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Lubica Učník

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Kant: *Sensus Communis* and the Public Use of Reason

Lubica Učník

> What I propose in the following is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness—the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of 'truths' which have become trivial and empty—seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.[1]

Over the past year, a radically new message is played out in public media: we are *bringing* freedom to Iraqis oppressed by the ruthless dictator. A sudden shift occurred; the rhetoric of freedom replaced the language of human rights. What kind of freedom is invoked in these proclamations? Is freedom a new commodity which we can export? Can freedom be sold to other countries as MacDonald's hamburgers? Is freedom something that can be packaged, transported, put on the market and used in straight forward way? What does this shift in political oratory really mean?

The question of freedom is, of course, the problem that Kant and the enlighteners were trying to think over when the old order ruled by hereditary kings was breaking down. Two hundred years later, Jean-Paul Sartre would still claim that we are condemned to be free. According to Kant, freedom cannot be 'given' or imposed on people. Freedom is not a property: people are free or they are not. Freedom is not something you can or cannot *have*. People must learn *to be* free. How can people do that? As Kant thought, the only way to learn to be free is to reject heteronomy by learning to think for oneself. Only in free communication with others we can learn to think for ourselves without heteronomous orders, however well meant they might be. Hannah Arendt calls this type of thinking—thinking without banisters. Only when we can account for our own thinking, we can be free and responsible for our actions.[2]

In this paper I will consider Kant's argument on the subject of the mature way of thinking, public reasoning and *Sensus Communis*. Kant's stress on responsibility of 'reading public' to pass judgment on the world's events is relevant even more now than it was in his time. Kant insists that we need a public space not only for exposing our ideas to others for further public scrutiny but also for finding out about ideas of others in order to learn how to think freely for ourselves (mature way of thinking) without prescriptions from church or unquestioned tradition of a community we live in. How can we think freely if we cannot compare our thoughts with those of others and let others to engage with our ideas? As Kant argues, to understand freedom of thought on the model of an individual who thinks in seclusion from others is to misunderstand the nature of freedom and public culture. Prohibiting free public expression of ideas curtails "freedom of *thought*."[3] Your freedom of thought is a chimera, if you cannot freely exchange your opinions with others.

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[1] Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, (1958) 1998), p. 5. I thank to Sue Ashford for her valuable criticism of earlier versions of this paper.

[2] See, for example, Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. One/Thinking. Two/Willing* (San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1978); Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture", *Social Research. An International Quarterly of the Social Sciences* Spring 1984, 7-37; Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989); Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", *Social Research. An International Quarterly of the Social Sciences* Winter 1994, 739-64.

[3] Kant, "What is Orientation in Thinking?" ed. Reiss, *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 237-49, p. 247, italics in original.

A general assumption is that to argue about freedom of thought in a public space is a domain of political philosophy. Arendt gave lectures on Kant's political philosophy, which he never wrote, as she says, underscoring Hans Saner's claim that Kant's political writings represent only one and a half to five percent of his overall work, depending on how we define the adjective 'political'.[4] Yet I argue that Kant's writings are relevant to politics, since he is preoccupied with the maturity of our thinking and with the public use of reason, or, as we would say today, free speech. He ties these notions to the concept of *sensus communis*. For Kant, *sensus communis* is *not* sedimented or internalized knowledge encoded in the traditional 'bigoted' way of thinking that is passed on categorically. This 'picture' of a tradition is already embedded in the negative understanding of a community and its way of life, privileging the notion of the individual who supposedly can transgress all that is bigoted and petrified in the shared way of living *via* her reasoning capacity. For Kant, reason "is necessarily exercised within a social context."[5] In order to pass well-rounded judgments on matters concerning us all, we require knowledge about the thoughts of others because we are not free floating atoms living alone in this world. It is precisely the atomistic understanding of society that Kant questions.[6] For Kant, then, *sensus communis* insures that we can only judge and act freely in society where different opinions are allowed. Kant also suggests, "there can be no justice (which can only be conceived of as *publicly knowable*) and therefore no right," if the right is not defined by "the *formal attribute of publicness*."[7] Nowadays, more than ever we need to know about others and their way of life. Never before 'reading public' could access information on such a large scale. Yet, as we saw recently, freedom of information is not a matter of course.

