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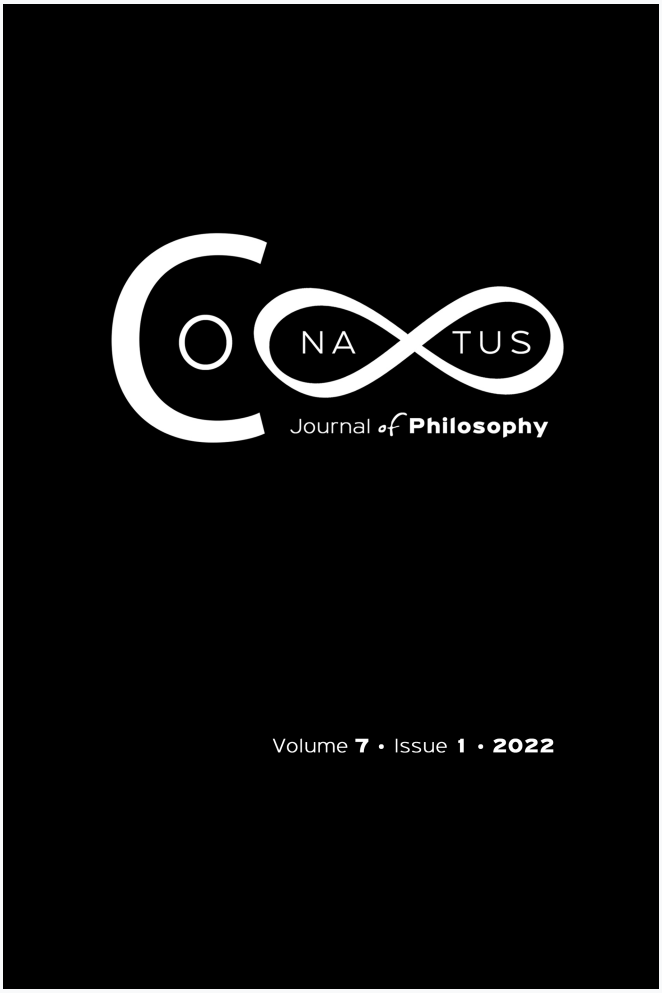

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'Enthusiasm' in Burke's and Kant's Response to the French Revolution

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Abstract

The article sets the most eminent defender of the French Revolution, Immanuel Kant, against its most eminent critic, Edmund Burke, articulating their radically different stance toward the French Revolution. Specifically, this juxtaposition is attempted through the concept of enthusiasm; a psychological state of intense excitement, which can refer to both actors and spectators, to both the motivation of someone, acquiring thus a practical significance, or to their distanced contemplation, thereby acquiring the character of aesthetic appreciation. Using the concept of enthusiasm, I aspire to bring out Kant's and Burke's radically different approaches to society as well as its history and prospects of progress, ultimately suggesting that enthusiasm can provide a vantage point for the dialogue between the enlightenment and counter-enlightenment theses.

Keywords: *Edmund Burke; Immanuel Kant; enthusiasm; sublime; French Revolution*

I. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to pose the most eminent defender of the French Revolution against its most eminent critic; to set Immanuel Kant against Edmund Burke and follow their radically different stance toward the French Revolution. Specifically, this juxtaposition is carried out through the concept of enthusiasm, which, I contend, can provide us with a vantage point for the dialogue between the enlightenment and counter-enlightenment theses on political society, its history, and prospects of progress and prosperity.

Enthusiasm is a concept that was born in ancient Greece to describe a psychological state of intense excitement accompanied by reduced awareness; a state caused by a sort of divine possession. It was applied par excellence to priests and oracles, who thus acquired a prophetic ability, or, alternatively, to the initiates of religious rites, who were carried to a state of ecstatic trance.[1] Needless to say, the concept of enthusiasm was also applied to artistic creation, referring to what we today call inspiration. Plato's *Ion* is the first extended and systematic treatment of this subject. In this article, however, I am interested in the use of the concept in a political context, in which, it is important to note, enthusiasm is applicable to both the actors and spectators of the political events, hence, to both the motivation of someone, acquiring thus a practical significance, or to a distanced contemplation, acquiring the character of aesthetic judgement.

