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PUBLIC USE OF REASON, COMMUNICATION AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE

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Abstract: In this essay I intend to explore the relationship between the enlightenment and communication in Kant and those ideas through which he construes the enlightenment not as a process focused on the rationalization of the individual but as a collective one that require communication. In this context I will show the role that Kant gives to the idea of change in religion both as organization and doctrine. The basis of this approach is to reconsider the core of Kant's distinction between public use of reason and private use of reason and link it thus clarified, to questions raised by religious change.

Key Words: enlightenment, communication, public use of reason, private use of reason, polemical use of reason, religious change, emancipation, immaturity.

Introduction

In his short and famous article *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* hereafter *WE*), Immanuel Kant considers that a priest must make private use of reason when he preaches the teaching of his church, but at the same time, he, as a scholar, can address the public at large making use of public reason. In this latter case, he can criticize the teaching and statutes of the church to which he belongs. In the same way, making public use of reason, the citizen may question the fiscal-policy and the officer may make observations on the orders received from his superior.¹

The occasion of Kant's article was an article of the theologian and educator Johann Friedrich Zöllner. After examining the effects of enlightenment on the people, Zöllner wondered and asked the audience of his time: "*What is Enlightenment?*"². Kant, like others, has taken this question seriously.³ He was joining a very animated debate regarding the enlightenment, which continued a long time after the publication of his answer. Ironically, two centuries after posing the question, Michael Foucault interpreted the entirety of modern philosophy as an attempt to answer this without being able to tell if it really succeeded.⁴ Kant's article remained in the history of philosophy not only by his famous definition of enlightenment as the man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity but also by bringing into question the distinction between public and private uses of reason, a distinction that seems to conflict with both his liberal conception and his idea of reason as faculty that gives unity of thinking.

The division between private use of reason - public use of reason continues to preoccupy the moral and political philosophers⁵, because of the fact that clarifying the separation between public and private uses of reason is crucial in a society in which the delimitation public - private concerns not only the states, the civil societies, the individuals and their beliefs, but also the plurality of communities and the cultures. In the name of plurality, the ones that promote the unlimited freedom join in their criticism with the ones who claim virtues of the past, preservation of particular lifestyles, or uphold prejudices. For them, the enlightenment does not represent, anymore, an ideal. On the contrary, radicalism, multiculturalism, relativism and conservative positions are both critical and opposed to it. However, even these positions regard communication as a solution to the problems that may generate conflicts, and understanding the other as a way forward. Despite such criticism, it should be noted that Kant interprets enlightenment as a collective process fostered by communication. Communication with others means to investigate their points of view, to suspend your own prejudices and interpretations, in one word, to think independently, with your own

mind.⁶ Independent thought, the ability to make use of reason is the enlightenment statement proposed by Kant. He does not interpret here the independence of thought in an epistemological sense and does not consider that only those who reason correctly and discover the truth can enlighten themselves. Independent thought means to question yourself about your own assumptions, to use your own mind, and to act according to your own reason. Such reasonings may be true or not. They can diverge from the restrictions set up by his critical philosophy, for instance, in a speculative way, but as long as they are public and are confronting the others' reasonings in a critical debate, they are suitable for the slow, but steady, advance towards enlightenment.

In this essay I intend to show the relationship between the enlightenment and communication in Kant and which are those ideas in his work which show that he construes the enlightenment not as a process focused on the rationalization of the individual but as a collective one that requires communication. In this context I will show the role that Kant gives to the idea of change in religion both as the organization of the church and in its doctrinal statutes. My view is Kant's understanding of enlightenment does not exclude religion and my argument is that discussing the church and religious problems in the perspective of the distinction between public and private uses of reason, the change in those matters become an important part of the collective emancipation.

The basis of my approach is to reconsider the core of Kant's distinction between public use of reason and private use of reason and link it, thus clarified, to communication and questions raised by religious change. Clarifying the relation between these two kinds of uses of reason and linking them with communication leads the way towards a valuable guidance on how communication can take place in a society that retains the same need for enlightenment as in Kant's time. Religions are called upon to contribute not only to the social and political stability, and the strengthening of tolerance, but also to human progress, to human emancipation from isolation or exclusion. These assessments are based largely on the fact that, in addition to theoretical issues regarding the configuration of the distinction between public use and private use of reason, much of Kant's article is intended for discussing some aspects of the role the church can play in enlightenment as a collective process, how the change within the church and religious doctrines may be a part of this or, even more, is a necessary condition to advance on the path of enlightenment. Public use of reason in religious matters is a condition of emancipation.

An inseparable dualism: public use of reason and private use of reason

The distinction public - private uses of reason as such appears only in one place in Kant's work, in his brief writing *WE*: "The public use of man's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men; the private use of reason may quite often be narrowly restricted, however, without undue hindrance to the progress of enlightenment. But by the *public* use of one's own reason I mean that the use which anyone may make of it as a man of learning addressing the entire reading public. What I term the *private* use of reason is that which a person may make of it in a particular civil post or office with which he is entrusted."⁷ If the definition of the term public use of reason is quite clear and may be easily included in Kant's liberal conception of public debate in a free society, the definition of private use of reason is unclear and appears to contradict the liberalism and the essence of his critical conception about reason.⁸ There are three main motives for this apparent contradiction. The first is that by accepting the possibility of private use of reason Kant limits the free use of it only within public debates: we may free use our own reason in the public debates, but, in many other situations (when someone acts as public servant, soldier or priest) the free use of it is restricted.