Kant

> Judgment is endowed with a certain specific validity but is never universally valid. Its claims to validity can never extend further than the others in whose place the judging person has put himself for his considerations. Judgment, Kant says, is valid 'for every single person,' but the emphasis in the sentence is on 'judging;' it is not valid for those who do not judge or for those who are not members of the public realm where the objects of judgment appear.[8]

We need to ask if Kant's writing is the contemplation of a philosopher who is concerned about ideas standing apart from political happenings, or, is Kant's thinking about politics one more attempt to erect a further immutable prototype of the Republic? Is Kant concerned with building tall towers of political models or is he concerned with the flux of political events in his days? We are familiar with the role of the king philosopher, who claims to know how the ideal political form should be. We know much less about the explicit Kantian denial of this dream. For Kant, the idea that kings should philosophise or philosophers should rule is absurd because "the possession of power inevitably corrupts the free judgement of reason."[9] Kant insists that it is the role of an administrator to govern, while the role of a philosopher is to critically engage with ideas. Clearly, if you are a jurist, you need to apply the

[4] See Arendt, *Kant's Political Philosophy* and Saner, *Kant's Political Thought. Its Origins and Development* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, (1967) 1973), pp. 1-4.
[5] Reiss, "Postscript", *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 250-72, p. 256.
[6] In his last unpublished work the *Opus Postumum*, Kant's refusal of the atomistic version of the universe led him to assert the self-positing subject who has rights and is living in community with others in the world. See Kant, *Opus Postumum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[7] Kant, "Perpetual Peace. A Philosophical Sketch", ed. Reiss, *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 93-130, p. 125, italics in original.
[8] Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture", *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 197-226, p. 221.
[9] Kant, "Perpetual Peace", p. 115.

positive law in particular instances, you cannot question the validity of legislature. It is the responsibility of a critical thinker to abstract from these particular instances, thereby reflecting on the whole juridical system. A scholar's role is to suggest new procedures for legislature.

Kant believes that the separation of the theoretical and practical deliberations can be bridged by application of sound judgment.[10] In order to do that, there must be a guaranteed free space where new ideas can be discussed. Already in the *First Critique*, Kant speaks of the duty of free citizens to assess critically exaggerated claims of reason. For Kant we are all rational human beings, so he asks us all to help him while he questions the limits of reason. At the start of the *First Critique*, he writes that he needs others to assist him with his ideas. He hopes that his readers will be tolerant and unbiased, like "a *judge*" and supportive as "an *assistant*."[11] For Kant, then, the critique of reason is not the preoccupation of a lonely philosopher who will legislate for all in seclusion, but a critique to be carried out by all. The hyperbole of reason concerns us all. At the end of the *First Critique*, after he has detected the pretentiousness of reason, he regrets that debates about reason's self-conceited claims have been so long coming: if "the dispute had been conducted sooner and with unlimited public permission," then, "a mature critique would have come about so much earlier."[12] To prevent a repetition of reason's overconfidence, free citizens—that is, *us*—should maintain the process of the *perpetual critique of reason* to always keep reason within its legal boundaries. Kant specifies that "the very existence of reason rests on this freedom [of critique]. For reason has no dictatorial authority; and its pronouncement is never more than the agreement of free citizens, each of whom must be able, without holding back, to utter his qualms—indeed, even his veto."[13] Yet in order to discuss different opinions, citizens need a public space free from censorship. Kant argues that one of the most important aspects of the Enlightenment is recognition that the possibility of a free space where different thinkers can present and debate various ideas among themselves and the reading public is *sine qua non* of freedom. Accordingly, many of Kant's writings were published in a newspaper, the *Berlinische Monatschrift*. For Kant, this is the space where one should use public reason. How does he understand this concept?

In November 1784, Kant responds to the question *Was ist Aufklärung*? posed by the editor of the *Berlinische Monatschrift*. His answer is that "*Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity*." For Kant, the dictum of the Enlightenment is *Sapere Aude!*—or, as he explains, "Have courage to use your own reason!" The important point for Kant is not a lack of reason, we all have a capacity to reason, it is rather "laziness and cowardice" of many to dispose of "lifelong tutelage." It is easier to follow others, instead of using one's own capacity to reason. Similar to "domestic cattle" that does not know how to live in the wilderness, men too are scared "to take a single step" toward freedom. They rely on books to tell them what and how to think, on a priest to make certain their righteous observance of moral conduct, on a dietician to proscribe the right regiment for their bodies. They can buy with money whatever they desire without any need to think. Similarly, in political matters, they rely on "statutes and formulas" of the state legislature without question. So, even in the event of a revolution, people simply turn around and adopt another set of rules because "new prejudices

[10] See Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, (1798) 1992). Arendt argues that a difference between Marx and Kant can be expressed as a difference to account for a bridge between theory and practice. For Marx, theory leads to practice, while for Kant a bridge is through a judgment passed by 'spectators.'