Odd as it may seem for the father of critical philosophy, Kant's appropriation of the concept is positive and used to vindicate the French Revolution and articulate his optimism about the future of humankind. Burke's appropriation of the concept is negative and used to condemn it and express his pessimism about the prospects of the western civilization cut off (owing to enthusiasm) from its tradition. Kant's relevant references are found in *The Conflict of the Faculties* and, more specifically, in *The Conflict of the Philosophy Faculty with the Faculty of Law*, while Burke's references are found in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and the *Letters on a Regicide Peace*.

II. Burke's confrontation with the revolutionary enthusiasm

Let us start then from Burke's major work, the manifesto of counter-revolution and, in effect, of counter-enlightenment, the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Of course, enthusiasm is not characteristic of Burke's sentiments toward the Revolution, although, until then, he had made a political career as a reformer on the side of the Whigs and was distinguished as a defender of the oppressed (Americans, Indians, and Irish); however, in his early works, he uses enthusiasm in a positive sense.[2] Enthusiasm in the *Reflections* refers to both the spectators and the actors of the French Revolution and is used negatively, as a form of fanaticism. It is thus addressed as a censure and, initially, finds its target in the person of Dr. Price, a nonconformist preacher and political pamphleteer, active in radical, republican, and liberal causes. Price belonged to English radical dissenters, who also came to be known

[1] Aristotle, *Politics* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1932), 1341b32-1342a15.

[2] Ross Carrol, "Revisiting Burke's Critique of Enthusiasm," *History of Political Thought* 35, no. 2 (2014): 317-344.

as rational dissenters.[3] As to the actors, Burke does not refer to the sans-culottes but to the men of letters, the philosophers.

A great part then of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* takes place during the sermon entitled *On the Love of our Country* that Price delivered to the Revolution Society in celebration of the 101st anniversary of William of Orange coming to the English throne. The sermon's subject was apparently patriotism, the love of one's country, but Price managed to turn it into a lecture against nationalism and war and a vindication of the French Revolution. In essence, with this sermon Price attempted a decisive stroke at regal authority and revitalized a radical interpretation of the Glorious Revolution[4] based on three fundamental rights that he placed at its foundations.

> First; The right to liberty of conscience in religious matters. Secondly; the right to resist power when abused. Thirdly; The right to choose our own governors; to cashier them for misconduct; and to frame a government for ourselves.[5]

In this context, the sermon was obviously planned to push English society to radical reformations on both the civic and the ecclesiastical level (in England there was a church establishment, thus the two levels were de facto closely associated) and according to the paradigm of the French. For Price, the French Revolution was the fulfilment of a millennialist belief that a great change was going to transform humanity[6] and seemed to complete the unfinished work of the Glorious one.[7]

One of Burke's major concerns in responding to Price's sermon was to refute his interpretation of the Glorious Revolution. The idea, that is, that it

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[3] Knud Haakonssen, E*nlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[4] Pocock maintains that Price's interpretation was not the predominant during the Revolution and thereafter, although the minority included an authority such as that of John Locke. See J. G. A. Pocock, "Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture: vol. 3,* eds. François Furet, and Mona Ozouf (Oxford: Pergamon, 1989), 23. Regarding Locke's position, see Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986). For a different approach, suggesting that "it was not Price's interpretation of 1688 that was really innovative, but Burke's," see F. P. Lock, *Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France*, (Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), 70.

[5] Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (London: T. Cadell, 1789), 34.

[6] See the way Price's *Discourse* culminates with the enthusiastic representation of the October March, the storming of the Versailles, and the leading of the royal family to Paris in a state of substantial captivity. Ibid., 49.

[7] The *Toleration Act* of 1689 excluded Dissenters from crown service and membership in corporations. See Price's relevant reference. Ibid., 35-39.

