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Thomas Nemeth

Kant in Imperial Russia

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Philosophy acquires a national character not in its answers – an actually scientific answer is the same for all nations and languages – but in its formulation of the questions, in their selection, and in their partial modifications.

(Gustav Shpet)

Contents

Part I
Introduction

Chapter 1
Introduction

Abstract Here we look principally at the Masaryk-Radlov thesis that, historically speaking, Russian thinkers paid scant attention to epistemological concerns, favoring practical issues. This preference accounted for their meager interest in Kant, which, in turn, reinforced their failure to develop a detailed theory of cognition. In this chapter, we look at responses to this thesis by several prominent Russian philosophers.

Keywords Masaryk-Radlov thesis • Russian paradigm • Two-aspect view • Positivism • Solov'ëv • Berdjaev • Frank

The following work had its inception decades ago in a broad and ill-defined project to undertake a history of Kant-interpretation. Although beginning with the reception and the understanding of Kant's works during his own lifetime would surely seem to be a natural, if not a logical, starting point, the present author consciously decided to postpone that "chapter." After all, the original source-material, e.g., the works of Reinhold, Fichte, and Hegel, was already the episode best known within the English-speaking philosophical community. The turn, then, to Kant's reception in Russia instead of, say, in France, England, or Italy was based largely on purely non-philosophical factors, though sheer ignorance of nineteenth century Russian philosophy in the West – and thus a perceived need to ameliorate the situation – played a significant role.

The story of "Kant in Russia" is not the history of Russian philosophy, even though a quick perusal of these pages may prompt one to think so – or, at least, to think that that is the present author's position. Still, the history of Kant-interpretation in Russia encompasses virtually the entire history of Russian philosophy, and no significant figure in the latter, with but a few exceptions, can or should be excluded. The reason for this is simply that, virtually from its first tentative steps, Russian thinkers confronted and arguably had to confront Kant's legacy given its enormity, measured in terms of both its subsequent influence and its sheer depth and breadth. The pages that follow will hopefully show this to be the case.

In an account such as this, we cannot reasonably aspire to paint a complete picture of how Kant was received in Russia. We cannot even aspire to mention either all invocations of Kant's name in the philosophical literature – let alone in all the literary forms – or all viewpoints that surely bear the influence of Kantianism during

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the era of Imperial Russia. Philosophy was barely tolerated and then only with great reluctance under the tsars, and Kant's views, in particular, were scorned, ridiculed and dismissed in the relevant government circles. Still, in general, he was neither overlooked nor was his importance discounted. Especially as we approach the momentous events of 1917, we find Kant's name mentioned more and more frequently in the literature in step with the growth of universities. The basis for inclusion and discussion here lies chiefly in what the present author felt to be most "philosophical," as that term is presently understood in Western scholarship. Another criterion had to be a direct invocation of Kant's name. To do otherwise, in the estimation that some argument was directed at Kant's positions or significantly influenced by those positions – albeit without Kant's name being mentioned – is speculative and would involve so many additional individuals and ideas that the present project would grow to an unmanageable size and scope. It might well become that entire history of Russian thought – and not just philosophy in the proper sense – that this author had hoped to avoid. Among those not dealt with here is Boris Chicherin, a large, even enormous, figure in nineteenth century Russian thought. Certainly, his ethical views and perhaps other aspects of his overall thought were deeply indebted even more to Kant than to Hegel. However, he did not see himself as a Kantian and his elaborations were not framed against the background of Kant's thought. Although the reader will find a discussion of Vladimir Solov'ëv in the pages that follow, his original philosophy with its broad sweep too can be read as a reply to Kant. With this in mind, the discussion here is limited to those passages wherein Solov'ëv directly invoked Kant's name.

In his justly acclaimed treatise, *The Semantic Tradition from Kant to Carnap*, J. Alberto Coffa writes, "For better or worse, almost every philosophical development of significance since 1800 has been a response to Kant."[1] We see this affirmed, even though to a limited and largely negative degree, in Russian philosophy. That is, all significant Russian philosophers and philosophically minded theologians in nineteenth century Russia acknowledged Kant's importance – if not explicitly, then by according special attention to his positions, which were, as often as not, singled out for analysis. Unfortunately, the vast majority of opinions were disparaging, some even harshly so. With strong clerical backgrounds and being educated in religious schools, few nineteenth century Russian scholars attempted to give Kant a judicious hearing, preferring from the outset to condemn him owing to his perceived subjectivity and overt lack of adherence to traditional religious practices. They argued, for example, that moral truths, after all, come from God by way of Revelation, to which Kant made no appeal. And as for the subjectivity of space and time, the clerics, in particular, found Kant's position to fly in the face of both common sense and Sacred Scripture. As the reader will see repeatedly, many, if not most, of these theologians accepted Jacobi's criticism, ascribing the puzzling conception of noumenal affection to Kant's epistemology. With such general assessments, it is surprising that they concerned themselves at all with the Königsberg sage. Nevertheless, they clearly felt the need to rebut his positions, though they never seemed to have

[1] Coffa 1991: 7.

asked themselves why, in the first place, someone would formulate what these clerics found to be Kant's utterly wrong and easily debunked positions. Nor did they ever ask themselves why if Kant was so utterly misguided, he was and remained so highly regarded in the history of philosophy. The astonishing fact is that so very few of them attempted to interpret Kant in a manner that would buttress their own views. Some of this perplexity still pervades contemporary philosophy.

