

# KANT AND CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS

## HISTORICITY AND TELEOLOGY IN KANT'S LATER PHILOSOPHY, AND ITS ETHICAL AND POLITICAL POTENTIAL

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### *Abstract*

In the contrast to the prevailing ahistorical Neo-Kantian constructivism, authors such as Axel Honneth intended to reconcile Kant's practical philosophy with Hegel's philosophy of history. In several of his later works, written mostly after the publication of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant offered accounts on judgment, history, and morality which effectively altered some of his earlier constructivism and explicated the model of reflection on human existence beyond the binary of absolutism and relativism. Considering the interpretations, provided by Rudolf A. Makkreel, Hannah Arendt, and Paul Ricoeur, the following discussion intends to provide an alternative model for the hermeneutics of social and political existence, and show the basis for a political ethics, founded upon the reflective potential inherent

in the rational, yet historically, contextually, and intersubjectively grounded being-in-the-world, while being attentive to the dangers of Eurocentrism and the justification of pathological political practices.

*Keywords:* Immanuel Kant, hermeneutics, social philosophy, historicity, critical theory.

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### **Kant in kritična hermenevtika. Zgodovinskost in teleologija v Kantovi poznejši filozofiji ter njen etični in politični potencial**

#### *Povzetek*

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V nasprotju s prevladujočim nehistoričnim novokantovskim konstruktivizmom so avtorji, kakršen je Axel Honneth, skušali spraviti Kantovo praktično filozofijo s Heglovo filozofijo zgodovine. V nekaterih svojih kasnejših delih, napisanih predvsem po objavi *Kritike razsodne moči*, je Kant ponudil razumevanje razsodne moči, zgodovine in moralnosti, ki je dejansko deloma spremenilo njegov zgodnji konstruktivizem, in razgrnil model refleksije človeške eksistence onkraj binarnosti absolutizma in relativizma. Pričujoča razprava želi s premislekom interpretacij, kakršne so predstavili Rudolf A. Makkreel, Hannah Arendt in Paul Ricoeur, predložiti alternativni model za hermenevtiko družbene in politične eksistence in razpreti bistvo politične etike, utemeljene na refleksivnem potencialu, vsebovanem v racionalni, a zgodovinsko, kontekstualno in intersubjektivno zasnovani biti-v-svetu, medtem ko obenem skuša pozorno razbirati nevarnosti evrocentrizma in upravičevanja patoloških političnih praks.

*Ključne besede:* Immanuel Kant, hermenevtika, socialna filozofija, zgodovinskost, kritična teorija.

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## I. Introduction

In the recent years, the silent transformations of the communicative patterns of media representation of socio-political realm may have distorted the relationship between the political action of the few and the public sphere of the many. Following Hannah Arendt's depiction of power as the ability of persons to act in harmony while exhibiting their collective potential, the affirmative political expression of power may be related with the social ontology of "being-with" as the primary mode of human social existence in contrast to the mere "being-along". Elsewhere, I argued that the implications of social recognition and intersubjective self-realization in the ethical world do exhibit a political dimension, harboring the immanent potential for the productive communal existence and the condition for the formation of the public sphere with healthy and effective models of communication. However, such a social theory, which is partly based upon Hegel's reinterpretation of Kant's moral and political philosophy, and was, for example, later appropriated and revised in the contemporary terms by authors such as Axel Honneth, faces two problems to which I intend to suggest a possible solution: the issue of justificatory standard for the normative claims and the related issue of the translation of social theory into the realm of politics which concerns the questions of ethical and political judgment, and the role of the *creative* dimension of society, pervaded by symbolic mediation which steers cultural and political traditions, social institutions, and ideological practices, and the formation of social symbols that preserve certain ideologies, and the social and political order. For this reason, we may take a step back before appropriating the Hegelian legacy of social and ethical philosophy, and revisit some of the contributions made by Kant in his aesthetic, political, and moral philosophy, as well as his philosophy of history and progress.

