

## ON THE SPECIFIC TRAITS OF RUSSIAN KANTIANISM

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The paper focuses on the influence of I. Kant and German classical philosophy on Russian philosophical thought. It deals with the challenge of “returns to Kant” in Russian philosophical culture. Kant's philosophy stimulates the field of the metaphysics of faith. The paper shows that in their confrontation with German classical thought, and especially with Kant's philosophy, Russian philosophers have various aims and use various methodologies and languages. Further, it shows Kant's philosophical legacy from two different points of view represented by two philosophical magazines – *Logos* and *Имь (Way)*. The paper also explains the importance of the notions of Kantianism and Neo-Kantianism in Russian philosophical thought from the 1850s up to the present day. Attention is paid in particular to A. I. Vvedensky and his understanding of the relationship between faith and reason as well as his confrontation with the philosophy of I. Kant.

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According to S. N. Bulgakov (1871 – 1944), German idealism was as important for Russian religious thought “as Greek philosophy was for the Doctors of the Church” ([1], 220). There is no doubt that Hegel and Schelling had the greatest impact on Russian philosophy. However, as S. L. Frank mentions, “... criticism of Kant's philosophy and the struggle against Kantianism are the permanent issues of Russian philosophical thought” ([2], 478). There was no need to struggle against Schelling: his philosophy could be adopted, interpreted, and included in the world outlook which was already existent at that point. Schelling was congenial with Russian philosophy. On the contrary, Kant touched upon the crucial issue: the question of faith and the problem of its ontological status. Russian philosophy could not ignore it; this issue had to be dealt with. Russian thinkers found Kant's authority challenging, and his statements kept quickening their minds, calling for struggle.

One can mention certain parallelism and synchrony of philosophical processes taking place in Russian and Western European philosophical cultures; let us consider, for instance, the Western “back to Kant” slogan which was eagerly taken up in Russia. Nevertheless, “...the common content, dominating tendencies and principal trends of development of philosophical thought in the West and Russia are characterized by serious qualitative differences, sometimes contrasting and even opposed to each other, though the contrast was revealed mainly from the part of Russian philosophy” ([3], 4). It is especially

obvious if we consider the attitude towards Kant's philosophy while creating the metaphysics of faith.

V. V. Zenkovsky emphasizes that Russia "...has always contented itself with epistemological products created by the West without being aware of the significant correlation these products have with the Western religious consciousness." Kireyevsky and Khomiakov were the first to start a self-reliant approach to the issues of epistemology. Russian philosophical thought was largely dependent on the Western epistemology later ([4], 75 – 76). For instance, J. Meyendorff admits, "I suppose Vladimir Solovyov and his group adopted German idealism as a philosophy and unconsciously surrendered to it without having any evil intentions" ([5], 48).

Since Russian philosophy inevitably had to elaborate more careful and intent cognition and premeditate the culture of transcendent principle by virtue of tradition while creating metaphysics of faith, yet the language it used was the language of German classics, a discrepancy between the object and the method emerged. The necessity of relieving the oppression of the Western methodology and ontology started manifesting itself. According to E. Trubetzkoy, overcoming Kant and Kantianism "... is undoubtedly necessary for any doctrine stating that any cognition is based on metaphysical suppositions and trying to reveal these suppositions" ([6], 1).

It should be mentioned that critique of Kantian philosophy is already present in classical German philosophy; it is mainly found in the works by Schelling and Hegel and the philosophy of faith and sense. However, the latter just revealed the limitation of rationalism, setting it in opposition to the sense, yet it failed to elaborate an integral positive doctrine. Hegel suggests in his *Encyclopedia* that after relying upon Kant's philosophy one can move both forward and back, i. e. return to uncritical and implicit thinking. The unilateral positions of philosophy of faith and sense are in many aspects criticized by Hegel in a justified way; he considers that, in this context, "... thought cannot reach any further than sensing God" ([7], 469).

Kant's statements regarding the world outlook have been dominant in the West. For instance, K. Jaspers emphasizes that, "... since Kant's epoch, such proofs [of God's existence] are considered to be impossible for conscientious thinking", though they "... do not become less important as ideal formations due to losing their substantiation" ([8], 434 – 435). In modern Europe, Kant is trusted more than Schelling, Hegel and Jacobi, all put together, as their arguments and renewal of the ontological proof are no longer considered to be serious. By the way, one can say the same thing about philosophic suggestions in Russia during the Soviet epoch. On the contrary, in classical domestic philosophy, critique of the Kantian philosophy (understood as an independently developing trend, not as the one borrowed from German classical thought) started dominating and finally prevailing.