One question, then, confronting us is why did the Russian intellectual community in general react so negatively toward Kant. Why were they so unreceptive – assuming, of course, that they were so – to his ideas for so long? One of the first to address this question was also one of the first to discuss the history of Russian philosophy from a secular viewpoint. Ernest Radlov (1854–1928), who served for a time as director of the St. Petersburg Public Library, noted the hostility of Russian philosophers in general to what they regarded as subjectivism coupled with their obstinate striving for a cognition of reality, i.e., not the reality merely "behind" appearances, things as they "really" are, but the reality of the unconditional or absolute. Radlov held that these national characteristics accounted for the "meager success of Kant on Russian soil."[2] Radlov's thesis was developed and made more poignant by Thomas Masaryk, the philosopher and friend of Husserl's from their student days, who went on to become the first president of the new nation of Czechoslovakia after World War I. In his two-volume study, *The Spirit of Russia*, Masaryk, like Radlov, acknowledged the meager influence Kant exerted on Russian thought. Looking over the history of Russian thought, Masaryk could not find any interest in epistemological issues, even among the most prominent figures. Their concerns to him bore only a practical character. Masaryk acknowledged that in Russia Kant's ethical teachings both had been known and had exerted influence. He singled out, in particular, Solov'ëv and Lavrov, two figures the reader will encounter later in our study, as being receptive to Kantian *practical* philosophy. However, Masaryk faulted the Russians for their limited knowledge of Kant's theory of cognition. In Masaryk's mind, this ignorance of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* was "peculiarly associated" with a failure to develop a sound theory of cognition.[3]

Masaryk opined that Russian thinkers viewed Kant's Critical Philosophy as a form of subjectivism in that it limited the range and scope of human cognition. That Kant had elaborated an epistemological activism in which the cognitive processes played a far-reaching contributory role remained, according to Masaryk, incomprehensible to Russian minds, which inclined toward positivism, toward accepting what was given to them without question. Russians are, he held, more inclined than Western Europeans to accept mythology and find difficulty in being critical. Time and again in the history of Russian thought, we find Russian thinkers rejecting the faith in which they were reared only to accept another creed with equal and often with an even more fervent resolve.

No doubt, we can mount a strong case for many of Masaryk's claims with the support of historical examples, but Masaryk himself boldly conjectured why the

[2] Radlov 1920: 56.

[3] Masaryk 1961: 468.

Russian mind shunned epistemology. The root of Russian passivity, of its negligence of epistemology, and of its failure to recognize Kant's contributions was an indoctrination by the Russian Orthodox Church, which accustomed the people to accept what it taught without question as objectively given.

Support for Masaryk's general position arose years later from a surprising quarter. The Russian Christian existential philosopher Nikolaj Berdjaev – another figure we will encounter in this study – broadly assented to Masaryk's characterization, writing that the Russian national character is religious. Russians assess every idea in terms of whether it is orthodox or heresy.[4] Even when they adopt a different worldview than that offered by their Orthodox Church, they evaluate everything else they encounter in terms of its adherence to that worldview, even the doctrines of Orthodoxy itself.

The unbiased reader coming to this study without extensive knowledge of the history of Russian thought will surely regard the opinions above as harsh and probably one-sided, a clear example of Russophobia by even its own countrymen. Nevertheless, these positions have largely remained not simply unrefuted, but even unchallenged. By not doing so, the contentions pass into received truths. A major purpose of this work is the investigation of whether Russian philosophy has given short shrift to epistemology or whether such investigators as Masaryk have not looked very carefully. As is so often the case with sweeping generalizations, there is some truth contained in them and to this one, in particular. Those who commented on and criticized Kant came to their study with quite different concerns, and this is told in how they read him. There can be no doubt that, for much of the period under study here, the Russians who turned to Kant's writings, unlike Kant himself and many of the German neo-Kantians, did not consider the natural sciences, and particularly not physics, to be the paradigm of knowledge. Rather, they, indeed, more often than not came to their studies, as mentioned, steeped in religious dogma and looked upon Kant's transcendental idealism from that perspective. The theologians who will predominate in several of the following chapters saw their own religious doctrines as such a paradigm. They did not come to Kant as philosophically minded scholars *seeking* TRUTH, weighing arguments based on rational and evidential criteria. They believed they already had it. Particularly for the Orthodox priests in the mid-nineteenth century, secular philosophy was a topic with which they had an acquaintance, but merely that and nothing more. Their academic scholarship was not a goal in itself, but a means for attaining a higher clerical position.[5] For them, truth was not a *terminus ad quem*, but a *terminus a quo* furnished by Biblical Revelation and the strictures of the Orthodox Church. Kant's arguments were conceived as correct insofar and only insofar as they agreed with Christian Orthodoxy. It was largely not a matter of giving Kant the benefit of a doubt in a particular instance, of seeking an interpretation of his words that would yield the strongest argument. Why would one even attempt to do so, if the ultimate conclusion is to be a fundamental rejection of the argument as erroneous? To the extent

[4] Berdyaev 1979: 27.

[5] See Vanchugov 2015: 244.

that they valued Kant's epistemology, it was for having shown – even if his procedure was viewed as fundamentally flawed – the limitations of reason and, thus, why we must ultimately appeal to faith and Revelation. They saw Kant's acceptance of God and free will in the "Second Critique" as a positive feature in his work, but again condemned his omission of a role for Revelation. In addition, if God were merely postulated, not only could we not speak of His existence, but it also would be unimaginable to worship the object of a mere postulate. Undoubtedly, hidden under the surface of their attacks was the fear that if Kant's philosophy with its rational religion were to gain popularity, there would be no need for a priesthood to serve as an intermediary instructing the people about the Divine.