Before we turn to Kant's later philosophy, it also needs to be acknowledged that while research on ideology and social imagination should be regarded as an integral part of the investigation of society, it is also a part which makes it harder to theorize about it in abstract and definite terms, and showcases the need for hermeneutics that could recognize and help with the interpretative nature of such a conduct. In that regard, we might turn to Ricoeur's hermeneutical

philosophy of narrativity as the means of a formation of self-identity by way of reflective distancing and only subsequent re-appropriation of normative practices in concurrent society. Additionally, one could emphasize the role of imaginary significations of society for the formation and expansion of moral imagination, self-realization, legal practices, and as the origin of power-relations, while recognizing the dangers of reification of ideo-logical processes (what Hannah Arendt called logocracy in Arendt 1954, 134), and the changes in the socio-political landscape in which the disturbances in realms of politics and economy affected not only the material conditions of existence, but also the social imaginary and the assessment of the value of truth (as correspondence to facts) in political discourse. Nevertheless, to research the manners, embedded in social practices, through which both the normativity and the diagnostics of social pathology can be inferred from the social ontology, a normative standard that could justify the ethical claims and motivation is required, and might still be in need of further exploration. In the following discussion, I will show how the program of social and political philosophy that is based upon the recognition of the interpretative nature of the social conduct, and acknowledges the role of (critical) hermeneutics in its realization, might be reinforced by taking clues from Kant's philosophical contributions. As I argue in this paper, Kant's late philosophy harbors an inherent hermeneutical and interpretative dimension while remaining tied to the ideals of modernity and enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> For that, we need to be able to bridge the metaphysical gap between the *noumenal* and empirical domain that pervades Kant's philosophy, and find a place for it in the historical, desubjectified and detranscendentalized world.

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1 In my research, I am, amongst others, heavily indebted to Rudolf A. Makkreel who emphasized the link between Kant's reflective judgment and philosophical hermeneutics (e.g., in Makkreel 1997, 151–166 and Makkreel 2015).

## II. The telos of human history: Kant's three models for a justification of the hypothesis of historical progress and the question of narrativity

From the ontological setting of being-with as the primary mode of being in society,<sup>2</sup> the complex relationship between the strata of primary mutual recognition as the locus of achievable communal co-existence, and the sphere of institutions as the determinate patterns of material and symbolic reproduction of society, often mediated by ideological and strategic discourse, can be recognized. My aim is, however, not to advance the problematic differentiation, which in the works of the critical theorists of Frankfurt School frequently results in a kind of two worlds ontology and methodology (for example, in Habermas' binary relationship between the lifeworld and the system, and Honneth's later move from psychological-anthropological theory of recognition to the sociological-historical theory of social freedom), but rather to research the phenomena of recurring patterns of intersubjective co-determination as mediated by ideology and imaginary significations. To infer the conditions that pre-set the possible articulations of the social in speech acts and practices, both productive and pathological, and the formation of the "we" of society, we may, therefore, take a step back to Kant and his later philosophy of modernity and history, mostly realized in and after the publication of the *Critique of Judgment* (1790).<sup>3</sup>

Kant's practical philosophy as it was set forth in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) has become a cornerstone for the constructivist, cognitivist, and universalist approaches to normative ethics and political philosophy, especially since the release of Rawls' *Theory of Justice* in 1971. However, its absent, abstract, and

2 Such a view is based upon Heidegger's ontology of *Dasein* that is also *Mitsein*, which was reintroduced in social ontological terms and further developed by Jean-Luc Nancy in Nancy 2000.

3 The most relevant essays in that regard are: *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* (1784), *An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"* (1784), *On the Common Saying: "This May Be True in Theory but It Does Not Apply in Practice"* (1793), *Perpetual Peace* (1795), and *Contest of Faculties* (1798).

demanding character has driven many to search for alternatives that might bring to the moral philosophy the life force of actual living world and the productive acknowledgement of the historical and fallible nature of human beings that rarely follow their inner rationality, and rather behave on the basis of contextual considerations; in fact, the factual unachievability of fully autonomous decisions—that is, the possibility of operating upon the maxims chosen by the procedure of categorical imperative that would be completely unsullied by empirical justifications—, the issue of application of norms to concrete historical situations,<sup>4</sup> and the non-congruence between the rational and the purposeful might itself be a cause of social suffering in some circumstances. Hegel's historical and teleological account regarding ethical life that provides normative justifications via the reconstruction of *actual* practices and claims made by the participants in the rational and institutionalized self-unfolding of the spirit<sup>5</sup> appears as such a welcome alternative to the more rigid Kantianism, and has been widely studied in such diverse circles as hermeneutic phenomenology and Critical theory. However, Hegel's solution is founded upon objective teleology of spirit that appears untenable in the current philosophical and political-theoretical climate, is outdated, and brings forth the dangers of conventionalism<sup>6</sup> and the possible admission of harmful social and political practices that could, despite appealing to the substantial ethical values in the community, be still retroactively justified by acknowledging their place within the progress towards the end state. While Hegel's take on social and ethical philosophy certainly has its charms by encouraging social freedom that allows the optimal self-realization of individuals, acknowledges the roles of intersubjectivity and social recognition for both individual and social improvement, and both contextualizes and historicizes normativity by locating its source in the actual living world, a deficit of robust normative standards that would be impervious for the ideological, power-exploiting, and

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4 The remarks about inapplicability, justificatory circularity, and the abstract and empty formalism are the *geist* of Hegel's criticism of Kant's ethics (e.g., in Hegel 1991).