The second motive refers to our common belief that reason has an intrinsic public character, and rational judgment leads to the same conclusions for all people, regardless of the place and time. Speaking of private use of reason, Kant paradoxically seems to suggest that there are ways of reasoning valid only for certain individuals and social positions. Even more, the ways he ascribes the public and private character to reason contradict the usual meanings of "public" and "private" terms in our days. We employ the word "public" for things connected to the state, and "private" in connection to our acts as individuals, while Kant employs them *vice versa*.

Finally, a third motive is the contrast between private use of reason, as a limited one, and the requirement of enlightenment for free use of reason. When individuals make use of private reason their freedom of thought and action are restricted. Then we may think the private use of reason obstructs enlightenment. Yet, surprisingly from the point of view of our expectations, Kant concludes that the private use of reason doesn't obstruct too much the enlightenment progress.⁹

While the idea of public use of reason seems pretty clear, the idea of private use of reason downs a curtain of mist for the entire distinction. Public use of reason is related with the free use of it, meanwhile the private use is associated with obeying to commands, the state and the dogma.

Although the pair public use of reason - private use of reason occurs in only one place in the entire Kant's work, in *WE*, it is connected with conceptual vocabulary of Kant's philosophy.

The term "use of reason" appears in many places in Kant's work primarily in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (hereafter *CPR*). In *CPR*, Kant does not provide an independent definition for the use of reason, considering its meaning somewhat implicit. That is why someone may suppose that the term "use of reason" can be related to different metaphors involved in the description of the activity of reason in *CPR*, and in his entire work. Reason is endowed in Kant with "interests", "tasks", "needs", "satisfactions", "aspirations", "strivings", "affection" and has "vocation", "destiny", "claims", "requirements".¹⁰ Our impression of similarity is misleading. The term "use of reason" in Kant does not appear in order to make better understood some ideas. It is not a metaphor. "Use of reason" is at the heart of *CPR*'s thematic approaches and corresponds to his constructivist design of knowledge. One might even say that the focal point of *CPR* is the critique of the different kinds of making use of reason and determination of the nature and the limits and their legitimacy: "It is humiliating for human reason that it accomplishes nothing in its pure use, and even requires a discipline to check its extravagances and avoid the deception that comes from them. But, on the other side, the fact that reason can and must exercise this discipline itself, without allowing anything else to censor it, elevates it and gives itself confidence. The greatest and perhaps only utility of all philosophy of pure reason is thus only negative, namely that it does not serve, as an *organon* for expanding knowledge, but rather, as a discipline for determining of boundaries, and instead of discovering truth it has only the silent merit of guarding against errors... if there is somewhere a correct use of pure reason, in which case there must also be a canon of pure reason, this will not regard the speculative use, but the practical use of reason".¹¹ In these terms, Kant believes that all philosophical systems must be regarded as histories of the use of reason (*alle Systeme der Philosophie des Gebrauchs der Vernunft ansehen*¹²). Making use of reason and use of reason is the same thing. In the same place as above, he notes that "the true philosopher, therefore, must, as an independent thinker, make a free and independent, not a slavishly imitative, use of his reason".¹³

In his writings, Kant attaches constantly and recurrently the term "use" to various notions in different ways. I mention here two of them. In the first kind of connection, the term "use" indicates something instrumental. Kant speaks about *use of space*, *use of concept*, *use of logic*, *use of regulative principles*, *use of understanding*, *use of reason* and so on. Here, *space*, *concept*, *logic* and *reason* are tools with certain uses in knowledge. But Kant also makes difference between some forms of use related to *understanding* and *reason*. Thus, he speaks primarily about a *pure* and a *practical* use of reason, and about *empirical*, *logical* and *transcendental* uses of

understanding. Also he mentions empirical use of reason by applying concepts, as well as *logical*, *transcendental*, pure and *speculative* uses of reason, after simple concepts.¹⁴ These forms of use of reason have to submit to “the formal conditions of a complete system of reason”¹⁵, as it can be seen in the chapter “Transcendental doctrine of method” of *CPR*. Here, in the context of the transcendental use and of the discipline which must be associated to it, he speaks about *regulative use*, *dogmatic use*, and *polemical use*, *hypothetical* and *demonstrative uses of reason*.

Public and private uses of reason may be added to this long list of uses of reason extracted from the Kantian writings. The place that these may occupy on it should be somewhere in the sphere of polemical use of reason. My argument is that the main part of the elements involved in the discussion about public - private uses of reason in *WE*, and, firstly, the problem of the public aspect of the use of reason, intervene also in the analysis of this sort of use.

In a polemical discussion, someone makes use of reason when it is necessary to defend its reasonings against dogmatic negations¹⁶. Dogmatic negations discussed by Kant in the context of polemical use of reason refer to the existence of God, immortality of the soul and freedom. These may come from theologians and from free thinkers that deny or ignore the Kantian restriction for their discussion within the limits of experience. Although, ultimately, Kant concludes that “there is... no real polemic in the field of pure reason”¹⁷ because of the fact that we already know the limits of reason and, then, we look at any dogmatic support for such an idea with tolerance, armed with the outcomes of the critical philosophy. However, it is important to note that he accepts the possibility of a free debate, even in this framework. Reason needs debates “for it is quite absurd to expect enlightenment from reason and yet to prescribe to it in advance on which side it must come out”.¹⁸ These debates in which the points of view can conflict have to be developed “with unlimited public permission”¹⁹ perhaps mainly from religious authority. The participants in debates skilled with the means of the critical philosophy must meet certain constraints. Firstly, they should not use another means than that of free reason. Secondly, they must be transparent in reasoning and finally, they should not use reason in a manipulative and persuasive way in order to criticize or to gain adherents to their views. In such conversations, the views must be confessed “openly and unreservedly”.²⁰ Thus, in the framework of polemical debate, Kant delegitimizes the public approval (*öffentliche Genehmigung*) by manipulating the audience. Even in the case when community (*gemeine Wesen*) believes that these debates would call into question the public welfare, apparent arguments²¹ are not to be used to support a just cause²², and he does not recommend this way, because in these cases, the question is not about public welfare, but about reason. These ways are rejected by Kant in the education of young people, because these would be equal to their being under guardianship, and, after

that, young people might fall prey to other fallacies that would attract them by their originality.²³ He seems to believe in the capacity of young people to judge with their own mind and to become enlightened in time.

