

Natalya A. Kutsenko

**FROM THE HISTORY
OF RUSSIAN KANT STUDIES
IN THE 19TH CENTURY**

This article is devoted to the dissemination and research on Kant's philosophy in Russia in the early 19th century. The author considers both the process of dissemination of information about Kant's teaching via printed materials and the analysis of his heritage in professional philosophical – in particular, ecclesiastic – circles. This process is illustrated by archive materials.

Key words: philosophy, theology, categorical imperative, academic philosophy, Kant studies.

The moral doctrine of Kant – one of the greatest European philosopher of the 18th century – did not only inspire educated Europeans throughout the 19th century but is also of considerable interest today. In this article, I would like to draw the attention of a wider audience of historians of philosophy to the need for an immediate analysis of the 19th century text material, which allows us to give a correct interpretation of the style of thinking and assess the philosophical positions of certain philosophers and theologians. Russian Kant studies offer a significant amount of such material; however, it has not been thoroughly studied, nor does it, due to various reasons, attract significant attention. Over the last decade, interest in professional philosophical studies, as well as Russian modern professional philosophical tradition has considerably increased in our country. Academic philosophy, as an element of professional philosophy, gradually receives due acknowledgement [see 1–4; 8; 11].

Western philosophical traditional had not only established corporations but also scientific and theoretical schools of thought. In the 18th-19th centuries, a professional philosophical school developed in Russia – which also affected the level of primary training – through investigation of the vast array of source materials and the teaching of basic philosophical disciplines. It existed and rested upon both its own training structure of academies, seminaries, and first universities

and the Western tradition, whose vast experience could not but be taken into account. When a balanced fusion of school, scholarly, scholastic and external, independent, creative tendencies take place, more favourable conditions for the development of philosophy and culture in general develop, as it was the case in Russia in the 19th – early 20th century.

The development of Russian scientific vocabulary in the field of humanities occurred in the 18th – early 19th centuries. It commenced during Peter the Great's language reforms in the early 18th century and continued through the whole century that was called the "age of translation".

Let us, first of all, clarify the general conditions of emergence and adoption of the ideas of German classical philosophy in the Russian Empire in the first half of the 19th century through defining Kant's position in this process. The first information about Kant reached Russia as early as the 1780s. In 1786, German philosopher Ludwig Mellman arrived in Moscow from Göttingen. In 1792–1794, he taught at Moscow University. Mellmann was one of the first Kantians and rather a populariser than a criticiser of Kant. The biographical dictionary of the teachers of Moscow University characterises him as a person who was excited about new philosophy, expressed one-sided and false thoughts regarding religious subjects freely and incautiously, as a result of which he was dismissed in January 1795 and had to leave the country [5, p.46–47]. If we keep in mind that Mellmann's lectures – delivered in German – gathered a sizeable audience, we can make a conclusion that Russian educated classes did have an opportunity to get acquainted with Kant's works immediately and through critical literature in the German language. In the *Letters of a Russian traveller* published in 1791, N. M. Karamzin tells about his visit to the famous philosopher Kant on the 18th of June 1789, which suggests that Kant had been known in Russia long before his works were published in the Russian language. Z. A. Kamensky, with a reference to the proceedings of the Imperial Academy of Sciences from 1725 to 1903, mentions that, in 1794, there was a discussion about the election of Kant to the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences [6, p. 55]. The lectures of the German professor Schaden on ethical philosophy given at Moscow University in 1795–1797 were also based on the principles of critical philosophy. However, decades had passed before the *Critiques* were published in the Russian language.

There are several scholarly perspectives on the time and place of appearance of Kant's works in Russian. E Radlov, in his *An outline of the development of Russian philosophy*, writes that Kant's name was first pronounced in the lectures of a Kharkov professor M. Osipovsky, while Kant's writings were translated later. So, the *Critique of pure reason* was translated by M. I. Vladislavlev in the 70s [9, p.16]. In the article *Russian philosophy*, V. Chuiko also mentions that the first critic of Kant was Osipovsky [12, p.15]. According to E. Radlov, the first Russian scholar to write about Kant was a professor of Kazan University, A. S. Lubkin. He published *Letters on critical philosophy* in 1805 [9, p.15]. One cannot overlook these authors, since their works are mentioned in bibliographical references on the history of Russian philosophy. However, a wider audience of readers and researchers do not always obtain correct information.