was based on – and in fact legitimized – a social contract between the people and its government founded on the above-mentioned rights; a principle of popular sovereignty, in effect, that made the king and the entire constitution dependent upon the will of the people. Burke's argumentation is based on extended quotations from the documents of the period of the Revolution; documents written by eminent jurists and Whig politicians of that era, such as Lord Selborn. If Price's language then is that of modern political philosophy, based on modern natural law, Burke's is that of the English common law, it is the language of the "ancient constitution"[8] and, in fact, of the traditional natural law.[9] It is in this context that Burke unfolds his famous traditionalism, putting in the place of natural rights, inherited ones (in effect, inherited privileges) and transforming political society into an organism, which is not and cannot be made at (human) will. It evolves instead gradually through the centuries, accumulating, in fact crystalizing in its institutions, experience and wisdom that no individual alone or a single generation could possibly possess. According to Burke then, during the Glorious Revolution there was no dissolution of Government and the power never reversed to the people to build at will a new government, as Price claimed.[10] All was cautiously done with reference to the past and to precedent, the constitution remained intact, maintaining its old orders and their privileges. Piecemeal and careful reformation was preferred to radical revolution as the sure means to progress and a safeguard against revolutionary chaos.

Having dissociated the Glorious Revolution from the French one, Burke proceeds to connect the latter to a different revolution in English history, in fact to a radical rift in this history, the Puritan Revolution. In this era, Burke discovers a predecessor of Dr. Price in the person of Hugh Peters, a preacher, political advisor, and soldier, who supported the Parliamentary cause during the English Civil War. There are indeed some striking similarities in the two cases and a notable prophetic dimension in the parallel drawn by Burke. Peters had ridden at the head of the force bringing Charles I to London as prisoner

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[8] The concept of the "ancient constitution" emerges in the context of a 17th political theory developed by jurists and, more particularly, by the barrister, judge, and politician Sir Edward Coke. It is a political theory related to the character of English Common Law. It was used at the time to oppose the royal prerogative. See J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (2nd ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and J. G. A. Pocock, "Burke and the Ancient Constitution: A Problem in the History of Ideas," *The Historical Journal* 3, no. 2 (1960): 125-143.

[9] See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), and Panagiōtēs Kondylēs, *Konservativismus: Geschichtlicher Gehalt und Untergang* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986), II, 63-181.

[10] Pocock, "Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm," 23.

and was one of the protagonists in his execution. Price's sermon, on the other hand, culminates with a reference to the October events and with an enthusiastic welcome of the leading of Louis XVI from Versailles to Paris in virtual captivity. This gives Burke the occasion for a quite lengthy reference to these events, which culminates with the famous encomium of Marie Antoinette and the lament for the decay of western civilization, founded, as Burke sees it, in the ethos of chivalry and religion. In this passage, Burke ironically notices that the only thing missing to Price's full satisfaction was the actual murder of the king.[11] His execution, as is well known, was indeed quick to follow.

What virtually unites the two preachers in Burke's eyes is the fervent rhetoric in favor of radical political action, dressed in the garment of pious devotion; religious enthusiasm, that is, applied to radical politics. The parallelism between the two preachers allows Burke to treat enthusiasm as a socially disruptive fanaticism and, in fact, to suggest a close relation between religious fanaticism and political radicalism. Our preachers are presented talking as under the spell of a divine revelation, but their talk is for political emancipation: "What an eventful period is this!" Price declares in his enthusiastic encomium of the October events, "I am thankful that I have lived to it; and I could almost say, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."[12] Therefore, by connecting political radicalism to religious fanaticism and the blot of the Puritan Revolution, Burke deals a major blow to the former in the eyes of his readers.

Burke's "play" with the odious religious fanaticism, however, takes a quite intriguing turn thanks to Price's special religious beliefs. Price was not a dogmatic puritan, as Hugh Peters; his religious credo was rather at the other end of the line. He endorsed a Unitarian theology, a non-incarnationist, dissenting theology, which placed its emphasis on the ultimate role of reason in interpreting scriptures. For the Unitarians, Pocock writes, "religion came to be identified with enquiry and with reason search after beliefs in which it could be satisfied."[13] Freedom of conscience and freedom of the pulpit were core values to this religious creed. This did not prevent the Unitarians from exhibiting enthusiastic behavior, thinking that the spirit of god was present and active in the congregations of the dissenting groups of this profession.

Burke was well aware of this rationalist character of the Unitarian faith and a great part of his attack on Price regards this aspect of his sermon. Referring to a novelty in Price's rhetoric, in comparison with that of his

[11] Edmund Burke, *Select Works of Edmund Burke* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), 2:98.

[12] Price, *Discourse,* 49.