Kantian philosophy had a crucial impact on Russia. No one could be indifferent to its deductions, regardless of acceptance or criticism. The spectrum of those "possessed" with Kantianism was very large: from Professor P. I. Linitzky of the Kiev Ecclesiastical Academy to poet Andrei Bely, a symbolist from Moscow. The entire pleiad of the early

20<sup>th</sup>-century Russian thinkers adheres to Kantianism and Neo-Kantianism. The main representatives of this trend of thought are A. I. Vvedensky, I. I. Lapshin, G. I. Chelpanov, S. I. Hessen, G. D. Gurvitch, B. V. Jakovenko, and F. A. Stepun. They were mainly grouped around *Logos*, the international magazine on the philosophy of culture, published in Moscow and Saint Petersburg before World War I (1910 – 1914).

*Neo-Kantianism* as a term may have double sense. Neo-Kantianism mainly refers to the 20<sup>th</sup> – century philosophical tendencies (the Baden School and the Marburg School in Germany), which turned to the Kantian system trying to develop the epistemological and culturological ideas it contained. In addition, this term is also used in an extended sense: it includes all the thinkers who share Kantian ideas, in spite of the fact that this interpretation deletes the essential difference which may exist between Kantianism and Neo-Kantianism. There are both the personalities who adhere to Kantianism in the proper sense of the word (such as A. I. Vvedensky) and its German Neo-Kantian version (including A. Beli and B. Pasternak) within the trend to be discussed.

*Logos* editorial board was opposed to *Путь (Way)* philosophical religious magazine (represented by S. N. Bulgakov, N. A. Berdyaev, P. A. Florensky, etc.). Reckoning themselves among philosophical elite and considering themselves sophisticated epistemologists and critics, they initially looked down at the thinkers who were inclined towards religion. Later on, F. A. Stepun described *Logos* activity as follows, “... we had a firm intention to shorten the hair and nails Moscow Slavophiles grew too long. I do not mean we were absolutely wrong, but we were too presumptuous in reforming the style of Russian philosophy” ([9], 218). He also quotes Berdyaev’s statement revealing the difference of world outlook typical of these two approaches in his memoirs. Berdyaev “attacked” Stepun, “To you, religion and church are cultural issues; to us, culture in all its aspects is an intrachurch issue. You wish to come to God by philosophical ways; but I affirm: one cannot come to God, yet one can merely come from Him; only coming from God, one can come to the right, i. e. Christian philosophy” ([9], 219).

Nevertheless, as V. V. Zenkovsky states, even Russian Kantianism, in spite of all its philosophical “stiffness” and strict observance of “criticism” requirements, does not reject “pan-moralism” and its inclination to constructing metaphysical systems (!). Perhaps this is the reason why the interest in Kant and Neo-Kantianism shown by such thinkers as I. I. Lapshin, G. I. Chelpanov, F. Stepun, and A. Bely was merely an evolutionary stage in their philosophical world outlook ([10], 225).

In this context, A. I. Vvedensky (1856 – 1925), philosophy professor of Saint Petersburg University, is a personality of special interest. Although Vvedensky was devoted to Kantian philosophy, he thoroughly revised it. This revision implies the fact that he spreads the primacy of the practical reason not only through confirming moral postulates, yet also through giving morality and faith a greater ontological importance than Kant ever did. Thus, Vvedensky claims, “Solving metaphysical problems in a reliable way is possible by means of studying the postulates of the moral sense” ([11], 93), up to creating metaphysical systems. This novelty is certainly inadmissible from the point of view of Kantianism: Kant himself was trying to “build a wall” in order to segregate philosophy

from metaphysical “reverie“, while Vvedensky mentions the possibility of “solving metaphysical problems in a reliable way” and even creating a “system of metaphysics”.

Besides, Vvedensky significantly disagrees with Kant while considering the issue of man’s cognitive abilities and possibilities. Thus, he claims that there is a “special cognitive *organ*”, a “metaphysical sense”, alongside with the sphere of experience. As Vvedensky considers the Kantian concept of “things-in-themselves”, he limits all the sphere of experience to cognition, the way Fichte did. He draws a paradoxical conclusion, probably due to Hume’s influence: the question regarding the “existence or non-existence of things-in-themselves... may be answered solely by faith, not by science”.

Vvedensky reveals the inadequacy of traditional rationalism in its attempts of comprehending the phenomenon of *faith*, as it is not sheer absurd or something irrational to a thinker, yet it is a “state which excludes doubt in a different way than knowledge does”. He formulates the drawbacks of rationalism unaware of this aspect as follows:

1) For rationalism, “... the essence of faith is either no different from the essence of knowledge or reduced to some absurd things”, i.e. “in a rationalist’s opinion, the essence of faith must be either absurd or merely immature knowledge, i.e. a statement which has not been successfully rationalized yet, but it *can* or at least *could* be successful due to limitless expansion of knowledge”.