The theologians discussed in the early chapters that follow certainly do not represent the entire picture of Kant-interpretation in Russia. There were many others who in the last decades of the Imperial era turned to Kant either for enrichment or to rebut the most prominent representative of what they conceived to be a badly flawed Western paradigm. Are they not examples of an engagement that a Western audience would characterize as a theory of cognition? Do they not, thereby, refute or at least force a qualification of the Masaryk-Radlov thesis of the absence of epistemology in Russian philosophy? To answer these questions affirmatively amounts to one possible reply to the thesis's advocates, and such a stand came from yet another prominent figure we will see again much later in our study. Boris Jakovenko explicitly rejected both the claim that Russian philosophy had throughout its relatively brief history a characteristic trait – whether it be ontologism, realism or some form of intuitivism – as well as the claim that it had shunned epistemology. Any such characterization, he claimed, is "one-sided."[6]

Jakovenko held, contrary to the Masaryk-Radlov thesis, that Russian philosophical thought had attended to fundamental epistemological problems, and this led to an inquiry into Kant's "First Critique." In fact, this attention to "theoretical" philosophy in the final third of the nineteenth century shows that it would be incorrect to speak of practical concerns predominating over theory. Jakovenko maintained that we do find, in that period, philosophers, such as Boris Chicherin, who devoted themselves to theoretical issues using scholarly methods. Even some philosophically minded theologians were attracted to theoretical problems. The philosophical limitations of the prior decades in that century "can be explained by the specific conditions of Russian socio-political life, which were not conducive to the development and predominance of a purely theoretical philosophizing."[7]

Whereas Jakovenko challenged the correctness of the Masaryk-Radlov thesis on its own grounds, another representative of Russian philosophy from the same generation but of a different philosophical orientation questioned whether that thesis spoke of a "theory of cognition" in the same sense as in the dominant stream of Russian philosophy. S. L. Frank contended that Russian philosophy was constructed on an epistemology, though with a different orientation, and this epistemology was of no less significance for Russian philosophy than it was for German philosophy. Frank

[6] Jakovenko 2003: 15.

[7] Jakovenko 2003: 11.

held that the key terms "experience," "truth," and "knowledge" had different senses in the former than they had in the latter. "Experience" in Russian philosophy was intimately associated with life, and to "know" something meant "to be joined to that something by means of an inner awareness and empathy, to comprehend something internally and in all of its living manifestations."[8] Russian philosophy with its unique understanding of key epistemological terms grounded an independent, unique Russian theory of cognition unknown to the West. We might add, in light of this, that while Hermann Cohen, the dean of Marburg neo-Kantianism, exclaimed that Kant had discovered a new concept of experience,[9] Frank, in effect, implicitly countered that his compatriots had discovered a new – a Russian – concept of experience. Armed with this concept, Russian philosophers, at least since Solov'ëv, constantly fought against Kantianism, and this struggle became an enduring theme of their thought.

In Frank's telling, the Russian concept of experience leads to a reversal of the quite artificial Cartesian "cogito ergo sum." The true path is not from thinking to being, but from being to thinking. In other words, primacy is accorded not to consciousness, as has predominated in the West, but to being, since the latter is a manifestation of the former, not vice versa. Thus, in Russian philosophy, realism is not a philosophical construct, but the foundation on which all else is built. It is only natural, then, that these Russians looked upon Kant's theory of cognition as phenomenalistic. It could not help but be that given Kantianism's starting point in an abstract "I." Whereas for Kant the world is an appearance, a phenomenon, in consciousness, for the Russian mentality consciousness is a phenomenon in being. A penetration into being, therefore, need not be preceded by an extended examination, as in Kant, into the structure of consciousness.[10] Thinking is a mode – just one mode – of being. Nevertheless, Frank's discourse on the distinct nature of Russian philosophy provided ample room for differences among its various representatives. Some of its proponents, in his eyes, had not set consciousness and being in their proper relationship, and he had hoped to correct this in his own works.

Apart from mutual criticism, another avenue for the further development of Russian philosophy was one that became apparent only at the end of its "classical" period with the Bolshevik Revolution. Just as Kant, seeking the conditions for cognition within consciousness, i.e., within the structure of the cognitive apparatus itself, came to categories and forms "within" or "of" the mind, so Russian philosophers came to a realization that cognition, in their understanding of that term, required categories and forms "within" being itself. It is these ontological categories and forms that made cognition, i.e., in their realist understanding of it, possible. Some, such as Frank – but also others – sought to elucidate these even in the intellectually harsh conditions of the diaspora.

Due to a number of factors – the dissimilarity of the Russian paradigm from the Cartesian one, its relatively recent maturing, its often oblique enunciation, and the

[8] Frank 1996: 166. This quotation is from a small German-language book originally published in 1926.

[9] Cohen 1871: 3.

[10] Frank 1996: 170.

inaccessibility of the Russian language itself – philosophy in Russia, classical Russian idealism, has typically been completely overlooked in contemporary surveys and its practitioners discounted even when they were noticed. The case could conceivably be made for introducing Russian philosophy into Western discussions based on its according primacy to ontology over epistemology. However, the lack of a succinct statement to that effect in the work of a single outstanding individual made such inclusion into Western philosophy difficult at best. Truth be told, the case for the inclusion of Russian philosophy as a chapter in the history of Western thought was not put forth by its Western investigators, who were largely themselves either clerics or historians, both of whom were presumably interested in some "bigger" picture and neither of whom were interested in whether philosophy starts with the thickets of the "I think" in the "Transcendental Deduction" or the role of internal time-consciousness in establishing objective reality. The historian Andrzej Walicki, for example, in his own telling of the history of Russian thought claims that his book "puts more emphasis on philosophical problems than most American books" place on the topic.[11] Yet, the English-speaking philosophy student/scholar will be hard pressed to find much that is recognizable as "philosophical" when set against his/her readings of Western philosophers. Another somewhat recent work by a quite prominent historian of philosophy, Frederick Copleston, went so far as to apologize for not including rigorous philosophy in his history, saying that such material would be very restricted and be of interest to only a very limited number of specialists.[12] The inference, then, is we should either broaden our notion of philosophy so that we can be "popular" or simply say nothing. On this basis, presumably, we should not include quantum mechanics in physics texts, since it too is of interest to only a very limited number of people.

Another goal of the present volume is to show that philosophy in Imperial Russia was not limited merely, on the one hand, to disgruntled ex-seminarians with dreamy schemes or, on the other hand, to relatively well-off idle men, who derided the West for its decadence. No, there actually were serious-minded philosophers who followed developments in Western Europe and sought to confront the same issues as they did, even if from a different perspective. Undoubtedly, from our Western perspective today, not a single figure emerged who could compare in depth and perspicacity to Kant and Hegel, Frege and Husserl, but their achievements in a comparatively short time are still worthy of notice for what they tell about the time and about the universal quest for answers and knowledge. Unless "Russian philosophy" is understood to mean philosophy in Russia, the expression is ultimately an oxymoron, for philosophy, understood as the search for final explanations, is a shared human quest on the part of all nations going back to when humans first stared into the heavens and into their hearts. Our quest is not to find some unique characteristics of "Russian" philosophy that set it apart from all others, but to show that its practitioners engaged throughout the Imperial era with the West in the search for timeless answers. Whereas the Russian idealists who emerged in the last decades of

[11] Walicki 1979: xi.

