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KANT'S INFLUENCE
ON RUSSIAN THOUGHT*

This article sets out to give an overview as to how Russian thought was influenced by the ideas and personality of Kant – a bright exponent of German spirit, the genius loci of Königsberg – a city of calamitous history.

Key words: *Kant's philosophy, Kant's personality, Russian philosophy, Russian culture.*

Due to the immensity and inexhaustibility of the topic, whose sufficient exploration requires several PhD theses, monographs and collective works, I will focus on a few of its aspects. I will confine my attention to Kant as a *personality*, a *thinker* and an *exponent of German spirit*. Influence, in the broad sense, will be understood as not only the positive adoption of his ideas, but also as polemics with them, their rejection and even passing them over in silence [1 – 4].

Apprentice's imitation and trustworthy retelling of that once reflected and fixed in the texts were the first forms of disseminating the ideas of the great philosopher that Immanuel Kant has been and will always remain. The next, more complicated stage is the in-depth analysis of his teaching, discovery of new turns of thought, creative development and revision, as it would happen in a hundred years within different versions of neo-Kantianism and other movements genetically connected to Kant [20; 21; 29].

As to polemics, it is the most complicated, oppositionary but, nevertheless, not less and maybe even more efficient form of influence on connections, since it, as any conflict, captures human mind more strongly than calm attitude. This conflict about Kant's heritage perfectly corresponds to the antinomy of his philosophy and the challenge he issued to the traditional and outworn ways of thinking. It only amplifies the halo of his fame and

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does not leave either adherents or opponents indifferent [5; 22]. In case of philosophy, which, by nature, poses questions more often than answers them, such situation is explainable, admissible and even desirable. It is much worse when there is no polemics and an indifferent mind scans through somebody's ideas and conceptions. And neither words of approval nor words of reproach are heard there.

Thus, we will say that there are *silence* and *silencing*. The former takes place when there is no desire or no opportunity to speak, the latter when words are not expressed publically due to internal or external prohibitions. Internal motivation can relate to both the unwillingness to enter into discussion and the desire to ignore those whom you do not agree with and prefer to draw no attention to. External limitations relate to deliberate regulation by certain circles, including civil and church authorities, ideological institutions and other public and private structures aiming to limit or prohibit the dissemination of undesirable ideas. So, the Soviet times did not welcome an in-depth study into the ideological heritage of the philosopher, of — as he was dubbed then — the idealist and agnostic Kant, although, as a representative of classical German philosophy, which was construed as a predecessor of Marxism, his works had to be selectively studied and partially used.

However, despite all prohibitions (and, maybe, due to them), the authorities' "non-recommendation" became a strong recommendation for the thinking classes. In the age of totalitarian state, one of the forms of intellectual protest was aspiration to learn that what was forbidden to be learned. And it holds true for so-called "bourgeois" Western philosophy, which, despite all prohibitions, was gaining popularity. Thus, the selective attitude to Kant as a thinker and Kantianism as a philosophical movement with all its modifications, as well as official silencing, do not indicate a lack of Kant's influence in the Soviet Union, on the contrary, the need for prohibitive measures emphasise the presence of the prohibited.

Let us outline certain aspects of the influence of Kant and his teaching on Russian thought and its individual representatives, which has been exerted for over two centuries. These aspects are as follows: 1) direct acquaintance with the philosopher, visiting his lectures, conversations and correspondence with him; 2) reading his works in the original or translation; 3) the dissemination of Kant's teaching in Russia by German and Russian teachers; 4) visits of Russian students and interns to German universities, where Kant's ideas were expounded; 5) studying the works of European experts dedicated to the philosopher; 6) the development of Russian Kant studies and consideration of different perspectives on I. Kant and his teaching; 7) the assessment of contemporary interest in Kant and his works in Russia. Each of the above mentioned topics deserves an in-depth study, thus, I will confine myself to an overview and several examples.

