

# Tradition of European Personalism

## Russian Philosophy in the Light of I. Kant's Ideas Perception

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**Abstract**—The article is dedicated to the analysis of the perception of I. Kant's philosophy, particularly in the Russian metaphysical thought. The authors focus on the understanding and attitude of the Russian philosophers expressed towards the works of Kant from the personalistic and metaphysics of faith points of view. The authors consider criticism, assimilation and the dependence of the Russian philosophy from the transcendental constructs of I. Kant.

**Keywords**—*Kantianism; neo-Kantianism; neo-Leibnitz personalism; Russian philosophy*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The topic of personalism in Russian philosophy finds its evidence of a well-designed philosophical movement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Just as the number of other Russian thought movements, Russian personalism was largely indebted to German philosophical tradition. Firstly, it concerns the creative works of G. W. Leibniz and I. Kant. The *Monadology* of Leibniz is considered to be one of the main theoretical sources of personalism. The doctrine of Leibniz and his followers (primarily R. H. Lotze and G. Teichmüller) of the spiritual substances (monads), being independent ontological centers, supporting harmonic relationship among them and God, was vital for the subsequent personalistic theories. No less important is the fact that Leibniz consistently argued the metaphysical reality of freedom and absolute reality of a person: "... the metaphysical relationship between soul and body exists and contributes to the fact that soul and body form a substrate called personality" [1. P. 134].

All the aforementioned ideas were perceived and developed in the Russian neo-Leibnizianism: in A. Kozlov's and S. Alexeev's (Askoldov's) "panpsychism", L. Lopatin's "monistic spiritualism", E. Bobrov's "critical individualism", N. Lossky's "intuitionism" and others. The named philosophical systems were not confined to Leibnizianism alone and, no doubt in that, showed peculiar and radically new metaphysical attitudes.

I. Kant's "critical" philosophy was essential for the design of the traditions of the Russian personalism. Kant structured and systematized basic "personalistic" categories: «Person» (a person), «Personalität» (reasonable substance, the

transcendental substance, subject) and, finally, «Persönlichkeit» (personality).

### II. KANT IN THE RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHY

In fact, almost no Russian philosopher was able to pass the works of Immanuel Kant; it was very urgent for the Russian philosophy to gain the insights of the Königsbergian thinker. The perception of Kant's ideas in Russian philosophy and culture has a long and remarkable history – it is "anything but a series of calm, balanced historical and philosophical studies, although these had appeared from time to time in Russia" [2. P. 87].

The perception of Kant's constructs was ambiguous, dependent on the philosopher's paradigm. All in all, there are three logical positions: 1. frank and radical rejection; 2. attempt to interpret Kant's works in order to incorporate them into "the Russian worldview"; 3. the full acceptance and imitation.

The last position, however, was almost non-existent (including the Russian Kantianism and neo-Kantianism), as Kant's philosophy encouraged creativity of those trying to get into it.

The first position was taken, however, either by those who hadn't set goals of in-depth understanding for German philosopher's constructions, or from those who had fundamentally stood on the other positions, coming from fideism, that gives faith priority over reason (L. Shestov, E. Trubetskoy, P. Florensky, S. Bulgakov, V. Nesmelov, N. Berdyaev and others). E.g., A. Ahutin (in his article "Sophia and the Devil") [3] and T. B. Dlugach (in his article "The Problem of Time in the Philosophies of I. Kant and P. Florensky") are inclined to that understanding of Kant's works in the Russian philosophy. T. B. Dlugach writes: "Of course, it was common for the religious philosophers of Russia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to express negative attitude towards the Western European philosophy as a whole, as it symbolized for them the victory of rationalism over faith, yet some provisions of the Hegelian and Schellengian systems often caused reverential admiration, while the philosophy of Kant was an object of, one may say, reverential awe. The explanation must be sought in the specific Russian idealistic philosophy regarding the fundamental problems of being and thinking" [4. P. 186].

The same applies to Y. Golosovker, author of "Dostoevsky and Kant".