2) “Under no circumstances could a rationalist assume that reason or mind might consider some objects to be absolutely imperceptible for it” ([12], 142).

In other words, rationalism cannot acknowledge the existence of something imperceptible for its cognition, yet perceived solely by means of *faith*. It follows that rationalism cannot admit the object of faith or the existence of faith itself as an objective and positive epistemological position. Rationalism tries to subject faith itself to mind, *cognize* it on the basis of its own *rationalistic* positions. It is unaware of the fact that faith cannot be cognized by means of increasing the quantitative parameters of mind, as it represents a sphere completely outside its reach. Mind has to reject itself, its own all-encompassing, maniac tendency to explain everything; yet, if it does acknowledge its own limits and sets borders for itself, it will overcome itself and become something else – more exactly, it will turn to *reason*. Only reason may deal with faith, as it realizes its necessity, importance, and objectivity; yet mind either tries to lay it open to ridicule for shallow brains by claiming it is something absurd, inadmissible, and improper, or attempts to devour it, depriving it of its own essence – exactly the thing which makes faith a *faith*, i.e. it transforms it into knowledge. Mind is also ignorant of the fact that faith in its deep essence cannot basically be rationalized, as its object is transcendent and inconceivable. This is *faith*, for it provides *belief*, not information, the wisdom from an eternal source, not knowledge of changeable and transient things of the world. The all-consuming rational method has worked itself out; it has proven its own inadequacy in the cognition of the world as a whole, comprehending the issues of metaphysics and faith.

Vvedensky regards Kant as an anti-rationalist, stating that he most often criticized rationalism while criticizing dogmatism (metaphysics). Moreover, Vvedensky sincerely considers that, after Kant, “our mind no longer has the right to protest against Christian

God" ([12], 156). Evaluating transcendental philosophy as a whole, he writes, "Kant has discovered that, after the critical activity of mind has woken, *the faith in knowledge itself makes us admit that there is a sphere* (exactly the sphere of the things outside the limits of possible experience) *unreachable for trustworthy knowledge and supplied (by the critical mind itself) by a faith whose postulates shall not be encountered by any protests from mind*" ([12], 154). Vvedensky keeps using the notion of "mind", yet it implies a "larger", "critical" interpretation.

However, this interpretation of *Critique of Pure Reason* is rather loose. Vvedensky seems to forget the "transcendental dialectics". Basing exclusively on Kantian conclusions regarding antinomies, he does not mention that he disproves the possibility of theology, and forgets the criticism of the ontological proof of God's existence used by St. Anselm of Canterbury and the famous example regarding "the 100 thalers". Thus, Vvedensky considers that, regardless of our opinion of God's existence, "in both cases we shall believe instead of knowing". Yet Kant holds another view: he absolutely unambiguously claims the *impossibility* of proving God's existence, not neutral attitude towards this issue.

Denying religious faith, atheism tends to develop materialistic philosophy as its positive basis, which, in its turn, tries to draw upon the data from the natural sciences which use rational cognition methods. However, Vvedensky has already demonstrated the inadequacy of such methods applied to solving philosophical issues, not to mention deeply metaphysical ones, such as the question of faith. This is why atheism, in his opinion, loses any possibility of getting any positive substantiation; as faith does not have it in the ontological aspect either (he obviously follows Kant here), both of them are equally unprovable. Yet, if he had to choose one of these equally unprovable things, Vvedensky would prefer faith. He finds religious faith more preferable than the "atheistic" one, as both faiths are devoid of any theoretical basis.

Kant made quite a definite statement regarding the absence of possibility of creating any metaphysics as an objective ontological theory. By contrast, Vvedensky seems to be closer to faith and is more touched by thoughts of it than Kant is. Unlike him, he attempts to give both faith and knowledge the same "weight". If, according to Kant, faith cannot belong to ontological knowledge, whereas science belongs to it, Vvedensky prefers the contrary. He claimed that, "... no matter how far could scientific knowledge reach or atheism could exert itself, yet faith in God will never disappear. Science is unable to help atheism" ([12], 191). He attempts to base this conclusion on Kantian philosophy understood in a rather particular way. Yet the "machinery" of Kantian philosophy Vvedensky could brilliantly use has turned out to be unfit for interpreting the religious experience and even alien to this purpose. This is why Vvedensky no longer relies on Kant in considering this issue and turns to the philosophy developed by V.I. Solovyov, his compatriot.