5 See particularly Hegel 1991. For a "modernized account" see Honneth 2014.

6 However, Axel Honneth, a staunch defender of Hegel's philosophy, is adamant in his insistence that Hegelian method of "normative reconstruction" can be exonerated from the charge of conventionalism. See Honneth and Koch 2014, 817–826.

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economically-oriented social distortions, and its problematic reliance upon the teleology of objective spirit could serve as an inspiration to seek additional sources for the grounding of social theory. As we will see, Kant's late political writings exhibit quite a different character in comparison to philosophy of the first two *Critiques*, and may already anticipate Hegel's historicization of reason and the moral and cognitive worth of mutual co-belonging under the aegis of the idea of the moral progress of society.<sup>7</sup>

While his ideal of an ordered civil society based on the principles of freedom and public reason is far removed from the bleak outlook of the Hobbesian society in which a state of conflict between the self-interested individuals can only be overcome by appealing to the common power (Hobbes 1996, 119–121), Kant obviously knew well that humans have a hard time following the freedom of (practical) reason and, in terms of them being the participants in common destiny, exhibit “unsocial sociability” (Kant 1991, 44), which drives them to conduct their behavior in opposing and competing manners leaving only hope that the (natural) course of history will allow human species to improve their fortunes after a series of internal conflicts due to their envious and egotistical nature. Despite the shortcomings of the human race and its tendency to silence the urge for rational self-improvement and to dominate and exploit another while it maintains unjust social order, that is, while it operates under the conditions of the reified hierarchical society,<sup>8</sup> he was optimistic that a society of enlightened individuals which can be up to the task of administering to the politics based on rationality and individual autonomy is a distinct possibility.

7 In his later philosophical writings, Honneth appears to be persuaded by such an interpretation, although he also finds those arguments “system-bursting” and incompatible with the general tone of Kant's moral philosophy (see Honneth 2009, 11). While a large part of the present paper follows and comments on the said Honneth's essay, the question about the vicinity of Kant's writings on history and society and Hegel's philosophy has been asked quite frequently with differing opinions (e.g., in Kain 1988, 345–368; Yovel, 1980).

8 Kant makes remarks about the oppression of the powerful, which use aggressive tactics to domesticate the dominated in their environment, making them docile and less likely to lead the intellectual resistance against them, in an essay *An Answer to the Question: “What is Enlightenment?”* (see Kant 1991, 54–60).

Most of Kant's works on philosophy of history are closely tied to the notion of human capacity to make reflective judgments, particularly of teleological variety. In the *Critique of Judgment* Immanuel Kant identified reflective judgment as the type of judgment corresponding to aesthetic and teleological claims. Unlike determinative judgments in which a universal is given and a particular is subsumed under it, reflective judgments start from a particular and actively seek to connect with a universal (Kant 2007, 18–19). Reflective judgments are non-cognitive: their validity cannot be justified with epistemic certainty. As such, reasoning about the beautiful or the purposeful starts from subjective experience; only after the acknowledgment of its singularity, can I recognize a specific object of interest as a token of a universal.

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The capacity for reflective judgment is the cornerstone of Kant's attempt to ground the hypothesis of progress in the cognitive interest of people to integrate the worlds of natural order and moral autonomy. I already mentioned Kant's problematic metaphysical separation between the *noumenal* and empirical realms, between the domains of freedom and natural laws: a teleological judgment that operates with the category of purposefulness intends to bridge the gap between the two realms and supports the will to see the history of humans as a unity resembling natural order that puts an external pressure on the “unsociably sociably” disposed human beings, thus displaying the need for cultural civilization and intellectual improvement of humanity under the flag of a cosmopolitan ideal as dictated by natural order of things (Kant 1991, 41–54; see also Honneth 2009, 4–5; and Ricoeur 2000, 100–101).