Dozens of Russian officials and military personnel had a happy opportunity to see and hear Kant, the then associate professor at Königsberg University, when visiting his lectures, mostly on applied disciplines. This opportunity arouse as, after the victorious Seven Years' War, East Prussia became for several years a part of the Russian Empire. However, no one from Kant's audience made a mark on the history of Russian thought. At the same time, one cannot but mention the name of A.T. Bolotov, who had a good command of German, was employed at the governor's office and expressed lively interests in philosophy in general, however, not in Kant's teaching, but rather in the ideas of his opponents, Crusius and Weymann. Although his religious faith was shaken under the

influence of the rationalism of Enlightenment, a bright exponent of which was Kant, Bolotov started to profess orthodox-style theocentrism following the concept of harmonisation of religion and science. Upon his return to Russia, he committed himself to intense social, pedagogic, and economic activities¹. This example, typical of the years to come, shows that Kant's ideas were not entirely welcome in Russia.

Tumultuous and ambivalent, the 18th century witnessed different trends. Extremely busy Kant, who rarely condescended to communicate with anybody, found time to write a serious conceptual message to prince A.M. Beloselsky-Belozersky, who published a treatise in French entitled *Dianology*, which was called an excellent work by the German philosopher. This remarkable episode in the history of German-Russian philosophical ties indicates favourable attention of the great philosopher to the questioning thought of his addressee and Kant's interest in being understood correctly by the Russian enlightener. Another positive example is the famous three hour conversation with N.M. Karamzin that took place in spring 1789 in the study of the Königsberg professor, in the course of which, the sixty-plus year old, worldly-wise man revealed to his twenty-three year old interlocutor the reflections concluding his continuous mental efforts. If the first episode with prince Beloseldky-Belozersky was of limited significance and symptomatic character, the meeting with Karamzin, who immediately recorded the conversation on paper and published it in his *Letters of a Russian traveller*, gained much public attention and contributed to the positive perception of Kant's name, personality and doctrines in Russia [38, p. 117–119]. The three above examples illustrate how the educated classes of Russian society formed their opinion about Kant and what arguments were about to erupt over his name and teaching.

Russian intellectual elite could get acquainted with Kant's life works in the German language both in Germany and in Russia as soon as they were delivered. Prior to the passing of the Königsberg philosopher, an important event took place — the first Russian translation of his *Metaphysics of morals* came out in the town of Nikolayev located in southern Russia on the coast of the Black sea. The work was translated by a teacher from a local navigator's college, Yakov Ruban [30, p. 786]. Throughout the 19th century, Kant's major writings were translated into the Russian language, as well as a number of works dedicated to him authored by Villers, Meiners, Rheinhold and other European — not exclusively German — experts. Today Kant's doctrine occupies a befitting position in the systematic reviews of Western philosophy, his ideas are scrutinised and introduced into the general cultural context [24]. In Germany, not only philosophers (Tieftrunk, Hufeland, Tinneman) but also poets (Schiller and Goethe) have exploited his ideas. However, all these trends made their way to Russia and took root there.

In Russia, Kant's authority was increasing gradually, especially, after he had been elected a foreign fellow of the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences in 1794².

¹ A.T. Bolotov became one of the typical representatives of the natural science movement in the Russian Enlightenment, who aspired, in accordance with his providentialist position, to develop the conception of *natural theology* as a Russia version of the popular in Europe *physical* and *cosmic theology*.

² However, for his natural science rather than philosophical works.

Alongside the distribution of books in German, Russian and other languages containing either the works of the Königsberg thinker, or analyses of his ideas, or explanation of his complicated terminology, the teaching process becomes the most important transmitter of Kant's doctrine [32]. One of the first adherents of Kant's teaching was a professor of Göttingen University, Mellmann, a devotee of critical philosophy, who was invited to Russia in 1786. He — and, later Schaden, Buhle, and Rheinhard — delivered lectures at Moscow University. Schad and Finke gave lectures at Kharkov and Kazan Universities, which were opened in the early 19th century, respectively. At the same time, dozens of Russian students studied at German Universities — the one in Göttingen, for example, where Kant's ideas were especially popular — and explored the heritage of the great philosopher in the German language.

