The issue of the conflict of the faculties

Pompiliu ALEXANDRU,
Université de Rouen

Abstract:

Modern institutions are built on bases that were inspired by a metaphysical thinking. Kant highlighted this conception in his last work published during his lifetime.

The faculties are organized following a practical orientation of the human action, by virtue of certain values "molded" in each faculty of the University.

Key words: faculty, state-run institution, transcendent, transcendental, lifestyle, discourse.

Kant's last book published during his lifetime was *The Conflict of the faculties* (*Der Streit der Fakultäten*). The book appears as three tomes, written during different years – the first in 1794, and the last in 1797. After writing this last part, Kant thinks of merging it with the other two, considering that there is coherence between them and consequently they can make up a single tome.

This book represents the starting point in the analysis we are going to make in the present article, and this is why, first of all, we would like to present it briefly, then we will move on to some rather general aspects concerning the topic approached, namely the conflict between faculties.

We must mention from the start that the topic Kant deals with is not mainly that of a critical analysis, in the sense of his previous theoretical writings. We should not think, when seeing this title, that it refers to an analysis of the mental faculties. It is not that, in the first place! Kant refers to the conflict between institutions – faculty in the sense of component of a University. So, this book refers to very concrete aspects of the social and political life of his time. The topic approached represents in fact a retort addressed by Kant to the King Wilhelm II of Prussia, successor of Frederic II, who died on August 17, 1786. The new king, influenced by his minister Jean-Christophe Woellner, adopts repressive measures against the critical attacks hostile to religion. This is how the Edict of Religion of December 19, 1788, appears, forbidding any propaganda against the state religion, namely Christianity. In the same year when this edict appears, Kant publishes *The Critique of practical reason*, and so he immediately becomes suspect for the new government. The censorship will prevent the publishing of the second part of the *Religion within the limits of reason alone*. This second part will represent the main focus of the dispute that will lead to the appearance of the book *The conflict of the faculties*. It was said about Kant that towards the end of his lifetime his writings acquired an ever stranger character compared to the rigor of the first books continued by the period of critique. Both the topics and the way the author dealt with these topics did not "rhyme" at all with the preceding periods. As an application of the voluntarist theory of practical reason, the conflict of the faculties approaches as well the topic of "celibacy" and of its advantages and the topic of the printed letters that could damage the eyesight, for which reason they should not be black, but grey. However, we should not rush to conclude that this book would be a mixture of disparate books, which were not meant to be published together. The bet is much more subtle, as we are going to see.

Which are the rational elements that led to this book? Firstly, it is a particular application of the voluntarist theory, as we have mentioned. Common sense (*le bon sens* of the Cartesian system), reason and moral disposition are the most uniformly-spread elements among mankind. The Kantian thesis intervenes about their *development* and *conservation*. The people's tendency is to be more inclined towards the pleasures of life than towards actions in accordance to the moral law. In this sense, the State will intervene to create the necessary framework to govern a docile people and to set into motion institutions whose purpose is the discovery of the scientific and moral truth. This institution of the Truth in the two senses exists, it is the University. It is structured on two steps which comprise the higher Faculties and a lower Faculty. The higher Faculties are: Theology, Law

BDD-A20453 © 2009 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:59:11 UTC)

and Medicine. The lower Faculty is Philosophy. The upper step is directly connected to the way the scientific or moral truth is put into practice (carried out in action). The faculties related to this level give birth to norms that help the people guide themselves in their actions. The people does not need theoretical explanations; a people does not need research or theoretical discussion, but needs to be guided and led by laws enforced thanks to institutions specially created in this sense. Philosophy is in exchange the forum theorizing the bases of the higher Faculties, but it lacks, and it is good that things are like this, the practical dimension that needs to remain under the control of the higher Faculties. The conflict of the faculties appears on this background of the intellectual authority and autonomy. Philosophy has the greatest freedom of movement in the domain of science, while the others are authorized to develop only in the framework of their own norms and statutory prescriptions. So, secondly, the secondary element of this book consists in the interpretation of the idea of conflict of the faculties.