The public use of reason as Kant defined it overlaps the restrictions that also apply to the free use of reason in polemical debates. Public use of reason must be always free and must show its freedom in communication. There are no exceptions from this rule, even though when we may have reasons to use apparent arguments that may help in different conjunctures our legitimate purposes. The point of view that I support is that polemic use of reason may be considered as a case of public use of reason. The role of a man of learning given by Kant to those making public use of reason is a restriction that applies also to polemical use of reason. We can say that the one who makes use of polemical reason has to act as a man of learning addressing the reading public, without trying to persuade it with apparent arguments and without seeking to persuade the audience at any price. Kant's analysis of polemical use of reason includes also some opinions regarding the intergenerational consequences of the public debate, which I will present in the next part of the essay.

There are no transparent indications in the analysis of the polemical use of reason regarding the meaning of its private use. We can locate some kinds of indications in another Kantian writings. In "What is orientation in Thinking" (hereafter *OT*), Kant gives a special attention to the free use of reason.²⁴ In *OT*, we can identify a passage dedicated to the analysis of the freedom of thought (*die Freiheit in Denken*).²⁵ Kant shows that there is a civic coercion (*bürgerliche Zwang*)²⁶ towards the freedom of thought. Usually, he says, we think that if a higher authority deprives us of the freedom to speak or the freedom to writing, our freedom of thought remains intact. Those considerations are false because "how much and how accurately we *think* if we did not think, so to speak, in community with others to whom we *communicate* our thoughts and who communicate their thoughts to us! We may therefore conclude that the same external constraint which deprives people of the freedom to *communicate* their thoughts in public also removes their freedom of *thought*, the one treasure which remains to us amidst all the burdens of civil life, and which alone offers us a means of overcoming all the evils of this condition".²⁷

Kant defines here the freedom of thought as communication. In any case, Kant argues that there is no freedom of thought without communication, without the freedom to communicate our opinion to others. I believe that here there is a clue for how Kant understands private use of reason too. In certain situations, such as those related to the situations of execution of commands by officers, the activities of public office holders, the fulfilment of legal duties by citizens or of the way in which the priests are preaching in parishes, there is no freedom to communicate, and, therefore, no freedom of thought. Reason is restricted.

We may make use of reason, but this use is private and not in communication.

If we put together the guidance that we have found in the analysis of the polemical debate and the above guidance about communication, the result is that the division between the public use of reason and the private use of reason is related to the use of reason in communication. Thus, external constraints, those which restrict the freedom of communication, suppress the freedom of thought also. With the suppression of freedom of thought, one makes use of reason only as private but, at the same time, may bring problems binding in the private sphere to be clarified and discussed in the critical debate based on the public use of reason.²⁸

Enlightenment as a collective process

WE may be read as a critique of use of reason in communication. Here, Kant offers his famous definition: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity".²⁹ Kant mentions two ways to exit the immaturity: a difficult but individual way, to which few may accede, and a collective or public way. He also identifies two reasons why someone, who possesses the necessary capability as an adult, does not use his or her own mind: lack of determination and courage as well as the cowardice and laziness because the most people are satisfied with their condition of infancy, although, as adults, they might think independently. Therefore, the capability of independent thinking is universal, but it is hampered by inner causes like lack of courage, cowardice and convenience. In this way, people permanently delegate self-thinking to their guardians. "It is so convenient to be immature!"³⁰, says Kant, as others think in place of me, a book may give me wisdom, a confessor awareness and a doctor a diet. "I need not think as I can pay".³¹ According to Kant, by taking upon themselves the work of supervising, the guardians contribute to the strengthening of infancy. The guardians supervise and warn those under their guidance about the dangers that threaten them if they dare to think with their own mind and act like adults. Immaturity has come to be part of human nature, especially because guardians attempt to ban people from doing the tests necessary to think with their own minds. People are constrained by *dogmas* and *formulas* "those mechanical instruments for rational use (or rather misuse) of his natural endowments".³² As we have seen, coming out of the condition of immaturity is a difficult process. Therefore, "only a few, by cultivating their own minds, have succeeded in freeing themselves from immaturity and have continued boldly on their ways".³³

With these assumptions, Kant's conclusion is that "there are more chances that an entire public would enlighten itself"³⁴, enlightenment being inevitable. The enlightenment requirement is that the entire public should be granted freedom. The guardians, who themselves are in a

condition of infancy, because of prejudices and institutions, have in this way the chance to enlighten themselves. Some of them will take advantage and will enlighten the others. Those guardians willing to think with their own minds will detach from others and will show what every man is valuable and is called to think with his or her own mind. Kant pays special attention to the guardians' initiative to endorse collective, public enlightenment. He believes that they would assume their role with responsibility so as not to instil in any way new prejudices as we have already seen in that passage of this article devoted to polemical use of reason. As prejudices are deeply embedded and persistent, people will advance on the path of enlightenment only slowly, step by step. Kant rejects, as in other writings, revolutionary solutions because revolutions generate and enforce new prejudices and hinder the enlightenment process.