[11] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc, (1781) 1996), A xxi, italics in original.

[12] A 747/B 75.

[13] A 738-9/B 66-7, square brackets in Pluhar's translation.

will serve as well as old ones to harness [these] unthinking masses."[14] Likewise, Arendt charges that people's refusal to think independently of official propaganda helped the Nazi Party to win and retain power in the government and establish the Third *Reich*.[15] It is "thoughtlessness—the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of 'truths' which have become trivial and empty" that prevents people from attaining (or securing) freedom.[16]

Yet freedom is not hard to realise if people only dare to think. If people learn to use their reason freely they will be able to reject heteronomy, think for themselves critically and also be able to offer new ideas to the ruler. After all, for Kant, it is a citizen's duty to argue in front of the "whole community or of a society of world citizens."[17] Indeed, everyone should be "free to make use of his reason in matters of conscience."[18] To prohibit the use of public reason "is to injure and trample on the rights of mankind."[19] A monarch "who is himself enlightened, is not afraid of shadows" and allows the public exchange of ideas.[20] For Kant, maturity of reasoning is tied to the public use of reason, or to put it in our present vocabulary, free speech.

The case is different when Kant considers the private use of reason. How can we understand Kant's notion of private reason, when he approvingly says that the Enlightened monarch should say: in the public realm, "argue as much as you will, and about what you will," but when you are carrying out an employer's order, "only obey!"[21] According to Kant, you use your reason privately when you are employed as a public servant, or in the army, or if you are a priest. In the *Conflict of Faculties*, he clarifies that while scholars teach; they are "tools of the government" and they have to follow University material and be subject to "the censorship of faculties."[22] They simply cannot teach whatever they choose. Kant explains that in paid employment you are consigned to a particular task that you must carry out passively, that is, according to your employer's wishes and while you are an employee, "argument is certainly not allowed—one must obey." For Kant, everyone who works, in effect, is executing the orders of others. In this instance, everyone must obey, otherwise work will never be done; it would be impossible to achieve necessary public ends.[23]

The case is different when you are *not* working. In that instance, it is imperative to reflect upon ideas that you must use in your capacity as an employee. As Kant says, in the public realm, "there can be nothing more dreadful that the actions of one person … placed under the Will of another."[24] So, in a public place you must be able to freely use your power of reasoning. As a scholar, it is your public duty to critically evaluate material that you are teaching as an employed teacher. You must examine it in order to improve not only the school curriculum, for example, but also to advise the ruler on better public laws. *Sapere Aude*! Dare to think! As Kant explains, the "public use of one's reason must always be free" because it is precisely the possibility of questioning reason that "alone can bring about enlightenment among

[14] Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., (1784) 1997), 83-90, pp. 83-4.
[15] See, for example, Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", p. 740.
[16] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 5.
[17] Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Bob-Merrill Educational Publishing, (1784) 1959), 85-92, p. 87.
[18] *Ibid.,* p. 91.
[19] *Ibid*., p. 90.
[20] *Ibid*., pp. 91-2.
[21] *Ibid*., p. 92.
[22] Kant, *The Conflict*, p. 25.
[23] Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" p. 87.
[24] Kant cited in Ladd, "Translator's Introduction", *Metaphysical Elements of Justice* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), xv-liv, p. xxiv.

men."[25] Thus for Kant, the use of public reason is political responsibility of the first order.

