



**Belás Ľ.**

## **Reason, Truth, and Revolution. Some Actual Remarks Based on Kant's Work *The Contest of Faculties***

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The paper reacts on a significant change in economic-political establishment which is, by the official propaganda and its promoters, called Gentle or Velvet Revolution and in this way it is also presented as a *definitive* return to *free world* and *democracy*. In this context we — as Kant's pupils and followers — who observed the revolution's *phenomenology* and its *binding* interpretations should ask a question if we can accept this title. And was it not slightly different? This paper is an attempt to make a preliminary research of the problem and the author suggests some connections which have not been explained yet and concentrates on possible methodological bases. The first is represented by Kant's maxim of faculty of philosophy which has the *public presentation of truth* as its function, and next, the paper reminds the methodological peculiarities of requests for explanation and truth, specific historical form of causality or multi-subjectivity of acts.

**Keywords:** Historical Experience, Historical Truth, Mythologization of History, Reason, Revolution, Truth.

Immanuel Kant included in his work *The Contest of Faculties* a renewed attempt to answer the question, whether the human race is continually improving? [Kant 1991.c, p. 177]. R. Brandt adds that this debate was originally formulated between July 1796 and beginning of 1798 as a separate article and only in March or April 1798 was integrated into *The Contest of Faculties* as its second part called *The Contest between Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Law* [Brandt 1987, p. 211]. And why is it *the renewed question*? According to Kant the answer is simple and clear and he dealt with the topic of continuous progress in his work *On the Common Saying: "This May Be True in Theory, but It Does Not Apply in Practice"* published in 1793 in which he formulates the question:

"Is the human race as a whole likeable, or is it an object to be regarded with distaste? Must we simply wish it well (to avoid becoming misanthropists) without really expecting its efforts to succeed, and then take no further interest in it?" [Kant 1991.b, p. 87].

In order to answer such questions, according to him, we must, first of all, answer the following one: "Does man possess natural capacities which would indicate that the race will always progress and improve, so that the evils of the past and present will vanish in the future good?" [Kant 1991.b, p. 87]. Kant would like to hope for it "since the human race is constantly progressing in cultural matters (in keeping with its natural purpose), it is also engaged in progressive improvement in relation to the moral end of its existence. This progress may at times be *interrupted* but never *broken off*" [Kant 1991.b, p. 88].

It is important to add that similar ideas about progress of the human race can be found in several of his *kleine Schriften*. To come scholarly and formally closer to his *renewed question* [Brandt 1987, p. 211], it is necessary to look at the external structure of the text. Kant divided it into ten parts, but in fact, the work is split into three logical parts; the first part, consisting of five parts, deals with preliminaries, which are followed by two questions (6 and 7) and the last part consists of reflections which should result from answers.

If we aim to deal with the answer on the *renewed question*, we should follow an important instruction whether a prophetic history of the human race does not start from some sort of experience which might suggest that man has the quality or

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power of being the *cause* and (since his actions are supposed to be those of a being endowed with freedom) the *author* of his own improvement [Kant 1991.c, p. 181]. Therefore there is a need for a search for an event which would indicate that such a cause exists and that it is causally active within the human race, irrespective of the time at which it might actually operate; and it would have to be a cause which allowed us to conclude, as an inevitable consequence of its operation, that mankind is improving. This inference could then be extended to cover the history of former times so as to show that mankind has always been progressing, yet in such a way that the event originally chosen as an example would not in itself be regarded as the cause of progress in the past, but only as a rough indication or *historical sign* (*signum rememorativum, demonstrativum, prognostikon*) [Kant 1991.c, p. 181]. This might then prove the existence of a *tendency* within the human race as a whole, considered not as a series of individuals but as a body distributed over the earth in states and national groups. In this context we can quote Kant's famous idea:

