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THE CRITICAL TRADITION IN BULGARIA

The critical tradition in Bulgaria includes all philosophical studies concerned directly or indirectly with Kant's philosophy. In this sense, it can be called the Kantian trend in the Bulgarian philosophical tradition. Compared with other philosophical schools, such as Rehmke's philosophy, dialectical materialism, etc., Kantianism develops relatively steadily, neither achieving lasting pre-eminence over other trends nor losing ground altogether.

In the first half of the 20th century, the philosophical climate is dominated by the philosophy of Rehmke, with D. Mikhachev and his followers as its representatives in Bulgaria. The second half of the century until the end of the 1980s is dominated by dialectical materialism. Yet despite these major swings in the general philosophical culture in Bulgaria, the main characteristic of the reception of Kantianism has been its relatively constant progressive development. The reception of Kant's philosophy in Bulgaria assumes three distinct stages. The first one begins in the middle of the 19th century and ends in 1925. The second stage lasts from 1925 till the end of the 1970s. This second stage is characterized by the pre-eminence of Leonard Nelson's philosophy and the translations of Tseko Torbov and Valentina Topusova-Torbova. The third stage reflects the study of Kant's philosophy in the 1980s and 1990s.

THE FIRST STAGE

The main feature of the first stage is the gradual formation of a professional attitude towards Kant's thought and its penetration into Bulgarian philosophy. During the first stage, there exists neither a fixed interpretative approach nor an attempt to form a philosophical society promoting Kant's ideas or their modern interpretations. The majority of the studies dedicated to Kant's system is frag-



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mentary, episodic or peripheral to other philosophical systems or problems.

Kant is mentioned in 1859 in the journal *Bulgarski knizhitsi*, where his style is described as “obscure and awkward.” In the newspaper *Narodnost* in 1869, I. Kasabov states: “A Bulgarian prince replied to a Greek emperor who had challenged him to a duel: ‘A smith who has tongs will not take out the red hot iron with his own hands’ ” (I. Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden*). Furthermore, Kant’s ideas are mentioned in the works of other Bulgarian figures of great influence in the political and cultural life of the country, including P. Beron, M. Balabanov, L. Karavelov, T. Ikonov, etc. (Beron 1855, 1861–1867).

During the first stage, one of the most interesting studies devoted to Kant is V. Drumev’s attempt to conduct a philosophical study of the place and role of Kant in the history of European philosophy. This attempt is the first of its kind in the Bulgarian philosophical tradition (Drumev 1984).

There is an obvious similarity between Kant and the Bulgarian philosopher Seliminski in their attitude towards the mind. The motto of the Enlightenment is “have the courage to use your own understanding,” a position embraced by Kant. Like Kant, Seliminski states that “understanding” should be the main criterion of truth. Furthermore, both of them think that the church circumscribes the freedom of the human mind (Seliminski 1979).

Kant’s ideas had significant impact on the formation of V. H. Stoyanov-Beron’s views. It is not inappropriate to claim that every thesis in his *Logic* can be traced to Kant’s thought. V. H. Stoyanov-Beron employs Kant’s definition for the notion of thinking, as formulated in his *Anthropology*: “thinking is a conversation of the soul with itself.” One of the most profound ideas in the Bulgarian critical tradition is Stoyanov-Beron’s defense of the statement concerning the synthetic character of mathematical knowledge, a statement later developed in so-called intuitionism (Stoyanov-Beron 1980).

After the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule in 1878, the social basis for a more dynamic economic, social, political and cultural life was created. The new conditions also proved favourable for the development of philosophy. In this context, it is worth noting

that Kant's ideas were used in the initial work on the first Bulgarian constitution. S. Radev claims that its authors had Kant's ethical ideas in mind, when they wrote: "Each citizen is a personification of the whole human race and is absolutely equal to all others" (Radev 1910).

