Knowledge or Gnosis is the key to tracing a history of salvation for the human race with the opening of a new horizon that transcends the empirical course of events and avoids falling into the despair the latter brings with it. In the transformation of the philosopher's psyche, we find a suggestive trace of the Gnostic attitude: the anguishing condition of the starting point, experienced through feelings of indignation and unease (*Unwillen*) at the present state of the world when he takes an initial phenomenal glance at the apparent lack of rational purpose in the actions of men, and the overcoming of this emotional state of alienation through a redemptive knowledge of divine origin, with the partaking of a providential wisdom that communicates to the philosopher his belonging to a superior world to come and bases his hope on the dissolution of the current order of things. However, the remaining agents acting in the historical scene are complicit in their straying in this chaotic world where every individual project fails, incapable as they are of ascending to a universal point of view to reveal the hidden wisdom that cunningly plays with their particular passions and interests. Their *agnoia*, the ignorance that makes them persist in their particular aims, keeps them subject to a mechanism that bends their intentions without them even being aware of it. A superior wisdom frees man from this trivial game, placing him on a higher plane. We should be careful when referring to the soteriological component of wisdom as a way of self-redemption because this feature only applies to Kant's philosophy in a specific, particular sense. Did he not react against a certain *hybris* of reason, attempting to hold it within its legitimate limits? "I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith" (Kant 1998a, p. 117). Considering the issue in this way, the critical task undertaken by Kant is to deprive reason of its extravagant, illusory insights in the field of theoretical knowledge. In this area, we will not find any of the soteriological dimensions that Gnostics

attribute to knowledge. Moreover, Kant's attitude can be well illustrated as an anti-Gnostic contribution to remedy the pathological excesses of reason. Chaly has followed this path recently, considering that Kant's philosophy has the therapeutic potential to compensate and mitigate the Gnostic dizziness of modern ages: "critical philosophy is called upon to bring back orientation in thought which facilitates orientation in the world process and in individual activity; it is a pill for the seasickness of the modern age" (Chaly 2024, p. 94). On the other hand, despite rejecting theoretical knowledge of metaphysical ideas because they exceed the limits of possible experience, this does not mean that thinking about them should be rejected (Kant 1998a, p. 115). On the contrary, it should be promoted as long as they are consistent with the interests of humanity in the practical realm. Therefore, we are not alluding here to scientific or theoretical knowledge, but to a certain kind of practical wisdom: "some things can only be known from reason, not from experience, namely when one does not want to know how something is, but must or should be"[9] (Kant 1923, p. 184). Once transcendental philosophy overrides metaphysics in the theoretical domain, the supersensible realm is recovered in a practical sense. In the specific area of the philosophy of history, Kant is well aware that empirical evidence does not support his ultimate hope when regarding history and the idea of progress cannot be a matter for theoretical knowledge. If we remain exclusively in this domain, one should become a sceptic faced with a "godless universe deprived of meaning" (Molloy 2017, p. 148). Hence the distressing Gnostic experience of alienation and the incessant search for an ultimate meaning beyond the phenomena. Nevertheless, the new turn implied by his transcendental method inaugurates a new perspective in considering history not as how it is, but as what it should be. This way of looking at history through a superior wisdom, which is related to ideas not borrowed from experience and immanent to reason itself, does not increase our knowledge theoretically or scientifically but enables a new horizon of significance to be glimpsed that stimulates human efforts toward perfection. Only in this practical sense are we allowed to stress that the philosopher possesses a secret, superior wisdom to scheme a philosophical history that transcends the empirical course of phenomena:

> As the sixth feature of the Gnostic attitude, therefore, we recognize the construction of a formula for self and world salvation, as well as the Gnostic's readiness to come forward as a prophet who will proclaim his knowledge about the salvation of mankind (Voegelin 2000, p. 298).