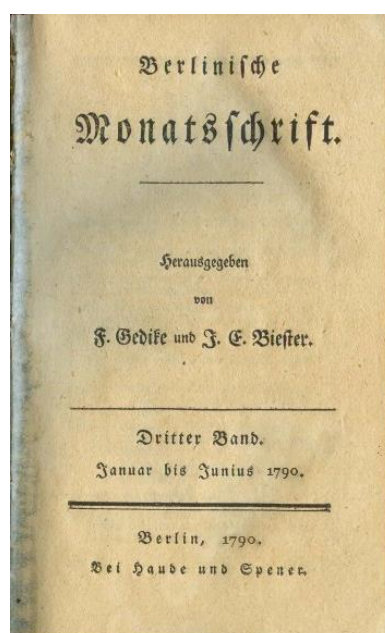
"The revolution which we have seen taking place in our own times in a nation of gifted people may succeed or it may fail. It may be so filled with misery and atrocities that no right-thinking man would ever decide to make the same experiment again at such a price, even if he could hope to carry it out successfully at the second attempt. But I maintain that this revolution has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators who are not themselves caught up in it a *sympathy* which borders almost on enthusiasm, although the very utterance of this sympathy was fraught with danger. It cannot therefore have been caused by anything other than a moral disposition within the human race" [Kant 1991.c, p. 182].

Then Kant continues and confronts the *concept of right* with the old military aristocracy's concept of honour, and consequently highlights the *evolution* of a constitution governed by *natural law* [Kant 1991.c, pp. 183–184].

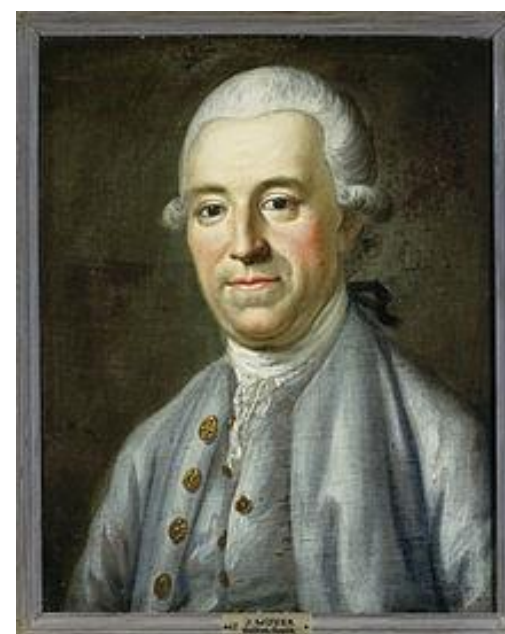
R. Kuliniak adds that the public discussion about revolutionary events in 1789 was stimulated by J. Möser (also the author of *Über das Recht der Menschheit, als der Grund der neuen Französischen Konstitution*) in June 1790 in the journal *Berlinische Monatsschrift* [Kuliniak 2009, p. 163] and he was especially interested in philosophical-legal dimension of *Declaration of Human and Civic Rights* (August 26, 1789). M. Riedel remarks that in connection with the *Declaration* Kant introduced his construction of legal-civil society in his work *On the Common Saying...* and it remained unchanged in the *II. Part of Rechtslehre* [Riedel 1973, p. 342]. It is based on three a priori principles — freedom, equality and independence.



Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).  
Engraving after a painting, 1791,  
by Dobler



The title page of magazine *Monthly Berlin* (*Berlinische Monatsschrift*, Jan. — June 1790, Friedrich Gedike and Johann Erich Biester publishers)



Justus Möser (1720–1794),  
a German jurist and social theorist

Kant's justification of law, state, and politics as an expression of request for legal law for everyone who is subordinated to legal state can also be found in *The Contest of Faculties*. Kant says:

"All forms of state are based on the idea of a constitution which is compatible with the natural rights of man, so that those who obey the law should also act as a unified body of legislators. And if we accordingly think of the commonwealth in terms of concepts of pure reason, it may be called a Platonic *ideal* (*respublica noumenon*), which is not an empty figment of the imagination, but the external norm for all civil constitutions whatsoever, and a means of ending all wars. A civil society organised in conformity with it and governed by laws of freedom is an example representing it in the world of experience (*respublica phaenomenon*), and it can only be achieved by a laborious process, after innumerable wars and conflicts. But its constitution, once it has been attained as a whole, is the best quali-

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fied of all to keep out war, the destroyer of everything good. Thus it is our duty to enter into a constitution of this kind; and in the meantime, since it will be a considerable time before this takes place, it is the duty of monarchs to govern in a *republican* (not a democratic) manner, even although they may *rule autocratically*. In other words, they should treat the people in accordance with principles akin in spirit to the laws of freedom which a people of mature rational powers should prescribe for itself, even if the people is not literally asked for its consent" [Kant 1991.c, p. 187].

