

THE PUBLIC USE OF REASON IN KANT AND ITS NECESSITY FOR (THE) ENLIGHTENMENT

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ABSTRACT

How to use reason in the face of political and religious authority, and whether, or to what extent, it has freedom have been the subject matter of many philosophical discussions. Kant's contribution to these discussions is his distinction between the public and private use of reason. The public use of reason (der öffentliche Gebrauch), he claims, is what enables (the) enlightenment to blossom out and provides the learned with the freedom they need in their publications, which serve the function of enlightening the people. Kant does not claim that the authorities – political or religious – are to be abolished; but, stresses that they need to be controlled by constant questioning. For this role, he singles out philosophy, and emphasizes that without it no authority could achieve what it strives for. In light of these issues, in this paper, I will be examining what Kant understands from the public use of reason, and why it is regarded as necessary for (the) enlightenment, taking into account not just his prominent essay, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'," but also The Conflict of the Faculties.

Keywords: Kant, (the) Enlightenment, Public Use of Reason, the Guardians, Freedom.

KANT'TA AKLIN KAMU HİZMETİNDE KULLANIMI VE AYDINLANMA İÇİN GEREKLİLİĞİ

ÖZ

Akıl siyasi ve dini otorite karşısında nasıl kullanılacağı, özgürlüğe sahip olup olmadığı veya eğer sahipse bu özgürlüğün derecesinin ne olduğu birçok felsefi tartışmanın konusu olmuştur. Kant'ın bu tartışmalara katkısı ise, akıl kamu hizmetinde kullanımı (der öffentliche Gebrauch) ile özel olarak kullanımı (der Privatgebrauch) arasında yaptığı ayırımıdır. Kant'a göre akıl kamu hizmetinde kullanılabilmesi, aydınlanmanın gelişmesine imkan sağlaması ve okumalara insanları aydınlatmalarında hizmet edecek yayın özgürlüğünü sağlaması anlamına gelmektedir. Kant siyasi ya da dini herhangi bir otoritenin yok edilmesini gerektiğini savunmamaktadır; ancak bunların sürekli bir sorgulama ile kontrol altında tutulmasına ihtiyaç olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Bu amaç için ise felsefeyi seçer ve felsefe olmaksızın hiçbir otoritenin hedeflediği amacına ulaşamayacağını altını çizer. Bu çerçevede, bu makalede, Kant'ın 'akıl kamu hizmetinde kullanımı'ndan ne anladığı ve bu kullanımın aydınlanma (dönemi) için neden gerekli görüldüğü ünlü "Aydınlanma Nedir?" Sorusuna Yanıt" adlı makalesiyle birlikte Fakülteler Çatışması adlı eseri dikkate alınarak incelenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kant, Aydınlanma, Akıl Kamu Hizmetinde Kullanımı, Vasiler, Özgürlük.

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FLSF (Felsefe ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi), <http://flsfdergisi.com/>

2018 Güz/Autumn, sayı/issue: 26, s./pp.: 135-147.

ISSN 2618-5784

Makalenin geliş tarihi: 04.09.2018
Makalenin kabul tarihi: 27.11.2018

I. The Public Use of Reason: the *Vormünder*

Investigations centring on the philosophical and historical aspects of the Enlightenment mostly take as their starting point, or at least include, Immanuel Kant’s famous essay “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’”¹ Besides this essay, however, there is another text dealing with this topic which is relatively neglected, i.e. *The Conflict of the Faculties*.² In both of these texts, we see a due attention is given to ‘the public use of one’s reason,’ whose delineation and importance in the Enlightenment will be the subject matter of this paper.

Kant’s “Enlightenment” essay was written and published in a periodical called the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* as a response to a question posited by Johann Friedrich Zöllner, who was a theologian, preacher, and educationalist. In his essay, Zöllner responds to a critique written and published by the editor of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, who inveighs against the role of the clergies and ministers in marriage. The latter claims that this practice runs counter to the Enlightenment frame of mind. Zöllner, in turn, questions this critique and asks in a note of his own essay what enlightenment is. He proceeds by saying that “[t]his question, which is almost as important as ‘What is truth?,’ should really be answered before one starts to enlighten! And yet, I have not found an answer to it anywhere.”³ This question of Zöllner was what prompted Kant and many other philosophers at that time to write essays on what enlightenment is. What gives prominence to Kant’s essay among other replies,⁴ and what makes it the starting point of many discussions on enlightenment, is its philosophically rich content, which we will disclose and analyse in the following.