[12] Copleston 1986: vii.

the Imperial era criticized the very notion of Kantian "transcendental idealism" without apparently fully attempting to engage with Kant's distinction between it and empirical realism – or, for that matter, empirical idealism – the basis of their position was sincerely held. To some degree, their reaction to Kant may have been channeled by hostility to Western modernity and formality, but how does one argue against such a claim?[13] Solov'ëv, in the last years of his life, was not hostile to the West, nor was Losskij, even though both rejected Kant. Are we to accuse them of being disingenuous?

In the pages that follow, the present writer has attempted to offer his own criticisms of the various arguments and presentations only sparingly and only when one of the figures has offered a reasonably detailed argument. These occur more frequently in our narrative as we progress through the decades when direct familiarity with the Kantian texts became more demonstrable and the various figures presented such arguments. For the most part, my own criticisms are heavily influenced by Henry Allison's interpretation, not *because* it is philosophically the soundest – though it may be just that – let alone an impeccable understanding. Rather, Allison's interpretation stands in starkest contrast to the general standpoint adopted in much of nineteenth century Russia, with its focus on the perceived contradiction in holding that unknowable things in themselves cause the sense manifold. Allison's "two-aspect" view, while not itself without its problems, attempts to offer a coherent understanding of Kant's epistemological position. As such, it can be read as a response to Strawson's criticisms, which bear more than a mere family resemblance to many points previously offered over the decades, including in Russia. Others, such as Nitzan, have also given sophisticated and probing readings of Kant's passages dealing with the thing in itself and in doing so have shown a patience for detail that was so notably absent in much of the Russian literature examined here.[14]

However, each generation comes to Kant with its own concerns, and it is only too easy to fault those who came before with not seeing Kant the way we do. Today, a number of scholars look on Kant as concerned, first of all, with the conditions that make referential thought possible. To the figures we examine in this study, such an enterprise would have appeared puzzling, perhaps even as a waste of time as compared to their own concern with issues that, to them, truly mattered. The reigning paradigm of Kant-interpretation in Imperial Russia was Kant as an ontologist who concerned himself, above all, with how and to what extent metaphysics, revealing what is, is possible. Even the staunchest proponent of Kant in Imperial Russia, Aleksandr Vvedenskij, devoted scant attention to the intricacies of Kant's arguments and positions, opting to challenge his compatriots on their own philosophical territory with their own concerns. Admittedly, there were some who did offer a different view, who sought positive lessons from their reading of the three "Critiques." There were even a few at the very end of the Imperial era, who, fresh from their advanced studies in Germany, brought with themselves an infatuation with the neo-Kantianism

[13] Oittinen writes that such hostility accounts for the Russian idealist antipathy toward Kant. Oittinen 2003: 98.

[14] The recent literature is already enormous, but see, for example, Nitzan 2014.

they had heard there. Sadly, very few of them took a direct interest in Kant scholarship; most simply slowly faded away into other disciplines or activities.

A monograph such as this would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to write a few decades ago, at least by someone anchored in the West. Technological developments and political changes have together opened up the possibility of investigating the history of Russian philosophy to an extent previously thought almost unimaginable. Those changes have not only made access to many original sources readily available, but secondary works, some of a quite high caliber, have also come forward. The studies of Kruglov on the reception of Kant in the first half of the nineteenth century and of Dmitrieva on the Russian neo-Kantians in the last decades of the Imperial era were of great help in obtaining a comprehensive overview of their respective concerns. However, while these studies break ground in researching hitherto neglected periods, they hardly dispel our doubts concerning the seriousness of Russian philosophical thought evoked by Masaryk, Radlov, and Shpet. The specter of this trio is likely to hover over studies such as this for some time – perhaps until Russia produces its own "Kant." Although the present writer seeks to investigate the accuracy of the Masaryk-Radlov thesis, his orientation is deeply informed by their respective works and perhaps even more so by Shpet.

The structure of the present study, hopefully, is clear from a perusal of the Table of Contents. When possible, I have attempted to proceed strictly chronological and then within those time periods by institution. This was neither always possible nor did it always make sense. Solov'ëv, for example, had something to say about Kant over the course of two discontinuous decades. However, since his role in Russian philosophy is not as a prominent Kant-interpreter, but as an original thinker, his pertinent remarks are confined to a single chapter. On the other hand, Aleksandr Vvedenskij, whose defense of the "Critical" enterprise spanned decades, must be handled in detail in the context of his work and against that of others. Finally, I have attempted to provide dates for individuals when possible. That this was not always the case, I trust the reader will understand.

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As with all such works, little could be accomplished in isolation. A deep and sincere expression of gratitude is owed above all to Dr. Frederic Tremblay, who went through the entire manuscript in its penultimate form, making innumerable corrections and comments. An embarrassed note of thanks go to Prof. Vitaly Kurennoy of the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, who wisely hinted at a misstep in a proposed title for this study in a facet of Kant-interpretation. I am indebted to Prof. Svetlana Kovalchuk of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia for so much information concerning Aleksander Vejdeman. Her dogged determination in pursuit of details regarding Vejdeman's life in Latvia is a testament to the spirit of scholarship. Of course, I remain grateful to the anonymous reviewers Springer recruited to read this work. Their notes were of enormous help in moving me in the direction of a unified and consistent overall approach. It would be through no fault of theirs if their careful reading of the manuscript ultimately proved futile. Thanks also

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Kant in Russia: Lavrov in the 1860s, *Studies in Soviet Thought*, 43(1992): 1–36.
Karpov and Jurkevič on Kant, *Studies in East European Thought*, 45(1993): 169–211.
Debol'skij and Lesevich on Kant, *Studies in East European Thought*, 45(1993): 281–311.
The Rise of Russian Neo-Kantianism, *Studies in East European Thought*, 50(1998): 119–151.
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Part II
Before the Great Reforms

Chapter 2
First Acquaintances – The Eighteenth Century

Abstract This chapter concerns the introduction of Kant's name and works into Imperial Russia from 1758–1800. Some young Russians studied in Königsberg and brought knowledge of Kant's ideas back to Russia proper. However, as a result of the Seven Years' War, Königsberg was under Russian occupation for a time, and as a result Kant himself was in a sense in Imperial Russia. Here, we look at both these young Russians as well as Kant's own relations to occupying military units stationed in his hometown.

