

“History is not an external subject given to us in complete form, but it is an uninterrupted existence created through human actions and intentions. Therefore, man confronts not only history, but he also stands in it. This is the area in which its moral goals and practical interests are expected to be realized, making it relevant to ask about the meaning of history in terms of these goals and interests and to try to make them understandable. We can therefore say that history does not confront man merely as an intellectual but also as an existential problem. His need to provide meaningful interpretation stems from the immediate reality of his life and not only from the needs of archaeological research.”

Y. Yovel: Kant and the Philosophy of History, p. 169.

I.

The question how to define and understand philosophy of history is not simple. Johannes Rohbeck has characterized it as a problem child of modernity and adds that it has always been one of the most controversial philosophical disciplines.² A general overview of various definitions of philosophy of history deals with a meaning referring to philosophical reflections on historical events and historical

¹ The paper is an outcome of the research project VEGA 1/0880/17 *Filozofia dejín v osvietenstve: Dejiny ako fundamentálny moment sebainterpretácie človeka v kontexte filozofie 18. storočia* [Philosophy of History in the Enlightenment: History as a Fundamental Moment of Human Self-Interpretation in the Context of 18th Century Philosophy] supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

² Rohbeck, J.: Rehabilitating the Philosophy of History. In P. Koslowski (Ed.). *The Discovery of Historicity in German Idealism and Historism*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Verlag, 2005, p. 187.

processes. A more specific meaning of the term philosophy of history refers to the philosophical theory of history as a whole process. Here, it is assumed that an image of nature, origin, purpose and course of the overall process, known as history, can be obtained. It is the latter meaning of the philosophy of history that is essential in understanding of the interpretation of history by philosophers of the 18th century when philosophy of history became one of the prevailing tendencies in philosophy. Hans Michael Baumgartner explains this fact in a way that during this period the world's image suffered from certain crack when the underlying assumptions and opinions were lost and suitable substitutes had to be found instead. According to him, at the time of the Enlightenment, God could no longer be the foundation of all, man could not rely on the idea of the theological interpretation of creation, and even the order of nature was not enough as an absolute law. Therefore, it was necessary to find substitutes for God as well as for nature and it was the idea of history that was offered because people could understand themselves in their own "autonomy, absoluteness, and, as it seems, in a reasonable way"³. Baumgartner calls it a final step of the change of perspective and the change of the style of thinking. "History is becoming the main concept that can take place of the divine cosmos as well as of the absolute God. By this, history becomes a new symbol of the salvation of mankind with a new positive view towards the future associated with the vision of progress, new energy and sometimes a more or less cautious optimism."⁴ Emil Angehrn mentions another assumption according to which philosophy of history appeared thanks to a modern assessment of the subject. It means that philosophy no longer had to rely on cosmos and nature, the time of which was described as cyclical, nor on the history of salvation, but rather was represented by a new positive change in attitude to history and the associated optimism of progress.⁵

However, there is no firm, stable, bindingly accepted definition of the philosophy of history. In a systematic interpretation, this discipline represents a variety of problems, examining history as a form of consciousness, cultural value or science, analysing nature and mode of history, examining history as a cultural-historical value, fulfilling certain functions in the lives of individuals and society, and discussing forms of construction, interpretation and explanation of history.

According to J. Rohbeck establishing the idea of evolution in enlightenment carries with it two essential changes that illustrate the penetration of nature and his-

³ Baumgartner, H. M.: *Philosophie der Geschichte nach dem Ende der Geschichtsphilosophie. Bemerkungen zum gegenwärtigen Stand des geschichtsphilosophischen Denkens*. In H. Nagl-Docekal (Ed.): *Der Sinn des Historischen. Geschichtsphilosophie Debatten*. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996, pp. 152–153.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 166–167.

⁵ Angehrn, E.: *Geschichtsphilosophie*. Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1991, p. 15.