Kant’s essay begins with the answer to the question the title asks, “What is Enlightenment?”⁵ But his much-cited answer decidedly differs from many others who wrote on this topic at that time, and considered

¹ Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’” in *Political Writings*, ed. H. S. Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

² Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979).

³ Manfred Kuehn, “Kant’s Critical Philosophy and Its Reception – The First Five Years (1781-1786),” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 649.

⁴ Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) was one of those who made contributions to this question. His article, “Über die Frage: Was Heißt Aufklären?” was published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in September 1784, three months before Kant’s “Enlightenment” essay.

⁵ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 54.

enlightenment to be a process of acquiring knowledge or mere learning.⁶ In his answer, Kant encapsulates his definition as follows: “Enlightenment is [one’s] emergence from [one’s] self-incurred immaturity,” and this immaturity has its source in one’s incapability of using one’s own reason without the help of another.⁷ Immature people, in this sense, are like children who have not yet emancipated themselves from their external guidance. Immaturity in question, however, does not ensue from the lack of understanding; instead, it is a result of the “lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another.”⁸ It is a “self-incurred immaturity”, that is to say, even though people are most of the time free and able to use their own reason, they let others guide them. The very cause of their immaturity, in other words, stems not from without but, at least at the outset, from within. They prefer to be guided by others. Kant considers laziness and cowardice to be the main reasons of one’s preference to remain immature.⁹ In other words, people remain immature and under the guidance of others, either because living in accordance with entrenched and recognized beliefs and values is much easier and demands much less effort, or because they feel weak and feeble in the face of situations where thinking for themselves is needed. That is why Kant finishes his first paragraph of his essay with the “motto of enlightenment [...]: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your *own* understanding!”¹⁰ A person needs courage, since thinking for oneself and struggling against those established beliefs and values are arduous and disquieting.

Kant acknowledges the difficulty of one’s emergence from immaturity, “which has become almost a second nature to him.”¹¹ This immaturity, however, is by no means natural for Kant. It is either due to (mis)education¹² or one’s garbled idea of comfort in staying in the state of immaturity, that one does not dare to speak for oneself, and lets others – the guardians (*Vormünder*), i.e. the clergy, paternalistic governments, or old books – think for oneself. One gradually becomes more passive, plays the role of a prey or slave, and thereby turns into an instrument of the dogmas and

⁶ Allen W. Wood, “Kant’s Life and Works,” in *A Companion to Kant*, ed. Graham Bird. (Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), 21.

⁷ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 54.

⁸ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 54.

⁹ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 54.

¹⁰ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 54.

¹¹ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 54.

¹² Michael Clarke, “Kant’s Rhetoric of Enlightenment,” *The Review of Politics* 59, no. 1 (1997): 59.

formulas. Immaturity is, thus, not natural and should be left behind. It is through the insistence on remaining under the yoke of dogmas and formulas – among them the most pernicious one is “the priestcraft of religious authorities”¹³ – and under the (mis)guidance of the *Vormünder*, who serve as the mouthpieces of them, that enlightenment is impeded.¹⁴ In order to emerge from this immaturity and be enlightened, it is required first and foremost to weed out the *Vormünder*.

However, despite their inimical role on the way to enlightenment, Kant gives the *Vormünder* another role, which is contrary to the roles ascribed to them previously. To him, there are only a few people who can manage to think for themselves, and can leave immaturity in order to attain maturity;¹⁵ and, some of the *Vormünder*, in his eyes, are the gateways which can lead people to enlightenment.¹⁶ Kant thinks that the emergence from immaturity is hard and unlikely for a separate, single individual to achieve. For such an emergence they need help, and this help, claims Kant, is provided by the *Vormünder*.¹⁷