And he clearly should know best. Freedom to publish was severely curtailed after the death of Frederick the Great in 1786. The next king, Frederick William II, a religious fanatic, introduced strict censorship aimed especially against the Enlightenment thinkers. One of his targets was Kant. A letter from the biggest adversary of the Enlightenment, the new Prussian censor, Wöllner, written in the name of the Emperor and dated 1 October 1794 was sent to Kant. The letter stated the "great displeasure" concerning Kant's abuse of philosophy to "distort and disparage many of the cardinal and basic teachings of the Holy Scriptures and of Christianity." Wöllner accused Kant of "irresponsibility" in his "duty as a teacher of youth," since Kant's teaching did not take into account the Emperor's "paternal purpose." The letter ends with a warning about possible repercussions if Kant were to fail to observe his "duty."[26]

From the answer given by Kant to the Emperor, we can see that his split between public and private reason was not an empty formula. Kant stresses that in his duty as a "*teacher of youth,*" he never expounded his critical consideration of the "Holy Scripture and of Christianity" to students but always used the "texts of Baumgarten," the standard textbooks for the University lectures.[27] While teaching, he strictly observed the use of private reason. Yet, he argues, scholars should be allowed to publish freely in order "to let the government know, by their writings, everything they consider beneficial to a public religion of the land." This does not mean that "as a *teacher of the people,*" his writings ever "offended against the highest paternal purpose" of the Emperor, for the simple reason that "the book in question [*Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*] is not at all suitable for the public: to them it is an unintelligible, closed book." It is relevant only for "a debate among scholars of the faculty, of which the people take no notice."[28] In the conclusion, he promises the Emperor that he will not publish material on religion "during His Majesty's lifetime".[29] Thus, for the time being, Kant renounces his right to use public reason.

There are a few points of interest here. First there is Kant's strict division between the private use of reason, which he observed as a teacher, and his right to publicly engage in debate with other scholars in order to influence the ruler's perspective on future legislation. We find the same argument as in "What is Enlightenment." Kant believes that *Caesar non est supra grammaticos*."[30] The Emperor knows how to rule but in order to rule justly and wisely he needs to consult thinkers instead of supporting dogmatism in religion. In order to help people attain liberation from "self-imposed tutelage," dogmatism—the ultimate "obstacles to general enlightenment"—must be eradicated.[31]

The next point—seemingly in contradiction to the one just considered, because it positions people against scholars—is Kant's claim that people are unable to participate in the intellectual discourses of scholars. It can be alleged that Kant is an elitist and proposes freedom of thought only to scholars. Yet, this understanding is questionable if we consider Kant's written note:

[25] Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" p. 87.
[26] "Failing this, you must expect unpleasant measures for your continuing obstinacy." Reprinted in his Preface in Kant, *The Conflict*, p. 11.
[27] Reprinted in his Preface in *Ibid.*, p. 13, italics in original.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 15, italics in original.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 19, note.
[30] Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" p. 88.
[31] *Ibid.*

> I am by inclination a seeker after truth. I feel a consuming passion for knowledge and restless thirst to advance in it as well as satisfaction in every accomplishment. There was a time when I believed that this alone brought honor to humanity and I despised the common people who know nothing. Rousseau set me right. The deceptive feeling of superiority vanished. I learned to respect ordinary people and I should consider myself much less useful than a common labourer if I did not believe that this consideration would besides all others give value to establishing the rights of humanity.[32]

As Kant sees it, the appointed guardians of the people must become enlightened first; only then can they influence people to shake off tutelage in order to start using mature reasoning. This is not easy, for even guardians need enlightenment. Moreover, not all of the guardians want to give up dogmatism in their dealings with people. It is easier to use order than to allow discussion thereby encouraging people to think critically. Immaturity is not easy to renounce because freedom frightens guardians as much as people. Yet when allowing free thinking in public debates, freedom "gradually works back upon the character of the people, who thereby stepwise become capable of managing freedom."[33] Every government will benefit if people become mature because it is to the government's "advantage to treat men, who are more than machines, in accordance with their dignity."[34]