All the above considered, we can draw the following conclusions. The combination of heterogeneous intuitions, Western European and Russian, secular and religious ones inevitably resulted in dualistic contradictions which could not be reconciled in one's conscience. They could be reconciled only if one aspect could be taken as an initial principle,

yet Russian Kantianists were not ready to confront this choice. Vvedensky acknowledges two types of cognition: the doubtless, lawful one (he lists a priori and a posteriori knowledge here) and the “unlawful”, yet also incontestable, transcendental one, as cognition by faith. He has inherited this dualism from Kant himself, yet its contradictions are even more obviously reflected in Russian thought. As V. V. Zenkovsky mentions, though this dualism “seems to yield an apparently coherent system, it is obviously dissatisfactory and requires revising criticism itself” ([10], 234). The author of *A History of Russian Philosophy* remarks that Vvedensky has fallen into the same trap he made for rationalism. He also seems to fall into a snare of irrationalism while following Hume too thoroughly. Vvedensky is preoccupied with critique of rationalism from Hume’s point of view, doubting the possibility of rational scientific knowledge as such. As to Kant, he treats this issue in a more cautious and prudent way.

Though Vvedensky does have problems with metaphysics and faith, he realizes that they cannot be eliminated from ontology and philosophy. Yet I. I. Lapshin, his apprentice, demonstrates no interest or taste in faith whatsoever. He mistakes rigid dogmas which deprived thought of any freedom for metaphysics, and any “transcendental existence” forces him to feel almost supernatural fear, as V. V. Zenkovsky mentions. It naturally follows that he is not interested in the moral range of problems, as it is derived from metaphysics. He does not suggest any moral imperatives; he does not try to justify them, and evidently finds this approach to be adequate. He writes, “The positive religions have lost their case beyond retrieve, and this is likely to become more and more evident as a result of further progress of philosophy”, though “the reservoir of religious beliefs is still quite significant” ([10], 238). Lapshin does not limit himself to merely avoiding metaphysical ideas in a skeptical manner; he forsakes faith, considering it an unlawful and inadmissible thing. According to him, it implies “... degradation of philosophical thought into mythology” ([10], 238).

G. I. Chelpanov, however, treats metaphysics less strictly while developing his teleological transcendentalist views. In his opinion, the “justification” of knowledge is “not in the sphere of logical arguments, yet in the sphere of faith”, and the inevitability of certain postulates for the system of knowledge renders teleological nature to philosophy.

S. I. Hessen is interested in the possibility of justifying the concept of personality. As he develops his views, he reaches the conclusion that “personality may be acquired only by means of working on suprapersonal tasks”. Personality is created while assuming suprapersonal values. He presumes that the power of individuality *is rooted deep not in its own essence*, not in the natural power of its psycho-physical organism, yet in the spiritual values acquired by the body and soul. Apart from the physical and the psychical spheres, he admits there is the “third realm”, that of “values and sense”, as understood by Neo-Kantianists: not transcendent, yet transcendental. Still, he considers these issues in a largely naturalistic way. As V. V. Zenkovsky remarks, S. I. Hessen is “... always on the threshold of metaphysics, yet he has never crossed this threshold” ([10], 250).

F. A. Stepun is also faced with the duality of the basic philosophical principles typical of A. I. Vvedensky’s views and almost all the Kantianists and Neo-Kantianists in Rus-

sia. On the one hand, he "... denies any thought of the possibility... of completing the world view shaped as a certain metaphysical theory"; on the other hand, he later mentions the "religious experience of God" based on some "mystical a priori" probably related to his interest in Romanticism and German mysticism. He tries to apply Neo-Kantian ideas to life, art, and analysis of works of art, which is confirmed by his articles published in *Logos: Tragedy of Creativity, Life and Creativity*, and *Tragedy of Mystical Consciousness*.

In general, we can state that the initial interest in epistemological and culturological issues of Kantianism and Neo-Kantianism were gradually replaced by the interest in ontological problematic and even mystical revelation of consciousness. Thus, B. Jakovenko (pluralistic transcendentalism), S. Hessen (metaphysical mysticism), and F. Stepun (philosophy of the absolute) joined this trend while developing their views.

According to M. Buber, "...in our epoch, thinking was not satisfied by irrealization of God and reducing Him to mere moral principle" ([13], 451). Therefore, "... the most important tendency in post-Kantian philosophy was that of recovering the absolute as such, i. e. not as something existing "in us", or at least as something existing not only in us" ([13], 451). This is the way Western theology evolved, stimulated by M. Heidegger's fundamental ontology; in Russia, almost all the philosophical thought intending to recover and justify the ontology of faith, i. e. create the metaphysics of faith, followed this trend.

However, Kant was interpreted in a different way in Russian philosophy during the Soviet epoch. This interpretation is represented, for instance, in the works by M. K. Mamardashvili. In this case, Kant is regarded as a demythologizer of philosophical thought. As to his critique of rational theology and ontological proof of God's existence, they may be regarded as critique of the supra-naturalistic understanding of faith, i. e. the faith based on mythological "supporting brackets" which, in fact, are devoid of any ontology.

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