[13] Pocock, "Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm," 24.

predecessor, Burke recasts Price's encouragement to dissent in the following way:

> If the noble seekers should find nothing to satisfy their pious fancies in the old staple of the national church, or in all the rich variety to be found in the well assorted warehouses of the dissenting congregations, Dr. Price advises them to improve upon non conformity; and to set up, each of them, a separate meeting house upon his particular principles. It is somehow remarkable that this reverend divine should be so earnest for setting up new churches and so perfectly indifferent concerning their content.[14]

This indifference for the content of religious beliefs led Pocock[15] to parallel the Unitarian faith with Rousseauist "transparence." Pocock, more particularly, argued that during the English interregnum it was this attitude that was characterized by the established church as enthusiasm.[16] The supremacy of reason in religion, of course, as we already show, was readily applicable to politics and resulted in a radical critique of the civil arrangements, as the dissenting congregation aspired to a separation of church and state that would give them full civil rights.

In this context, Burke reinterprets Price's call to dissent as indifference to religion, connecting it thus to the events in France and what he took to be a prevailing current of atheism (to which he included deism).[17] The shift is quite noteworthy; what in fact seems to bother Burke in Price's sermon is not religious enthusiasm, but religious indifference. This attitude goes by the name of enthusiasm and acquires an essentially political character. Allying itself with the atheists across the channel, religious indifference cooperates in the persecution of religion itself.[18] Burke writes:

> For my part, I looked on that sermon as the public declaration of a man much connected with literary caballers and intriguing philosophers; with political theologians and theological

[14] Ibid.

[15] Unitarians, Pocock writes, "cared nothing for doctrine and everything for sincerity, everything for openness of belief and nothing for its content." Ibid., 25.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Burke refers to the so-called "free thinkers" of England, Colins, Toland, Tindal, and Chubb, as to the English atheists; see Burke, *Select Works,* 2: 184-185.

[18] Carrol has argued that Burke linked religious indifference with prosecution not only in the case of French Revolution, but with regard to the protestant ascendancy in Ireland too and the prosecution of the catholic natives. See Carrol, "Revisiting Burke's Critique of Enthusiasm," 317-344.

> politicians, both at home and abroad. I know they set him up as a sort of oracle; because, with the best intention in the world, he naturally philippizes, and chaunts his prophetic song in exact unison with their designs.[19]

In this way, Burke has prepared the ground for leaving the debate on the character of the Glorious Revolutions that occupies the first part of the *Reflections*, and passing to the criticism of the proceedings in France and the steps taken by the National Assembly. The concept of enthusiasm gets in this context completely disentangled from the religious and political conflicts of England's past and present and comes to be applied to the actors behind the French Revolution. We leave the enthusiastic dissenting preachers and pass to the atheists of France who represent a new type of enthusiast as the concept gets totally secularized (although we have already observed that what Burke castigated in Price and led to the comparison with Peters was already political and not religious fanaticism). The atheists of France are the literary men in the quotation cited above, the men with whom Price was presented conspiring, the "philosophes." Burke thinks that these people, related to the two academies of France or active in the vast project of the encyclopedia, "had some years ago formed something like a regular plan for the destruction of the Christian religion."[20] It is in them that he sees the main actuating spirit behind the proceedings in France.[21]

We have then what Horace Walpole called the first instance of "enthusiasm without religion."[22] An enthusiasm, that is, that does not describe any more the fantasy "of an illumination from the spirit of God,"[23] of a special communion with God, but a state of an absolute self-assertion of reason; of abstract reason, the theoretical constructions of which warm human imagination and take possession of a person. In his second *Letter on a Regicide Peace*, Burke would state directly that religious opinions are not the exclusive object of enthusiasm. He writes:

> There is no doctrine whatever, on which men can warm, that is not capable of the very same effect. The social nature of

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[19] Burke, *Select Works*, 2: 97.

[20] Ibid., 209.

[21] Burke identified two groups of men who cooperated to bring about the French Revolution and considered them responsible for the special course it took. These groups are the moneyed interests created by the national debt of France, a group that envied the nobility and hit at them, and the literary men, to which we refer.

[22] Cited in Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 84.

[23] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Penguin Books, 1997), 616.