Granting such a role to the *Vormünder* might seem paradoxical if one reminds oneself what Kant repeatedly underlines previously in his text, namely ‘having courage to use your own reason’, ‘not letting others to think for you’. Hence, it seems contradictory to claim at the same time that, one needs to be independent from anything but one’s own reason, and one needs to follow the *Vormünder* in order to be enlightened. So, should it be understood that when Kant lays stress on the necessity of one’s emancipation from anything other than one’s own reason, he in fact talks about not a total but a quasi-emancipation, where one is still dependent on the guidance of some others? But, in either case, one is left perplexed as to what one should do. At this point, one might straddle between remaining passive and waiting for others to enlighten oneself, and leaving behind the state of immaturity through independent thought. But, if what Kant really claims is the former, then he seems to run counter to what he expresses in the very first paragraph of his essay.

¹³ Wood, “Kant’s Life and Works,” 21.

¹⁴ Antoon Braeckman, “The Moral Inevitability of Enlightenment and the Precariousness of the Moment: Reading Kant’s ‘What is Enlightenment?’” *The Review of Metaphysics* 62, no.2 (2008): 291.

¹⁵ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 55.

¹⁶ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 55.

¹⁷ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 55. Braeckman, “The Moral Inevitability of Enlightenment,” 291.

While these problems hang in the air, there is another point which begs the question: how do those *Vormünder*, who are supposed to enlighten the public, become enlightened in the first place? What makes them different from other *Vomünder*, who are not to be enlightened, and how do they accomplish to think, speak, and act for themselves without the aid of others?¹⁸ Does Kant grant such a role to them because of the fact that since they are the ones who know the inherent problems in their areas, only among them can enlightenment emerge? Since these are the questions which anyone would naturally posit after reading the first pages of Kant’s essay, one expects answers to these questions to be there as well. But Kant does not give us any direct answer concerning them.

The significance of the *Vormünder* who “set the *enlightenment* process in motion among the masses”¹⁹ lies in their making ‘public use of their own reason’. According to Kant, the enlightened *Vormünder*, as being intellectuals, free thinkers or scholars (*Gelehrten*), are the ones who can address the people, the public, without any restraints. What makes the *Vormünder*, or the intellectuals, the forerunner of enlightenment is their practice of using their own reason ‘in public’ and their freedom in doing this. The individual, private enlightenment, even though it is necessary for the enlightenment, does not so much interest Kant as the public enlightenment. As a philosopher of the Enlightenment, Kant “insists on the possibility and necessity of public enlightenment through philosophical openness.”²⁰ There should not be restrictions on the public use of reason for enlightenment to take hold. The public use of reason, in other words, is the guarantor of enlightenment.²¹ However, this does not mean that enlightenment is exempt from any restrictions. On the contrary, while Kant maintains that the public use of reason should always be free, whose restriction prevents people from being enlightened, he also argues that in ‘the private use of one’s reason’ narrow restrictions, in fact, promote enlightenment.²²

Kant designates ‘the private use of reason’ as that which is utilised while holding a civil post.²³ In this use of reason, one functions as “part of [a] machine.”²⁴ Regardless of the type of one’s civil post – one could be an army officer, a tax officer, or a priest –, one must carry out the role one’s post

¹⁸ Braeckman, “The Moral Inevitability of Enlightenment,” 292.

¹⁹ Braeckman, “The Moral Inevitability of Enlightenment,” 291.

²⁰ Clarke, “Kant’s Rhetoric of Enlightenment,” 59.

²¹ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 55.

²² Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 55.

²³ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 55.

²⁴ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 56.

demands. One must not argue while fulfilling one’s duty as the public official; rather, in such circumstances, one must simply obey.²⁵ Kant’s use of ‘private’ may sound paradoxical, due to the fact that in general usage of the term, it alludes to personal or individual matters, which implies more leeway than ‘public’ matters. However, what Kant understands from it is related to matters in which one keeps one’s own thoughts confidential and does not make them public, and “agree[s] to give up [one’s] freedom to attain authoritatively set or commonly agreed upon ends.”²⁶ In the private use of reason, one is the spokesperson of the rules, the laws, or the order of the authority – religious or governmental. While carrying out the requirements of one’s post, one is therefore not free, but solely an instrument of the public objectives to be fulfilled. However, not as a public official, but as a scholar, can one posit one’s criticisms to the “entire reading public,”²⁷ and can argue as much as one pleases.²⁸

