

POPPER AND KANT ON OPEN SOCIETY

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In this contribution I wish to draw attention to some parallels between Popper's conceptions of *open society* and *rational critical discussion* (as a basis for changing society) and Kant's conceptions of *civil commonwealth* and *public use of reason*, especially relevant in the context of post-totalitarian societies.

Popper's *open society* is *not* (as it is often understood in today's Russia) an *ideal* society or a society whose borders are open for trade and people; it is a society open to auto-reflection as basis for its own development: rational reflection (critical discussion) leads to "personal decisions" which "may lead to the alteration . . . even of the political laws" in "the quest for the 'best constitution'", inspired by the "faith in reason, freedom and the brotherhood of all men". In everyday life these personal decisions concern only the life of individual citizens, but in the process of intersubjective critical discussion they may change the structure of society.

For Kant, there are two concepts of *civil society*: as it actually exists as an aggregate of people going about their private occupations under the control of the law, and an as yet non-existent (and unattainable) highest aim of the humankind - "a universal civil society administered in accord with the right". And the only way of moving toward this aim is "public use of reason": "such use which is made by someone addressing the entire *reading* public as a *scholar*".

Both pairs of concepts (Popper's and Kant's) presuppose that critical discussion (free public use of reason) (a) is aimed at the betterment of society, and (b) is capable of distinguishing means working for its betterment from those working for its degradation. The plausibility of this presupposition is discussed, together with the influence which the lack, in totalitarian societies, of the field of personal decisions even in everyday life has on the development of post-totalitarian societies.