On the basis of the works of above-mentioned authors, as well as those of V. Zenkovsky, G. Shpet, archimandrite Gavriil, A. Galich, and Z. Kamensky, I will attempt to give an overview of Russian literature on Kant published in the 19th century in order to reveal the actual state of affairs in this field, however, I will not claim to have compiled the final bibliographical review.

So, the *Vestnik Evropy* magazine No. 6 of 1802 features an article entitled *Kant's philosophy in France* – apparently written by N.M. Karamzin – that considers the critique of Kant's idealism. In 1803, the first Russian translation of Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* made by a teacher of a navigator's school, Yakov Ruban, came out in the Ukrainian town of Nikolayev. In the same year, the first critical account of Kant's works in Russian appeared in K. Sprengel's book *Kritische Übersicht Des Zustandes Der Arzneykunde in Dem Letzten Jahrzehend* translated by V. Dzhunkovsky. In 1805, A.S. Lubkin published his *Letters on critical philosophy*, where he gives an assessment of Kant's gnoseological ideas. His critique of Kant's ethical doctrine was included in the *Review of logic* published in Saint Petersburg in 1807. In 1804, K. Villers's article *Immanuel Kant – a great philosopher and man* is published in *Sankt-Peterburgsky zhurnal* No. 10. *Kant's philosophy* – translated from French by A. Petrov – came out in 1807. The *Vestnik Evropy* magazine of 1808 (No. 24) publishes *A letter to Kant from anonymous* as well as *Kant's reply*. The *Ulei* magazine of 1812 (Nos 14, 15, 16) publishes *The review of aesthetics extracted from Kant's critique of aesthetical judgement*. Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* comes out two years later. Translations of critical literature are published alongside these works of Kant. For instance, a work entitled *Odoyevsky's Eleatic metaphysical school and Kant* based on the notes of Madame de Staël appeared in the *Mnemosyne* magazine. Her work *Of the most celebrated Philosophers before and after Kant* was published in 1824. Most works also offered a bibliography on Kant as well as on critical literature – a good example is *The history of philosophical systems* by A. Galich published in Saint Petersburg in 1818–1819.

The above and, in my opinion, incomplete, overview of Russian early 19th century literature on Kant indicates a permanent interest in Kant's philosophy and its different assessments. As the influence of German classical philosophy on Russian cultural life increased, interest in Kant's heritage, especially his ethical doctrine, became more considerable. Initially, practical philosophy was more popular than critical philosophy, since it was free from excessively "heavy" gnoseology. It is worth repeating that the first Kant's work in the Russian language was published in Ukraine and presented his ethical ideas.

Russian 19th century literature on Kant – both manuscripts and published works – requires much research and replenishment. Among numerous manuscripts dating back to the first half-the mid-19th century and relating to Kant studies that I examined in the archive of Kyiv Ecclesiastical Academy, I would like to draw your attention to those immediately linked to teaching. First of all, it is the manuscripts of lectures on *Philosophy of Religion* by Professor I.M. Skvortsov, most of which are dedicated to the concept of God in Kant's philosophy [10]. We should not forget about I.M. Skvortsov's published work *Overview of Kant's Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, which came out in Saint Petersburg in 1838. Below I would like to quote excerpts from two manuscripts of Serafim Serafimov, a graduate and later a professor of Kyiv Ecclesiastical Academy. The manuscripts entitled *What is the difference between Christian and philosophical moral teaching?* and *On Kant's principle of morality* are dated 1837–1841 and are registered as student semester papers of 1837–1841¹.

¹ For further information on the study of the manuscript archives of Kyiv Ecclesiastical Academy see [7].

1) No 766 of the register is a student composition of a 10th year student (1837–1841) of Kyiv Ecclesiastical Academy, Serafim Serafimov. This manuscript was delivered to the museum by Nadezhda Serafimova in Odessa on September 1904. Here and below, words and phrases are italicised by the author.

What is the difference between Christian and philosophical moral teaching?