N.V. Motroshilova takes a slightly different point of view, believing, that, at its core, Russian philosophy took the second logical position. To the second position, one may apply the philosophers, who based on the intuition of all-encompassing unity, standing on the principles of reason, striving for faith. P. D. Yurkevich, V.I. Solovyov and his followers (L. Lopatin, S. N. Trubetskoy, S. L. Frank) are considered the founders of this thought movement. According to them, Kant shall be "overcome" through the assimilation of his ideas on the basis of the principles, expressed in the Russian philosophy. N. V. Motroshilova, highlighting two approaches in this regard – *radically critical* and *apologetically derivative* – seeks to show that the Russian philosophy in its attitude towards Kant had chosen some middle way: "... the Russian Kantian studies are, most likely, the reason of the struggle of ideas, the clash of "speculations and revelations" over the topics and problems, crucial and decisive for both Russian and the world around" [2. P. 87].

The given distinction, however, is only conditionally logical and is intended to differentiate the most common approaches to the works of Kant in the Russian philosophy. In reality, the range of opinions was much more diverse, contradictory and complex as every Russian philosopher had his own opinion on critical philosophy. Although, after conducting a study in order to identify the relation to Kant's philosophy in a spiritual-academic environment, A. I. Abramov came to the conclusion, repeating the one of S. N. Bulgakov, that "for the Orthodox theology, the philosophy of Kant is a kind of Christian heresy" [5. P. 82, 112]. S. A. Chernov described the issue: "The Kant's "razor" was used mainly to cut off materialistic, atheistic, skeptical, scientific-empirical rationalistic attacks on the Orthodox faith and Christian personal freedom. However, the Russian thinkers were alienated from Kant's "subjectivism". Overall, ontological Orthodox "sobornost" in a particular epistemological attire opposed reflective Protestant "subjectivism" [6. P. 117].

The major Russian philosopher of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Vladimir Solovyov acknowledged that Kant's criticism was a "central turning point in the history of human thought", that "he had raised philosophical thinking to the highest (in comparison to the previous) level, from which it would never descend". This, however, doesn't mean that V.I. Solovyov accepted all the conclusions of the critical philosophy. He opposed, e.g., the exaggeration of its value, when one "wants to see in critical philosophy not an improvement and intensification of the essential tasks of philosophy but rather their best and possibly final solution". Solovyov recognized Kant's "final role" only in the field of ethics (in its "pure" or formal part) and stressed the fact that in the other branches of philosophy Kant had been "the great provocateur but not the solver of the most important issues". Solovyov also believed that in Kant's doctrine of law, state, history and religion "not everything deserves equal attention" [7. P. 42-58].

In his last works (especially in "The Justification of the Good" and "Theoretical Philosophy") V.I. Solovyov, arguing with the Russian personalists-Leibnizianists, viewed Kant's philosophy as a definite and significant step in the European philosophy's development. Still, we shouldn't speak of Solovyov's transition to Kantianism. Recognizing that Kantian "pure reason" is closer to the truth than the Cartesian "thinking substance", Solovyov, at the same time, reproached Kant for "recognizing only the formal reasonableness" and, therefore, for the "ambiguity" of the Kantian cognizer [8. P. 828]. However, Kant's understanding of personality and, in particular, his ethical sense, appeared for V.I. Solovyov to be much more productive than the idea of person-substance of the pre-critical metaphysics. In "The Justification of the Good", reflecting on the "reasonableness" of a moral choice, Solovyov relied largely on the general principles of Kant's "practical reason" theory. It should be noted that Solovyov once again exhibited an amazing ability to foresee philosophical development perspectives.

The Russian philosophers en masse believed themselves to be metaphysics in the field that was revolutionized by I. Kant - and especially by his first "Critique". The consequences of the said revolution were perceived with ambiguity, suspicion and even hostility. A more appropriate attitude was established towards the second "Critique", as evidenced by the statements of, e.g., V.I. Solovyov and S. N. Bulgakov. However, the Russian thought couldn't confide to the boundaries, designed by Kant for any philosophy; it transgressed them everywhere, breaking the resistance of the Russian Kantianists. The veteran of the Russian metaphysics B. Chicherin wrote that all categories of thinking, "emanating from the universal mind", can be derived a priori, therefore making metaphysics possible as a science.