A justification of the hypothesis of progress, based on theoretical interest, which Honneth identified as his first justificatory model, never fully satisfied Kant, and in the later works, such as *On the Common Saying: “This May Be True in Theory but It Does Not Apply in Practice”* and *Perpetual Peace*, a different attempt to ground the hypothesis may be recognized, this time founded upon one's practical reasoning. As a being possessing the capacity to exercise his freedom in obeying inner morality, an enlightened actor is bound to assume that he is not alone in his endeavor: due to the universal character of Kantian morality, the latter must be able to be translatable into the empirical world and communicated between peoples and generations—the “ought implies can” (Kant 1998, 540–541), and can be realized in a historical world. This highly speculative

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thesis relies on one's moral imagination: by creating a moral image of the world,<sup>9</sup> the actor is able to assume that his own moral convictions can be shared and contribute to the progress of humanity, even if they need no external justification of their legitimacy. Such a picture of a morally determined idea of progress which complies with the late Kant's tendency to situate practical reason in the living world is much more interesting for our cause since it appears to contemplate upon *temporal* and *intersubjective* dimensions of morality. Nevertheless, the model is beset by several problems: it retains the framework in which there is still a division between freedom and nature, the moral actions of the agent are still tied to monological cognition of duty, and it continues to rely on the teleological judgment to comfort the doubting agent about the (natural) purpose of his actions and contributions (Honneth 2009, 5–7; also consult Kant 1991, 108–110; and Kant 1991, 61–92). We will later return to Kant's moral philosophy when we will reflect on the political dimension of practical reason; for now, it should be noted that Kant's teleological arguments which presuppose the existence of a common world manifest the need for reflective rather than determinative judgment when applying the moral "ought" onto the historical context.

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It is, however, in the essays *An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"* and *Contest of Faculties* that we find the most unexpected and promising approach to the understanding of the idea of progress and normative justification of modernity. Here—in, according to Honneth, the third model for justification of progress—Kant makes a somewhat surprising turn towards the de-transcendentalized thinking, situated in the historical world, employing a fair share of political imagination in the interpretation of current social climate and historical tendencies; an approach which Michel Foucault in one of his last philosophical contributions saw as a turn towards the "ontology of actuality" (Foucault 1984, 32–50). We may, along with Honneth, perceive that Kant in the above-mentioned essays showcases *hermeneutic* attitude as he envisions a self-reflecting and a contextually, historically concerned manner of approaching the themes of human destiny, moral development, and social and political existence.

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9 I took the expression from Putnam's interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy (Putnam 1987, 51–52).

This time, Kant changes the focus from writing in the perspective of an anonymous, only indirectly affected observer of the course of history to the direct participant in the era-defining events that illuminated humanity's capacity for rationality and set the course of history towards Enlightenment.<sup>10</sup> In those essays, the progress is tied to the public expression of moral and political norms which necessitates the conscious internalization of the *geist* of historical transformations of all those who agree and sympathize with the moral and intellectual progress. Unlike the previous two models, which were bound to the idea of the natural inclination, here Kant allots the idea of progress in the actions of self-understanding individuals. Contributors to the revolutionary events have no choice, but to reflect on the historical perspective of time, in which they are situated, to understand the horizon of the past and the tendency of future as an opportunity for further improvement. With that solution, Kant approaches the ideas of effective history, the importance of communicability, the role of experience from the first-person perspective in judgment, and the refiguration of internalized convictions after the circle of self-reflection, which indeed appear to echo Hegel's historicization of Kant's philosophy and the later development in philosophical hermeneutics. While we should not go overboard with reaching for the associations, Kant's late philosophy does show the signs of a more actualized and historically situated philosophical perspective which *secretly* anticipates existential, hermeneutic, and phenomenological philosophies. By justifying the moral progress of humanity via collective impressions of the actions of individual actors rather than the over-rationalized objective teleology of spirit, Kant's insights have a certain advantage over Hegel's idea of moral progress as they allow the practical reason to settle in the empirical world and endure a share of existential contingency requiring the use of non-determinative interpretation.

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10 Now, there are obviously some differences between the two essays due to the fact that *An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"* reflects on the progress under the confines of enlightened monarchy of Frederick the Great (see Kant 1991, 54–60), while for our cause especially interesting *Contest of Faculties* glides on the intellectual waves of the French Revolution (see particularly Kant 1991, 177–190). However, the general views regarding the concept of progress appear to be similar (Honneth 2009, 8–11).