Therefore, rising over the infancy condition, enlightenment must be conceived as a reform of the way of thinking (*Reform der Denkungsart*).³⁵ For this reform (and not a revolution in thinking), it takes only freedom. The most inoffensive form of freedom is to make public use of one's reason in all matters³⁶ (*von seiner Vernunft in allen Stücken öffentlichen Gebrauch zu machen*). Public use of reason must be unconditionally free, because only then it can bring enlightenment.

Yet, Kant also analyses some cases where people are stopped from communicating their own thoughts and the use of reason is not free. He chooses three cases of limiting the use of reason: in the military, the public offices, and religion as an institution. The first two cases refer to restraining the uses of reason under civil constraints and the last under religious mandate. In the military, the officer must obey commands, in society, citizens must pay the taxes imposed by the state, and in religion, the priest must preach only the learning of the church to which he belongs. These circumstances involve, for the officer and their superiors, citizens and the tax-officials, the priests and the members of the parishes, to make private use of reason which excludes communication and freedom of thought.³⁷ In the first two cases, Kant justifies the blocking of communication and the restriction of the free use of reason in terms of civil coercion due to the existence of public ends and a mechanism for achieving them: "in some affairs which affect the interests of the commonwealth, we require a certain mechanism whereby some members of the commonwealth must behave purely passively. So that they may, by an artificial common agreement, be employed by the government for public ends (or at least deterred from vitiating them)".³⁸ The argument for restricting free use of reason for the priest under his duty is quite similar. A priest in pursuit of his duty must expound only the teaching of his church and cannot preach to the parishes at his own discretion. Assuming to teach in the name of the church, "he extracts as much practical value as possible for his congregation from precepts to which he would not himself

subscribe with full conviction, but which he can nevertheless undertake to expound, since it is not in fact impossible that that may contain truth”.³⁹ He then is part of a mechanism, a member in an organization, and in order to remain in good conscience he would have to resign if he would decide to teach against the doctrine and the statutes of his church. In these passages, Kant clearly indicates that he does not identify the public use of reason with simply addressing other people, even numerous, but only to use of reason in conditions of freedom of thought. There are some conditions for the use of reason to become public. First, is the condition of freedom of thought (to make use of reason in communication) and, second, to making use of free reason as a scholar addressing the entire world of reading people. The priest, no matter how large is the public, makes private use of reason in front of his parishes because he does not expose his own views without any restriction of the teaching and status of the church to which he belongs.⁴⁰

As we have seen, “the private use of reason may quite often be very narrowly restricted, however, without undue hindrance to the progress of enlightenment”.⁴¹ Kant justifies the restrictions on the free use of reason with the interests of the commonwealth and the obligation of carrying out the mandate imposed on someone who plays different roles within organizations. Yet, Kant does not accept any other institutional restrictions related to the commonwealth or churches. He discusses the case of a society of clergyman (for example a ecclesial synod) that would decide to commit itself by oath to a perpetual religious creed in order to perpetuate without an end their guardianship over each of its member and even, with the help of the priests, over the people. Such a decision of preventing further enlightenment is entirely impossible, even if it is sanctioned by the sovereign, voted in parliament and ratified into international treaties, says Kant. A generation cannot commit by oath to stop the next generation from improving and extending knowledge, to purify the ideas and to make progress in enlightenment. That would be a crime against human nature. “Later generation are thus perfectly entitled to dismiss these agreements as unauthorized and criminal”.⁴² Not even a nation can legitimately contract to prevent the development of enlightenment. A nation could postpone enlightenment, only for a short period and only for enlightenment’s benefits. During this short period each citizen and especially the clergyman, as scholars, have the liberty to expose publicly their own opinions and criticize the institutions by public use of reason. In this way, those who want to make changes in religious arrangements should be able to do it, while those who want to keep existent arrangements could keep them. At the end of this period, by general consent, if not unanimously, when the understanding of the state of things has been advanced and the public perception on the nature of such a matter had progressed, “a proposal could be submitted to the crown” in order to protect those parishes which come to the decision to

change the religious arrangements, without obstructing those who wanted to keep the initial ones. For Kant, it is unacceptable to decide on a perennial religious constitution which cannot be criticized through the public use of reason. Similarly, an individual may postpone enlightenment in what concerns his person, but only temporarily and not for his future offspring. The individual decision to abandon enlightenment, whether for his own person, or moreover for a later generation, means violating and trampling underfoot the sacred rights of men.⁴³ In the same way, the monarch has no legitimacy to prevent the enlightenment, because his authority as legislator comes from the people. His duties are monitoring civil order and improving the society, giving protection to those who want to express their opinion in these matters against any attempt to obstruct them. Therefore, the monarch has no right to get in the way by censoring opinions devoted to the clarification of religious ideas and he demeans his high majesty if he supports spiritual despotism⁴⁴.

In conclusion, Kant considers illegitimate any limitation of the free use of reason which would undermine the progress of enlightenment. The situations in which the free use of reason can be restricted and entails a private use of reason are related only to the position of an individual in a commonwealth and organizations like churches in which some members must only behave passively or fulfil a certain office, a mandate. Various individual and collective decisions on preventing the enlightenment which require the future generations to obey them are also illegitimate.⁴⁵

Enlightenment and religious change

Throughout this essay, I tried to provide descriptive reconstructions of the way Kant understands the uses of reason in communication, avoiding reference to those aspects which would have involved a reconstruction from the perspective of the specific terms of his moral philosophy, such as the categorical imperative. My goal was merely to distinguish between public use and the practical use of reason from the perspective of communication. Thus, I have used, until now, the term of “communication” in order to designate the acts through which we make our own opinions known.⁴⁶ This simple way of defining “communication” corresponds to the freedoms of thought and of speech and is sufficient in order to make the distinction between the public and the private use of reason. Does this narrow concept of communication support not only the possibility to make known our own opinions to others, but also the possibility to understand them? How does this way of interpreting communication affect the requirement of making free use of reason and to use our own minds that is Kant’s *motto* of the enlightenment?