Before proceeding to the next point, a clarification as to who practises ‘the public use of reason’ should be made. It should first be questioned whether it includes all humanity or all citizens, or whether it refers only to scholars. In the context of the “Enlightenment” essay, even though he lays emphasis on the use of one’s own understanding, Kant does not seem to extend the public use of reason to everyone. Rather, considering this essay at least, he singles out scholars for the task of enlightening the people – regardless of the types of their official posts. In other words, Kant sees scholars, intellectuals, or the *Vormünder*, as the initiator and motivator of the process of enlightenment. It is through their activities that, claims Kant, the spirit of the Enlightenment – using one’s own reason, not remaining under the yoke of anything and anyone other than one’s own reason – spreads among the people, and thereby the public enlightenment can be achieved.

In addition to Kant’s restriction of the public use of reason to scholars, Kant also specifies the ways in which this use of reason should be executed. To him, scholars or intellectuals make use of their reason through publications or writings. In his essay, one can find numerous examples of his emphasis on the vital role of publication, such as “a man of learning who may through his *writings* address [...]”²⁹ and “as a scholar addressing [...] through his *writings*.”³⁰ According to Kant, publication is reckoned as the only way of,

²⁵ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 55.

²⁶ Clarke, “Kant’s Rhetoric of Enlightenment,” 60.

²⁷ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 56.

²⁸ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 55.

²⁹ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 56, emphasis added.

³⁰ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 57, emphasis added.

and hence the requisite for, enlightenment to emerge and take root. Taking into account these restrictions, it can be said that, for him, disseminating the spirit of enlightenment is limited to the scholars, because only they are able to convey the products of their public use of reason to the public through publications.

However, for Kant, not all scholars are supposed to have absolute freedom in their speeches and publications. Kant deals with this point in his text entitled *The Conflict of the Faculties*. Before discussing Kant’s pertinent remarks in this text, a brief explanation as to the content of the text, and the difficulty in its publication should be made, since this difficulty itself elucidates how the public use of reason is central to enlightenment.

II. The Public Use of Reason and the Lower Faculty of Philosophy

The Conflict of the Faculties is the last published book of Kant in his lifetime. Despite the long time that passed between their publications, Kant’s “Enlightenment” essay and *The Conflict of the Faculties* betray a continuity of thought. They both focus on the freedom in the public use of reason; the former in rather general terms, the latter in the context of the faculties of a university. The publication of *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798) had to wait for four years after its completion, even though the three essays of this work had been written as early as 1793. These three essays were written in different occasions, and were originally planned to be published separately. However, after their completion, Kant decided to issue them together under one title, since they form a unity and continuation in their contents. In general, these three essays scrutinise the conflicts between the ‘higher’ faculties, i.e. theology, law, and medicine on the one hand, and the ‘lower’ faculty of philosophy on the other. Why there is such a conflict between them, and to whom or to what each of them renders service will be explained below. But, for now, an explanation as to the difficulty of its publication is in order.

According to Kant, under the reign of Frederick the Great – to whom Kant famously pays homage and shows his reverence in his “Enlightenment” essay³¹ – the academic communities benefited from the freedom bestowed on them by him.³² “Argue as much as you like and about whatever you like, but

³¹ See Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 55, 58.

³² Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, viii-ix.

*obey!*³³ was the key phrase for Kant that sums up Frederick’s enlightened mind and governance. This should not be understood, however, that the governance under Frederick the Great was exempt from censorship. There was surely censorship, but it was used only “to prevent public scandals.”³⁴ It was, in fact, the order of Frederick the Great that censorship should be applied only to a slight extent if it were to be really necessary in scholarly matters.