In effect, the prophet–philosopher transcends the empirical course of events and reformulates a priori the script of history, orienting it towards an end that the thinker, detached from the partial ambitions and selfish interests of the rest, already lives internally. According to Kant, hope for a redeemed humanity is inextricably linked to the advent of the realm of perfect morality, however distant this dream from reason may seem. However, despite the infinite remoteness of this idea from the empirical reality of the present world, the philosopher considers it a duty to approach this goal with all his strength. The inner discovery of his belonging to this invisible, superior realm of morality demands that he separate himself from all contact with the impurity toward which his fallen nature inclines him. Abstracting from the motives for the will proposed by his natural inclinations, he directs his moral efforts towards a pure fulfilment of duty, unmixed and untainted by any kind of interest associated with a happiness that is perishable in this world of sensibility. Gnostic dualism, which radically separates the intrinsic misery and evil of the natural world and the superhuman superiority of the spiritual dimension, runs through Kant's image of humanity, divided into the extremes of animal coarseness and moral sanctity. On the one hand, his contemptuous, negative view of human nature is well known: "how could one expect to construct something completely straight from such crooked wood?" (Kant 1998b, p. 111). There is a radical evil in human nature, an essential tendency to

disobedience that makes man an ethically guilty and religiously sinful being. However, man can radically reverse the supreme foundation of his maxims when he finds in himself a moral disposition of divine origin capable of despising everything natural as nothing (Kant 1998b, p. 69). Through the asceticism of a moral work that is practically inhuman, for it consists rather of the cultivation of the divine seed implanted in the original depths of every man's heart, he is able to overcome his sinful condition by extirpating his natural propensity towards evil, being reborn with a nature almost proper to an angelic spirit, of a superhuman purity unbroken by sin. Like the Gnostic who undertakes his process of separation from the world until he restores the purity of his origin, whose pneumatic quality as a partaker in divinity reveals his ontological superiority, the sanctity proper to the moral character of the man who fulfils his duty in the purest possible way is proper to a world superior to that of the Kingdom of nature. Reintegration into the divine pleroma is, for Kant, analogous to the communion of all the saints in a realm of morality, which constitutes the ultimate aspiration and vanishing point of his system. This ideal, in a way similar to Gnostic reveries, fades away on the horizon. Its realization is postponed indefinitely, for it is projected asymptotically towards infinity. This lack of defined concreteness is a symptom of the Gnostic distrust of the ontological status of the present world, whose constitutive imperfection renders it impure for hosting a stage of definitive perfection. The progressive purification of all worldly contamination stretches the proposed ideal to the maximum, depriving it of any possibility of representation based on categories of concrete, historical reality. However, this absence of concreteness does not constitute an impediment to action that paralyzes the spirit, but rather a spur that puts even more strain on man's efforts to separate himself hostilely from this world through self-awareness of his belonging to a perfection that finds no form or parallel among the present corruption. Man's struggle to achieve his divine reconciliation is an infinite task, but one that cannot be postponed. Regardless of the final consummation of his efforts, which extends into the indefinite, man's moral dignity results from the zeal with which he persists in his aspirations (*Streben*).

This dualism, inherent to Kant's vision of the twofold fate of mankind as being destined for two entirely different worlds—one subjected to the mechanism of nature and the suprasensible moral realm—has led Seán Molloy to speak of a quasi-Gnostic feature in Kant's thought: "Kant opens the pathway to the declaration of independence from nature by means of a quasi-Gnostic distinction between God as the *architechtus* or creator of the universe and the demiurge as author of matter" (Molloy 2017, p. 150). The author is reluctant to present this dualism plainly as Gnostic because of Kant's hope in the final restoration of all things, or *apokatastasis*, including nature:

> Although Kant's diagnosis of reality shares much with Gnosticism's belief in the deceptiveness of the cosmos, his position regarding the ultimate goodness and salvation of nature as a part of divine creation (albeit in need of redemption and harmonization with the will of God) is ultimately closer to that of the post-Gnostic apocatastatic Christianity of Origen (Molloy 2017, p. 217).

