The philosophical ideal of eternal peace.

The title of Kant's famous essay "Zum ewigen Frieden" (Perpetual Peace) is somewhat ironical: it refers to the shield of an old Dutch bar, which obviously locates perpetual peace in death. Kant, however, is not interested in the peace of the cemetery, but rather in the peace between living people. He investigates under which conditions perpetual peace in the world is thinkable. This project is tied to two presuppositions:

- The original situation of mankind is the struggle of all against all
- It is desirable to overcome struggle and establish a peaceful society

In philosophical tradition both presuppositions are contested:
Rousseau, for example, thinks that human nature is basically good; Nietzsche thinks that the overcoming of struggle leads to a European Nirwana, to a nihilism in which all human vitality dies.

The first presupposition, however, is also supported by many philosophers of the western tradition. In Nietzsche's Herrenmoral (Master Morality), for example, the struggle is central. Also Heidegger's analysis of western thinking as *Wille zur Macht* (Will to Power) focusses on struggle. The *instrumentelle Vernunft* (instrumental reason) in the Marxist tradition can be regarded as an elaboration of the Will to Power.
The problem in this line of tradition is evident: if human existence is determined by struggle, how struggle can ever be banned? This makes an alternative tradition attractive, in which the point of departure is not one-sidedly a situation of struggle. Beside the domain of struggle in the world of nature, this tradition distinguishes a domain of peace. Examples of this alternative tradition are Plato, who introduces the essential realm of perpetual ideas, Immanuel Kant, who distinguishes the world of natural appearances (the phenomenal world) from the *noumenal world*, and Levinas, for whom the finite world of struggle opposes the infinite world of peace.
Its infinity makes the world of peace a divine world that transcends temporal relations. In this sense, the world of peace could be understood as the world of death, the world after life. More interesting, however, are the philosophical approaches in which the world of peace is not separated from the world of life and struggle. An illustration of this approach is the Ulysses motive: Ulysses leaves his home (Itaka), participates in the Greek war against Troy, and returns home after many years of wanderings in the world. Ullysses's journey is a metaphor of a person's life experience. In living one's life one can become aware of one's essential identity. Although this essential identity transcends time, it can only be known by real life experience. The essential identity is not a Platonian idea in which the appearance of human life has been overcome, but rather an identity that appears in the finite forms of real life.

Based on the foregoing considerations it is possible to determine the meaning of a *peaceful mind*. A peaceful mind has (to a large extent) succeeded in acquiring insight into his essential identity. Full insight into this identity, however, is never possible. Human beings can only strife after this insight. Whether they succeed is also dependent on the world they are living in. Insight into the own identity is only possible in a non-alienated society, i.e., in a society whose institutions serve the development of self-insight. Therefore, the discussion how to reach a peaceful mind, must clarify what can be meant by the institutions of a non-alienated society.

Is it possible at all to create a non-alienated society?

Many modern philosophers stress that humans are finite beings: they are thrown into a contingent, traditional world. Just because this world is pre-given, there is no reason to assume that it is non-alienated. Post-modern thinkers qualify the human self as a situated self, a self that can only be determined in the context of cultural environment. Their view implicates that alienation is necessary. The peace of mind becomes something coincidental.

Only if the cultural context can be transformed into a context that is not pre-given it is possible to overcome alienation. In that case humans can feel at home in their society.

For some philosophers this transformation is basically impossible. Sartre, for example, says: "The Other is hell". Another example is Levinas who says that humans are "the servant of the Other". For other philosophers, however, this transformation is not only possible, but in some cases even unescapable. Marx, for example, thinks that, after the communist revolution, society can be conceived of as the expression of human autonomy. Aristotle even thinks that a communist revolution is superfluous: the law of the polis (the human law) already expresses human autonomy throughout.

In Marx and Aristotle, culture is understood as "second nature": the natural objectivity is transformed into a cultural objectivity that expresses human autonomy. Their approach, however, is problematic because their concept of autonomy concerns the collective of the community. There is no room for individual autonomy (and, therefore, no room for the peace of mind at individual level).

To think about the possibilities for peace of mind at individual level, Hegel's critical reception of Aristotle can be helpful.

According to Hegel, participation in a cultural context, presupposes (although at a hidden level) individual autonomy. Whoever can observe the laws of tradition must be able to suspend his natural drives and, therefore, be able to relate freely to his drives. (Like Freud, Hegel thinks that culture presupposes the possibility to postpone the satisfaction of needs). Hegel reconstructs European history from the ancient Greek polis to Modernity, as the process in which this implicit individual autonomy is explicated. This process results in the French Revolution in which not the autonomy of the community is central (as in the Greek polis), but rather the autonomy of the individual: all individual are free and equal persons. For Hegel, this individual autonomy is philosophically expressed in the Kantian philosophy (especially in his *categorical imperative*).

Hegel's philosophical project can be characterized as the attempt to synthesize Aristotle (autonomy at the level of community) and Kant (autonomy at the level of the individual). Therefore, this project can also be characterized as the attempt to explicate the institutional conditions under which the individual peace of mind is possible.

Important elements in Hegel's project are:

- The autonomous individual is the result of a historical process of education
- This process of education is dependent on the institutional structures of societies in history
- The modern individual can only realize his autonomy if he repeats the historical process of education
- The modern individual can only repeat the historical process of education if he lives in a society with institutional structures that enable this repetition
- These institutional structures are characterized by three domains: the domain of the family, the domain of the civil society and the domain of the state: these structures guarantee a multicultural, democratic society that enables the individuals to relate freely to the (multicultural) tradition they are living in