After his death in 1786, however, this situation has changed drastically. Frederick Wilhelm II, who acceded to the throne after the death of Frederick the Great, applied stringent and unbending censorship on publications, the majority of which were about religious affairs. With the new Minister of Justice and Education, Johan Cristop Wöllner,³⁵ who had been described by Frederick the Great as “deceitful and scheming,”³⁶ The intention of Frederick Wilhelm II was to weaken the influence of the enlightenment project and its spirit, and thus issued a new Censorship Edict. Through this edict, any publication in Prussia or those writings “exported for publication outside Prussia,” which have religious affairs as their topic, were controlled, and, if necessary, censored. Kant’s *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, whose first part was published in 1792 in the *Berlinische Monatschrift*, appeared in such a circumstance, and gave rise to the reactions of biblical theologians.³⁷ As a response to these reactions to his *Religion*, Kant wrote an essay in 1793 which would be the first part of *The Conflict of the Faculties*. However, the official order given by J. C. Wöllner not to discuss this topic caused a deferment of its publication. This censorship spread to such an extent that lecturing on Kant’s philosophy of religion was banned in Prussia.³⁸ The publication of the *Conflict*, therefore, had to wait the death of Frederick Wilhelm II, since the promise Kant gave to Frederick Wilhelm II was a personal promise which lost its validity upon the latter’s death. Hence it was in 1798 that, after many years of censorship, the book was published. As one

³³ Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’,” 55.

³⁴ Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, ix. A good example of this can be found in the conflict between Voltaire and Maupertuis. Frederick the Great sided with the latter and offered Voltaire to withdraw his claims or leave Berlin. For the reason of this conflict, see J. B. Shank, “Voltaire,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/voltaire/>, sec. 1.5.

³⁵ J. C. Wöllner was put into this position replacing Baron von Zedlitz to whom Kant dedicated his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

³⁶ Wood, “Kant’s Life and Works,” 24.

³⁷ Clarke, “Kant’s Rhetoric of Enlightenment,” 64-5.

³⁸ Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, xi.

can see, The process of the publication of the *Conflict* itself is the epitomisation of the necessity of the freedom in the public use of reason, since only it can enable one to question the dogmas and formulas of the authorities.

In *The Conflict of the Faculties*, as stated above, the primary focus is on the freedom of the public use of reason. But, unlike the “Enlightenment” essay, in this book, Kant deals with the conflicts between the faculties of universities, and with their relations to the government rather than positing general remarks, as is the case with the “Enlightenment” essay. German universities, at least before and in Kant’s time, had a political character, and were regarded as the instruments of government.³⁹ Professors in general were thought to be public employees. Their publications as well as the contents of the textbooks were controlled, censored, or amended by the government according to the demanded service, which each faculty was thought to fulfil.⁴⁰ In terms of freedom, the German universities were lagging behind those of France and Italy. In the eighteenth century, German universities were in a period of decline, and discussions concerning university reformations were in the wind. However, the reformation under discussion involved not reducing the government control over universities but increasing it.⁴¹ Kant’s contribution to this problem comes to the fore at this point. By emphasising the public use of reason, he attempts to modify the universities, or better, to make room for this use of reason within its confines. This attempt, however, does not change the fact that for Kant universities of his day were still political institutions.

Bearing this historical background in mind, we can now turn to the relation between the faculties of the universities, and the public as well as private use of reason. According to Kant, not all intellectuals ought to enjoy the freedom of speech. Among intellectuals, first of all, there is a distinction to be made. After receiving an academic education, some of the intellectuals work as public officials. Due to this, they should not to be deemed to be free both in their speeches and publications, which are considered to be nothing other than “manuals for the general public,” produced in accordance with the permission of the government.⁴² The other group of intellectuals, on the other hand, who are working in universities or scientific associations, are to be considered free. The main reason for this distinction is that their publications, which are specific and technical, are intended to be delivered to the learned,

³⁹ Clarke, “Kant’s Rhetoric of Enlightenment,” 65.

⁴⁰ Clarke, “Kant’s Rhetoric of Enlightenment,” 65.

⁴¹ Clarke, “Kant’s Rhetoric of Enlightenment,” 66.

⁴² Braeckman, “The Moral Inevitability of Enlightenment,” 296.

i.e. to their colleagues, or to those who are interested in these specific areas. As is evident, the ‘public’ they address is very limited. Hence, they are regarded as free while making use of their reason, since what they produce as intellectuals would be understood by only a select few.