In 1898 and 1899, three Bulgarians each defended a thesis on the ethics of Fichte. In analyzing Fichte, it is only natural to refer to Kant's philosophy due to the historical and theoretical proximity of the two philosophers (Nikolov 1898; Ivanov 1898). One of the most interesting studies on Fichte's philosophy is undoubtedly that of A. Dimitrov. The main problem he addresses is the foundation of a complete system of ethics uniting absolute ethics and relative ethics (Dimitrov 1899).

Although the majority of studies on Kant's philosophy seeks to offer psychological insights, S. Tshakarov pursues an anti-psychological trend found in neo-Kantianism. He thinks that what makes Kant's philosophy special is "the establishment of a transcendental point of view." Hence, he maintains that Kant's philosophy is a theory of the transcendental *a priori* (Tshakarov 1902). The position defended by D. Mikhachev is analogical: "According to Kant the concept of *a priori* is logical rather than psychological" (Mikhachev 1909).

During this period, two monographs are published which focus on the relationship between Kant's philosophy and the ideas of Schopenhauer. The first is *Das Kausalproblem bei Kant und Schopenhauer* (1906), in which the author S. Tschauchev draws two basic conclusions. The first one is that Kant is a metaphysician. It is an extremely interesting conclusion, bearing in mind that the so-called metaphysical (ontological) interpretations of Kant's philosophy originate in the 1920s. The second conclusion is even more important because it asserts that the transcendental factor has greater significance for knowledge than the immanent one (Tschauchev 1906). The second is Radoslav Tsanov's *Schopenhauer's Criticism of Kant's Theory of Experience* (1911). Tsanov, later a professor at several US universities, analyzed Schopenhauer's critique of Kant's conception of experience. The notions concerning experience include perception and conceptions, structure and organization of

experience, deduction and the objective validity of categories, limits of experience, experience and reality, etc. (Tsanov 1911).

The socialist journals *Obshto delo* and *Novo vreme* promoted ideas of neo-Kantianism. J. Sakasov translated K. Vorländer's article "Marx and Kant," where the necessity of a connection between Marxism and Kant's ethics is emphasized. The same ideas were developed in M. Adler's article "Lassalle and Marx: Representatives of the Idealistic and the Materialistic Understandings of History." P. Dzhidrov studied problems of Kant's conception of law and justice. Another vehicle for the popularization of neo-Kantian ideas was the journal of the radical-democrats *Democratichen pregled*. Its leading contributors included A. Nedyalkov, D. Gavriysky, and M. Ninov; Nedyalkov focused on the field of sociology, building upon Stammler's ideas.

In sum, the high points in the interpretation of Kant's system during this period deal with Kant's philosophical system. For the most part, they address epistemological and ethical problems. The main factor contributing to this orientation to Kant's thought is the existence of distinct intellectual traditions. These traditions suggest specific fields of thought, and serve to illuminate Kant's system and its modern interpretations. For example, the interest in epistemological problems is connected with the specific characteristics of the Bulgarian National Revival: the quest for knowledge as well as respect for science and education. The desire to attain a more realistic way of philosophizing accounts for the 'positivist' treatment of problems in the critical tradition. During this period, however, there emerge favorable conditions for philosophical research beyond the hitherto existing 'limitations' in the Bulgarian reception of Kant's philosophy, conditions which will promote new interpretations and further integrate Kantian thought into the national philosophical tradition.

THE SECOND STAGE

The second stage in the reception of Kant's thought is characterized by a decrease in the interest in critical philosophy. The number of studies focusing on Kant's philosophy or its interpretations is insignificant. The influence of neo-Kantianism also

decreases. This tendency also occurs internationally but there are some 'national' reasons for it as well. The main factor is the spread of Rehmke's philosophy in Bulgaria. At the time, even *Kant-Studien* supported the opinion that Rehmke's philosophy is extremely influential and in this sense naturally dangerous for Kantianism. Despite this general trend, however, historians of philosophy continued to conduct research on Kant's philosophy and investigate aspects that were previously ignored. I. Sarailiev demonstrated the connection of ideas between the pre-critical and subsequent periods. He also suggested an interesting interpretation of the problem of transcendental schematism. Similar ideas are developed in the contemporary studies on Kant's philosophy (Sarailiev 1943). R. Ganeva translated parts of Kant's works and analyzed significant aspects of Kant's philosophy (Ganeva 1940).