Nevertheless, it needs to be mentioned that the following interpretation of Kant's justificatory models of progress relies on Honneth's reconstruction of Kant's philosophy of history which is problematic in some areas—however, due to constraints of the following discussion further analysis can only be sketched here. However, both Honneth's own social philosophy of recognition and social freedom, and the already suggested issues with Kantian philosophical framework require additional interpretation and cannot be unequivocally accepted without some further considerations which connect the present discussion with the question of ontologically and anthropologically oriented investigation of selfhood and personal identity.

A special concern should be given to the issue of moral standards that underlie the idea of historical progress; if the progress should count as an immanent criterion for the justification of moral and political norms, we should consider to which underlying first-order principles should we appeal to when judging historical transformations as progressive and morally justified. In other words: without resorting to the Kantian monological account of morality or adopting the Hegelian *objective* teleology of spirit, can we avoid collapsing into circularity, *Whig historiography*, Eurocentrism, and cultural colonialism? Such problems are attributed by Allen to Honneth's late philosophy which takes the account of progress towards social freedom as the basis for his critical theory of social freedom (Allen 114–121; also Zurn 2015, 193–194). Curiously, a conscious decision to not follow Hegel's philosophy towards the finalization of historical progress in the self-transparency of absolute knowledge is also what separates Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics from Hegel's philosophy of spirit and renounces the possibility to attain the rational justification for the necessity of historical progress (Gjesdal 2009, 132–141). By appealing to the concepts of dialogical understanding, effective history, and tradition, such a hermeneutical approach is a welcome alternative to the monological constructivist accounts of ethics and political philosophy, but may, without resorting to either a tight anthropology that would justify the specific features of progress, or the rational standards of normativity like in Habermasian discourse ethics, have a hard time to avoid the charges of (moral) relativism and reformism on the spectrum of hermeneutics (sharing certain similarities with communitarianism in political philosophy) or, as in Honneth's critical theory, Eurocentrism.

A certain, if only partial, solution to relate the notion of self-understanding to the idea of dialogical ethics and to the importance of public reasoning and the progress towards greater social freedom might be to appeal to the notion of narrativity, stemming from the anthropological account regarding self-identity like in Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology. As Ricoeur believed, narrative identity bridges the gap between one's character (which relates to the notion of *what oneself is*) and selfhood (which answers the question of *who oneself is*), mediates between the passive, time-resistant features of oneself and the will to keep the promises through the temporal changes, and gives history to the subject (Ricoeur 1992, 165–166). By ordering it into narratives, one gives a meaning to his life; in addition, by linking a fragile identity via the progress of *refiguration* to the intention of a “good life lived with and for others in just institutions” (Ricoeur 1992, 172), the notion of narrative identity is also connected to the ethical identity of a singularly responsible, self-constant agent.

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Rather, the following the line of argumentation that is based on the dialectics between teleological (Aristotelian) ethics and deontological (Kantian) morality (where the primacy is on the side of ethics; Ricoeur 1992, 170), Ricoeur's hermeneutical approach to the philosophical anthropology of selfhood, which forms the backbone of his later work in ethics and political philosophy, reveals an important element that transposes the focus from the agent-centered theory of moral progress, based upon the individual perception, to the notion of ethical narratives, mediating between oneself and the other, and the publicly based political narratives, which introduce the third party into the discussion.<sup>11</sup> As it will be expounded upon in the next chapter, the interpretative character

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11 Nevertheless, an account that would expound upon the dialectics of teleological ethics, based on the notion of personal virtues, and deontological morality, founded upon the concept of duty, could offer fruitful insights for the discussion about ethical-anthropological foundations of social philosophy, particularly in connection with the normative and epistemological concerns; however, such an attempt would greatly exceed the limitations of the present article. However, similar duality also underlines the difference between the ethical and the political, which I exposed above and is indebted to Levinas' account on the disparity between the asymmetrical obligation to the other and the symmetrical notion of public justice between equals, introduced by the appearance of the third (in Levinas 1991, 213).

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of reflective judgments might be useful in representing and deciding upon the ideological narratives of spectators and the actions of the agents of political change. However, the importance of publically expressed opinions in form of narratives could be recognized; in words of Iris Marion Young, narratives “aid in constituting the social knowledge that enlarges thought” (Young 2000, 76), orient us to deliberate on the source of values, cultural meanings, and allow us to experience the feelings of the other (cf. Young 2000, 73–75). Through the symbolic form of narratives, a Kantian appeal to the “public use of one’s reason” (Kant 1991, 55) garners a new meaning in which the criterion of publicity makes the narratives, the texts of interpretative nature, the center of attention.