As we have already seen, there is a Kantian hope in the ultimate abolition of evil because of its self-destructive nature through which one could expect a gradual purification of the world. The regular administration of a providence of nature, the most anti-Gnostic trait in Kant's philosophy of history due to its crossed, antithetical influences, secretly plans to promote a greater good from the wickedness of wars and selfishness, whose negative effects neutralize each other. One would expect that, following his hope in the ultimate abolition of evil, Kant finally leaves his dualistic system in order to embrace the final restoration of all things. This would also imply the denial of the eternity of Hell in order to reunite the dammed with God, going through a gradual, finite purification process. However, as we have already seen (note 6), Kant does not go that far. In *The End of All*

Things, he considers that this matter, which concerns the suprasensible realm, can only be postulated as a principle of practical action. From this perspective, the unitarian system is rejected as a moral principle, since "it is wise to act *as if* another life -and the moral state in which we end this one, along with its consequences in entering on that other life- is unalterable" (Kant 1998b, p. 198). The final restoration of all creation, including the dammed, through a finite process of purification by the fire, is not even clear in Origen. Although there are a few texts in which the theologian suggests that the punishment of fire will end up at a certain point (Orígenes 1967, p. 344) since it has a pedagogical purpose, the *apokatastasis* and ultimate reintegration of all creatures remains only a possibility and is not categorically stated (Mora Calvo 2012, p. 163). In short, there is no doubt that certain elements of Kant's philosophy counterbalance the Gnostic influence, but not to the extent of neutralizing his profound dualism.

Kant's insistence on human efficacy in order to earn the goods of redemption reveals a typically Ebionite trait in his thinking. Despite the doubts that the idea of an ever-elusive final horizon might generate, he bases his confidence in the moral destiny of the soul on the unwavering fulfilment of duty. The uncertainty and insecurity of belief require the spiritual strength necessary to base a more solid belief on a firm foundation, which Kant finds in the immanence of man's autonomous moral behaviour: according to Hans Urs von Balthasar's fine observation, believing becomes a duty (von Balthasar 1947, p. 34). The substance of faith is transferred to the centre of man's moral life, who by his efforts in the honest fulfilment of duty becomes worthy of divine favour. This sanctification of man, derived from his own moral energies in the blameless following of the precepts of duty, recalls the divinization resulting from an obedience to Old Testament law that practically surpasses all human measure. It is through the scrupulous fulfilment of divine commands that individuals become worthy of the promised messianic goods. For Kant, the history of the human race is also oriented according to a promise of redemption. However, when he attributes to nature the guarantee of the progressive realization of the divine plan through its supreme wisdom, he does not do so to relieve men of the responsibility of acting in accordance with the dictates of practical reason. For this requires their most rigorous cooperation through the fulfilment of duty, since the ultimate question that beats in the depths of conscience is not whether man will be able to enjoy the promised happiness, but whether he really deserves it. Only by having demonstrated his probity in fulfilling the law is man entitled to expect future goods as a corollary of his merits. The teleological plan that is responsible for the providential administration of these goods is the required correlative to found hope in the success of his well-intentioned efforts.

Like the Ebionites, who await the secular redemption of their sorrows through the advent of the Kingdom of God on Earth in a political and carnal form, Kant also projects the definitive fulfilment of justice among men with the establishment of a legal (though not moral) state of perpetual peace. This political materialization of messianic hopes is symptomatic of the legalistic conception of the relationship between God and men, underlying both the Ebionites and Kant. If the former expected the appearance of the Messiah as a righteous leader capable of leading the people of Israel towards earthly peace, Kant delegates this task of pacification to providential nature, who administers in its particular theodicy the progressive realization of justice in history by reconfiguring political relations between nations. The final peaceful condition is the realization of the reign of justice on Earth insofar as it is ordered to the legality of actions in accordance with duty, in a visible, public form. We have already seen that, according to Kant, this is the external realm where law reigns, relegating the morality of actions to the interiority of intention. The Ebionites, for their part, were unable to transcend this exclusively earthly orientation of the justice to come, for the advent of the Kingdom in a political, public form is symptomatic of

a Judaizing attachment to the flesh. Their refusal to abandon the external–legal relationship with the old law is consistent with the spiritual blindness of not noticing the supernatural action of the grace of Christ, which spiritually imprints law within the hearts. In both cases, the coming of the Kingdom on Earth has no spiritual significance, an interpretation proper to all crass or carnal millenarianism (Canals 2005, p. 132). Kant's philosophical chiliasm, of secular, intra-historical orientation, thus connects with the Ebionites' keeping of messianic promises regarding the political establishment of a peace that would put an end to the war and oppression announced by the prophets, albeit interpreted carnally. Kant also isolates relevant events that serve as precursory signs to prophesize the definitive culmination of the reign of justice on Earth. The problem that puts the entire Kantian system in tension is the apparent incompatibility between this political end of history and the infinitely distant idea of a realm of morality that, like a sudden entry of eternity into time, draws human efforts towards the vanishing point of a higher world.