The basic and crucial difference between philosophical and Christian moral teaching is the *end*, the former and the latter aspires to achieve. They are apparently similar in this relation.... The moral teaching of mind is limited only by the development of an internal law, the explanation of requirement, formulation of certain rules of activity, and indication of several means easing the way for virtues. But whether a person will do it and how – it is not a task of mind. <...> The purpose of Christian moral teaching is to develop in a person an ability to do right – rectify their will, make it such that it cannot deviate from the law, eradicate every inclination to evil. In a nutshell, to bring a person back to the state of innocence, restore the image of God in them, *revive* them. Philosophical moral teaching tries only to prevent a person from getting in a state that can destroy their nature. The purpose of Christian moral teaching is to elevate human nature up to its amalgamation with divine nature, up to the likeness to God. It demonstrates the spirit of both moral teachings. Philosophical moral teaching does not penetrate human nature, does not see and apparently does not want to see all corruptions of human heart, thus its rules only alleviate and conceal our moral diseases but do not cure them; it does not contain anything that can expel pride – the image of devil – from our hearts <...>

Being different in *spirit* and *purpose*, Christian and philosophical moral teaching are also based on different *principles*. <...> Before Kant..., all principles philosophers had built their moral systems on were amoral, which was proven by the wise Critic. <...> In Kant's teaching, it is *one-sided*, since it determines only the form of actions, saying nothing about their objects and purposes.... It is also based on conceit and egoism, since the assessment of actions is delegated to universal practical reason – a judge, who is not always correct and unbiased;... who lost much of the primordial light.

The organisational principle of Christian activity is the church – a safe and immaculate principle. (Thou shalt love thy God and neighbour as thyself). For a Christian, *love* is the motive for any activity. Philosophical love is a far cry from Christian love.

One can say that this text demonstrates the beginnings of polemical spirit peculiar to any theological tradition and cultivated in academy students, but it also proves that the moral theory of the "wise Critic" could not but arouse deep sympathy in theologians.

2) S. Serafimov. *On Kant's principle of morality*.

Quoted from the manuscript: Institute of Manuscripts of National Library of Ukraine – Kyiv Ecclesiastical Academy – 327 pp. (Mus. 909).

Part 1

(P. 1) "Two things", Kant writes, "fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily reflection is occupied with them: *the starry heaven above me and the moral law within me*". Kant's deep respect for the moral law led him to addressing the moral aspect of human mind and raising it above the theoretical ones. It encouraged him to rise in arms against

false moral systems and disprove all principles based on the concept of happiness and other irrelevant motives. What is Kant's moral doctrine? In order to see that, one should pay heed to the very principle of morality that Kant locates as a cornerstone of his teaching.

Kant's principle of morality is as follows: act only on a maxim that you can will to be a universal law¹¹. Evidently, this principle is completely different from the material principles that were rejected by Kant. There are no sensual motives and no external reasons determined by law. (P. 1, reverse). Here, the object of moral activity can be neither happiness, not self-perfection, nor the will of God: nothing has a direct, immediate relation to a person: all of it, Kant says (there is a teacher's comment – N.K.), is material.

A person, when taking a certain action, should keep the only thing in mind: how to act in order to be a moral being, how to maintain the rights of their practical reason without being guided by anything external. The moral law and freedom are the two guides on the way of a human being. Law, as a law, is a form of action; a person only needs to know this form, this example full well, so that his activity is always compliant with it, concordant with the legal activity of others, the true social good and moral order in general, which is universally accepted and must be followed by everyone. For instance, I want to get rich and employ the following means to achieve my end: instead of the real price of a good I charge twice or thrice more. (P. 2) But since such way of enrichment cannot be universally accepted, because it is not concordant with the universal good and everybody would not follow it, since everybody is more or less certain of its unrighteousness, thus, such way of enrichment could not and should not be the maxim of my activity. Apparently, a human being should renounce external profits and do everything to abide by the law in order to ensure that their action is universally beneficial, act only out of respect to universal moral legislation, which should be accepted and sanctified; at the same time one should imagine neither the outcome of such actions, nor a reward for it. What a wonderful idea! The more selfless human deeds are, the more elevated and noble they are. And the principle of morality expressing and prescribing such selflessness, such love to law (P. 2, reverse) as a law, deserves praise and approval. In this case, a person is an independent doer of the internal law, guided only by the conviction about the equity of its requirements. However, it seems to be the only merit to Kant's principle, since it is not devoid of flaws.

Kant's principle determines only the form of actions passing over its object and purpose. It is also an extreme! A person, while they have inclinations, a *heart*, cannot be bereft of aspirations on the way of their moral activity; they cannot but imagine the final end, where all their inclinations should be oriented to and ask themselves where the true end to their exploits and the rest from their labours are. Indeed, this person's sin is only that they do not know how to act, how to *think*, desire and act legally.