> man impels him to propagate his principles, as much as physical impulses urge him to propagate his kind. The passion gives zeal and vehemence, the understanding bestows design and system. The whole man moves under the discipline of his opinions.[24]

What remains from religious enthusiasm is its fanaticism and dogmatism. "These atheistical fathers," Burke notes, "have a bigotry of their own; and they have learnt to talk against monks with the spirit of a monk."[25] It is, however, remarkable that this is not only an enthusiasm without religion, but also an enthusiasm that is turning against religion, and does it with a persecutory spirit far more systematic and violent than the one that characterized religious enthusiasm. The philosophers, he argues, pursued their plan of destroying religion with

> a degree of zeal, which hitherto had only been discovered only in the propagators of some system of piety. They were possessed with a spirit of proselytism in the most fanatical degree.[26]

In the case of the revolutionaries, then, we have in fact a pathological psychological state where the intellect takes absolute ascendance and ends up repressing human nature and hardening man's sensitivities, moral instincts, and sentiments. This is no more a temporal pathological condition that will quickly exhaust itself, "like the thunder and tempest,"[27] as it was the case with religious fanaticism. Burke writes:

> This sort of people, are so taken up with their theories about the rights of man, that they have totally forgotten his nature. Without opening one new avenue to understanding, they have succeeded in stopping up those that lead to the heart. They have perverted in themselves and in those that attend them, all the well-placed sympathies of the human breast.[28]

Then, commenting on the attack on religion, he writes that "man is by constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against not only our reason

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[24] Burke, *Select Works*, 3: 170.

[25] Ibid., 209-210.

[26] Ibid., 209.

[27] David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (Carmel, Liberty Fund: 1985), 76-77.

[28] Burke, *Select Works*, 2:157.

but our instincts."[29] The result of the corruption of the human constitution is violence and crime.

III. Kant's interest in the enthusiasm concerning the French Revolution

Passing to Kant, we come across a completely different assessment of the French Revolution and its heritage as well as a positive assessment of enthusiasm, far from its entanglement with fanaticism and religion as found in Burke.

The subtitle of the text we are interested in, which was in fact the main title in Kant's first attempt to publish the text,[30] is more eloquent than the main title. The well-known subtitle is: "An old question raised again: Is the human race constantly progressing?" The question is an "old" one since Kant had discussed relevant issues in his essay "On the Common Saying: That may be Correct in Theory, but it is of no Use in Practice" (1793), where he had treated the subject of a rational and enlightened polity and the course of international law. As to the progress referred to, Kant is interested in moral progress, and this again as it is applied to the human race as a whole, to the human race in its social capacity, organized in societies.

The question of progress is reducible to the question whether there is a way to foretell the future; whether "a history a priori is possible."[31] Thus, we come in a way to the discourse of enthusiasm, although for Kant the supernatural intervention forms no more a choice for predicting the future. Besides, according to him, a combination of circumstances makes such a divinatory historical narrative impossible. The first is that human actions are essentially free and the second that man forms an indefinite amalgam of evil and good, which does not allow us to predict which disposition will prevail at every historical junction. Thus, while man ought to strive to accomplish the kingdom of ends, the moral society, it is very questionable whether he will choose to move to that direction. In fact, only god – someone, that is, for whom future and present are the same – knows if he will.

However, although no reasonable prediction can be given, and no supernatural aid can be expected, Kant attempts a "philosophic prophecy" based on a certain occurrence that, according to him, provides a hint for the future progress of humankind. An occurrence that allows him in fact to be optimistic about it, because it testifies a disposition in human nature that, given

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[29] Ibid., 186.

[30] The text was initially meant for publication in the journal *Berliner Blatter*, but it went through censorship and was rejected for publication.

[31] Immanuel Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties," in *Religion and Rational Theology*, eds. Allen W. Wood, and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4:80.

the right circumstances, could drive man to furnish himself a more rational society and a more representative constitution. That the right circumstances will be eventually realized is a thing that can be predicted, although we cannot tell when this will happen and when progress will actually be obtained, as a result. In fact, if this occurrence is indeed found, it may work as a hint for the past too, for a progress already accomplished and can work as an "historical sign" for the general progressive tendency of the human race.