Russia saw the beginning and development of in-depth exploration of Kant's works, analysis of his doctrine and the introduction of his ideas into the teaching process by Russian specialists. A professor of Saint Petersburg University, Galich, in his *History of philosophical systems*, dedicated to Kant a whole section equipped with a formidable bibliography (Saint Petersburg, 1819). Archimandrite Gavriil (Voskresensky), when considering German philosophy in his six-volume *History of philosophy*, allotted Kant a paragraph entitled *Kant's critical idealism* (Kazan, 1840). Professor Gogotsky dedicated to Kant his doctoral thesis entitled *Critical perspective on Kant's philosophy* (Kyiv, 1847) and the first four-volume Russian philosophical encyclopaedia compiled by him (*Philosophical lexicon*, Kyiv, 1857–1873) boasts an article on Kant. Since then, such article and, later, articles entitled "Kantianism", "Neo-Kantianism", "Kant in Russia", "Critique of pure reason", "Critique of practical reason", "Critique of judgement", "Categorical imperative", etc. have always been featured in Russian philosophical references, having become an obligatory part of philosophical knowledge [20–22].

Another topic is the specific features of Kant studies and the attitude to his heritage at Russian theological academies situated in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Kyiv, and Kazan. All in all, ecclesiastical-academic philosophy had had a long history in Russia (the Slavic Greek Latin Academy was founded in Moscow in 1658, it was transformed later into the Ecclesiastical Academy and relocated to Sergiyev Posad, where it has been situated ever since) and demonstrated professionalism, especially, in the fields of philological, historical, and theological training. The scope of reactions to Kant's philosophy in general and his individual ideas in particular was broad — ranging from total rejection to deep appreciation; at least, he could not be but mentioned, for it was impossible to pass over such authority and such fundamental doctrine [1; 8].

It is quite obvious that Kant's ideas discussed in his work *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, whose mere title sparked protest among orthodox audience, were rejected.

As a professor of Kyiv ecclesiastical academy, Skvortsov, said, the best of Kant's ideas about religion belonged to the Gospel, and the worst to his rational philosophy. At the same time, his colleague Yurkevich rated highly Kant's contribution to contemporary philosophy and widely used his ideas and works comparing him with Plato in terms of influence. A professor of Moscow academy, Golubinsky, admired Kant's ideas in the field of epistemology but did not accept his proofs for God's existence.

It is remarkable that A.I. Vvedensky, a professor of Moscow Academy, became one of the most eminent Russian Kantians, having dedicated several works to Kant, including *Kant's teaching on space* (Sergiyev Posad, 1895). He was opposed by a professor of Saint Petersburg Academy, Karinsky, who had vast philosophical knowledge, visited Lotze's lectures in Göttingen and wrote a book entitled *A critical review of the recent period in German philosophy* (Saint Petersburg, 1873). In the monograph *On self-evident truths*, Karinsky conducted a comprehensive analysis of the *Critique of pure reason*, presuming that Kant's teaching on speculative truths was marked by subjective dogmatism, thus, new rationalistic philosophy had to look for new foundations for its judgements. Vvedensky wrote a polemical review of this monograph entitled *On real and imaginary Kant*. A comprehensive work entitled *Positive philosophy and supersensible being* was published by bishop Nikanor (Brovkovich) (Saint Petersburg, 1875–1888, volumes 1–3). Bishop Nikanor was an outstanding person. After he had graduate from Saint Petersburg Academy and become rectors' assistant, he was suspected of "unorthodox thinking" and exiled from the empire's capital; he changed several residential locations and settled on Odessa. While criticizing "antichristian" Western thinkers – from Voltaire and other Encyclopaedists to Marx and Schopenhauer, he tried to employ positivistic methodology to fight materialism and atheism and gained a reputation as a liberal theologian [22, p. 266–316].

By the end of the 19th century, Kant's philosophy found its rightful position in the intellectual life of Russian society, but the dry rationality of the Königsberg philosopher, as compared to the inspired pathos of Schelling and the fundamental style of Hegel, contributed to the initial success of Schellingianism and, especially, Hegelianism in Russia. However, Kantianism started to press its German competitors. Following Liebmann's slogan "back to Kant", it transforms into neo-Kantianism and finds new adherents. Of course, Kantianism did not attract as many followers as populist Marxism and was not as alluring as aesthetising Nietzscheism. A small community of its Russian supporters brought together those who were interested in intense work of human consciousness aspiring to cognise the world and itself, which always means a hard and, sometimes, exhausting labour.