In reference to this last question, Kant plays with a certain ambiguity. Hans Urs von Balthasar had already warned that Kant's conception of humanity and the idea of its full realization is trapped in a tragic dualism of aporetic resolution (von Balthasar 1947, p. 98). On the one hand, the idea of indefinite progress extending asymptotically towards infinity is proposed. This projects history according to a regulatory ideal that must guide human action to the greatest extent possible, despite the concrete, empirical unrealisability of this idea on the intra-historical level, the result of Kant's distrust regarding the intrinsic evil of human nature and the empirical course of events as manifested by experience. Nor is the distance between the individual and the species, reserving the fruits of progress for the idea of the infinite totality of the series of generations on Earth and not for a specific historical stage of human evolution, indicative of an empirical materialization of the end of history. Such are Kant's resistances and precautions against considering the natural order capable of harbouring such perfection. On the other hand, Kant does not renounce the possibility of a final, definitive state for human history on Earth. This hope is oriented towards the idea of the creation of earthly and political institutions capable of guaranteeing perpetual peace among men in accordance with the idea of law. We can state that Kant's ambivalent, hesitant attitude between both extremes derives from the influence of certain antithetical elements belonging to Gnosis and Ebionism. Both movements reconfigure themselves in a strange unstable synthesis, coexisting in tension in Kant's philosophy of history. However, their composition results in the dialectic required to distort the supernatural, transcendent sense of Christian hope, giving rise to certain secularized derivations such as Kant's:

> The Ebionites' vain distortion of the Kingdom's hope in secular humanism continues its work across the centuries, as has its antithesis, the gnosis that is hostile to nature and that disguises its hatred of God with contempt for earthly goods. Gnosis and millenarianism, on the other hand, synthesize themselves repeatedly throughout history and entail the errors of our times with an obvious, universal influence (Canals 2005, p. 152).[10]

In short, we can affirm that Kant's approaches to history are based on a synthesis of Gnostic and Ebionite elements from whose instability derives the tension existing in his hopes between an infinite approximation of unviable empirical materialization and an intra-historical consummation of the promised Kingdom. While a certain Gnostic attitude drives the movement towards a horizon that is always elusive and distant from any worldly concretization, a longing of Ebionite origin motivates the efforts to present the promised messianic goods on an earthly, institutional plane.

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Notes

1 Hans Blumenberg has argued against this theorem of secularization transfer put forward by Karl Löwith, accusing it of a historical substantialism that presupposes an underlying identity whose hidden permanence in secularized forms denounces the appearance of this process and of any change or discontinuity. Instead of proposing an identity of the contents that are transferred, Blumenberg argues for an identity of functions: "the only reason why 'secularization' could ever become so plausible as a mode of explanation of historical processes is that supposedly secularized ideas can in fact mostly be traced back to an identity in the historical process. Of course this identity, according to the thesis advocated here, is not one of contents but one of functions. It is in fact possible for totally heterogeneous contents to take on identical functions in specific positions in the system of man's interpretation of the world and of himself" (Blumenberg 1983, p. 64). Modernity's debt to certain theological antecedents would consist of the inheritance of a system of questions raised, categorizing secularization as the substitution of response mechanisms that would represent the same inherited function: "what mainly occurred in the process that is interpreted as secularization, at least (so far) in all but a few recognizable and specific instances, should be described not as the *transposition* of authentically theological contents into secularized alienation from their origin but rather as the *reoccupation* of answer positions that had become vacant and whose corresponding questions could not be eliminated" (Blumenberg 1983, p. 65). In line with this functionalism that can be traced back to Cassirer, Gustavo Bueno pointed out that in the formation of secularized concepts there is a relationship with precursor ideas, an analogical relationship that is also maintained among the bodily organs of different species with similar functions. This is how he describes it in *El mito de la cultura* (our translation): "precursory, not in the sense of anticipations, but in the sense of what in zoology are the analogous organs of one species with respect to later ones, that is, organs that, precisely because of their characteristic morphology, perform a similar function in a given organism not precisely by way of anticipation of subsequent organisms" (Bueno 2004, p. 140). For further information about the context in which we use the term secularization throughout this article, see the exhaustive research of Jean-Claude Monod (Monod 2015). This author defines and distinguishes the idea of secularization transfer as opposed to the form secularization liquidation, which inspires the emancipation movements that claim the radical independence of the modern categories and institutions from the former religious backgrounds. Nevertheless, the theorem of secularization transfer that we are applying in this article is a useful hermeneutic tool to trace certain theological influences that underly modern formulations (Monod 2015, p. 33).