The occurrence to which Kant refers is of course actually there, and it is no other than the French Revolution. In it Kant sees a potential progress toward a republican constitution, an evolution that is of the constitution "in accordance with natural right."[32] Kant's praise of the French Revolution, however, is not unqualified; indeed, many scholars charge him with inconsistency.[33] Revolution, Kant argues, "is always unjust,"[34] because it makes use of immoral means. Regarding the French Revolution, in particular, he noted that it was filled with

> misery and atrocities to a point that a right thinking being, were he boldly to hope to execute it successfully the second time, would never resolve to make the experiment at such cost.[35]

Being an avowed opponent of the use of violence to bring political change and insisting that no violence should be used, or even threatened, against anyone and especially against the person of the king,[36] Kant indeed must have found the October events as repugnant as they were to Burke. Besides, although he acknowledged that people had inalienable rights, which the king should respect, it is certain that he would condemn Price's list of fundamental rights. For Kant, the protection of these rights lied in the power of publicity and speech and not in any procedure of cashiering the governors for misconduct. This would drive to war, the source of every evil for him, and to anarchy. Although a stout defender of republicanism, he was ready to

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[32] Ibid., 7:88.

[33] See H. S. Reiss, "Kant and the Right of Rebellion," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, no. 2 (1956): 179-192, and Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5.

[34] Kant, "The Conflict," 7:87. See also the *Metaphysics of Morals*: "...there is no right of sedition, much less a right of revolution..." Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals,* trans. John Ladd (Indianapolis: Bobbs- Merrill, 1965), 49:320.

[35] Kant, "The Conflict," 7:85.

[36] "... and least of all a right to lay hands on or take the life of the chief of state when he is an individual person ..." Kant, *The Metaphysics,* 49:320. For an analytic presentation of the evils of a Revolution, see Sidney Axinn, "Kant, Authority, and the French Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, no. 3 (1971): 423-432.

accept a republican constitution "only in its manner of governing" and not necessarily "in its political form."[37] In fact, he distinguished the republican form of government, respecting the laws of the realm and the liberty of the people, from the democratic one, which would presuppose the actual consent of the people in the process of decision-making. In this context, Kant would also reject Price's claim that governments that are not elective are not legitimate and that the people have a right to replace them. To sum up, although Kant approved the end of the Revolution, he rejected the means chosen for it, because they were immoral and subversive of peace.

It is obvious then that Kant's optimism regarding the future progress of humankind did not lie on the actual incidents of the revolution and the actions of its agents; however, neither did it lie on its ends taken abstractly. His optimism was based on the reaction of its spectators, their avowed sympathy for the Revolution, and their siding with one of the two contestants. Kant writes:

> It is simply, the mode of thinking of the spectators, which reveals itself publicly in this game of great revolutions, and manifests such a universal yet disinterested sympathy for the players on the one side against those on the other.[38]

The concept of enthusiasm comes to enhance this sympathy with a strong passion and is found after a few lines. Indeed, it is introduced in a rather hesitant way. Kant writes:

> This Revolution, finds in the hearts of the spectators (who are not engaged in the game themselves) a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm, the very expression of which is fraught with danger; this sympathy therefore can have no other cause than a moral predisposition in the human race.[39]

Thus, the occurrence to which Kant is referring from the start is not the Revolution itself, but rather its welcome by its uninvolved spectators. The two characteristics that Kant attributes to the judgement of the spectators concerning the Revolution, universality and disinterestedness (two of the basic characteristics of the aesthetic judgements in their contrast to the practical

[37] Kant, "The Conflict," 7:88.

[38] Ibid., 7:85.

[39] Ibid.

and cognitive ones),[40] are those that make it the proper historical sign for man's tendency to progress. The first, Kant argues, allows us to think that the mode of thinking exhibited is not accidental but demonstrates a character of the human race; the second, its disinterestedness, shows this character to be a moral one, at least in its predisposition, as Kant adds.