The moral or political narrative is always told to the other or to the concerned public; however, as it may *refigure* one’s understanding of the self and the society, the hermeneutical attitude may be required from participants in the political discourse, demanding from one to have the ability to listen to and hear the voice of the other, the use of practical reasoning and the self-realization about the finite nature of understanding and human conduct (see in Gadamer 2004).

Thus, while the moral image attained by accepting the possibility of progress and by listening to the narratives that reveal both the extent of social suffering and the normative expectations of the members of society, might retain its interpretative character and might by itself not fully justify the normative claims of the participants in the historical process, it can still be recognized as an important element in reaching the self-realization, the recognition of one’s particular needs, and allow us to relate the individual inclinations of its members to the collective actions in a particular society.

While the model of historical progress which I presented in the present chapter remains to be plagued by some problematic and anarchic aspects of Kant’s moral philosophy and his rational anthropology, it seems to have a potential to contribute to the question of recognition of the objectified normative standards in institutionalized social sphere as a complement to the more committed psychological understanding of the nature of agents in society. In the following paragraphs, we will see how Kant’s philosophy of history can also be connected to the theme of political judgment and social hermeneutics by taking another, more indirect route of interpretation.

### III. Reflective judgment, social, and political interpretation and the social imaginary

Until now, we have been following Honneth's analysis of Kant's justifications of historical progress with a purpose to recognize the areas where his moral and what could be retrospectively named socio-political philosophy may be important for a contemporary thinking regarding the questions of ethics, justice, and politics, founded upon the belief in interpretative nature of understanding and judgment of human conduct. There is, however, another way to approach Kant's late philosophy in the interest to garner support for a contemporary hermeneutics of society. This time, upon returning to Kant's conception of reflective judgment, we may consider employing aesthetic rather than teleological judgment like in Kant's writings on philosophy of history as a tool for social and political interpretation. Such an approach, relying on the category of taste rather than purpose, is well known by Hannah Arendt's work in the unfinished third volume of *Thinking, Willing, Judging*.

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Instead of going into the details of Arendt's reinterpretation of aesthetic judgment in Kant as the potential basis of political judgment, we should only reflect upon the most interesting aspects of her work for the present discussion. Given Kant's penchant for teleological judgments in his works on philosophy of history, which come close to the status of political philosophy, the choice of aesthetic judgment and the notion of taste over teleological judgment and the category of purpose may seem odd at first, but a reflection upon taste certainly has its advantages. Instead of taking into account Kant's claims in his works on philosophy of history, which are predominantly tied to the understanding of human species in entirety, basing its intuitions upon the *phantom* of the intention of nature—however, as we have just seen, such a conception can be circumvented and largely overcome as in *An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"* and *Contest of Faculties*—, Arendt takes a more creative stance in adopting the judgment of taste as a more dynamic foundation for political judgment, specifically appealing to its inherent attributes of *communicability*, which ensures its universality by appealing to the common sense (*sensus communis*), the tendency to recognize the *particularity* of a (beautiful) object, and *retrospective* orientation which relates to the notion of the spectator rather

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than actor of the events in history, allowing this mode of thinking to take on the new and—over the course of time—refined meanings.<sup>12</sup>

We see that we are operating here with a different take on the potential of Kant's political understanding and the conception of reflective judgment. Whereas we previously— with the help of Axel Honneth—subscribed to the will to see the conjoined efforts of rational individuals reflected in a vision of moral improvement that manifested the standard for normative directions for society, the examination of the promising aspects of (aesthetic) judgments of taste yields different results for the alternative areas of interest. Since reflective judgment is based on the idea of the reflective appropriation of a particular under the heading of a general rule without objective subscription, it is more easily translatable into contingent world of “post-rational” society than determinate theoretical and moral judgments, and complies with the theoretical interest in a historical and interpretative nature of the world. Despite their interconnection, the judgment of taste has certain “hermeneutic” advantages over the judgment of purpose, namely the immediacy of the intuition of taste, its self-imposing need for the cultivation of the sense of taste, and its appeal to