So, this conflict takes on two forms: one that is legitimate and another one that is illegitimate. The legitimate conflict is built through the collaboration of the higher Faculties with the lower one. This thing is necessary because they need constant revision. This revision is claimed by Reason, namely by the Faculty of Philosophy. The internal re-analyses occur not without a resistance that can go up to stubbornness, and in this case only rational arguments and the people's decisions can win.

The illegitimate conflict appears as a consequence of the tendency to dominate the higher Faculties, of freeing oneself from the philosophical reason, in order to impose one's own norms, following laws that no longer respect a general framework, but one's own interests. So, this would lead to illegitimate autonomies on the part of these Faculties. Consequently, they would lose their reason to be, namely: 1.to impose a moral law with transcendental bases, in the case of theology; 2.to put in order the necessary norms for social life, in the case of law; and 3.to organize life in a preventive way in order to preserve one's health, in the case of medicine. The three central concepts of Kant's philosophy: God, Freedom and Immortality find a correspondent in this way in this segment of the educational institutions.

It has been stated about Descartes that his entire philosophy did nothing else but introduced a methodology aimed essentially, from a practical viewpoint, at life and extending it. Perfect health would be the target of the Cartesian system. The Kantian philosophy could be interpreted similarly, if we take a closer look at this book. What comes out of the book of Kant is precisely the preservation of life, the harmonization of life with the divinity, with the others and with one's self. Now we can understand better what is the inner reason of Kant's answer to the accusation brought against him, namely of "[...] abuse of your philosophy leading to the deformation and degradation of many of the capital and basic dogmas of the Holy Writings and of Christianity [...]" (Kant, Preface, our translation). A philosopher has the absolute freedom to choose the topic of his research from any domain, and this topic shall be treated according to the abilities of one's reason. This does not need to trigger a practical impact on the respective domain. This thing is possible only in the case of a higher Faculty. So, this accusation has no solid grounds, since the exercise of reason is aimed only at practical modifications that are not part of the competence of this kind of thinking. This being the Kantian thesis, its enlarged argumentation will be therefore oriented towards the functioning of this University which has two parts and towards the legitimate and the illegitimate conflicts of the Faculties.

So, Kant's answer is not without a certain boldness by which the author risked his freedom. To place the king's letter in the beginning of his work represents in fact as well a daring action which warns us of the harsh criticism to follow. So, the letter is seen by Kant as being an attempt of intervening in the business of philosophy from the part of those who should only be concerned with the putting into practice of the ideas. The phenomenon is "natural", resulting from the desire to impose something by means of force on the whole. That is why Kant sets into motion his argumentation in order to point out the place of each of these elements in the natural and social system.

BDD-A20453 © 2009 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:59:11 UTC)

The basis of the institutional framework

What is the theoretical fundament that Kant relies on in the architectural construction of the university system? The issue is older and does not have a direct bearing on the state institutions. It concerns the *principle of the correspondence between immanence and transcendence*. Sure, this formula is of metaphysical origin. But his is the very thing we are pushed towards or pushed to look for starting from the Kantian thinking. The metaphysical basis on which the state's institutions are built is this: there is an institution postulating the correspondence of the transcendent and the immanent structures. This conception was first enunciated by Plato, from a philosophical viewpoint. We will not take into account the religious doctrines from the China of the Antiquity to the South-American religions, which were also fond of this idea of the reflection in the material domain of some transcendent principles. In truth, many arguments can be pointed out in support of the fact that this idea comes from the religious and mystical thinking. "What is up is down as well and what is down is up as well" says one of the first "axioms" of hermetism. Philosophically speaking, we can say that Plato's doctrine of the Ideas is the one that develops this principle best. More precisely, Plato's theory of participation. What is related to the created, material world is ordered and has a reason to be only if it is though of as being obtained according to a pattern, that of the transcendent Ideas. The material things *participate* to the transcendence of the Ideas and this is how they get born logically.