In the ninth part, dealing with the question what profit the human race will derive from progressive improvement, Kant writes:

"The profit which will accrue to the human race as it works its way forward will not be an ever increasing quantity of *morality* in its attitudes. Instead, the legality of its attitudes will produce an increasing number of actions governed by duty, whatever the particular motive behind these actions may be. In other words, the profit will result from man's good *deeds* as they grow ever more numerous and successful, i.e. from the external phenomena of man's moral nature. For we have only *empirical* data (our experiences) on which to base this prediction — that is, we base it on the physical cause of our actions insofar as they actually take place as phenomena, not on the moral cause which contains the concept of duty as applied to what ought to happen, and which can be determined by processes of pure *a priori* thinking.

Violence will gradually become less on the part of those in power, and obedience towards the laws will increase. There will no doubt be more charity, less quarrels in legal actions, more reliability in keeping one's word, and so on in the commonwealth, partly from love of honour, and partly from a lively awareness of where one's own advantage lies; and this will ultimately extend to the external relations between the various peoples, until a cosmopolitan society is created. Such developments do not mean, however, that the basic moral capacity of mankind will increase in the slightest, for this would require a kind of new creation or supernatural influence. For we must not expect too much of human beings in their progressive improvements, or else we shall merit the scorn of those politicians who would gladly treat man's hopes of progress as the fantasies of an overheated mind" [Kant 1991.c, pp. 187–188].

R. Brandt formulates the conclusion of his analysis of Kant's theory of progress in this way:

"*Causa fiendi* of the progressive improvement on the preliminary level of law is not nature with the mechanism of dispositions, as it was supposed by Kant even at the end of the second part of *The Contest of Faculties*, but it is the determination of people's own acting by the means of the ideas of law. People who revolt and spectators are not introduced as subjects who follow their own (by their dispositions created) aims and thus realise the aim of the whole on the basis of foreseeing planning of nature; in their utterances they thematise something beyond the senses: law itself, and they let law determine them in their acts, adequate to duties, if they are given the chance. This is the way how people emancipate from patriarchal nature's leadership and come to the growth of something that was planted (as a seed) by nature — disposition to morality. If this is theoretically accessed by indirect evidence, then the renewed question becomes the aim. It belongs to the phenomena of older Kantian philosophy that it motivates to — seemingly — non-Kantian ideas" [Brandt 1987, pp. 220–221].

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In this part I will continue with our present time. We have experienced a significant change in economic-political establishment which is, by the official propaganda and its promoters, called Gentle or Velvet Revolution and in this way it is also presented as a *definitive* return to the *free world* and *democracy*. In this context we — as Kant's pupils and followers — who observed the revolution's *phenomenology* and its *binding* interpretations should ask a question if we can accept these names. And was it not slightly different? This will be an attempt to make a preliminary research of the problem...

The first methodological starting point I have chosen is Kant's maxim of a philosophy faculty which has the *public presentation of truth* [Kant 1979, p. 55] as its function. Then there are methodological peculiarities of the requests for explanation and truth, specific historical form of causality or multi-subjectivity of acts highlighted by E. Angehrn [Angehrn 1991, p. 22]. I also add my own historical experience in the attempt to evaluate the Czechoslovak revolution.

R. Dahrendorf, an authority on philosophy, explicitly says:

"What happened in Prague and whole Czechoslovakia then deserves to be called revolution. It was prearranged by Charter 77, extensive samizdat literature and underground university, but it was only when Václav Havel became president that brought the practical and symbolic meaning which was shining to Europe" [Dahrendorf 2008, p. 11],

and J. Habermas [Habermas 1999, p. 161] agrees with him.

A different, and at the same time symptomatic position is presented by J. Měchýř's work with an eloquent title *Velký*

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*převrat či snad revoluce sametová? (Big Takeover or Perhaps Velvet Revolution?).* P. Janík says:

"November 1989 obviously developed from geopolitical solutions and security measures taken by influential world powers in advance, and thus it was actually a theatrically performed stunt breaking of open door..." [*Moravčík 2013, p. 8*].