Kant believes that to make use of our reason, the independent thinking, means examining your own internal reason: “*To think for oneself (Selbstdenken)*” means to look within oneself (i.e. one’s own reason) for the

supreme touchstone of truth; and the maxim of thinking for oneself at all times is *enlightenment*".⁴⁷ In this context, he strongly emphasizes that enlightenment should not be equated with knowledge (therefore it requires less effort than is thought), because those who are rich in knowledge are often less enlightened in their use of it, or with education, because there are many constraints that make difficult the implementation of the enlightenment programme through instruction.⁴⁸ Therefore "to employ one's own reason means simply to ask oneself, whenever one is urged to accept something, whether one finds it possible to transform the reason for accepting it, or the rule which follows from what is accepted into a universal principle governing the use of reason".⁴⁹ Kant believes that anyone can apply this test himself. It follows, therefore, that enlightenment does not represent accumulation of knowledge, to be educated to make exercise of your free use of reason in ways that would require much more knowledge and instruction. Kant thinks of enlightenment as a historical process, with very long periods, eras (*Zeitalters*), which is based on a characteristic of human nature, the vocation towards free thinking (*der Beruf zum frein Denken*). At the same time, as the vocation towards free thinking, in *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (hereafter *CPJ*), Kant considers enlightenment as the first maxim of the human understanding in the larger context of his analysis devoted to the reflective power of judgment (*sensus communis*): "1.To think for oneself" (*Selbstdenken*) , the second and the third being "2.To think in the position of everyone else" and "3.Always to think in accord with oneself".⁵⁰ The first statement regards a way of thinking free of prejudices. The main task of thinking is the liberation of prejudices (understood by Kant as a result of passivity in thinking) and more importantly the liberation of superstitions, which endanger independent thought more than prejudices. The second statement refers to the way of thinking (*die Denkungsart*). According to Kant, one's way of thinking is *enlarged* when the individual is able to overcome his particular, subjective, perspective and reflects upon his own judgments from a universal standpoint.⁵¹ Here, Kant considers that someone achieves a universal standpoint by putting himself into the standpoints of others. Finally, the third statement is more difficult to follow, because it implies combining the first two statements and repeatedly following them until they become a habit. Neither liberation from prejudices nor achieving a universal standpoint is a psychological process. Kant's persistence in identifying independent thought with enlightenment and, further on, the correlation he makes between enlightenment and the reform in the way of thinking, rather emphasize the fact that both are sides of the enlightenment process.

In my view, the explanation given by Kant to the second maxim, that "the issue here is not the faculty of cognition, but the way of thinking needed to make a purposive use of it"⁵² indicates that Kant interprets the

act of putting himself into the standpoint of other, and acquiring a universal standpoint, not as an internal act (perhaps natural in thinking), as introspection, for instance, but rather as external one, which is performed by questioning and discussions with others. This concords also with Kant's observation that someone whose talents are insufficient for any great employment can set himself apart from the subjective private conditions of judgment "within which so many others are as if bracketed."⁵³ Those many others who remain bracketed within the subjective private conditions, perhaps full of natural talents, do not make use of this way of thinking as communication. In these terms, this way of thinking can make sense along with the idea of enlightenment. However, Kant does not offer any kind of indication about how the reform in the way of thinking should be developed and implemented. He seems to suggest that the free communication will provide its necessary framework and the human vocation of free thinking will show the path to be followed. This suggestion is strengthened by two footnotes attached at the end of *WO* and at the analysis of the common human understanding interfered in *CPI*, respectively.

Therefore, in the first footnote, he explains that "enlightenment consists rather in a negative principle in the use of one's cognitive powers".⁵⁴ In the second footnote, Kant exposes his idea according to which there will always exist people who, strove by the desire of knowledge, will promise to satisfy this desire that overpowers the understanding's capacity and that under these conditions "it must be very difficult to maintain or to establish the merely negative element (which constitutes genuine enlightenment) in the manner of thinking (especially in that of the public)".⁵⁵

By defining enlightenment as a *negative* principle or element, there is a clear conclusion to be drawn, namely: the enlightenment cannot be realized in a positive way, through a project for instance, the so called "enlightenment project" about which many of the authors belonging to the second half of the twentieth century talk about. Kant does not propose any objective of the enlightenment, nor means to achieve it. Enlightenment is only a reform in the way of thinking and is based on the elimination of all the prejudices and superstitions and on examining own judgments by achieving a universal standpoint. According to Kant, in order for enlightenment to happen, one only needs freedom, that is to make public use of reason: "in the course of enlightenment, more and more of the doctrine considered binding in the private sphere are taken up and clarified within the public sphere, and thus more and more of the private life becomes assimilated into the exchange of a critical audience".⁵⁶