2 Our translation.

3 For a concise exposition of the fundamental aspects of gnosis, see the entry "gnosi—gnosticism" in the *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane* (Ramelli 2007, s.v. "gnosi—gnosticismo"). The classic reference for a more in-depth study of the subject is the work of Hans Jonas, in particular *La religión gnóstica. El mensaje del Dios extraño y los comienzos del cristianismo* (Jonas 2000). Other more recent relevant studies on gnosis can be found in the final list of references (1997–2000; Rudolph 1983).

4 As in the case of gnosticism, the entry "ebioniti" in *the Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane* provides a good presentation of the general features of the Ebionite sect (Klijn 2006, s.v. "ebioniti"). The other literature consulted on the subject can be found in the final references (Bauckham 2003; Goulder 2003; Häkkinen 2005).

5 This is not the place to discuss the objections of Hans Blumenberg, according to whom the modern use of the idea of providence does not derive so much from a secularization of an originally theological concept founded on Christian tradition but rather from a recovery by natural reason of a central idea of the Hellenistic period, mainly of the Stoic school: "a sufficient reason why the idea of providence could not be secularized in a late phase of the history of Christianity is that it had already participated, at the beginning of that history, in the one fundamental secularization of Christianity that was accomplished by rolling back eschatology and recovering a respite for history. The fact that the world as a whole is well administered has significance, as a source of satisfaction, only if its duration is once more supposed to have a positive value" (Blumenberg 1983, p. 37). Molina Cantó has explored the relationship between the Kantian and Stoic ideas of providence and that the former's references to an immanent purpose of the course of the world, be it called destiny, nature's intention or providence, are more related to Stoicism than to the Christian tradition (Cantó 2015, p. 476).

[6] According to von Balthasar, this belief is rooted in the denial of the eternity of hell and, therefore, in the reclamation of the ancient doctrine of the final restoration of all things (*apokatastasis*), a theme revived by Jacob Taubes in his *Occidental Eschatology*: "the doctrine of the restoration of all things inspires not only the mystical elements within Pietism but the pietistic Enlightenment, too. Pietism and the Enlightenment both put their faith in the final abolition of evil" (Taubes 2009, p. 128). Kant, however, is careful not to rush into dogmatic judgement on questions concerning supersensible objects. In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, he declares that reason cannot settle anything speculatively on the question of the finiteness or eternity of punishments in hell, despite the important practical utility of such a dichotomy: "in general, if, instead of the constitutive principles of the cognition of supersensible objects into which we cannot in fact have any insight, we restricted our judgement to the regulative principles, which content themselves with only their practical use, human wisdom would be better off in a great many respects" (Kant 1998b, p. 88). In this respect, Kant judges according to its practical value between the unitary system (reserving eternal bliss for all men, so that the doctrine of the restoration of all things could be included in this alternative) and the dualistic system (only some are saved, the rest destined to eternal damnation) in his work *The End of All Things*: "thus from a practical point of view, the system to be assumed will have to be the dualistic one -especially since the unitistic system appears to lull us to too much into an indifferent sense of security- yet we might not try to make out which of the two systems deserves superiority from a theoretical and merely speculative point of view" (Kant 1998b, p. 198). In this work, Kant also reflects on the possibility of a "perverse" end of all things, where Christianity, if it loses its moral worth and becomes authoritarian, could provoke a regime of fear and self-interest, leading to moral collapse. However, Kant ultimately dismisses this scenario, maintaining hope in moral progress under a wise world governor (Kant 1998b, pp. 199, 205). This assessment is coherent with Kant's global philosophy of history, as it underscores the fragility of human morality while reaffirming his ultimate faith in moral progress guided by practical reason. Rather than an exception, it aligns with the broader teleological framework of his thought.