12 The following overview of Arendt's decision to use aesthetic judgment as a foundation of political judgment is a summarization of Ricoeur's concise analysis in Ricoeur 2000, 94–108. Also, see and consult the primary sources: Kant 2007; Arendt 1968. It may be relevant to also draw attention to the work of Italian critical theorist Alessandro Ferrara, another author who transported Kant's vision of reflective judgment to contemporary political philosophy believing it allows us to recognize “exemplary normativity” of particular norms and standards in an effort to avoid the extremes of overgeneralized universalism of liberals, and the passivity and normative relativism of communitarians (see, e.g., Ferrara 2008). It should also be taken into account that the “first-person experience” I mentioned above and the role of spectator are understood in different contexts: the first relates to the question of interpretation and judgment, the second is considered from the perspective of the action.

the *sensus communis*.<sup>13</sup>

An important issue that Arendt recognizes with the notion of reflective judgments is that they reveal a *tragic dimension* of social conduct; as they are *retrospectively* used by spectators rather than the actors of political events in history, they expose the extent of the tragedy of human existence by way of connecting the past events into the seemingly endless chain of manifestations of human fallibility (Lara 2008, 94); they mirror our finite understanding and continuous struggle to interpret the seemingly chaotic conglomeration of the actions of actors on the stage and place them into an ordered chain of events that could entertain the possibility of historical progress.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, at this point we must ask—is there a tighter connection between the roles of the judging spectator and the actor in historical events? To answer this question, we shall make a small detour with the short reflection upon the concept of (social) imagination.

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There is, however, another important aspect of aesthetic judgment, related to the faculty of imagination. As it is well known, the judgment of taste observes and judges upon the effects of the “free play” of understanding and imagination, where imagination takes the upper hand as it “schematize[s] without [overarching] concept.” (Kant 2007, 116–117)<sup>15</sup> Considering the role that ideology plays in a world where the web of symbolic mediation not only mediates the particular intellectual and cultural tradition (legacy), but also

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13 Hans-Georg Gadamer, while critical to Kant’s aesthetics (especially the trend of “disinterested anesthetization” which it is supposed to have commenced), recognized positive development in his appeal to common sense in the communication of the judgment of taste; however, he may have missed the opportunity to further develop this reflection, and gain additional theoretical support for his ideas on effective history and *Bildung* without predominantly grounding it in a more problematic legacy of Hegel’s philosophy of spirit. See Gadamer’s remarks regarding Kant’s aesthetics and judgment of taste in Gadamer 2004, 37–52.

14 Here we are obviously again confronted with what Honneth called the “first model” for the justification of historical progress.

15 The discussion about the significance of the faculty of imagination in Kant’s philosophy and the interconnection between the synthetic function of said faculty in his theoretical philosophy, and its role in the judgment of taste and the production of the beautiful far exceeds the boundaries of purpose and length of the present paper, yet it is certainly an investigation that has been and still remains worthy of undertaking.

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social institutions as relatively stable and permanent patterns of social behavior, legal relationships, and consciousness, political programs, social symbols of authority, and ideological practices, a reflection upon the imaginary aspects of social existence could reveal the necessary orientation of the normative expectations of social agents. Here, an interplay between the imaginary work of a genius—an exemplary individual who creates utopias of better life—and an observer of social reality who reflects upon ideologically and symbolically mediated society and interprets it in conjunction with the normative standard, set by the actions of contributors to the progress of human values, curbs the enthusiasm of the “genius” by applying the normative orientations to the actual living world.<sup>16</sup> It is the “enlarged mentality” that the reflective judgment of taste brings into the discussion which may help to understand the—both pathological and illuminating—effects of ideology upon society, and be the potential source of a cure for pathologies and disorders of contemporary society.

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Such a depiction of the role of reflective judgments in the understanding of political currents and state of society brings us back to the notion of moral and political narratives we explored earlier. The reflective, interpretative judgment can be recognized as an important tool in deciding upon the value and the relevance of particular narratives, often masked by hidden agendas of economic and political forces, and sometimes even systematically distorted due to the unjust distribution of social power, as it judges the particular characteristics of the inspected object, and can temporalize the moral and political image of the examined object or event by reflecting upon the historical perspective of society in which it takes place. Again, such an approach may require a hermeneutical attitude which recognizes the omnipresence of ideological narratives which pervade current society and regards the possibility of a definite answer to the social and political challenges as a delusion, yet strives towards a better understating of the self, the other, and the state of society in question.