Furthermore, Kant introduces another distinction between intellectuals: the professors of the ‘higher’ faculties of theology, law, and medicine, on the one hand, and the professors of the ‘lower’ faculty of philosophy, on the other.⁴³ These designations – higher and lower – are ascribed to the faculties not due to their respective qualities of education, but on account of their service to the government.⁴⁴ The ‘higher’ faculties of theology, law, and medicine serve as channels through which the government can influence the people within its territory. Kant sums up their respective services to the government as follows:

[F]irst comes the *eternal* well-being of each, then his *civil* well-being as a member of society, and finally his *physical* well-being (a long life and health). By public teachings about the *first* of these, the government can exercise very great influence to uncover the inmost thoughts and guide the most secret intentions of its subjects. By teachings regarding the *second*, it helps to keep their external conduct under the reins of public laws, and by its teachings regarding the *third*, to make sure that it will have a strong and numerous people to serve its purposes.⁴⁵

The ‘lower’ faculty of philosophy, on the other hand, teaches history, languages and literature, mathematics, natural science, and philosophy. This faculty is considered to be “preparatory school for higher faculties,” and less interesting to the government.⁴⁶ This feature of the lower faculty of philosophy, that is, its not having an immediate function in influencing people and aiding the government to achieve its ends, enables this faculty to be free, unlike the higher faculties. The lower faculty of philosophy can therefore be considered as the epitomisation of the public use of reason, in which the truth and the teachings of the higher faculties are questioned.⁴⁷ It is not to be under the yoke of any authority, but only answerable to the “laws given by reason.”⁴⁸

⁴³ Braeckman, “The Moral Inevitability of Enlightenment,” 297.

⁴⁴ Clarke, “Kant’s Rhetoric of Enlightenment,” 67.

⁴⁵ Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, 32-33.

⁴⁶ Clarke, “Kant’s Rhetoric of Enlightenment,” 66.

⁴⁷ Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, 45.

⁴⁸ Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, 43.

It is due to these characteristics of the lower faculty that its professors are regarded as free and true intellectuals by Kant. The higher faculties, on the other hand, are responsible to the government, and cannot transgress the limits drawn by the government; hence it can only be the embodiment of the private use of reason.

The lower faculty of philosophy with its efforts in testing the truths of the higher faculties also serves the government, even though this is not its primary motive. By investigating the latter’s teachings, it disciplines them, so that they cannot “usurp the political authority that rightly belongs to the government.”⁴⁹ The crucial point here is that Kant does not argue that the lower faculty of philosophy questions the truth of them with a view to putting an end to them. Rather, according to Kant, the lower faculty of philosophy questions the teachings of the higher faculties in order to control and, if need be, reform them.

To put it in a nutshell, for Kant, the decay of the German universities can be prevented with the help of the lower faculty of philosophy and its use of reason publicly, without any restrictions imposed by any authority except those coming from reason itself. This of course holds true for not just Kant’s time, but also for ours. The freedom of expression, publication, and questioning the authorities, ensures the government, the people, and the universities a continuous progress.

Furthermore, we can also see that in both texts, Kant does not question the superiority and control of government. To him, the state, government, or political authorities should invariably be in place, and not be overthrown by any means. He is in this sense a reformist rather than a revolutionist. That is to say, he supports the existence of government, no matter with what problems it is beset. To him, the problem lies not in the governments per se, but the undue restrictions it might impose. In order for a society to maintain and promote its welfare, harmony, and order, governments are needed. But, what is crucial for Kant is that they need to serve the spirit of enlightenment, which in turn protects their existence and authority.

This view of Kant may sound inconsistent with the spirit of enlightenment with its insistence on using one’s own reason without the guidance and restrictions of another. Hence, it might be disturbing to grant a paternalistic role to governments, which can decide where and when one can

⁴⁹ Clarke, “Kant’s Rhetoric of Enlightenment,” 69.

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be free to make use of one’s own reason through publications (the public use of reason), or when one is restricted to the private use of reason. With these points in mind, there seems to be a fine line between thinking Kant as a totalitarian due to his endorsement of the role which governments should play and Kant as a proponent of enlightenment due to his insistence on using one’s own reason. But, to my mind, it would be more reasonable to think Kant as the one who strives to make room for free thinking, and to promote reason in the face of political authority within the existent order.

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