Mature and public uses of reason are interdependent. First, the freedom of scholars to reflect on ideas and examine them critically is the domain of the public use of reason; the other is the use of mature reasoning that should be exercised by everybody. Those two sides of a problem is what Kant defines as the Enlightenment.[35] The critique must always be public and based on mature reasoning. But how can we orient ourselves in thinking without guidance from others or from tradition? In his "*Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientiren*?"[36] Kant considers the issue of using concepts "which are not in other respects derived from experience." How can we employ them in the "*experiential world*?"[37] Or how can we think without the help of others? By way of example, Kant reflects on the concept of orientation in three different ways: geographical, mathematical and logical. (1) "I orient myself *geographically*" in the world, "purely by means of a *subjective* distinction." I know that when I am facing the sunrise, in front of me is east, behind me is west and I also know that on my right is south and on my left is north. I am always 'subjectively' interpreting the "objective data in the sky," that is, I can only orient myself geographically relative to my body. Depending on the position of my body, I can say that on *my* right is east, because I am facing north. (2) I can orient myself "in a purely *mathematical* sense" when I am in a particular place.[38] The example Kant gives is a dark room. How can I orient myself if I cannot see? If I wake up in the middle of the night, I can find my way in a room if I use touch and feel my way around. Once again, I orient myself according to my body, my left and my right side and I can estimate distances between different objects as I remember them. (3) Now, if we extend these two spatial experiences to our thinking, we have what Kant calls *logical* orientation. Here we cannot rely on the data in the sky or our room which we can feel as we find our way around. In thinking, we must be "guided, in [our] conviction of truth, by a subjective principle of reason where objective

[32] Kant cited in Ladd, "Introduction", pp. xxiii-xxiv.
[33] Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" pp. 89-90.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 90.

[35] Michel Foucault characterises the Enlightenment as "the mode of reflective relation to the present" (Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" ed. Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32-50, p. 44).
[36] Kant, "Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientiren?" *Berlinische Monatschrift* October 1786, 304-30.
[37] Kant, "What is Orientation in Thinking?" p. 237.
[38] *Ibid*., p. 239, italics in original.

principles of reason are inadequate."[39] We need to orient ourselves according to reflective reasoning considered by Kant in his Third *Critique*. The point is that, in the case of public reasoning, our singularity is at stake. We must pass judgment on the world while there is no general principle, neither 'pure' nor 'objective' to guide us.[40] This is the reason why the reflective use of reason has political significance.[41] Thus, *Sensus Communis* is Kant's answer not only to 'what is orientation in thinking' but also to our particularity.

Sensus Communis

In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant first explains *sensus communis* negatively, by considering what a "crazy disposition" is.[42] After discarding singularities such as "the dandy" and his travelling foolishness, or a mystic who "believes that he is blessed or haunted," Kant says that the "only general characteristic of insanity is the loss of a sense for ideas that are common to all (*sensus communis*)." The one, whose mental disposition is affected, cannot see the world as the rest of us experience it. Consequently, orientation in thinking and therefore communication is impossible. Kant then proceeds to characterise the term positively. *Sensus communis* is a "subjectively necessary touchstone of the correctness of our judgment." Only by comparing "our understanding to the understanding of others," can we check the "soundness of our understanding." There is no possibility of public communication if we use only some kind of private experience, what Kant regards as the merely subjective in the Third *Critique*. As Kant says, by closing "ourselves within our experiences," we can only "make public quasi judgments which are merely based on our own private ideas." Yet Kant is concerned above all with our common world. Any experience divorced from the common way of living is irrelevant (if possible at all). Moreover, if madness means the lack of *sensus communis* thereby preventing communication, so does censorship. For Kant, madness and censorship are similar. If a government arbitrarily bans certain books, the result is a removal of "the greatest and most useful means of correcting our own thoughts." Books and journals assure that we know what others think and we can publicly participate in this intellectual exchange, so as to see whether our thoughts are in agreement "with the understanding of others."[43] Public reasoning depends on maturity of our thinking and *vice versa*.

Mature reasoning is also important in our everyday life. Kant insists that a soldier must follow an officer's command, but an officer, who is in charge of others, must also know why he is issuing a particular command. Here, the use of mature reasoning is absolutely necessary, "because instructions cannot be given for every case that might arise," so, an officer must be able to use her judgment in each particular instance according to circumstances.[44] As Kant explains, "the faculty of discovering the particular for the universal (the rule) is called judgment" and "the faculty of discovering the universal for the particular is called intelligence (*ingenium*)".[45] Rules cannot be given exhaustively, the manual for officers would be unmanageable. Every officer must be able to orient herself in singular instances by considering each particular event and applying judgment to cases not covered by the given rules. Kant gives another example that concerns our moral standing in the world. In the case of a "so-called layman," the use of mature reasoning is

[39] *Ibid*., p. 240, note.
[40] There are two approaches to thinking, one theoretical and the other practical. Kant's First *Critique* deals with theoretical or pure reasoning, while the Second *Critique* considers morality and freedom. The case is different when we consider public reasoning where our singularity is at stake.
[41] See Arendt, *Kant's Political Philosophy*.
[42] Kant, *Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View* (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, (1798) 1996).
[43] § 53, p. 219 [p. 117].
[44] § 43, p. 200 [p. 94].
[45] § 44, p. 201 [p. 96].

especially important. In moral matters "every man must account for all his doings."[46] Following a priest's prescriptions blindly is to refuse not only moral reason but also reasoning maturity. We all must make our own particular moral decisions; we cannot rely on precepts given to us by others.