L. Štrougal, one of the more 'enlightened' politicians of the previous regime, was asked if he had any reliable testimony of the matter. His answer was:

"I know how and what can be done by security machinery if it comes adrift from the state control" [*Štrougal 2011, p. 162*].

This was said by a Minister of the Interior. The overall evaluation of the event is very demanding task which requires a complex review of external and internal factors.



Lubomír Štrougal (born 1924), a former Czech politician and communist Czechoslovakia's prime minister (1970–1988)



Pavol Janík (born 1956), a Slovak poet, dramatist and public figure, worked at the Ministry of Culture (1983–1987), was the editor of cultural section of the newspaper *Pravda* (1989–1990), Chairman of the Association of Slovak writers



Valtr Komárek (1930–2013), a Czech economist, forecaster and politician. In 1968, he participated in the preparation of economic reforms of Prague Spring. In November 1989, he became the first deputy chairman of Government of National Unity Prime Minister



Ota Šik (1919–2004), a Czech economist and politician. He was one of the key figures in the Prague Spring. After the Velvet Revolution he became an economic advisor to the Czech president

The crucial question is what the expectations of revolting masses (praying the Lord's Prayer in Prague, and establishing a corridor ordered by the *men of November* in Bratislava) were. Here are some opinions of people outside our geographical space: W. Thompson in connection with the November events says that "[t]he actual centres of mobilisation, the groupings who orchestrated the demonstrations, and pushed the revolutionary process forward, were mostly the civic and democratic forums made up of democratically-minded dissidents, frequently including oppositional elements from within the ruling parties themselves. In terms of the traditional right-left spectrum their political status may be considered ambiguous but it is clear they never dreamt of dismantling the system of full employment and basic but comprehensive welfare provision established under the old regimes. Perhaps they can be thought of as the last flicker of socialism with a human face" [*Thompson 1997, pp. 118–119*]. F. Leoncini is thinking about ideals of *The Prague Spring* in a similar way [*Leoncini 2011, p. 3f*]. The connection between ideals and euphoria with The Prague Spring and November 1989 is confirmed also by P. Littmann who emigrated in 1968 and did not return from the West:

"We sincerely believed that there existed a third way of development represented by the economist Ota Šik. We hoped that we would build something new — some sort of a hybrid of capitalism and socialism — which would absorb the best of both systems and from which a new way for mankind would appear. As time passed, I realised that this ideal did not suit the West, nor the East. None of the political systems wanted the third way. I was disappointed and this was the reason I have not returned to Czechoslovakia" [*Sedlák 2013.a*].

V. Mináč also dealt with this event in a very interesting way [*Mináč 1993, pp. 45–76*]. One of the men of the years 1968 and 1989 V. Komárek later said:

"I saw largeness of our revolution in the fact that it was gentle. And when it devoured me, so to say, I did not see it as gentle any more, but I saw confused chaos, greed for power, many personal interests. Also today I perceive it as unmanaged process in terms of programme and morality. I was one of those who were not able to manage it. But I do

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not feel bitterness. Rather regret. Regret that I did not succeed to enforce the way I believed was the right one" [Matišák 2013, p. 27].

People who succeeded in November 1989 were quickly prepared experts — paradoxically selected by the ruling party — who, as if by magic, became *persistent* neoliberals with arrogant enforcement of the dogma of free market which solves everything. I will deal with social and political consequences of unbounded dictatorship of market and primitive economism from several aspects.

1. The first point is the dissolution of Czechoslovakia into two separate states which were misappropriated and privatised by the effort of two men and numerous gangs of their minions. History shows that the creation of two independent states was a big challenge for the elites of both states who did not manage it... From the present point of view I see this event as a fatal geopolitical mistake. In Kant's words it is possible to ask "how our remote descendants will manage to cope with the burden of history" [Kant 1991.a, p. 53] which we have bequeathed to them by our indifference. From the *cosmopolitan* point of view we have probably (or for sure) done them harm. And the *ambitions* of two rulers and their servants [Kant 1991.a, p. 53] used it. This should be a motive for our further philosophical-critical-historical analysis.

