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Title:

Ethical and Political Constellations: Fichte, Schlegel and Hegel on Kantian Peace¹

Abstract:

The reception of the Kantian essay on Perpetual Peace by Fichte, Schlegel and Hegel gives rise to a contrastive constellation of ethical, juridical and political ideas revolving around the idea of freedom, and the relationship between rights and duties within a constitutional State. In his review of the Kantian essay, Fichte (1796, Werke I, 3: 221-228; SW 08: 427-436) emphasizes the rational foundation of Kant's *Hauptidee*, thus endorsing also the metaphysical status of the historical process through which Republican Constitutions are generated; for the progressive fulfillment of peace would testify both to the rational essence of Right and to the unfolding of the inexorable ends of Nature. The imperative of peace reveals the "supreme question of right" which concerns the purely rational condition of possibility of a community of free beings, i.e., the very possibility of humanity-as-community, encompassing necessarily the law of coexistence or compatibility of all possible free beings that relies on the reciprocal capacity of free self-limitation of freedom. Such capacity belongs to the people alone, and therefore it entails also the capacity to judge, without rebellion, how rightfully freedom is realized; hence, the proposition of creating a new institution, the *Ephorat*. In a nutshell, according to Fichte, peace and right are one and the same process of self-ordering freedom. Unsurprisingly enough, F. Schlegel accepts the equation that conjoins freedom and republicanism, and draws the logical conclusion that the true definitive article of perpetual peace would be the practically necessary political imperative of "universal and perfect republicanism" (1796, *Versuch über den Begriff des Republikanismus*, in Ausgabe 07: 11-25). Grounded in "primordial freedom," source of individuality and independence, the Hegelian idea of State cannot surrender any degree of internal and external sovereignty. Consequently, the actualization of the individuality of the State implies negation, and thereby requires the continuous creation of the enemy and the continuous readiness to wage war against the enemy. Only the dialectical power of war does avoid vegetative and feminine stagnation, and by the same token it guarantees the protection and development of the State's individuality. Peace must always be overcome by the "ethical moment" of war in which patriotic courage signifies a "universal duty" and a "formal virtue" consisting of self-sacrifice and self-abandonment or self-alignment with the universal (*Grundlinien der PR*, §§. 259, 324-327).

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