Maturity of thinking underwrites public reasoning, but is not reducible to it. We need to make decisions and pass judgments all the time. For Kant, in *Anthropology*, maturity means wisdom that "must grow out of a man's own self."[47] Kant affirms that the Enlightenment began the "mightiest revolution coming from inside of man" and he defines mature way of thinking similarly as in "What is Enlightenment:" it is man's "departure from his self-incurred tutelage." Once again, man's rejection of heteronomy, that is "merely imitating or allowing himself to be guided by others," means that "he now dares to proceed, though still shakily, with his own feet upon the ground of experience."[48]

Likewise in *Logic*, after explaining that an "*external* mark or an *external* touchstone of truth is the comparison of our own judgment with those of others, because what is subjective will not dwell in all others alike," Kant insists that only if we compare our thoughts with others can we come to a common understanding. Though we should not discard our judgement straight away, the "*irreconcilability* of the judgments" between my own and that of others should be used as "an external mark of error and to be considered as a hint" that I must inspect my "procedure in judgments, without however immediately discarding it."[49] As Kant says, mature reasoning means examining one's own thoughts, because "one may well be right *in re* and only wrong *in the manner*, i.e., in presentation."[50] Thus, "common understanding (*sensus communis*) in itself is also a touchstone to discover the mistakes of … understanding."[51]

Finally, in his Third *Critique*, for Kant "*common human understanding*, which is merely man's sound ([but] not yet cultivated) understanding, is regarded as the very least that we are entitled to expect from anyone who lays claim to the name of human being."[52] We all, as singular human beings have common sense, "the possession of which involves no merit or superiority whatever." For Kant, then, *sensus communis* simply means that we all share common sense. In community with others we all participate and, at the same time, shape this common sense, which is described by Kant as: "(1) to think for oneself; (2) to think from the standpoint of everyone else; and (3) to think

[46] § 43, p. 200 [pp. 94-5].
[47] "1) Think for yourself; 2) (in communication with other people) Put yourself in the place of the other person; 3) Always think by remaining faithful to your own self" (§ 43, p. 200 [p. 95]). Later in *Anthropology*, he describes "immutable laws of thinking" that guide "the class of thinkers," explaining them as: 1) think independently; 2) (in communication with people) put yourself in thought into the place of the other person; 3) always think in harmony with your own self" (§ 59, pp. 228-9 [p. 128]). Here we have a tension between common understanding, which for Kant "lays claim neither to intelligence nor to acuteness, both furnish a kind of luxury of mind, whereas common, sound understanding limits itself to what is truly needed," and intellectual pursuits of a special class, i.e., thinkers (§ 44, p. 201 [p. 96]). This Kantian oscillation between ascribing mature reasoning to a thinker or to an ordinary person on the street is evident in many passages in *Anthropology*. Here, it seems, the thinker is privileged.
[48] § 59, p. 229 [p. 129].

[49] Kant, *Logic* (New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1988), Introduction, section VII, pp. 62-3, italics in original.
[50] *Ibid.*, Introduction, section VII, p. 63, italics in original.
[51] *Ibid.*, Introduction, section VII, p. 63. Kant returns again to his consideration about how we can orient ourselves in thinking "when *common* understanding is used as a test of judging the correctness of the speculative one." For Kant, "the maxim of thinking for myself may be called the *enlightened* maxim; the maxim of putting oneself into others' viewpoints, the *broadened* maxim; the maxim of always thinking in harmony with oneself, the *consistent* or *conclusive manner of thought*" (Kant, *Logic*, Introduction, section VII, p. 63, italics in original).
[52] Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, (1790) 1987).

always consistently."[53] Thus considering the political space, the Kantian idea of *sensus communis* is important. According to the Kantian theory, we must think independently (think for oneself) as well as mentally adopt others' standpoints when we come to consider public matters (enlarged mentality) and we must always stand by our judgment (think consistently).