In this framework, religion cannot be removed, simply eliminated from the human life. Enlightenment takes time especially because it should not lead to replacement of old prejudices with new ones. Kant's

premise is that the public can only progress step by step to enlightenment. That is why emancipation would not only remove the old prejudices, slowly, but especially prevent the emergence of new ones. Kant's main concern is not removing overnight the prejudices, because he identifies a natural process of enlightenment which removes them anyway, and especially to prevent the emergence of new prejudices. Therefore, it is in the spirit of Kant's approach to consider that in the context of enlightenment, understood as a long-term collective process, the church must keep its organizational and doctrinal consistency since the revolution would simply lead to new prejudices, which would mean no profit in the process of enlightenment. Religious change may, however, contribute to the process of collective enlightenment and be part of it. In this change "to maintain that the guardians of the people in spiritual matters should themselves be immature is an absurdity which amounts to making absurdities permanent".⁵⁷ Therefore, the priests, in discussing the problems of the church and of their religion, should have the opportunity to make public use of reason. Here, the decision of a congregation, a synod to be bound by oath to a secluded and unchangeable religious doctrine, has a lack of legitimacy. Preventing religious change would be an obstruction to enlightenment. Neither the religious courts, or the people and the political power can engage in stopping the change, nor are such actions permitted. Religious change can be delayed only to achieve a partial or general agreement, so that in the debate on religious issues, those who wish to discuss issues of change, should make public use of reason, and have the freedom to do so under the conditions of tolerance and protection of political power, but at the same time, those who wish to preserve the old ways should retain the liberty to do so. Political power can show an interest in stability, but it must leave "his subjects to do whatever they find necessary for their salvation, which is none of its business".⁵⁸ We can therefore think with our own mind, independently, also in religious matters, about the ways that we consider appropriate for salvation. Thus religious choice is no longer a choice made by imposing prejudices, but a choice made by each according to the free use of their own reason.

It is significant that in order to distinguish between an *enlightened age* and *the age of enlightenment*, as Kant characterized his own age, Kant's reference is to religious choice. Kant defined the enlightened age as an era in which "men as a whole can be in a position (or can even be put into a position) of using their own understanding confidently and well in religious matters, without outside guidance"⁵⁹. This means that the enlightened age is the age in which people are autonomous in religious decision, and make free use of reason. The age of enlightenment is one in which "the obstacles to universal enlightenment... are gradually become fewer".⁶⁰ The blame for their infancy lies with the individuals and not the institutions, because against all constraints, people can always find an

individual way to escape from infancy, to emancipate themselves. At the same time, it must be said that in its social and long term aspect enlightenment implies the possibility of religious change. Religious change cannot be developed through guardianship. Therefore Kant praised Frederick the Great for the fact that he understood that the social process of enlightenment is at odds with the government's exercise of guardianship, especially in religious matters.⁶¹ Removing obstacles from the path of enlightenment as a public process is conditional on respecting religious freedom and on ecclesiastical dignitaries' possibly "notwithstanding their official duties, may in their capacity as scholars freely and publicly submit to the judgments of the world their verdicts and opinions, even these deviate here and there from orthodox doctrine. This applies even more to all others who are not restricted by any official duties".⁶² Kant strongly emphasizes that he sit the main point of enlightenment in religious matters because religious infancy is the most harmful and dishonourable of them all, and because in the arts and sciences the authorities had no interest to do the guardianship.⁶³ Emerging from the religious infancy, the possibility to think independently on issues of religious choices is therefore the first condition of enlightenment. Separation between private use and public use of reason creates a space of public discussion on issues of religion and give the possibility for the people to choose the path to salvation as they consider.

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Notes:

¹ Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", in Hans Reiss (ed.), *Kant's Political Writings*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), 54 - 60.

² For details about the circumstance of the publishing of this article and the debate generated by it, see James Schmidt, *What is Enlightenment?: eighteenth-century answers and twentieth-century questions* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996), 2, 58.

³ Kant's article "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Erklärung" was originally published in December 1784, in *Berlinischer Monatsschrift*, 4, 481 - 492, after Moses Mendelssohn's essay dedicate to the same question. Interesting to mention that Kant, without knowledge of the Mendelssohn's essay at the time he was completed his own article, mentions that both came to the same conclusion in their answers. See Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 60, and also Schmidt, 58.

⁴ Michael Foucault, *What is Enlightenment?*, translated by M. Henson, <http://philosophy.eserver.org/foucault/what-is-enlightenment.html/> (accessed 3.11.2010).

⁵ Those who have brought back the concept of public use of reason in the contemporary debate were Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls. Use of reason in the

public sphere became Habermas' theme with *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962), translated into English by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1989) and continued until now to stay fundamental to his conception of democracy. See Jürgen Habermas *Faktizität und Geltung: Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1992, translated in English by Wiliam Rehg, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1996). Even if in his first great work *A Theory of Justice*, published in 1971, John Rawls does not employ the term, public reason becomes an essential concept for what he called *political liberalism*, a conception devoted to a generalization of his theory of justice for a pluralist society, characterized by deeply cleavages at ethical and religious levels. Public reason is a background for his late work. See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples with "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited"*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), John Rawls, *Justice as fairness. A Restatement*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001). Habermas and Rawls argued about public reason in the middle of the 1990's. See Jürgen Habermas, "Reconciliation through the public use of reason: Remarks on John Rawls's Political Liberalism", *The Journal of Philosophy*, XCII, 3 (March 1995): 109-131, and John Rawls, "Reply to Habermas", *The Journal of Philosophy*, XCII, 3 (March, 1995): 132-180.

⁶ Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 54 - 60.

⁷ Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 55.