tory, namely, the historization of nature and the naturalization of history and there were also new topics of philosophy of history presented in connection with the events in Europe. Rohbeck describes philosophy of the mid-18th century through the theory of progress when society experienced certain transformation, human work became its central area and progress represented an image of a continuous gradual and targeted movement. This understanding of progress has become a key concept of the theory of the history of French and Scottish Enlightenment and has been the general principle of clarifying the overall course of history.⁶ Rohbeck explains that progress is not an aim, it is a process and the concept of progress is the universal category of movement of history which is resembling more a circle than a linear movement. The process of history is evolving and changing in particular by the consequence of a person who, through his reason, is able to participate on the progress and thus makes his own history. Compared to the changes made by man and his reason, nature does not develop so much, but only lives its eternal cycle. The research of the history of nature and the beginning of the theory of progress have taken place concurrently, and thus, according to Rohbeck, it is possible to speak of parallels in the historical thinking of natural sciences and in the theory of society.⁷ A fundamental problem in 18th century historical theories is the rationale for progress. We can ask whether the history of nature could also be used in interpreting human history. These thinkers relied on the principle of improvement, which is a common criterion for both types of history, but at the same time draw attention to the importance of man as a natural being incorporated into the history of nature.⁸ Man has the ability to improve just like animals, but there are two significant differences between them – freedom and ability to use reason. Of particular importance is also the direction of progress, which is to establish civil society as a necessary human goal. In the enlightenment philosophy, civil society becomes a new concept and an indispensable institution that would be synonymous with a just social establishment. In order to ensure the stability of this right of constituent civil society, social behaviour of people was also included in the scientific analysis.

II.

One of the first complex studies on Kant's philosophy of history is E. Fackenheim's *Kant's Concept of History* published in *Kant-Studien* in 1956/1957. Facken-

⁶ Rohbeck, J.: *Die Fortschrittstheorie der Aufklärung. Französische und englische Geschichtsphilosophie in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts*. Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 1985, p. 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

heim opens his paper with a statement that many “treat Kant’s philosophy of history; but few treat it seriously” and continues with a question what makes Kant’s views on history so attractive.⁹ He continues with other questions, e.g. if he sets up a division between the realms of nature and morality, how can he allow a special realm for history or if he teaches a doctrine of unqualified moral freedom, how can he also teach a historical determinism.¹⁰ Fackenheim answers that Kant was well-aware of the fact that he is no professional in the field of history, nevertheless, he did involve in this issue with the greatest caution and care and if there are any contradictions between Kant’s system as a whole and his philosophy of history it is highly improbable that Kant was not aware of them, especially when some of his main works were written at the same time as the works on history. According to Fackenheim, we are obliged to take Kant’s philosophy of history seriously in the way that we “treat it as a systematic whole, and as systematic part of a larger systematic whole, – the Kantian system”.¹¹

Today, it is possible to say that scholars have responded to Fackenheim’s appeal. Kant’s philosophy of history has become a matter of serious philosophical interest. The fact that Kant’s philosophy of history cannot be found in a complex form, as for example, Hegel’s, could be another reason why it was overlooked, if not forgotten, for such a long time and the first reflections of Kant – as a philosopher of history – appear only in the second half of the twentieth century. The decades since then have proven that philosophy of history is a relevant part of Kant’s philosophy and it is necessary to deal with it as an important element of his practical philosophising. Y. Yovel writes in his work *Kant and the Philosophy of History* that he thinks it is both necessary and possible to reintegrate Kant’s philosophy of history into his critical system¹².

In the work *Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History* Kant explains the position of man cosmologically – man lives on this planet and should be proud of it. However, he must be able to escape the state of nature and enter the state of society. This was done in small steps through instinct of food, sexual instinct, anticipation of the future and, finally, realisation that he is the true end of nature (MAM, AA 08: 114)¹³. Man was able to overcome everything on earth thanks to his capacity of reason that caused human progress and development of mankind as such. In the *Second Proposition* of the work *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* he writes that “[r]eason, in a creature, is a faculty which

⁹ Fackenheim, E. L.: Kant’s Concept of History. *Kant-Studien*, 48, 1956/1957, p. 381.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 382.

¹² Yovel, Y.: *Kant and the Philosophy of History*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 127.

¹³ Kant, I.: *Political Writings: Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*. 2nd Edition, transl. by H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 225.

enables that creature to extend far beyond the limits of natural instinct, the rules and intentions it follows in using its various powers, and the range of its projects is unbounded" (IaG, AA 08: 18–19)¹⁴. Later he introduces the idea that a human being "should not partake of any other happiness or perfection than that which he has procured for himself without instinct and by his own reason" (IaG, AA 08: 19)¹⁵.