During the Middle Ages this idea is repeated and reintroduced in the religious scheme, but this time much closer to the Kantian meaning. Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite in his *The Heavenly Hierarchy and the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* justifies the order and functioning of the Church through the "participation" or the symmetrical imposition from the transcendent area. The holy church is justified through its sacred character by the very fact that it corresponds to certain transcendent structures. From here appear some ideas that should be deduced from the Areopagite theory. Such is the issue of the corruptibility of the Church, or, more precisely, its *lack of corruptibility*. Kant would say that there is an illegitimate attitude in this statement, illegitimacy that appears because of an exaggeration in the interpretation. The fact that the institution of the Church is a *faithful image, a parallel structure*, pervaded by transcendence, would lead to the erroneous ideas that it shares the incorruptible and perfect character of the transcendence that is directly responsible of it. Actually, this is false and the practical consequences can be seen directly, especially in the Orthodox Romania of the 21st century. This idea persists more or less consciously until today, when any criticism or accusation addressed to the people that are part of the clergy involves an accusation or criticism against the Church, and from here to Religion and to God. We forget the very character of created thing, of imperfectability and corruptibility inherent to the mundane, despite its transcendent basis. What other more conclusive example could be brought in this sense except what is going on today in the Orthodox world, where if a representative of the Church is accused of corruption, the accusation gats to be accused in its turn of getting involved in the divine business, of treacherously trying to defame God himself? The conflict is open between the blind defenders, who embrace this principle of the transcendent basis that would guarantee the lack of any imperfection and the critics, who, in their moderate and rational form, draw the attention on the fact that there is a functional separation between the constitutive transcendence and the functional immanence from a "worldly" viewpoint. So, the sociopolitical institutions did not appear out of the blue or out of a biological necessity, similarly to an organization of the insects or of other beings. In the case of man, he created these institutions starting from a necessity imposed from the transcendent world. This is, broadly speaking, the idea on the basis of the social order from a religious viewpoint. Plato thought of the appearance of these institutions firstly not from a social-religious viewpoint, but from an ontological perspective.

In the case of Kant, he keeps just the principle of thinking, and not its form presented above. He does not say that the social order is structured into institutions that appeared from a transcendent impulse or according to a transcendent pattern, with a strong sacredness induced by the religious dimension. In exchange, he admits the existence of certain ideas that can be called as well ideals of

BDD-A20453 © 2009 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:59:11 UTC)

our reasons. God is an idea of our reason, just like Freedom and Immortality. Man leads his life according to his own way of conceiving and interpreting the world. The ideas that result from this particular way of conceiving and interpreting the world acquire a special status, and seen from a certain perspective, can be called independent, having an autonomous status. This autonomy, with Kant, should not be considered similar to that of Plato. The autonomy of Plato's ideas is related to their exclusively transcendent character, which can get consistence on the transcendental level only through participation. So, in Kant's case, this autonomy needs to be understood as being exclusively transcendental. What does this mean? The idea of justice, of God, of freedom and of immortality, are autonomous in the sense that they are *postulated* as being endowed with their own ordering character. They guide the human *actions* within certain limits and forms that become specific for a certain community or epoch. It is not the transcendent world that imposes the human actions on man, but man himself, who guides himself according to his own ideals concerning his acts. From this point of view, says Kant, the Faculty of Law is "better", in practice, than the Faculty of theology; it has a visible interpreter of the laws, namely a judge, a juridical commission or the state legislator himself. As for the sentences of the holy book of the Faculty of Theology, things are different. The reference is transcendental this time. The advantage is in this case that the laws are immutable, non-modifiable by man. These divine laws are imposed and non-modifiable. The laws of the Faculty of law are submitted to modifications, according to the experience. So, we can say that the law adapts itself to the acts, while in the case of Theology, the acts adapt themselves to the Bible. These are two different ways of perceiving things, and both rely on different *human rational conceptions*. So, a guiding idea is *projected* as bringing order, and charged with a certain *value* instituted as such through action; action in relation to the divinity, to the others and of the individual with his self.

An example given by Kant in the sense of the above-mentioned ideas, concerns the hierarchy in the university. He speaks about deans. The dean is a head of Faculty. This title comes from astrology, designating at the origin one of the three astral geniuses that preside a sign of the zodiac (of 30^0), each of the geniuses having 10^0 – from here the term *dean*. This astrological structure was first transposed into agriculture (*ab astris ad castra vid;* Salmasius – *De annis climacteriis*), and then in the university system. We would say today that this thing is related only to the history of the institutions and there is no relation between the actual denominations and functions of these institutions. But this is the very sensitive point that Kant touches by means of his theory. *The Conflict of the Faculties* is a title that touches at the same time the institutions and the mental faculties. The inter-institutional conflict derives from a conflict of the mental faculties that have a determined function in their organization and functioning. So, any state social institutional manifestation drives from a thinking process according to certain values.