Until the 1920s, the influence of Kant's ideas remained partial, fragmentary, and without clear interpretive principles. In the inter-war period, however, studies of Kant's thought acquired a new character marked by consistency, systematic methods of research, and a large number of publications focusing almost exclusively on a single school and analyzing different aspects of Kant's philosophy, including his theory of knowledge, ethics, law, politics, etc. The central figure responsible for this tendency is Tseko Torbov. He was born in Oriahovo in 1899. In 1920, Torbov went to Berlin where he studied law. While in Berlin, he maintained contact with Leonard Nelson who sent him several publications. Torbov translated two of Nelson's works. Later Torbov collaborated with Nelson in Göttingen.

In 1956 the Bulgarian Academy of Science entrusted him with the task of translating the major works of Kant. The following books appeared for the first time in Bulgarian: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1967), *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1974), *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1977). At the same time, he functioned as editor of the *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* (1968), *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1974), which were all translated by V. Topusova-Torbova. In 1970, Torbov was named the Herder-prize laureate of Vienna University for his translation of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and in 1993 became a laureate of the Kant-Gesellschaft. He was also

the winner of other international and national prizes. Torbov died in June of 1987.

With remarkable consistency, Torbov's work partakes in the tradition of the critical school of Fries-Nelson. From 1925 until his last publication entitled "Das Grundgesetz des Rechts bei Kant, Fries und Nelson" (*Kant-Studien*, 65. Jahrgang. Sonderheft, Akten des 4. Internationale Kant-Kongresses. Mainz, 6–10. IV. 1974), Torbov's studies invariably deal with problems connected with this school and generally adhere to its main philosophical principles (Torbov 1929, 1930, 1931, 1933, 1993).

The popularization of Nelson's philosophy in Bulgaria illustrates well the fact that there lies great cultural significance in the odd philosophical partialities of philosophers from smaller countries: they embrace, respect and develop traditions and ideas, which often diverge from the mainstream of philosophical knowledge. In Torbov's philosophical writings we can discern two tendencies. The first one is a then already established commitment to concentrate on aspects of Kant's philosophy that deal primarily with ethical and pedagogical problems. The second tendency is found in the introduction of a new trend – his studies on the philosophy of law and politics. Torbov's contribution to the development of critical philosophy in Bulgaria lies not only in the establishment of a critical school in this country but also in the introduction of a systematic philosophy of law in the 1930s and 1940s. Beyond its originality, the popularity of the Fries-Nelson critical school is the result of a number of ethno-psychological factors, in particular the strong realistic orientation given in the Bulgarian philosophical landscape during the period in question. In Heinrich Schmidt's *Philosophisches Wörterbuch*, Fries is dubbed the founder of positive philosophy, based on the systems of Kant, Jakobi, Schleiermacher, and the psychology of Ernst Platner. The feature which Torbov shares with representatives of the previous period is the stress on psychology. The central premise of this school is that the critique of reason should be distinguished from the system of metaphysics and should be based on psychology. In this connection, a very important element of the critical method is the so-called psychological deduction of the main metaphysical principles. Parallel to the first stage in the reception of Kant in Bulgaria, the fundamental theoretical

foundations of Kant's philosophical system are interpreted in a psychological fashion.