2. P. Schnur reminds that one absolute truth was replaced by another — and at the same time he asks whether it cannot be called "another import of a ready-made social model" [Schnur 2010, p. 163] — while the other truth was carried on the basis of economic transformation connected with the arrival of foreign investors which cemented Czech — I also add Slovak — economy into a state of construction halls and subsidiaries of supranational corporations [Schnur 2010, p. 163]. In the Slovak reality we can also add A. Ostrihoňová's opinion that we have *factories for cars and diplomas* [Ostrihoňová 2013, p. 33]. I consider the publicly presented information according to which there will be 600 graduated political scientists this year in Slovakia to be worthy of attention

3. Situation in the field of culture is concisely and realistically described by R. Berger who says:

"From the beginning of the Gentle Revolution not only enterprises, factories, banks, and shops have been tunnelled; above all, tunnelled have been spiritual essence of man, spiritual basis of culture, spiritual dimension of democracy. *Sensi stricto*. This is the way how the remains of good manners, responsibility and shame have been tunnelled" [Berger 2013, p. 33].

There is nothing to be added to the precise characterisation of our present day situation.

4. It is undoubtedly interesting to see what the dissidents, who represented the voice of freedom, truth, and moral consciousness in the times of totality, say on the situation in the *real capitalism*. One of them, O. Pastier says:

"The totality of an infallible party and an infallible ideology was replaced with the totality of unrestricted and unpunished plundering, the totality of consumers excitedly and loyally consuming enormous tastelessness, the totality of semi-literate celebrities wading in the cream of vulgarity" [Pisár 2013].

V. Mináč, considering the causes of the end of the old (socialist) regime, presented his opinion after some period of time:

"During the three-year time, several facts have been revealed, facts about which we (provincial country cousins) could not have a clue — secret deals, foundations visible only to one third of the icebergs, role of political sciences research institutes and spying centres — all of them are only additions to the main song: So called real socialism did not break up because there we fools and villains at the head, not because if and what kind of agreement there was between Vatican and Polish clergy, and not because some of the oppositions were bribed. Of course there were fools and villains, secret pacts and clearly visible dollars. But the break-up of real socialism was caused by the victory of new and old owner, the victory of armoured consumer who had refused to watch shop windows full of lights from a distance. All the people contributed to the Event and our following history; but it was especially citizen hungry for ownership" [Mináč 1993, p. 40].

In other words, thinking about it in broader perspective, *modern man* focused on the consumption *invaded* Eastern-European space. Today, we have full shop windows, excess of goods, but weak purchasing power and high unemployment. Our social misery is documented by a text from daily press:

"Businessmen, experts, and also the government impatiently expect whether people start spending more. During

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the last holiday, which was Christmas, the expectations did not become true and domestic consumption stagnates" [Sedlák 2013.b, p. 1].

It is bizarre when the government is also *only* waiting and not acting. And maybe it cannot do anything because everything has been privatised and we are colonised by foreign investors. Is it possible to talk about Slovak industry, food security and other things in this context? The public power is back in peoples' hands as it was sung by a singer during the freezing night in November Anno Domini 1989 at Wenceslas Square in Prague. What song is she singing now?

E. Fromm, thinking about modern man and his freedom, wrote about human relationships:

"The concrete relationship of one individual to another has lost its direct and human character and has assumed a spirit of manipulation and instrumentality. In all social and personal relations the laws of the market are the rule. It is obvious that the relationship between competitors has to be based on mutual human indifference. Otherwise any one of them would be paralysed in the fulfilment of his economic tasks — to fight each other and not to refrain from the actual economic destruction of each other if necessary" [Fromm 2001, p. 102].

We experience it in both *sovereign* republics right now. The dissident J. Šiklová — a fighter against real socialism — in an interview with characteristic title *Keď sa zastaví rast, vrátíme sa k vzťahom* (*When the Growth Stops, We Will Come Back to Relationships*) appreciates that "in 'socialism' there was much more time for human relationships, meetings and personal interests, which were not professional but interpersonal. Maybe, if the growth expansion is no longer possible, people will go back to it" [Jancová 2012, p. 19]. This will probably last long. Today we are ruled by the fetish of economic growth, strengthening competitiveness and budget responsibility. They are our current deities.