Keywords Moscow University • Karamzin • Schaden • Mellmann • Russian Orthodox faith • Königsberg

Unlike so many other European countries, Russia had no universities before 1755, at which time Moscow University was founded. Education, such as it was both before and for decades afterward, was intended, from the government's point of view, to help young noblemen acquire modern technical skills useful to the state. From the individual's point of view, schooling in general, or at least a certain bare minimum, was necessary for promotion within the official Table of Ranks, introduced by Peter the Great in 1722, and to be able to conduct oneself properly within social circles. Consequently, the standard curriculum itself was framed with these attitudes and needs uppermost in mind. Emphasis was placed on such subjects as classical literature, good manners and modern languages, particularly French, the language of diplomacy at the time and of all things that would interest an aspiring young man. *Gimnazija* instruction included as much time devoted to ballroom dancing as to the Russian language. Obtaining an education for its own sake was certainly not a prevalent attitude within Russia, and it certainly was not encouraged. As Russian-born Alexander Koyré, an eminent 20th century historian of science and philosopher, remarked, pure philosophy was always considered "perfectly useless."[1]

Nevertheless, out of this stress on mindlessness there were those, such as Mikhail Lomonosov, the greatest Russian-born scientist of his day, who, along with his patron Ivan Shuvalov, co-founded Moscow University and sought to encourage and foster the love of learning. Lomonosov had been sent at government expense to Marburg, where he studied philosophy and natural science under the great German

[1] Koyré: 47 f.

T. Nemeth, *Kant in Imperial Russia*, Studies in German Idealism 19,
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rationalist Christian Wolff. These men realized that unless higher education directly benefited the prospective students they would not attend a university even for a brief time. Such an institution would be successful only if its students would be rewarded with the one thing that really mattered to them, a proportionately high rank in the Table. Within years, this basic idea became accepted and the awarding of an academic degree bestowed on the individual such a rank. Nonetheless, most young noblemen realized that there were other, faster ways of moving ahead and so found no tangible motive for seeking advanced learning.[2] Many who did matriculate at a university did so only for a short time, learning little, and thereby further promoted an image of university education as a sheer waste of time.[3] This situation was not remedied until the 1830s, when the young aristocracy began flocking to the universities, particularly the one in Moscow. Until then, enrollment, such as it was, was largely confined to the sons of priests, free peasants and townspeople.

Yet, the picture was not entirely bleak for higher education and, in particular, for philosophy – or at least at the time it did not appear so. Already by the mid-1700s, there was a general relaxation of the requirement instituted by Peter the Great that all noblemen perform military or civil service. This gave them sufficient opportunity to pursue their own interests. Even the curriculum at many of the military training schools was lax enough to permit many of the cadets ample free time, which they could have used for education but generally did not. Lomonosov prevailed over Shuvalov in allowing Moscow University to accept students of all social classes. However, this possible mingling of classes served only as an additional reason for noble parents to discourage their teenage sons from furthering their education. There was only one undergraduate law student in 1765, and only one medical student passed the final examination for his degree during Catherine the Great's entire reign. Nevertheless, there were mixed signs for the future of Russian education and philosophy for a period under Catherine, who at least for a time gave lip service to Enlightenment ideals. By 1789, the press affiliated with Moscow University published more books in the previous 14-year period than in all prior years together. The prospect of a government-sanctioned enlightenment, however, came to a sharp end with the Revolution in Paris.

2.1 Kant's Königsberg Under Russian Occupation

The Seven Years' War, which erupted in 1756, originally pitted Prussia and her new ally Britain against France, Austria and Russia. Königsberg, the capital of the Province of Prussia from 1701 to 1773 and from then of the province of East Prussia, was the home of Immanuel Kant for his entire life. In early January 1758, the Königsberg garrison abandoned the city when word was received that Russian troops had crossed the border. A civilian delegation proceeded to meet the

[2] Raeff 1966: 135.

[3] Alston 1969: 10.

commander of the Russian forces, William Fermor, to ask for terms of surrender only to be astonished at the generous terms the Russians offered. When the Russian troops entered the city on the 22nd, they were met with celebration befitting liberators rather than occupiers. Within the structure of the Russian Empire at the time, administrative control was established, and shortly thereafter all the city officials were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the empress Elizabeth.[4] Together with all university professors and lecturers, Kant swore to recognize Elizabeth's position and not to intrigue against the Russian authority. The daily routine of life within Königsberg remained largely unchanged. In February, Elizabeth proclaimed that all preexisting privileges and rights were to be maintained as well as religious freedom. All the local officials continued to collect their usual salaries, and the university budget too remained unaltered. General Fermor was appointed governor of East Prussia.