As to the content of the approbation, Kant's answer is twofold, referring, on the one hand, to a right asserted and, on the other, to an end approximated. Both of them form, for Kant, a moral cause. He writes:

> This moral cause, exerting itself is twofold: first, that of the right, that a nation must not be hindered in providing itself with a civil constitution, which appears good to the people themselves; and second that of the end ... that the same national constitution alone be just and morally good in itself, created in such a way as to avoid ... principles permitting offensive war.[41]

Furthermore, specifying the object of enthusiasm, which however he qualifies as a "genuine" one, Kant notes that it "always moves only to what is ideal and, indeed, to what is purely moral such as the concept of right"[42] and is considered completely distinct from self-interest. The reference to a "genuine enthusiasm" disentangles the concept from fanaticism with which it was commonly connected – as in Burke's *Reflections* – and, in fact, brings Kant in a line of thought inaugurated by Plato and revitalized by Shaftesbury in modernity. Plato gave originally enthusiasm an ideal moral object[43] and Shaftesbury made enthusiasm an aesthetic response and, in this context, connected it to disinterestedness.[44]

Shaftesbury anticipates Kant in another respect too, because not only did he attribute aesthetic character to enthusiasm, but he also connected it to the aesthetic quality of the sublime.[45] This is what Kant does too in

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[40] For Kant's aesthetic theory, see Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[41] Kant, "The Conflict," 7:86.

[42] Ibid.

[43] I am referring mostly to *Phaedrus* and the distinction between the different kinds of madness, with the madness of love being supreme. The object of this madness is the idea of beauty.

[44] Shaftesbury condemns enthusiasm as religious fanaticism in his *Letter on Enthusiasm,* but introduces a benign enthusiasm, which is related to disinterestedness. The more systematic treatment of the concept is to be found in the *Moralists*. In this text we also find an understanding of enthusiasm in aesthetic terms, which takes special importance with regard to the text we are discussing and Kant's use of the concept.

[45] The first who made the connection between enthusiasm and the sublime was of course Longinus. However, Longinus' sublime was not aesthetic but rhetoric. Listing the five causes

the third *Critique* relating enthusiasm to moral ideas.[46] "If the idea of the good," Kant writes (in words very much like those of the "Old Question"), "is accompanied by affect, this is called enthusiasm." The fact that we have a sentiment related to an idea of reason – the idea of good – brings already enthusiasm under the jurisdiction of the sublime (beauty is related to the pure concepts of understanding), Kant, however, explicitly states that enthusiasm is "sublime aesthetically," and his justification is that

> it is straining our forces by ideas that impart to the mind a momentum whose effects are mightier and more permanent than are those of an impulse produced by presentations of sense.[47]

It is interesting to note that this sublime character is also what distinguishes enthusiasm from fanaticism, because while the former is deemed sublime, the latter, which is "the delusion of wanting to see beyond the bounds of sensibility,"[48] is characterized as ridiculous.[49]

Having introduced the concept of "genuine enthusiasm," and rather unexpectedly, Kant leaves for a moment the aesthetic appreciation of enthusiasm, applying the concept to the protagonists of the Revolution. He takes enthusiasm to be a motive of action, which indeed prevails over any other, giving to the people inspired by it – the French Revolutionaries in our case – an invincible power. Kant writes:

> Monetary rewards, will not elevate the adversaries of the revolution to the zeal and grandeur of soul, which the pure

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of the sublime, Longinus starts from the innate ones, in which we find the reference to the "vehement and inspired passion." Longinus, *On the Sublime,* trans. Rhys W. Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 8, 13-20.

[46] Clewis argues that enthusiasm forms an instance of what he calls the "moral sublime" to distinguish it from mathematic and dynamic sublime. "While both the mathematical sublime and the dynamical sublime," he writes, "can certainly lead the subject to reflect on the idea of freedom (and possibly other moral ideas as well), such reflection in the case of the mathematical and dynamical sublime happens indirectly, through an interaction with extensive or powerful nature or art. In the case of the moral sublime, by contrast, such reflection takes place directly in that the subject has an immediate aesthetic response to something that is deemed to have, and that actually has, moral content." See Robert, R. Clewis, *The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 84.

[47] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement,* trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 29:121.

[48] Ibid., 29:125.

[49] I is a subject that Kant had already treated in his pre-critical work, relating fanaticism to a supernatural communication. Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkley: University of California Press, 1960), 2: 251, 108 n.