THE THIRD STAGE

Following the translation of major works of Kant, a strong professional interest in critical philosophy emerged in Bulgaria and has been further solidified since the political upheaval in Bulgaria during the 1980s and 1990s. This general tendency is documented, for instance, by the studies of Ivan Stefanov, including *Kant and the Problem of the Dialectics* (1981), *The Dialectics of Fichte* (1982), and *Transcendental Philosophy and Metaphysics* (1987). During this third period positive features of the previous two periods were creatively combined: the wide range of research topics was complemented by an increase in the professional competence of investigation. Compared with preceding periods, the primary focus in the interpretation of Kant's ideas is metaphysics. This should not imply an adaptation of the ontological interpretations of Kant's system developed by H. Heimsoeth, G. Martin, G. Lehmann, H. Knittermeier, and others, but rather the definition of a new horizon of problems hitherto ignored in neo-Kantianism. As a result, Bulgarian philosophers begin to concentrate on the possibility of a science of metaphysics, analyzing basic elements of Kant's transcendental philosophy and its solution. In the so-called ontological interpretation of Kant's philosophy the emphasis falls primarily on constitutive (negative) dialectics. The new basic theoretical premises in considering Kant's dialectics are as follows: 1) A solution to the antinomies must be based on transcendental logic, without of course ignoring the laws of formal logic that are to function as a negative precondition of validity; 2) The dialectics of Kant constitutes a methodology of systematic knowledge. In this sense, an evaluation of dialectics must be linked to an analysis of the problem of regulative dialectics, as distinguished from constitutive dialectics. Regulative dialectics is the 'highest' theoretical 'grounding' of transcendental idealism. It both highlights and solves the problem of the essence of philosophical knowledge and its role as a methodology of positive, scientific knowledge. The theme of metaphysics is explored in depth by I. Stefanov in his

profound analysis of metaphysics from Kant to neo-Kantianism. Stefanov's main objective was to explain the internal mechanisms which force a reconstruction of metaphysics in a post-neo-Kantian fashion.

A new field of research is Kant's aesthetic ideas. Furthermore, E. Panova studied the place of Kant's philosophy in the history of philosophy, especially in relation to the contemporary ontological conceptions of W. Quine, P. Strawson, A. Quinton (Pasi 1976; Tsoneva 1981; Panova 1978, 1996). Besides these monographs, numerous articles have been published which deal with different aspects of Kant's system of thought and its contemporary interpretations.

Through the establishment of a Kant Society in Bulgaria with its chairman Ivan Stefanov, simultaneously a member of the German Kant-Gesellschaft, efforts have since been institutionalized. Over the last years a number of Kant's works have been translated, including Kant's *Logic* (D. Denkov), *Pedagogy*, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, and *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (V. Kanavrov). Several studies of Tseko Torbov were also published, thanks to the dedicated work of Valentina Topusova-Torbova.

Along with these translations, a diverse set of topics relating to Kant's critical philosophy have been investigated, including post-neo-Kantianism (I. Stefanov), logic (D. Denkov), problems of morality (V. Kanavrov), transcendental philosophy as ontology (G. Donev), Kant's ideas and their relation to contemporary physics (A. Stefanov), Kant's pre-critical period (V. Miteva), the history of Kantianism and Nelson's philosophy (D. Tsatsov), and problems of schematism.

The main flaw in the development of research on Kant during the third period is the lack of consistent and profound analyses of the ethical, socio-political and legal problems and, more generally, of the humanitarian aspects of Kant's philosophy and its interpretations. The existential, theological and phenomenological aspects of Kant's thought also go almost unrecognized. The ideas of R. Lauth's transcendental school were made popular by I. Stefanov but this has not led to further research. The reason for the limited, theoretical character of interpretations during the third period lies in

the increasing scientific exchange with colleagues in the West. This exchange was occasioned both by political factors and by a change in the 'spirit' of the 1980s and 1990s, which has led to a definite withdrawal from Kant's rational approach.

In conclusion, the linear progressive development in the Bulgarian reception of Kant and Kantianism over the last one hundred and forty years is evident. This seems to suggest that in the postmodern future many important ideas will be inspired by transcendental philosophy.

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