According to German accounts, the general and his officers regularly visited the university and even attended lectures there including those by the *privat-docent* Kant, who in addition gave private lectures on a variety of practical military topics, such as construction and fortification, as well as mathematics.[5] It should be added that the Russian officers paid Kant well for these services. He also enjoyed the many parties and the relaxed social atmosphere that came with the occupation. General Fermor was replaced in time as governor by Baron Nikolaj Korf, a very wealthy nobleman who owed his position to his connections at the court and who spent much of his time in Königsberg entertaining the city's social circles and the friends of the Count Keyserlingk family, which included Kant.[6]

In December 1758, the professor of logic and metaphysics at Königsberg, Johann David Kypke, died, thereby opening a position in philosophy. Availing himself of this opportunity, Kant wrote first to the university rector and senate and the next day to the philosophy faculty. Two days later, he wrote to the Russian empress stating his interest in filling the vacancy and summarizing his own academic background and duties. Kant closed the letter, writing "Your Imperial Majesty's Loyal Servant Immanuel Kant."[7] He, of course, was not the only one who sought the position, but only he and the eventually successful candidate Friedrich Buck (1722–1786), who taught mathematics at the university, were deemed competent. The precise reason for Kant's candidacy being passed over never entered the public record, although the usual explanation is that Buck had a longer tenure at the university.[8] In any case, years later Buck moved to the professorship in mathematics, and Kant, applying again, obtained the position he had sought for so many years.

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[4] Apparently irritated by Königsberg's swift allegiance to Russia, Frederick the Great never returned to the city after the Russian occupation ended.

[5] Reicke 1860: 40.

[6] Kuehn 2001: 114.

[7] Kant 1902- : vol. X, 5–6.

[8] Gulyga writes that, "Evidently, the question of vacancy was settled in Königsberg, not in Petersburg." Gulyga 1987: 35.

By the end of 1761, Prussia's military fortunes looked bleak, its army gradually dwindling. Talk of the possibility of a complete Prussian collapse was spreading. Then on 5 January 1762, Prussia's luck suddenly changed: Russia's Empress Elizabeth died. Her successor and son, Peter III (1728–1762), a clear Prussophile, himself half-German with a German wife, ordered the withdrawal of Russian troops and formed an alliance with Prussia. Frederick, who had thought he would have to make major territorial concessions including the ceding of East Prussia, now found all his Russian-occupied lands restored without any additional cost to himself.[9] On 8 July, the last of the five Russian governors of East Prussia issued a proclamation releasing the people of Königsberg from their oath of allegiance to the Russian throne. Peter's reign and his total Prussophile foreign policy, however, were short-lived. He sat on the Russian throne for a mere six months. His wife and successor, Catherine the Great, herself an ethnic German and the daughter of a Prussian general struggled with her dual but conflicting allegiances. To Prussia, she was linked by birth and ethnicity, but as the new ruler of a vast country she was linked by duty and love to Russia. She, at this moment, compromised. She respected her late husband's peace with Prussia but would not let Russian troops march into battle together with the Prussians. For a brief period, the last Russian governor again took over governmental authority and Russian guards took up positions. In August, the Russians finally left East Prussia. With their departure, the first, initial phase of Kant in Russia came to an end. Thus, if for the purposes of this study we consider Russia to be not a fixed geographic region but the area governed by an administration centered in and directed from St. Petersburg, then Kant himself was for several years in Russia just as his city of Königsberg, now renamed Kaliningrad, is today.

2.2 Students and Travelers in Königsberg

Regrettably, the names of the Russian officers who heard Kant lecture have not come down to us. Quite possibly, they included Grigorij Orlov, a future lover of Catherine the Great, and Aleksandr Suvorov, who went on to become the last Generalissimo of the Russian Empire. If they were among the Russian auditors of Kant's lessons, their respective careers were hardly affected by hearing his pre-Critical teachings. If they had heard him, they surely did not preserve for posterity what he said.

Independently of the events linked to the Seven Years' War, a number of Russian students were studying, however briefly, in Königsberg. For example, Semen G. Zybelin, the first Russian professor of medicine at Moscow University and a graduate of that institution in 1758, studied in Königsberg as well as in Leiden and Berlin. He along with six others arrived in Königsberg in September 1758. The principal mentor of all seven was Professor Buck. All seven took courses in philosophy, mathematics and physics, but the surviving records do not so much as even mention

[9] Madariaga 1981: 24.

Kant by name.[10] Russia sent another ten students the following year to Königsberg, two of whom had studied some philosophy in Moscow. Again, in none of the surviving reports is Kant mentioned. In short, whatever gifts the future Critical philosopher possessed at the time as a teacher and a thinker and whatever charm he could display in society, the pre-Critical Kant went unnoticed by the Russian students.

In May 1789, several years after the publication of the first two "Critiques" and just a year before the publication of the third "Critique," a young Nikolaj Karamzin, the son of a Russian army officer and the future official state historian, embarked on a journey through Europe determined to visit Germany, Switzerland, France and England. On 18 June, he arrived in Königsberg, and the next day he decided to pay a visit to Kant. Although he lacked a letter of introduction, Kant graciously received Karamzin. They talked of foreign lands, of history and, of course, of broad metaphysical concerns, such as the afterlife. In all, the meeting lasted some three hours. In the course of the conversation, Kant mentioned the "Second Critique" as well as the *Metaphysics of Morals* and wrote down the titles for Karamzin.[11] Later on his return to Russia, Karamzin wrote an account of his meeting with Kant in one of his *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, which began their serial publication already in January 1791.[12]

Since Karamzin gave no indication that he had only a short time earlier heard Kant's name mentioned as someone worth visiting upon his arrival in Königsberg, how did Karamzin know of Kant and how much of Kant's philosophy did Karamzin know before embarking on his European sojourn? Before relating the details of his visit with Ernst Platner in Leipzig in mid-July, Karamzin wrote that Platner's philosophy was an eclectic blend of Kant's and Leibniz's views but yet "is at variance with both of them."[13] Which field of philosophy did Karamzin have in mind? Since Karamzin had revealed that he was not familiar with Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and yet could say with self-confidence that Platner agreed with some of Kant's views, we can conclude Karamzin had in mind metaphysics. Indeed, in the same letter Karamzin mentioned that Platner's writings are easy to understand even for someone, presumably like himself, not well versed in either that topic or logic, i.e., basically what we today call epistemology.