> concept of right produced in them; and even the concept of honor among old martial nobility (an analogue to enthusiasm) vanished before the weapons of those who kept in view the right of the nation.[50]

After this reference, however, Kant returns to the spectators and the aesthetic treatment of enthusiasm. "With what exaltation," he writes, "the uninvolved public looking on sympathized then without the least intention of assisting."[51] We have an interesting combination of a practical and an aesthetic sense of enthusiasm. Kant referred to the concept of practical enthusiasm, an enthusiasm that allows man to perform great deeds,[52] mostly during his pre-critical period,[53] while the aesthetic treatment of enthusiasm is characteristic of the critical period. Enthusiasm in its practical dimension is a passion and is related to the faculty of desire, while enthusiasm in the aesthetic dimension is an affect, related to feelings[54] (to the human sensibility) and, as all aesthetic judgements, disinterested. "Affects," Kant writes, "are impetuous and unpremeditated, while passions persistent and deliberate."[55] Furthermore, a passion, according to Kant, can never be called sublime, because the mind's freedom is abolished, while an affect can.

Given the above distinctions, it becomes, I think, clear why Kant gradually places aside the practical sense of enthusiasm to bring out the aesthetic one. Furthermore, it is this aestheticization of enthusiasm that allows Kant to take a positive interest in the French Revolution without contradicting his moral beliefs.

IV. Conclusion

Enthusiasm appears originally at the junction of metaphysics and epistemology; it was born as a response to the acknowledgement of man's cognitive limitations and the realization of the radical difference of knowledge between man and god.[56] It worked, in this context, as a vehicle of supernatural communication and privileged knowledge.

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[50] Kant, "The Conflict," 7: 86-87.

[51] Ibid., 7: 87.

[52] Kant, *Critique of Judgement,* 272. In the *Critique of Judgement* Kant refers rather critically to this sense, attributing it to others.

[53] For the use of enthusiasm in Kant's pre-critical work, see Clewis, *The Kantian Sublime,* 50-52.

[54] Kant, *Critique of Judgement,* 29:121, 39 n.

[55] Ibid.

[56] See Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought,* trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), 136-152.

When Burke castigates enthusiasm, he does it with the conviction that he castigates the recovery of a certain kind of metaphysics, which, however, is of a secular kind and closely allied to politics. It is the metaphysics of abstract reason. When he castigates enthusiasm, in fact, he attacks a kind of intellectual presumption; the intellectual presumption exhibited by the French revolutionaries and their English supporters. Enthusiasm thus is politicized and, in this new political context, the presumption is seeing as turning into a "titanic energy,"[57] which attempts to recreate social institutions ex nihilo. "Political theologians and theological politicians"[58] seemed to Burke to "play" god, but, in effect, they were turning into devils. In his sermon, Price had written that "virtue without knowledge makes enthusiasts and knowledge without virtue makes devils."[59] Indeed for Burke, the French "philosophes" were little devils, in whom reason was separated from virtue and the moral constitution of the heart. In Burke then, enthusiasm is practical and negative, it is a sort of secular fanaticism and a kind of hubris, threatening to unsettle human civilization and coarsen human sensibility.

Kant, on the other hand, sees in the French Revolution a hint for the ongoing progress of reason and civilization, appreciating positively the enthusiasm exhibited in relation to it. The enthusiasm, however, he is interested in is of a very different kind from that of Burke and follows rather the platonic tradition with no reference to religion whatsoever. Enthusiasm, thus, is linked to the vision of a higher moral ideal, which is the ideal of right and, in our case, the ideal of a republican constitution. It is well known, however, that Kant, already from his first *Critique,* had broken away with the traditional metaphysics, the right therefore, to which he refers is not a constitutive but a regulative idea, which must be accomplished by man's free will and action. Kant's enthusiasm, however, in the text we are interested in, is not a practical principle, a motive of action. In his mature work, Kant avoided the pitfall of recommending a passion as a guiding rule for our actions. Enthusiasm thus is treated as an effect, a token of sensibility rather and, thus, as an aesthetic principle. Enthusiasm is recast as a pure aesthetic judgement, referring to the spectators of the events and transforming the French Revolution to a sublime spectacle, although its protagonists were rather the little devils Burke described. In this context, Kant's politics is closely related to his aesthetics.[60]

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[57] Pocock, "Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm," 30.

[58] Burke, *Select Works*, 2: 97.

[59] Price, *Discourse,* 15.

[60] The most extensive treatment of this relevance is to be found in Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

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