One should mention that pre-revolutionary Russian philosophy of the late 19th-early 20th century was thriving as never before or since. This period is characterised by a happy combination of good European training, independent development of own original conceptions, considerable freedom in expressing ideas, which resulted in the emergence of different schools of thought – from vulgar materialism to subtle mysticism, from statism to anarchy, from personalism to cosmism, and many others that fought with each other for human minds. All in all, it accounted for the perfect philosophical condition of Russian thought and the polyphony of thinking, which are of crucial importance for creative diversity [12; 13; 40].

Of course, in this situation, Kant could not be ignored. There appeared numerous connections, intersections, oppositions that could be labelled as Kant and Solovyov, Kant and Dostoyevsky, Kant and Tolstoy, Kant and Florensky, Kant and Bely. This list can be easily continued. The multitude of ideas under the heading "Kant: pro et contra" moves to Russian emigrant circles, which, in the framework of Russian philosophy abroad, continued to develop pre-revolutionary thought. One can mention Bulgakov, Frank, Berdyaev, Stepan, Yakovenko and others, whose works address Kant and his doctrine, evaluating and interpreting it in different ways [22].

There are numerous studies into the issue, and there is no need to list them. Let us confine to a few crucial questions. The first one is how Kantianism and neo-Kantianism relate to *sophiology* — one of the dominant currents of Russian thought and culture of the time. According to Florensky, sophiology is connected with Christianised Platonism, and Plato and Kant are two watersheds of thought, since they divide *theocentrism* and *autocentrism* into two contradictory currents, which are opposite, on the one hand, and supplement each other, on the other [35]. Moreover, Kantianism is explicated as a teaching by solely verbal and rational means of expression, while sophiology employs both verbal (not only rational, sometimes even irrational) and non-verbal (aesthetic, visual, symbolic — artworks and rituals) means³.

The second question concerns the typology of Russian thought, which differs from Western European thought in a number of features. Despite the diversity of philosophising forms in the West, the dominating one has been the tradition of rational discourse stretching from Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz to Wittgenstein, Russell and the adherents of contemporary analytical philosophy. The tradition of Russian philosophising, in view of the diversity of its forms, is based, first of all, on the above mentioned Christianised Platonism. The missionaries Cyril and Methodius planted into the orthodox soil *Slavia orthodoxa* — the Byzantine synthesis of philology, philosophy, and theology that can be traced back to metropolitan Hilarion of Kyiv, a 11th century author, and stretches to Vladimir Solovyov, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky [11, p. 472–475]. Proficiency in written word, philosophical depth of thought and appeal to sacred values is evident and inseparable in their works. It is where Kirieevsky's idea of "integral knowledge" and Solovyov's concept of "all-unity" stem from. With all due respect to the Western tradition, the Russian one should also be taken into account; together, they constitute the diversity of philosophical universe, where Plato and Aristotle supplement each other and rationalism and irrationalism balance our consciousness preventing us from being pulled to either side [36, 43].

Summing up my reflections and admitting that a lot of aspects remained untouched, I would like to say that Kant as a *personality* inspires respect in Russian people as an honest worker of thought, a selfless labourer, and a patient mentor [39]. He was a worldly ascetic, who sublimated and sacrificed all his mental and physical strength to the altar of philosophy. Maybe, a Russian person with their big Russian soul and poorer organisations shuns the excessive discipline, strict pedantry and even automatism of the German professor's behaviour, but this is a matter of national taste. At the same time, the external order of Kant's life contributed to internal concentration and strict and predictable life helped stay fit and conserved energy for the main task — intense mental activity.

As to the understanding of Kant as a *thinker*, a lot has been said above. One can only add that, in contemporary post-Soviet Russia, Kant, Kantianism and Kant studies represent a respectable component of philosophical and, to an extent, cultural and social life [14; 28; 29; 34].