It is worth noting here, that for Arendt, Kant's stress on the concept of non-contradiction is not *sensus communis logicus*,[54] but a requirement for always to think "in harmony with oneself," which Kant calls the "*consistent* or *conclusive manner of thought.*"[55] Arendt uses an example of Socrates to make her point by recounting Platonic dialogues. Speaking to the politician Cratylus, Socrates muses on Cratylus's way of living. As Socrates says, in the Assembly, when the Athenian *demos* do not agree with Cratylus, it is not a problem for Cratylus to change his stand any time and alter his opinions according to people's wishes. He behaves similarly when he is with his lover. Socrates is fascinated that it does not bother him that, at times, his pronouncements contradict each other because he is accommodating those around him instead of being consistent in his own beliefs. By contrast, as Socrates says, my views are consistent. If necessary, I rather be "out of tune and dissonant" with a chorus that I might lead than to be "out of harmony with myself" by contradicting what I believe.[56] His explanation to Hippias is similar. As Socrates admits, when he comes home, whatever he says in public is always scrutinised by the 'strange fellow' who lives with him, in other words, himself. In order to live in peace with himself, it is easier to be consistent and question every claim made. So, when the time comes and Socrates is in the silent dialogue with himself, which Arendt calls thinking, there is no inconsistency between Socrates's beliefs and his public pronouncements.[57]

Arendt calls this way of thinking to think without banisters. For her, who had to flee from Nazi Germany, the question is why so many people unquestioningly accepted Hitler's government. Why they did not oppose him? Why did they turn against the basic moral maxims and accepted murderous Nazi government, thereby revealing "the original meaning of the word [morality], as a set of *mores,* customs, and manners, which could be exchanged for another set with hardly more trouble than it would take to change the table manners of an individual or a people."[58] How can one explain that seamless shift from the belief 'love thy neighbour' to the tacit approval of the Nuremberg's laws, which reduced Jews to the status of non-citizens in Nazi Germany and opened the road to Auschwitz? Her answer is thoughtlessness, forgetting the maxim of enlarged mentality and the violation of the law of non-contradiction. Not as a logical contradiction, which of course it is also, but as a glaring contradiction at the heart of one's value system when it changed from one day to the next. *Sensus communis*, that

[53] "The first is the maxim of an *unprejudiced*, the second of a *broadened*, and the third of a *consistent* way of thinking." And he explains further, "The first is the maxim of a reason that is never *passive*. A propensity to a passive reason, and hence to a heteronomy of reason, is called *prejudice*; and the greatest prejudice of all is *superstition*, which consists in thinking nature as not subject to rules which the understanding through its own essential law lays down as the basis of nature. Liberation from superstition is called *enlightenment*" (§ 40, italics in original).
[54] As Drucilla Cornell charges in her article. See Cornell, "Critical Response I: Enlightening the Enlightenment: A Response to John Brenkman", *Critical Inquiry* Autumn 1999, 128-40.
[55] Kant, *Logic*, Introduction, section VII, p. 63, italics in original.

[56] Plato, "Gorgias", ed. Cooper, *Complete Works* (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 792-869, 481c-2c.
[57] Plato, "Greater Hippias", ed. Cooper, *Complete Works* (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 898-921, 304b-e. See also Arendt, "The Two-In-One", ed. McCarthy, *The Life of the Mind. One/Thinking* (San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1978), 179-93.
[58] Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", p. 740.

"subjectively necessary touchstone of the correctness of our judgment"[59] was silenced by the loud voice of the official propaganda which always addresses us in our singularity, targeting our private fears and vulnerabilities forcing us to accept a new tutelage. As Arendt argues, the concept of sociability is the Kantian presupposition of our human "faculty of judgment."[60] Only in community with others, can we learn about others' opinions and discuss the issues from different points of view, thereby rejecting dogmatism and tutelage.