What, then, was Karamzin's source of information about "the illustrious Kant" that led him to pay the latter a visit? Karamzin explicitly credits Jakob Lenz, a German poet, who resided in Moscow from 1781–1792, for helping him to speak German so well.[14] In 1768, Lenz enrolled at Königsberg University on a scholarship

[10] Andreev 2005: 37.

[11] Kant's *Die Metaphysik der Sitten* [*Metaphysics of Morals*] did not appear until 1797. Yet, Karamzin clearly had Kant writing down that title along with that of the "Second Critique." Surely, Karamzin had in mind the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, which originally appeared in 1785. Whether Kant wrote down the abbreviated title on his note or Karamzin wrote down the abbreviated title on his own can only be decided if we had the original note in Kant's hand.

[12] For an English translation of the "letter" in which he described his meeting with Kant, see Karamzin 1957: 38–41.

[13] Karamzin 1957: 73.

[14] Karamzin 1957: 90. Karamzin in a short letter devoted entirely to Lenz dated 22 July wrote of the latter's peculiar, if not odd, character. Apparently, Lenz was more than a mere acquaintance of Karamzin's.

to study theology. However, while there he heard Kant lecture on metaphysics, logic and science. He abandoned his theological studies in 1771, and after a long series of unsuccessful employments he ended up in Moscow, where he learned Russian. Lenz, conceivably, could have imparted to Karamzin some knowledge of the pre-Critical Kant. Whatever the case, Lenz never prospered in Moscow either and depended on others for his daily sustenance. His life ended on a Moscow street in June 1792 at the age of 41. Another possible, certainly more likely, source of Karamzin's knowledge of Kant is Johann Schaden, who maintained in Moscow a boarding house/school separate from the University and where Karamzin resided and studied from 1778–1781.[15] We will return to Schaden in more detail in the next section.

While Karamzin obviously had some knowledge of Kant as a philosopher, his direct familiarity with Kant's writings – whether they be from the pre-Critical or the Critical period – at any time of his life remains an open question.[16] Based on Karamzin's account of his meeting with Kant and the topics discussed, we cannot conclude that the former had read any of Kant's works in advance of the meeting. Additionally, although Karamzin does say that he would keep the note on which Kant wrote the titles of his two recent ethical treatises "as a precious memento," Karamzin did not remark that he would read those titles or even that he had any interest in doing so.

Another traveler through Königsberg who made a point of visiting Kant at home was the Russian diplomat Ivan M. Murav'ëv-Apostol, who served in several different posts and who was in command of a number of languages. His meeting, arranged, though, with some difficulty, took place in 1797 and thus some six years after the publication of Karamzin's account. Murav'ëv-Apostol found Kant to be a gracious and kind host. They spoke of German literature, but apparently – and unfortunately – not of Kant's philosophy, despite Murav'ëv-Apostol's knowledge of the great philosophical figures in history.[17]

2.3 Correspondents

Although not given to corresponding frequently, Kant did from time to time make exceptions. In 1790, Aleksandr M. Belosel'skij, a Russian diplomat and envoy in Dresden published there in French a tract entitled *Dianologie ou tableau*

[15] In his comments on a German translation of that portion of Karamzin's letter describing the visit with Kant, Palme wrote that Lenz also stayed at Schaden's boarding house/school. Palme 1901: 122.

[16] Amazingly, there is divided opinion in this matter. In his highly informed work on the subject, Kruglov writes that Karamzin had not read Kant's writings. See Kruglov 2009: 80. On the other hand, Cavel'eva writes, "Judging from everything, he [Karamzin – TN] knew Kant's works quite well." Cavel'eva 2006: 38. She goes on further to write that "Kant's works were known in Russian intellectual circles" as shown by Karamzin's remarks in his *Letters*. Cavel'eva 2006: 40. As we saw, the *Letters* provide no such evidence. The most we can conclude is that Kant's name, but not necessarily his works, were known in Moscow circles.

[17] Murav'ëv-Apostol 2002: 90.

philosophique de l'entendement, a copy of which he forwarded to Kant. What prompted Kant's reply to Belosel'skij was most likely the latter's attempt to establish the limits of human reason in its speculative employment from a different direction, an anthropological one.[18] There is no record of any further communication between the two.

Arguably of more interest is a letter from Woldemar Ungern-Sternberg (1750–182?) dated 12 May 1796 to Kant that reveals some knowledge of Kant's "Critical Philosophy." Written from St. Petersburg, Ungern-Sternberg presented himself as a cavalry officer in the Russian army who, traveling through Königsberg, requested an opportunity to meet with Kant. Ungern-Sternberg related that in his homeland of Livonia Kant's philosophy is studied with pleasure and great industry. As for himself, he wrote, "Long did I err in philosophical forests and morasses until the truth in the form of your *Critique of Pure Reason* guided me out and taught me to be aware of every wrong path."[19] It is unknown with assuredness whether Kant replied. In any case, no reply has survived. There is the distinct possibility that Kant replied to Ungern-Sternberg but only after the latter had long departed from St. Petersburg. As a result, he quite possibly never received the letter.[20]

Another figure – albeit another rather odd one – we must mention is Friedrich Hahnrieder, born in Lötzen in what then was Prussia, later East Prussia, and now named Giżycko in Poland. Accounts of his life vary, but all agree that he enrolled at Königsberg University in 1782, where he studied under Kant.[21] At some time afterward, he entered St. Petersburg. According to one account, presumably based on Hahnrieder's own, he served as a lieutenant in the Russian Army during the Second Turkish War (1787–1792). However, owing to certain injustices (*Ungerechtigkeiten*) he was sentenced to a long prison term, from which he escaped in some manner. This account has recently been challenged as almost totally false. Hahnrieder did not spend time in a Russian jail. What is indubitable is that Kant exchanged several letters with Hahnrieder already in 1796 and later when the latter had left Russia. Most peculiar, however, of these is one from 31 July 1800 in which he wrote, "During my stay in Russia, I learned so much that was useful in terms of economics and anthropology, but mainly I studied there in the prisons of the Inquisition your writings, which were my greatest luck. For without their guidance, I would have remained a mere fragmentary man."[22] As mentioned, whether Hahnrieder was ever in a Russian prison may be doubted. However, if he did spend time in prison, it was hardly comparable to the Inquisition, since he had access to Kant's writings and the opportunity

[18] Kant 1999: 417–420.