16 For a discussion on the conception and the interplay between ideology and utopia consult Ricoeur 1986.

#### **IV. Conclusion: Kant, critical hermeneutics, and the responsible interpretation of contemporary society**

In conclusion, let us see if a common ground has been found for the two lines of interpretation of contemporary importance of Kant's later philosophy that we assessed in the previous chapters. Firstly, I undertook the investigation of Kant's late philosophy by consulting Honneth's take on the relevance of his philosophy of progress, which allowed me to recognize the inherent if restrained "hermeneutical", historical and, communicative dimensions in Kant's moral and political thinking. Approaching the spectrum of the phenomenology of social change, Kant conducts the philosophy of historical progress, where the notion of moral improvement is tied to the demand for experiencing intelligible claims in the real historical world.

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Let us remind ourselves that even in what we, along with Honneth, recognized as the "second justificatory model" for the hypothesis of progress, Kant's moral philosophy has an inherently political dimension. The categorical imperative as a rigorous testing procedure for the sustainability of maxims that lead to concrete actions in the empirical world should be used by the rulers and the administrators in public deliberation to reach morally appropriate decisions. However, the formal and abstract character of Kant's deontological ethics, relying on the separation between the realms of freedom and natural law, has frequently proven to be difficult to translate into the contingent and often "irrational" actuality. Thus, the justification of moral progress, tied to the keenly shared self-understanding of the role and place of the particular participants in the process of enlightenment—moral, intellectual, and political improvement—can offer the structural framework for the exposition of normative standards and interpretation of the current of social change. While such a conception does bring a plethora of new problems, ranging from the broadness of the vision and potential Eurocentrism to the problematic anthropology that sets its formal background, the apparent "empiricization" of practical reason suggests a welcome alternative to the overly strict logic of Kant's practical philosophy and Hegel's objectivized representation of progress and ethical life.

As it turned out, the notion of moral and political narratives which help publicly situate reason can be utilized to serve as a link between the discussion

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upon the hermeneutically depicted concerns of the self-understanding participants in the course of history of society and anthropologically oriented reflection upon the narrative identity that constitutes human nature.

After investigating Kant's writings on history, teleology, and politics I took a more specified look at the potential of the concept of reflective judgment for the usage in contemporary political theory and moral philosophy. Rather than orienting according to the teleological variety, which was a key to understand Kant's works on philosophy of history, I followed Hannah Arendt in assessing the relevance of the aesthetic judgment of taste for the understanding of contemporary politics. Such a judgment might have an important role in the investigation of ideology and social imaginary, which ties the reflection upon moral standards of society relating to the normative expectations of its actors to the investigation of the methodology for a contemporary moral and political interpretation.

Both of those lines brought me to the belief that Kant's late philosophy contains inherent interpretative<sup>17</sup> and historical elements which could prove beneficiary for the critical hermeneutics of society, which intends to retain its focus on the deepened understanding of its features and one's specific role in the course of its self-presentation rather than a mere explanation of social facts, and yet ascribe to the certain normative and interpretative standards of validity. The narratives which we tell each other depict moral images of society and its members, and they often contain the seeds of hope—the hope that in a society in which both rationality and *common sense* are often expelled from public discussion the understanding of *the tragedy of human existence*, the acknowledgment of finiteness of our knowledge, and the interpretative character of our judgments can help us provide a more effective means of

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17 Accordingly, Rudolf A. Makkreel names the reflective judgments as »interpretative judgments« (Makkreel 1997, 160).

fighting social injustice.<sup>18</sup> Thus, a critical hermeneutics that allows us to create visions of a better life while remaining tied to the idea of responsible interpretation of the symbolically and ideologically pervaded society can prove to be a useful and effective manner of approaching the current social and political challenges.

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18 One should also be attentive to the work of Stanley Cavell who, besides reflecting on the relevant attitude of *acknowledgment* which he regards as a conceptual necessity for the understanding of the meaning of linguistic propositions (Cavell 2002), and might be connected to Heidegger's notion of *care* (see Honneth's analysis in Honneth 2008, 50–52), displays hermeneutic sensibility when approaching the concept of *moral perfectionism* where he connects the themes from Emerson, Thoreau, Nietzsche, and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology (in particular with regards to the reflection on the finiteness of existence and authenticity) with Wittgenstein's philosophy of language to inspect the possibly of *originary ethics* that reach beyond the normative issues of traditional ethics, and intend to grasp the foundational stance that represents the source of all moral judgment (see, e.g., Cavell 1990; a possibility of relatedness to the present discussion can be recognized in Grušovnik 2014, 117).

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