⁸ In the theme's exegesis we can identify two strategies that explain Kant's view on the distinction between public use and private use of reason and the understanding of their relations. The first strategy has sociological and historical accents. It attempts to explain the distinction that Kant sees between public and private uses of reason in relation to political and historical facts of Kant's time. According to this strategy, *WE* is a political philosophical work. Kant's writing is very contextual historically and socially. The purpose of *WE* is not to sketch a theory of public reason but to persuade the audience of his time. He employs the distinction between public and private uses of reason to convince the public and the authorities on the necessity of a public debate on sensible problems such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion. From this point of view the strategy gives you a good argument for understanding *WE* as pleading for the freedom of thought and against censorship. Kant tried to show the conditions of the possibility of enlightenment in the framework of his time and society. He was conscious of the difficulties implied by the fast implementation of the enlightenment program of emancipating the humans from the political and religious authorities. That is why he considered that the appropriate way to attain enlightenment is a progressive advance step by step towards it. However, the fact that this writing is influenced by historical and social context does not mean that here Kant would have exposed a view that contradicts the core values of his philosophy. On the contrary, he would have reaffirmed the trust in the public use of reason and the enlightenment ideal. Under this strategy, James Schmidt has

made an extensive presentation of the context in which Kant published *WE* and of the debates from that time. See Schmidt, 1996. Schmidt's picture points out many hidden references in Kant's article for the contemporary reader which reveal Kant's rhetorical intention to reconcile his own republican political ideal of enlightenment with the political reality of Prussian absolutism. See also, Ciaran Cronin, "Kant's Politics of Enlightenment", in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 41, 1 (January 2003): 51-80. Nevertheless, no matter how rich this description is, and as much credit we can give to a sociology of knowledge of this kind, reading Kant's text, we have to ask about its relevance for today (in fact, the intent of this explanatory strategy is not to locate and isolate the historical significance of Kant's distinction between public use and private uses of reason). The second strategy relies on clarifying this distinction in the broader context of Kant's work. Its promoters intend to find a junction between the two uses of reason, public and private, and the demands placed by the criticism of Kant's use of reason. Under this strategy, some authors interpret Kant's discussion of the dualism of public use - private use of reason as based on his theory of social contract (see Cronin, "Kant's Politics of Enlightenment") or as part of his theory of law (see Michael Clarke, "Kant's rhetoric of Enlightenment", *The Review of Politics*, 59 (1997): 53). Other authors interpret the distinction between public and private use of reason in terms of a theory of communicability. For them, communicability becomes a basic framework of Kant's philosophy. It sets the basis for his ethics in a non-formal and non-transcendental sense, and the public use of reason is understood as a way of attaining an ethical consensus within the community. The most notable contributions to this strategy belong to Onora O'Neill (see Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reasons. Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Jürgen Habermas (see particularly his dispute with Rawls cited above). I must say that my reading of the relationship between the public use of reason and the private use of reason is related with the second strategy and could be seen as a development in a particular way of the views of Onora O'Neill. Yet, in my reading, it is not the *separation* between the two uses of reason that is important, but the *connection* between them, the fact that public use and private use of reason form an inseparable conceptual couple in the conditions of enlightenment and enlightenment is a collective process. This departure point has important consequences. The first consequence is the possibility of a reading of *WE* somehow independent of Kant's other writings. "Somehow independent" should not be understood "without regard to other writings or whole of Kant's work", but only that this connection should be understood as economically as it can be (but that this would not be a virtue in this case). "As economically" means firstly to bring into this puzzle of the reading of *WE* as few little pieces as possible from other Kant's writings and secondly, not changing too much of the general design of Kant's work to achieve the desired interpretation. In this regard, I am only referring to the notion of the use of reason and attempt to see how Kant understanding of the use of reason in *WE* is compatible with how he make use of the term in his other writings and primarily in *CPR*. A second consequence is strongly related to the first. My point is in *WE* we have enough clues to explain how Kant sees the relationship between the public use and the private use of reason and to clarify the matter.

⁹ Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 55.

¹⁰ Yrmiyahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 16.

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited by Paul Guyer, and translated in English by Paul Guyer, Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Logik*, in Immanuel Kant, *Samlitche Werke*, ed. Kurt Vorländer (Leipzig: Meiner, 1920), IV, 20:28.

¹³ “Der wahre Philosoph muß als Selbstdenker einen freien und selbsteigenen, keinen sklavisch nachahmenden Gebrauch von seiner Vernunft machen”. Kant, *Logik*, 20:28.

¹⁴ Investigating the way in which Kant discusses various relationships between reason and the use of reason deserves a separate discussion which cannot find its place in this article.

¹⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 707 / B 735.

¹⁶ Those claims that derive synthetic judgments from (essentialist) concepts are impossible in the Kantian view.

¹⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 756/ B 784.

¹⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A 747 / B 775.

¹⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A 747 / B 775.

²⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A 748/ B 776

²¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A 749/ B 750.

²² Apparent arguments are sophisms or reasonings that are not meeting the requirements of a Kantian critique of reason.

²³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 744/ B 777.

²⁴ Kant, “What is orientation in Thinking”, in Hans Reiss, 247.

²⁵ Kant, “What is orientation in Thinking”, 247.

²⁶ Kant, “What is orientation in Thinking”, 247

²⁷ Kant, “What is orientation in Thinking”, 247

²⁸ Alfred Norman, “Community, Immortality, Enlightenment: Kant's Scholarly Republic”, *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, vol. 2 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 7.

²⁹ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 54

³⁰ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 54

³¹ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 54

³² Kant, “An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 54-55.

³³ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 55.

³⁴ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 55.

³⁵ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?" 55.

³⁶ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?" 55.