[19] Kant 1902- : vol. XII, 82.

[20] In the manuscript known to us as *Opus postumum*, there is an intriguing note in the margin on one page where Kant writes of two letters, one being by Ungern-Sternberg. Kant 1902-: vol. XXI, 471. Unfortunately, this note is of little help. Also see Kruglov 2009: 90, where there appears to be a misidentification of three letters, not two.

[21] For a more thorough discussion of Hahnrieder, see Kruglov 2009: 94–110. Also see his German-language account, Krouglov 2012. Also see Ritzel 1985: 610–613.

[22] Kant 1902- : vol. XII, 319.

to study them. How he acquired them in Russia, and, moreover, in a Russian prison, is of interest but something that we cannot know. Since many of the basic details of Hahnrieder's account may be incorrect, it is possible that his acquisition of Kant's writings is also mistaken. That he knew something of Kant's moral philosophy, however, is clear from his invocation of the categorical imperative in his decision to become a farmer (!) expressed in his letter to Kant of 18 November 1797 from Berlin. Hahnrieder writes, "I can vindicate myself before all rational beings, since the maxim to till the land can be applied as a universal law, and the maxim to abandon any situation at any moment in order to take up the position of a farmer can also be shown to be a universal law."[23] Of course, such a sweeping application of the categorical imperative does not speak well of Hahnrieder's penetration into Kant's ethics.

2.4 University of Moscow

When it opened in 1755, Moscow University had three faculties and ten professorial chairs. The philosophical faculty contained the chairs of philosophy, physics, rhetoric and history. All students studied in the philosophical faculty for their first three years, after which they could either stay or transfer to one of the other two faculties, viz., law and medicine, for a total of seven years. Although the university was given wide autonomy in its governance, professors could not simply teach whatever they wished in their respective fields. Lesson plans and textbooks had to be approved in advance.

The first to occupy the chair of philosophy was Nikolaj N. Popovskij (1730–1760), a former student of Lomonosov's with a degree from the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg in 1753.[24] However, in May 1756, after barely a year, Popovskij was shifted to the chair of rhetoric. Since at the time the philosophy professor taught logic, metaphysics and morals, Popovskij's reassignment was most likely more to his taste, having translated Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*.[25]

Not surprisingly, at its opening the University had a difficult time finding qualified domestic instructors. Thus, Russia sent out invitations to Germany to help fill the new positions. The first group of three, consisting of Johann H. Frommann, Johann M. Schaden and Philipp H. Dilthey, arrived in 1756 and were among the first in what was to be over the course of the next several decades a steady stream of German professors lecturing to Russian students mostly in Latin but also in French and German. Popovskij did attempt to lecture in Russian at first but was rebuked for doing so. Many of the foreign professors simply dismissed the idea that Russian could ever replace the other mentioned languages in higher education. Dilthey also attempted to learn Russian, but his poor pronunciation did little to help make his

[23] Kant 1902- : vol. XII, 220.

[24] For extensive information about Popovskij, see Modzalevskij n. d.: 111–169.

[25] Popovskij also prepared a translation of Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* in 1757. However, Popovskij used an existing French translation as the basis for his own Russian one, not the English original.

lectures intelligible to the students. Scandal soon revolved around Dilthey, who was accused of poor attendance and prioritizing private lessons, which legally he was allowed to do provided they did not interfere with his official duties.

Frommann taught philosophy for just short of a decade after Popovskij's shift to rhetoric. He then returned to Germany, where he taught in Tübingen. Of far more significance here is the case of Schaden, a Hungarian from Pressburg (today's Bratislava), educated in Tübingen, who taught philosophy using the manuals popular in Germany at the time. For logic and metaphysics, it was the manuals by Winkler and Baumeister, and for practical (moral) philosophy it was the manual by Feder. Yet, Schaden was politically astute enough to realize that despite his broad educational and cultural background the convenient and efficacious method to resolve thorny issues in metaphysics was simply to appeal to the tenets of the Russian Orthodox faith. As he once remarked, "The Orthodox faith lifts the veil that hides these mysteries; it is the incarnation of wisdom and possesses the absolute truth."[26] Despite his background in Wolffian philosophy, Schaden kept up with the latest developments in Germany. Of greatest interest for us here is the testimony that during the late 1770s "judging from the references he made in his lectures while teaching philosophy, we can see that he followed the progress of the disciplines in Germany and was already acquainted with the philosophy of Kant."[27] Clearly, he continued to monitor German philosophy through the decades as we see from the fact that in the university catalogue for the 1796–1797 academic year we find the mention that Schaden would continue a course on moral philosophy, started the previous year, "conforming to the principles of Critical Philosophy…."[28] Fortunately, a manuscript of the course has survived that shows Schaden had studied Kant's works from his "Critical" period that had appeared up to that time and also some literature on them.[29]

Of importance also is that in addition to his professorial duties Schaden, as mentioned earlier, ran the boardinghouse/school attached to the University where Karamzin stayed and studied for four or so years. The instruction there relied more on appealing to morality rather than strict discipline, a novel idea at the time. The curriculum placed stress on German literature, and there students, such as Karamzin, acquired a good knowledge of the German and French languages, which, as we saw, helped Karamzin greatly during his sojourn through Western Europe. Quite probably, it was during his stay with Schaden that Karamzin learned at least of Kant's name, if not some of his ideas.[30]

Even though Schaden knew of the turn in Kant's thinking, the first to bring information about the Critical Philosophy into Russia proper was the philologist Johann

[26] Koyré 1929: 47.

[27] *Biograficheskij* 1855: 567

[28] *Biograficheskij* 1855: 573.

[29] Kruglov 2009: 177.

[30] Pipes 2005: 23–24.