The example of the first educational institutions

We do not cease to see in Kantianism the origin of the modern thinking. The mutation towards rational experience that applies in all the domains of knowledge comes from his epoch, that of the Enlightenment. But this thinking, in the above-mentioned pattern, functioned ever since the Antiquity. Which are, therefore, the distinctive marks of the institutions of the Antiquity? Generally, considered from the Kantian viewpoint, modernity has not contributed with significant modifications to the structure of the educational system, except formally and too little, but it has had an essential contribution on other levels.

Pierre Hadot touches this topic of the institutionalization of the educational forms in his excellent work *Qu´est-ce que la philosophie antique?* The topic of this book is that of the reconstruction of the significance of the notions of philosophy and of philosopher during the Antiquity. This significance has multiple meanings, some of which are completely lost today. Some of the dimensions of these notions' meaning are even excluded today from any Faculty of

BDD-A20453 © 2009 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:59:11 UTC)

philosophy. Speaking about this "lower faculty" in Kantian terms, Hadot shows how this discipline became institutionalized and then stared to get in touch with other disciplines.

Two are the main characteristics of the philosophy during the Antiquity: it is a from of life and it is a continually perfectible discursive exercise. In other words, the philosopher of the Antiquity fully assumes the condition of *traveler* towards wisdom (M. Heidegger is the one who pointed out again this aspect of philosophy of having as main metaphorical correpondent corespondent *the road* (*der Weg*)), and not at all the possession of wisdom. The wise man is not a philosopher for the people of the Antiquity – wisdom is the end of the road, it gets out of the framework of philosophy, overpassing it. To be a philosopher is to live according to certain principles and to have a perfect discourse, which means, in other words, to have an orderly thinking. The appearance of philosophical *schools* coincides with the appearance of educational institutions that applied different models according to the specific thinking of the respective school. The school of Pythagoras is one of the first schools of this kind, and it was organized in a specific way, the accent falling on the arrangement of one's life in a certain framework (food, behavior ethics, meditative preoccupations, religious rituals, considered a first university institution, if we were to force a little bit the sense of the word. This aspect that concerns the *lifestyle* is the one that has been completely lost today. Aristotle's school, whose main direction was the exercise of the *intellect*, is the one that continued through the Middle Ages (with the commentary of Aristotle's works) and led to the form of University that we can see today. But we should not forget either that the High School was also ordered according to principles drawn from Plato's Academy. So, today there is no trace of exercise in the direction of the philosophical *life*, a fact that is no less obvious in the case of the other disciplines. Maybe only the theology still keeps some vocational elements that aim to chisel a certain framework of life. This mutation occurred through the change of certain values. What used to be a means some time ago – philosophy was a means to reach a perfect life, in harmony with god and nature; mathematics was just an *organon*, an instrument serving either in practice or for the agility of the mind; the political man *was formed with a view to contribute to the good organization* of the city, etc. Today these faculties are an object in themselves, and we forget, to a significant extent, that to be a politician, a philosopher, a mathematician does not represent a purpose in itself, but a means to acquire certain competences that lead to a certain lifestyle. No Faculty of philosophy is concerned today with anything else but an exercise of the mind, separated from any extra-bookish dimension. On the contrary, if things were different, we would get not a Faculty of philosophy, but a philosophical sect. The modern people's orientation is towards *science* and not towards *wisdom. Asceticism*, which is an essential component when it comes to acquiring wisdom, is replaced by *study*. The first is sent away to the domain of religion, while the second is appropriated by any educational system that forms scientists and not wise men.