The fact that people were endowed with the faculty of reason means that human being is not dependent on instinct any longer. It is a gradual process and people can come to the full development of their predispositions at its end. In *Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History* Kant describes the moment of understanding man's own capacity of reason by the understanding that man himself is the end of nature – because his reason enabled him to overcome instincts and he understood that he could use what nature gave him for his own prospect. However, an individual never lives alone and all his natural predispositions can be developed only in a social institution in which all his qualities – good or bad – are being present. Kant writes

[t]he means which nature employs to bring about the development of innate capacities is that of antagonism within society [...] By antagonism, I mean in this context the *unsocial sociability* of men, that is, their tendency to come together in society, coupled, however, with a continual resistance which constantly threatens to break this society up (IaG, AA 08: 20)¹⁶.

Kant describes tendency of people with two opposite verbs – to *associate* with one another (to live in society) and to *isolate* from one another (to live as an individual) (IaG, AA 08: 20–21)¹⁷. People are social beings, they like and need society for full-valued life, but at the same time, an individual wants to be an outstanding personality and is driven by "the desire for honour, power, or property, [...] to seek status among his fellows, whom he cannot *bear* yet cannot *bear to leave*" (IaG, AA 08: 21)¹⁸. This is an idea that has been brought to the philosophy of history by Rousseau and Kant develops it further. In fact, it is conflict that becomes an active principle which motivates people to make progress. The idea of progress is a common motive for Kant and Scottish Enlightenment philosophers that is being fulfilled by establishing civil society. History is therefore for Kant and other philosophers of the 18th century characterized also by the process and means of

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

social change that one stands for. Yovel gives a very convincing assessment of Kant's understanding of history when he says that Kant is suggesting that a "reasonable person can no longer escape his private morals or just react to some moral problems that occur in life but must also initiate global changes in the world – ethical, political and educational reforms – the subject of which is not only that it should become good, but, ultimately, a good world order as a whole"¹⁹.

Civil society becomes a new term and at the same time a necessary institution representing human natural environment and the progress to civil society is a key condition for social and civil life of people. Kant says that an inevitable step in human progress and the highest intent of mankind is when people achieve civil society "which can administer justice universally" (IaG, AA 08: 22)²⁰. It is a just society based on antagonism, and at the same time, on freedom. This freedom – "*freedom under external laws* [...]" combined to the greatest possible extent with irresistible force, in other words of establishing a perfectly *just civil constitution*" (IaG, AA 08: 22)²¹.

One of the basic conditions of civil society, which human beings should be aware of, is to be a good citizen and "active citizenship" is one of the key moments of progress. It was only thanks to reason that people were able to introduce law and every step in history was based on development of public law and later progress towards international commonwealth. The last step of development of human nature is the federation of states without which the mission of nature could not be finished. In *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* Kant claims that everything should be subordinated to the goal – "externally perfect political constitution, as the only possible state within which all natural capacities of mankind can be developed completely" (IaG, AA 08: 27)²². Everything will be subordinated to the idea of perfect constitution which will be able to last forever. Firstly, it is the evil that motivates mankind to move forward and secondly, the enlightenment that influences the government. In the state of enlightenment states should realize that instead of permanent preparations for war it is necessary to set laws which would guarantee cosmopolitan state with free and equal citizens and state's security. States must gradually realize that wars are extremely dangerous and expensive and that the only way how to avoid the risk is to "prepare the way for a great political body of the future, without precedent in the past" (IaG, AA 08:28)²³ and he expresses a hope that humankind is able to enter a phase where all the conditions for the highest aim of nature,

¹⁹ Yovel, *ibid.*, p. 269.

²⁰ Kant, *ibid.*, p. 45.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

“a universal *cosmopolitan existence*” (IaG, AA 08: 28)²⁴ would be fulfilled.

Even though history is focused on a political development, the aim of Kant’s philosophical history is to support the conditions for the formation of cosmopolitanism.²⁵ Preceding political history was characterized by the frustration of human development caused by ceaseless deflecting from economic and human sources towards wars and preparations for them. *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Purpose* suggests that states have to do the same as people did: renounce their “brutish freedom and seek calm and security within a law-governed constitution” (IaG, AA 08: 24)²⁶. Kant says that the final stage will be possible only after people become citizens of the world.

III.

Although today philosophy of history is a problematic discipline, in 18th century it was a dynamic concept closely linked to the search what man is. History in the Enlightenment philosophy became a means of answering this question – history became the place where people could identify themselves and their place. Through human natural capacity for progress, man could be called the goal of history, by the words of Kant.