Part 2

(P. 3)... Does it not bring more suffering that a person does not know *where* to direct his aspirations to. Their heart does not know where to rush; it... clings to the false good. Of more virtue would be such teacher who would see the true good for a human being... that would satisfy his heart and quench his thirst of his god-like spirit. And only then would he determine *how* one can achieve the good.

(P. 3, reverse)... Consequently, it is necessary to point out not only the form of actions but also its purpose... Thus, to attach such principle to morality, without specifying *where* such action should lead, means to bereave morality of its consoling elements and ascribe cold stoicism to it.

... Kant is afraid of defining the object of activity, because he aspires to remain true to his system, within which practical reason is raised above all human faculties and God – the source of reason and all morality – can be hardly discerned behind it. <...> Kant seems to be convinced that a person does not need anything except a mere action. <...> Thus, his doctrine is one-sided.

(P. 4, reverse) Kant exhausts all subtleties of reasoning to exclude from the circle of human actions the most sacred of them – duties towards God. <...> But human heart will always rise in arms against it. Without love for God, morality turns into pure egoism.

(P. 5) Kant accepts the idea of God that can establish only a moral feeling, however, while obeying the law, one should be filled with love and respect not for God, but law (practical reason). Maybe it is better to stand in love to the Lawmaker. "The fear of the Lord", another sage, not lesser than Kant, once said, "is the beginning of knowledge" and, therefore, of all true morality.

Thus, all virtues will strive to please practical reason, as if there were nothing above it. <...> A righteous person, according to the spirit of Kant's rule, can easily sink into moral pride, but a person following the Christian rule... always has a reason to humble themselves... Thus, our principle leads to humbleness – the foundation of Christian morality, while Kant's principle to egoism.

Below this passage Serafimov quotes a story about a rich man who sacrifices all his property and emphasises that, according to Kant's logic, the actions that cannot be a universal law should not be the object of activity. If everyone follows this example, there will be no rich people in society, which stresses the contradictions of Kant's doctrine of moral law.

As the above texts show, for a long time, Russian philosophical thought was closely linked to theology, thus, their joint consideration was and is one on the most promising lines of research in philosophical knowledge proper and spiritual culture in general. The link between philosophical and theological issues, which implies not only harmony but also certain collisions, should be considered as interdependent aspects of the process of development of Russian thought. Even research on particular issues of this interconnection proves poor applicability of common historical-philosophical methodologies and requires recognition as an independent line of research in need of a specific methodology. Research on Russian Kant studies plays an important role in this process.

Bibliography

1. *Абрамов А. И.* Сборник научных трудов по истории русской философии. М., 2005.

2. *Авдеева Л. Р., Абрамов А. И., Жуков В. Н.* Философия в духовных академиях и университетах в XIX – начале XX в. Философско-правовая мысль // История русской философии. М., 2001. С. 285–334.

3. *Бажанов В. А.* Прерванный полёт: История «университетской» философии и логики в России. М., 1995.

4. *Баранец Н. Г.* Философское сообщество: Структура и закономерности становления (Россия рубежа XIX–XX веков). Ульяновск, 2003.

5. *Биографический словарь профессоров и преподавателей Императорского университета: в 2 ч.* М., 1855. Ч.2.
6. *Каменский З. А.* Кант в русской философии начала XIX века // *Вестник истории мировой культуры.* М., 1960. №1.
7. *Куценко Н. А.* Духовно-академическая философия в России первой половины XIX века: киевская и петербургская школы (Новые материалы). М., 2005.
8. *Пустарнаков В. Ф.* Университетская философия в России. М., 2003.
9. *Радлов Э.* Очерк истории русской философии. Пб., 1920.
10. *Скворцов Иоанн.* Лекции по философии религии. Ч. 1 (Издание рукописи и комментарии Н. А. Куценко) // *Философия религии: альманах.* 2006–2007. М., 2007. С. 393–427.
11. *Цвык И. В.* Духовно-академическая философия в России XIX в. М., 2002.
12. *Чуйко В.* «Русская философия» // *Киркнер Фр.* История философии с древнейшего до нашего времени. М., 1919.

About author

Dr. Natalia A. Kutesnko, Senior Research Fellow, History of Russian Philosophy Unit, Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, e-mail: dr_gromov@mail.ru