What is, in the case of the Antiquity, the metaphysical support lying at the basis of ht creation of the educational institutions? We have seen what things are like in the case of Kant. In the case of Plato's Academy, we can no longer speak of the order comprising two parts that we find with Kant. We could probably speak only about the fact that the educational system is now oriented towards creating the *king philosopher* – namely perfect politicians, incorruptible and with a healthy behavior, little inclined to making errors in the leading of the city. But things are not limited to these things, because this particularity is not defining for all the schools of the Antiquity. The cynics, for instance, do not belong here, as we know that, according to their philosophy, they are against any generally accepted social and moral directions. What would be then the essence of this system of the Antiquity? Virtue? Wisdom? Pleasure? An answer could be: all of them together, under the form of *harmony*. Through this term we identify the essence of the educational system both during the modern times and during the Antiquity. The differences appear only on the background of the system of reference that we need to be harmonized with. Etymologically, the term comes from the Greek root *ar – άρ*; άραρίσκο, *ή άρμονια*, which means "adaptation", "adjustment", "harmonization". It joins ar-t, practical professions, pleasure and virtue (for this word, see V. Fontoynont – *Vocabulaire grec*). To this root are related the nominal derivatives with -*ti*-, Lat. *Ars, artis*, "natural disposition, talent", *artus*, "articulation", or another form of the root,

BDD-A20453 © 2009 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:59:11 UTC)

Lat. *ritus*, "rite, ordering". So, it is also semantically related to "order", whose Vedic form is *rta*, or the Iranian *arta*. "Order" in these terminologies point to the moral, juridical and religious dimensions in the entire Indo-European area (See as well E. Benveniste – *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européenes*, II, chap. 1 *Themis*).

Without going into further details concerning this term, we will only remind that in the Far East there has been no directly translatable concept for the Greek *philosophy*. However, on this interpretative level, there has been the term of *yoga* – derived from the verb *yuj* = to unite. The system of yoga, as it appears as well from Mircea Eliade's research work (M. Eliade – *Yoga, nemurire şi libertate* / Yoga, immortality and freedom), not to mention the most important book of the system, Patanjali – *Yoga sutra* – as well as an extremely rich bibliography in this domain, focus on this dimension of ordering one's life with a view to reaching a perfect harmony with one's self and with the outside. The Occidental Antiquity coincides, broadly speaking, with the Far East Antiquity. However, we should not exaggerate up to the point of identifying the two. We can talk rather about some family similarities, or about some coincidences on the level of the manifestation of the cultural life. In our case, the similarity goes only up to the idea of harmony, union to a certain value. In the Far East, this union manifests itself on the transcendental level, isolated from the world of the created things, which is a permanent source of suffering, a space of *maya*, of illusion (except for the *Samkya school*, for which nature is not illusory and harmony with one's self and with the divinity is reached by means of other mechanisms). The referential systems differ in the two areas. At the same time, in the Occidental area, at different epochs, as we have seen, the orientation of the individual's harmonization was accomplished in accordance to different values. But the essence is the same.

In conclusion, the issue of the conflict of the faculties opens onto the metaphysical dimensions of the creation of the political institutions. At the basis of these institutions, especially concerning the system analyzed in the present article, namely the University, lay metaphysical principles that orient people's practical actions in accordance to some value-ideas. According to Kant, if we consider his third *Critique*, the mechanism is that of the *projection of ideas* that become an axis towards which our actions converge in order to obtain concrete results for the individuals' welfare. This mechanism of the passage towards practice of the theoretical ideas does not function uniformly and error-proof. But the critical analysis, which understands the *functioning* of the system, will be a *voie royale* for detecting the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the forces acting within the institutions. The conflict of the faculties becomes a problem if there appear illegitimate components that impose themselves in practice because of the imbalance of the powers attributed to each component of the University.

Bibliography

Bădiliță C. – *Platonopolis*, Curtea Veche, Bucureşti 2007.

Benveniste E. – *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européenes*, Les éditions de minuit, Paris 1969.

Ferry L. – *Kant. Une lecture des trois „critiques",* Grasset, Paris 2006.

Fontoynont V. – *Le vocabulaire grec* – Auguste Picard, Paris 1949.

Hadot P. - *Qu´est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, Gallimard, Paris 1995.

Kant I. – *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, Hartenstein, Leipzig 1868.

BDD-A20453 © 2009 Valahia University Press

Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:59:11 UTC)

BDD-A20453 © 2009 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:59:11 UTC)