The philosophy of history in the Enlightenment represented a new historical force that the thinkers believed in and thought it could be institutionalized through practice and embodied in historical reality. This view is consistent not only with the general optimism of the period, but also with Kant’s theory of rationality that understands reason as a real, self-sufficient, practical motive. Nature is no longer the area that dominates history; new categories of society, such as freedom, law and morality, are in its place. Philosophers offer an explanation of history as a process that is no longer the result of nature, but man is responsible for its progress – starting with an active individual and ending with a human species, who, by realizing their own power, can create their history and transform the world.

Man, on the one hand, a part of nature, on the other, with own dispositions, is able to shape nature, for example in the form of ownership relations or social relations in the form of legal institutions. According to Kant, the condition for achieving legal status at all levels must be a moral policy as an effective legal profession, i.e., it cannot be based on the well-known but dishonest political prac-

²⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

²⁵ Kyslan, P.: Kantovo svetoobčianstvo ako výzva pre súčasnosť. *Studia Philosophica Kantiana: filozofický časopis pre kriticko-rekonštrukčné uvažovanie*, 6, (1), 2017, p. 37.

²⁶ Kant, *ibid.*, p. 48.

tices that are commonly used, but it must be based on the principles of practical reason – freedom and equality. In Kant's philosophy of history, the final step is represented by the idea of cosmopolitanism. By eliminating wars, ensuring equal opportunities for all people and all nations, as well as developing trade, man, as part of history, has a chance to move towards the goal. Kant understands it as the end result we can certainly hope for, and he believes that we are getting closer to it. His reflections on politics, morality, law and duty form an integral part of his philosophical-historical project, in which man's self-consciousness takes place to the extent that his principles become the basis of the systems of states – the federal union and ultimately the cosmopolitan state.

Thinkers of the 18th century tried to imagine the philosophy of history as a type of science that, according to the pattern of natural laws, aimed to find some regularity in history. The issue of the theory of progress is not unambiguously based on linear improvement because even if one is in both processes of history – both natural and social, there is uncertainty based on the fact that the nature of people and his tendency to coexistence cause complications that need to be solved. The philosophy of the 18th century undoubtedly brought new ideas into the field of philosophy of history. In addition to the idea of human progress, it was an enrichment of thinking about the direction of man, the relationship between the natural and social sphere of people, the evaluation of the socio-political reality of the time, and the rationale for the importance of morality and laws while guaranteeing freedom. History, therefore, is a new challenge, a task of reason and self-interpretation of a person who can explain their history, but also recognizes their responsibility in the field of morality – not only theirs, but also the moral progress of the world to become a better place. The natural state is progressively transformed by human power into a complex social system in which people perform themselves. The themes of self-reflection and self-assessment have persisted in philosophy to this day, and while they are part of different philosophical reasoning, they do not lose their importance. Of course, interpreting ways of writing and evaluating history brings questions about their exactness, on the other hand, the idea of cosmopolitanism, introduced by I. Kant, poses a challenge for contemporary thought. Kant has shown two, by free human will interconnected worlds, world of nature and world of man (world of freedom), and although contemporary concepts of cosmopolitanism elaborate their own thoughts, the reference to Kant remains valid.

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²⁷ Kant's works are cited in accordance with Akademie-Ausgabe (AA), Berlin 1900ff.

Abstract

Kant in the Context of 18th Century Philosophy of History

The paper concentrates on Kant's ideas on history in the context of philosophy of history of the 18th century. It firstly focuses on the philosophy of history, which became one of the leading tendencies in the Enlightenment philosophy, and points out how this discipline aimed to interpret man and their place in history from a new perspective. Secondly, the paper deals with Kant's model of philosophy of history focusing on the issue of progress in history represented by formation and development of civil society, the role citizens in it, and the portrayal of possible future history.

Keywords: Enlightenment, history, Kant, nature, reason

Abstrakt

Kant v kontexte filozofie dejín 18. storočia

Príspevok sa sústreďuje na Kantove úvahy o dejinách v kontexte filozofie dejín 18. storočia. V úvodnej časti sa zameriava na filozofiu dejín, ktorá sa v osvietenскеj filozofii stala jednou z dominantných tendencií, a poukazuje na to, ako sa táto disciplína pokúša interpretovať človeka a jeho miesto v dejinách z novej perspektívy. Následne sa príspevok zaoberá Kantovým modelom filozofie dejín so zameraním na problematiku pokroku v dejinách, reprezentovanú vytvorením a rozvojom občianskej spoločnosti, na úlohu občanov v nej a zobrazenie možných budúcich dejín.

Kľúčové slová: dejiny, Kant, osvietenstvo, príroda, rozum

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