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Instead of conclusion: I. Jurica, a representative of the artistic community, commenting on our capitalistic present in broader context of former Eastern Bloc, formulates a requirement:

"Eastern Europe needs its own radical and historically situated critical theory of capitalism based on the analysis of totalitarian structures without which the alternative and resistance to the system inequality is reproduction of racisms, sexism, stigmatisations and xenophobia" [Jurica 2013, p. 56].

In any case — from philosophical-theoretical point of view — a sound *social critique* which can be based on the *normativity* of Kant's practical philosophy is necessary. However, it is important to add that those who dominate in this critical activity are writers, essayists, artists and many civic activists...



Stopping of the students' march walking along forbidden path by the public security forces on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1989, Prague

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**РАЗУМ, ИСТИНА И РЕВОЛЮЦИЯ.  
НЕКОТОРЫЕ АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ЗАМЕЧАНИЯ,  
ОСНОВАННЫЕ НА РАБОТЕ И. КАНТА «СПОР ФАКУЛЬТЕТОВ»**

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Статья представляет собой философскую рефлексию значительных изменений в экономико-политическом истеблишменте, которые стараниями официальной пропаганды и ее «промоутеров» получили наименования «нежных» или «бархатных» революций, представ таким образом окончательным возвращением в свободный мир и демократию. В этом контексте нам — ученикам и последователям Канта, — тем, кто наблюдают феноменологию революции и имеет дело с ее трактовкой, следует задаться вопросом, можно ли мы такие наименования принять? Не были ли революции не столь уж нежными и бархатными?

Эта статья является попыткой предварительного исследования проблемы, и автор, анализируя опыт Пражской весны 1968 г. и, особенно, чехословацкой «бархатной» революции ноября 1989 г., основывается на работе И. Канта «Спор факультетов», рассматривая ее в качестве возможной методологии при изучении революционных процессов. Речь, прежде всего, идет о сформулированной Кантом максиме философского факультета, которой истина объявляется функцией факультета. Таким образом, социально-философский анализ революционных процессов предстает как поиск истины конкретных исторических форм причинности и/или мульти-субъективности социальных (социально-политических) актов. Особой же методологической ценностью при анализе последних обладает выделение в политическом ноуменальной и феноменальной частей (республика как феномен и республика как ноумен И. Канта).

Применяя данный методологический подход к «бархатной революции» 1989 г., автор делает весьма критические выводы. Распад Чехословакии на два независимых государства представляется автору процессом их (государств) незаконного присвоения и приватизации усилиями двух политиков и их многочисленных приспешников — смертельной геополитической ошибкой и экономическим, духовным и метафизическим тупиком. В экономической и образовательной сферах был осуществлен импорт чужеродной готовой социальной модели — одна абсолютная истина была заменена на другую, однако эта другая истина в основе своей имела экономическую трансформацию в интересах иностранных инвесторов — создателей дочерних наднациональных корпораций, превративших Словакию в предприятие по производству автомобилей и дипломированных специалистов для обслуживания интересов ТНК. В итоге даже диссиденты оказались вынуждены признать, что тоталитаризму непогрешимой партии и ее непогрешимой же идеологии пришел на смену тоталитаризм неограниченного и безнаказанного грабежа, тоталитаризм потребительской безвкусицы, тоталитаризм полуграмотных знаменитостей и всепоглощающей пошлости.

Восточная Европа, делает вывод автор, нуждается в собственной критической теории капитализма, основанной на собственном анализе тоталитарных структур, без чего центрально- и восточноевропейских государства обречены на воспро-



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изведение расизма, сексизма, социальной стигматизации и ксенофобии. В этих условиях основой сохранения разума и истины выступает нормативность практической философии Канта, — при том, что доминирующими субъектами социальной критики и при подготовке «бархатных революций», и при столкновении с их негативными последствиями являются писатели, публицисты, художники и гражданские активисты.

**Ключевые слова:** исторический опыт, историческая правда, мифологизация истории, разум, революция, истина.

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