³ The history of sophian tradition in Russia stretches over 4,000 years, it developed under Byzanthian and, partially, Western influence. Sophia the Wisdom of God was perceived as a manifestation of the divine Logos as early as the construction of Saint Sophia cathedrals in Kyiv, Novgorod, and Polotsk that imitated Constantinople's Hagia Sophia. In architecture, hymnography, and icon painting, the idea of Sophia came across as clearly as in Biblical texts and the works of the Church Fathers.

As to the attitude towards Kant as an *exponent of German spirit*, I would dare offer the following interpretation. The influence of Germany, its culture and economic, political, and military power has been significant throughout Russian history [31; 42]. When the two countries were allies, it ensured stability in Europe, when they were rivals, it shook the continent. Russians ranked highly the great German spirit as represented by Bach and Beethoven in music, Goethe and Schiller in literature, Kant and Hegel in philosophy. However, a great nation with a great spirit is always inclined to subdue other nations and cultures not only by economic, political, and military, but also intellectual means. Thus, the neighbouring nations develop a natural defence reaction to the Germanisation of consciousness, which is easy to understand for the French, the Polish, and the Russians and is quite perplexing for the Germans. I think that, as to Kant, this cautious idea – not to become completely subordinate to the German giant of thought – can be found in the works of many Russian thinkers. With all due admiration, it is necessary to keep a certain distance between Kant and those who dare approach this colossus. It holds true to a greater extent for the adherents of Slavophile, irrational, religious and other currents that contradicted Kant's doctrine a priori, and to a lesser extent, to the followers of "Westernised", rationalistic, scientific and adjacent currents of diverse Russian thought [5; 8; 9; 37; 42].

In conclusion, I would like to mention the city, with which the German philosopher is closely associated and whose creature he is. Königsberg as a fortress, a working city, a port, the German outpost on the Eastern border had a long history (observable, unfortunately, only in the surviving pre-war photographs), which affected the traditions and mentality of its residents. The ascetic life of its founders, the warrior monks of the Teutonic order, the puritan ethics of Protestantism, the continuous struggle for existence with the animus nature of East Prussia among hostile tribes and nations left its mark on the residents of the unique city on the edge of German universe. At the same time, Königsberg became a cultural centre of the Baltic area, where the famous university, Albertina, attracted young people from throughout neighbouring countries. Thus, it was an intersection of different cultures, ethnic groups, and confessions [26]. All these accumulated over centuries peculiarities expressed themselves in Kant, who consciously did not want to move to any other city and has always been not only a sightseeing object and a brand, but, first of all, *a genius of thought*, the genius loci of this great city with turbulent history.

Supposedly, by his father's side, Kant was a Balt (according to one version⁴) and, maybe it is not a coincidence, that one of the last opuses of the great master of philosophy was the afterword to a German-Lithuanian dictionary. Living an honest and industrious life not unlike his craftsman father, in his ideas, he expressed the interests of the numerous third estate, which the enlighteners of the 18th century – his contemporaries – concerned themselves with throughout vast European space from France to Russia. Having fulfilled his professional and civic duty, Kant was interred in the ground of his small motherland, whose son and patriot he was.

As if foreseeing the tragic lot of his native city, Kant writes in 1795 a treatise entitled *Perpetual Peace*, where he voices hope for a peaceful Europe to come, a

⁴ There is another version of Kant's genealogy, according to which, his father was a German colonist, whose ancestors settled in East Prussia.

continent free of wars and violence. But the authorities and military leaders rarely pay heed to philosophers. The desire to rule over other nations that underlay German militarism led not to the domination but to the defeat of the great country and nation. Königsberg fell a sacrifice to that catastrophe [6; 23]. It is striking and, at the same time, providential that, in 1945, in the chaos of a destroyed smouldering city, Kant's tomb — the shrine to the Königsberg's genius loci — survived intact and still remains a symbol of continuous cultural tradition in the new historical conditions. Let us pay homage to the great thinker and the city that gave birth to such an honourable citizen.

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