³⁷ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?" 56. Onora O'Neill thinks that Kant talks about *private use of reason* in a particular sense of the term “private” which comes from the Latin “*privatus*” which means “depriving”. (Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reasons. Explorations of Kants Practical Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), 17). In her view, this way of using reason refers to reason that takes as its premise power or force. Kant appreciates that reason cannot exercise its whole authority and cannot offer the necessary context for the freedom of thinking and action when there exists an exterior power that limits it (O'Neill, 18). Therefore, the private use of reason is the use of reason assuming the obedience to a higher authority than reason itself. Thus we

have a conflict between two kind of reason - one that recognizes only the authority of reason - public reason and one that recognizes exterior authorities generated by official positions - private reason. Based on her view of the transcendental methodology, O'Neill sees in the concept of *self-discipline* of reason a possibility of reinterpreting Kantian ethics in the context of a communication theory embedded in Kant's main writings as *CPR* and *CPJ*, and also in his small political and moral post-*CPR* writings. Her argument explores different metaphors that Kant associates with the tasks of reason like the "the judicial court", "the debate" and "the community" to construct a vision in which reason's reflexive character has a political nature. In its self-reflexive dimension, reason builds up authority by confronting the different points of view - "the citizens" of reason. Because the authority of reason cannot be taken from the exterior, discipline, that usually comes from outside, must be found inside. The self-discipline refers to the ways through which reason, by self reflection, limits its pretensions to know things in itself (metaphysic pretention) as well as the pretention to institute rational standards by introspective examination (transcendental pretention). The disciplining of reason cannot be done from outside but only from inside as self-discipline as a "system of precaution and self examination" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 711 / B 739). Because Kant considers that not even mathematics can offer a model for the use of reason, different rational approaches must be examined democratically "for reason has no dictatorial authority; its verdict is always simply the agreement of free citizens, of whom each one must be permitted to express, without let or hindrance, his objection or even his veto" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 738 / B 766). That is why we do not have a discipline enforced by exterior power, but a discipline that "the citizens" of reason enforce on themselves or with the rules that they can extract from their public exercise. "Reason's authority must... be seen as a *practical* and collective task, like that of constituting political authority" (O'Neill, 18). Because reason is not algorithmic, "we cannot expect the principles of reason to dominate and control all reasoned thought and actions" (O'Neill, 19). That's why Kant seems to suggest "that reasoned communication and coordination can be modeled by a debate". The debate metaphor has its own essential merits in the understanding of the way reason works. The debate model has its own fallacies like the circularity of the decision and the impossibility of finding ultimate responses. The authority of reason is a recursive concept not a foundational one. We cannot reach absolute conclusions through those debates, and those reached by the "citizens of reason" are always put in discussions and can be reflected upon. That's why if we can have "a possible history of the emergence of reason" we could understand "there is no contradiction in presuming standards of reasoning in giving an account of the emergence of such standards" (O'Neill, 21). Painting the use of reason by a political metaphor, in which the ideas of reason, the points of view, play the role of "citizens", is consistent with Kant's constructivist view of reason. According to this metaphor, the construction materials are not important, but the plan after which is being built. "Fellow workers" or "citizens of reason" do not work coordinated by instinct and no transcendent authority of reason has inscribed in them the procedures of reason. Also, they are not slaves of a despot (reason). They themselves must find a plan. In accordance with Kant's ideas on discipline, the self-constraint that "citizens of reason" must follow is that of withholding themselves "from preventing

agreement.” This instruction, however, is not positive, but negative, that is, it doesn’t contain an algorithm for its realization. To have a plan in these circumstances, the only thing they can do is, in the absence of procedures of how to get to it, “For Each to act only on Principles on Which Others at Least (thought they note) agreed to act” (O’Neill, 22). There are therefore two constraints that must be considered, the reason cannot be imposed, but at the same time, the reason should not be anarchic. The authority of reason can only be self-imposed and therefore the debate metaphor should only be understood as a metaphor for the conditions of the possibility of a debate (O’Neill, 23). This view about reason cannot lead to a form of justification because in O’Neill’s view, “the Supreme Principle of reasoning cannot be any rule of inference or algorithm for thinking and acting” (O’Neill, 24). It is also important to design the authority of reason as a form of acting and thinking strategy. In this light, the authority of reason comes not from the imposition of a set of principles, but only by restrictions that constrain the adoption of such principles.

³⁸ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”, 56

³⁹ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”, 55.

⁴⁰ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”, 57.

⁴¹ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”, 58.

⁴² Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”, 57.

⁴³ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”, 58.

⁴⁴ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”, 58.

⁴⁵ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”, 59-60.

⁴⁶ For a conclusive discussion about communication and communicability in Kant’s *CPJ*, see Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, edited and interpretative essays by Ronald Beiner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), esp. 69-72. See, also, Andrew Norris, “Arendt, Kant, and the Politics of Common Sense” in *Polity*, vol. 29, nr. 2 (Winter 1996), 572 – 579, Avery Goldman, “An antinomy of political judgment: Kant, Arendt, and the role of purposiveness in reflective judgment”, *Continental Philosophy Review*, 43, 3, (August 2010): 331-352, Robert Hanna and A. W. Moore, “Reason, Freedom and Kant: An Exchange”. *Kantian Review*, vol. 12, pp. 113-133.

⁴⁷ Kant, “What is Orientation in Thinking”, 249n.

⁴⁸ Kant, “What is Orientation in Thinking”, 249n.

⁴⁹ Kant, “What is Orientation in Thinking”, 249n.

⁵⁰ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, edited by Paul Guyer and translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5: 294.

⁵¹ Based on the enlarged way of thinking, Onora O’neill translates *sensus communis*, which refers to the faculty of reflective judgment, as “public sense”. (see Oneill, 1995, 45).

⁵² Kant, Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:295

⁵³ Kant, *The Power of Judgment*, 5:295

⁵⁴ Kant, “What is Orientation in Thinking”, 249n.

⁵⁵ Kant, *The Power of Judgment*, 5:294.

⁵⁶ Alfred Norman, 7.

⁵⁷ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”, 57.

⁵⁸ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”, 58

⁵⁹ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”, 58.

⁶⁰ Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 58.

⁶¹ See Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 58-59.

⁶² Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 59.

⁶³ Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment'?", 59

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