Conclusion

> I have been seeking to stress that the thread that may connect us with the Enlightenment is not faithfulness to doctrinal elements, but rather the permanent reactivation of an attitude—that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.[61]

In conclusion, I want to come back to the beginning. How are Kant's notions of mature thinking and the public use of reason important to consideration of freedom? Could not the antiwar protests on the global scale be seen as undermining my argument? It seems that we *have* space to express our thoughts freely in backchat radio programs, on the newspaper pages in a section "Letters to the Editor" or on the Internet. Surely, this is the case of free public reasoning, thinking without banisters or heteronomous guidance. After all, *The New York Times* announced that after the end of the Cold War, there are still two powers in our world: the American military might and public opinion. A few disturbing examples might suffice to express my doubt while considering this rosy picture of free public mature thinking. Despite some reservations expressed marginally on the pages to the editor, the overall sentiment of Australian citizens, measured by the vote in 2001 election, did not question the accusations levelled against mothers throwing their children overboard in order to 'blackmail' the Australian government.[62] Against the common sense that assumes the protective nature of motherhood, this new sentiment of the immigration threat to our way of life prevailed. The management of the Howard government adopted the so-called 'Pacific solution'. The notion of human rights became irrelevant. Another issue, perhaps, is the war with Iraq. Despite protests, the Howard government supported Bush's pre-emptive strike. An extension of this war on terror is the silent erasure of our basis human rights. One of them, no doubt, the right to free public reason. This is justified by the mantra of securing our freedoms. I suppose freedom from fear. So, in order to be free from fear, we give up all our freedoms. There is no open public debate. So, the question is: how can we define a public space in the age of proliferation of many sites where citizens can express their opinions? Where is that space where they can *compare* their thoughts with others? Where is a space where scholars debate their understanding of what constitutes a good government? Luc Ferry argues that in our consumer society, the idea of a common good becomes obsolete.[63] To be free means by and large to have freedom to buy whatever we want by striving after our singular happiness that can be fulfilled by different goods we acquire on the market. The Kantian moral universe, where happiness cannot be the highest good because it is by definition singular for each of us, becomes irrelevant. If this is so, the challenge is to think of the public space *not* as a site of singular expression for a singular person. That is Kant's definition of madness, which is always defined by singularity and by "the loss

[59] Kant, *Anthropology*.
[60] Arendt, *Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 14.
[61] Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" p. 42.

[62] See "truthoverboard: lies, damned lies, and politics", (2002). See also Parliament of Australia, "A Certain Maritime Incident", (7 May 2003).
[63] See Ferry, *Man Made God. The Meaning of Life* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

of a sense for ideas that are common to all."[64] It is incompatible with our common way of life. We need to think anew how we can encourage the ability to think for oneself, while comparing our thoughts with others in a consistent way by using *sensus communis* as that common ground and touchstone for us to find out the mistakes of understanding.[65]

Thomas Hobbes's observation might help. Before his death in 1679, he wrote that preachers, monks and the powerful have no interest to teach people what is useful or harmful to them. Rather, what is in their interest is to emphasise "whom" people should "believe."[66] In the Kantian words, some guardians prefer to enforce heteronomy in the public domain by *discouraging* people to think for themselves. As Stephen Holmes explains, the "ultimate source of political authority is not coercion of the body, but captivation of the mind."[67] This trend is reinforced by the media and by the present political rhetoric that is design to persuade people to unquestioningly subscribe to the justification given by the 'leader,' even though, as Hobbes also says, "the power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people."[68] The crumbling of the so-called Real-Socialist countries in 1989 is a vivid example of the false belief in the omnipotence of the government. The moment the people realise that the power of the administration depends on them, the king will be seen for what it is—having no clothes. In other words, if people were encouraged to think for themselves, they would be less likely to unthinkingly adopt the rhetoric of the powerful. For Foucault, "one must refuse everything that might present itself in the form of a simplistic and authoritarian alternative, in the form of 'either/or.'[69] As Kant stressed throughout his writings, to think for oneself is paramount to rejecting heteronomy. After 11 September 2001, when Bush called for support in his war on terror, the option given was simple: either you are with us or you are against us. An 'all or nothing' choice. The enlarged mentality of Kant's *sensus communis* is sadly missing in this kind of politics.

[64] Kant, *Anthropology*.
[65] Kant, *Logic*, Introduction, section VII, p. 63. For a different reading of the "modification of the codes of communication," see Badiou, *Ethics. An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London, New York: Verso, 2001), p. 70.
[66] Hobbes, *Behemoth or The Long Parliament* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, (1682) 1990), p. 16.
[67] Holmes, "Introduction", *Behemoth or The Long Parliament* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), vii-l, p. xi.
[68] Hobbes, *Behemoth*, p. 16.
[69] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment", ed. Rabinow, *Ethics. Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 303-19, p. 313.

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