[7] Fichte, in *Foundations of Natural Right*, deduces the principles of law without deriving them from moral law, a procedure that he considers to coincide with that of Kant even though *Toward Perpetual Peace* does not provide a direct verification of this deduction: "on the basis of the work just cited, it is not possible to see clearly if Kant derives the law of right from the moral law (in accordance with the usual way of doing things) or whether he adopts another deduction of the law of right. But Kant's remark concerning the concept of a permissive law makes it at least highly probable that his deduction agrees with the deduction given here" (Fichte 2000, p. 13). For Fichte, as also for Kant, law refers to the sensible manifestations of the freedom of men in reciprocal action, while the court of morality exercises its law in the interiority of intentions: "in the domain of natural right, the good will has no role to play. Right must be enforceable, even if there is not a single human being with a good will; the very aim of the science of right is to sketch out just such an order of things. In this domain, physical force -and it alone- gives right its sanction" (Fichte 2000, p. 50). The wickedness of human nature makes coercion necessary in order to enable even a people of demons to behave, in their external actions and not according to their inclinations, in accordance with duty, something that would not be necessary in a perfect moral community: "for a species of perfected moral beings, there is no law of right. It is already clear that humankind cannot be such a species, from the fact that the human being must be educated and must educate himself to the status of morality; for he is not moral by nature, but must make himself so through his own labor" (Fichte 2000, p. 132).

[8] For Lyotard, this enthusiasm experienced by the spectators of the revolutionary drama is a modality of the sublime feeling: "the enthusiasm they experience is, according to Kant, a modality of the sublime feeling" (Lyotard 2009, p. 29). The sublime feeling is an *Affekt* aroused by a formless object (Kant 2007, p. 75), unrepresentable to the imagination no matter how hard it tries to present it under an adequate sensible intuition. This impotence does violence to the imagination, provoking in the soul a feeling of displeasure caused by a terrible excess in which the imagination fears losing itself and sinking. However (and this is the important thing here), this first movement is necessary to shake the spirit, for after this shock the subject experiences a certain negative pleasure or relief (*delight*, as Burke would say) derived from his/her affinity with the infinite, elevating him/her above sensibility. To the subject is revealed, negatively exhibited, the infiniteness of the idea of his/her own humanity, and, in particular, of his/her moral character. Faced with a monstrous, violent event such as the Revolution, which Kant judged to be the greatest of crimes (Kant 2006, p. 53), the spirit of the spectators is shaken and shocked, and when the initial displeasure is suspended, the first reactions that reveal a moral character in the spectators begin to awaken enthusiastically, due to having experienced the affinity between the spectacle contemplated and the infinity of its ideas and character, which lifts the spirit. The infinite idea of the moral character of humanity is revealed in a kind of negative exhibition, for it is unrepresentable in the sensible field as intuition positively given to experience: "this pure, elevating, merely negative presentation of morality involves, on the other hand, no fear of fanaticism, which is a delusion that would will some vision beyond all the bounds of sensibility; i.e., would dream according to principles (rational raving). The safeguard is the purely negative character of the presentation. For the inscrutability of the idea of freedom precludes all positive presentation" (Kant 2007, p. 105). The revolutionary, like the fanatic, falls into the transcendental illusion of pretending a direct exhibition of the ideas of reason, whose infiniteness makes them incommensurable to any positive presentation (Lyotard 2009, p. 30). In the enthusiasm of the spectator, whose detachment from the revolutionary game implies their disinterest in the empirical, contingent outcome of the rebellion, is revealed the infiniteness of an idea of morality that transcends the empirical course of events and the historical role of its bearers, true custodians of

the progress of humanity in history: "true enthusiasm is aimed solely at the ideal and, indeed, at the purely moral, to which the concept of right belongs, and cannot be attached to selfishness" (Kant 2006, p. 156). For Lyotard's in-depth study of Kant's sublime, see *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (Lyotard 1991).

[9] Our translation. For the original: "einige Dinge lassen sich nur auss der Vernunft erkennen, nicht aus der Erfahrung, nemlich wenn man nicht wissen will, wie etwas ist, sondern seyn muß oder soll".

[10] See notes 2 above.

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