### III. NEO-KANTIANISM IN THE RUSSIAN THOUGHT

German neo-Kantianism in its logical-methodological (the Marburg School) and value-cultural (the Baden School) variants experienced a period of theoretical expansion and acquired pan-European popularity and authority at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. German neo-Kantianism found its supporters in Russia as well, influencing literature, theology and, above all, philosophy. A Russian neo-Kantianism school was formed with its own settings, goals, program and even a printed journal called "Logos" (which was being published in Moscow and St. Petersburg from 1910 till 1914). Counting themselves to the philosophical elite of that time, a group of the Russian Kantian philosophers (I. I. Lapshin, G. I. Chelpanov, S. I. Hessen, A. F. Stepun, B. V. Yakovenko, A. I. Vvedensky) made a claim to "critically" overcome "homegrown" traditions of the Russian religious metaphysics, going back to the Slavophiles, that found its renewed existence in the religious-philosophical journal "Put" ("The Path"). Yet, the intentions of the Russian neo-Kantianists went no further claims. Their failed attempt to reform the Russian philosophy in the neo-Kantian spirit only confirmed the Russian philosophy's autochthony and its origins stability. The "reformers" themselves recognized their failure. F. A. Stepun described the *Logos* journal activity this way: "... we were determined

to cut the Moscow Slavophiles' nails and hair. I can't say we were wrong all the way, but it was overconfident of us to reform the style of the Russian philosophy" [9. P. 281-282]. For many philosophers and writers, the temptation of neo-Kantianism proved to be a transient and didactic fancy, age-related stage of their worldview formation. Worth noting, that even the philosophers, not completely breaking with the Kantian principles, were attracted to the metaphysical layer of the Russian philosophy that attempted to reconcile the "critical" philosophy with the traditions of the Russian speculations and faith. According to the remark made by V. V. Zenkovsky, Russian neo-Kantianism, despite its adherence to the requirements of "criticism", "doesn't break with the rooted problems of the Russian spirituality" [10. P. 225].

Of particular interest from that point of view is A. I. Vvedensky (1856-1925), Professor of Philosophy at St. Petersburg University. Saving his devotion to Kant's philosophy, Vvedensky exposes the critical philosophy to a fundamental revision. The revision involves distributing the primacy of practical reason not only through the adoption of the moral principles, but also through giving more ontological weight to morality and faith than it had been thought of by Kant himself. Vvedensky wrote: "By studying the principles of the moral sense, it is possible to draw lasting solutions of the metaphysical problems" to the extent of the metaphysical systems construction. From the upright Kantian point of view, that is an invalid innovation, destroying everything that was so long and patiently erected by I. Kant. If Kant built up a wall, preventing philosophy from metaphysical "dreams", Vvedensky reviewed the possibility of a "durable solution of the metaphysical problems" and even building a "system of metaphysics".

Vvedensky is at fundamental odds with Kant while also concerning the question of cognitive abilities and human capabilities. So Vvedensky argues that, along with the sphere of experience, there is "a special *body* of cognition" - *metaphysical sense*. In his early work, "The Experience of Building Theory of Matter" Vvedensky, considering the Kantian notion of "thing-in-itself", tackles a subject in the spirit of J. G. Fichte, limiting the entire sphere of experience to consciousness. From this, he makes a paradoxical conclusion, apparently under the influence of D. Hume: the answer to the question on "the existence and non-existence of the things-in-themselves ... can be given not by science but only by faith". These contradictions of Vvedensky's thoughts to the Kant's philosophy are natural, as, according to E. N. Trubetsky, "... the attempt to overcome Kant and Kantianism is definitely a must for any teaching, which claims that any cognition, as such, rests upon metaphysical assumptions, trying to uncover those" [11].

The given interpretations of Kant's heritage in Russia, as well as the aforementioned quotations, may not be debated unequivocally. There were various opinions on certain Kant's ideas in the works of the Russian thinkers in different periods of time. It is rather important to discover fundamental difficulties, interpretation attempts, possible borrowings and prospects. Besides, the style of a number of the Russian philosophers implies vivid and emotional statements that

should not be viewed as theoretical findings. The Russian philosophers have always "led thorough critical work on the Kant's most important texts and ideas" although being "largely characterized by the difference between their scathing philippics and positive practice". N. V. Motroshilova concludes: "Kant was not a philosophical God to the majority of the Russian thinkers, but it is unlikely that he was their devil" [2. P. 94].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Further on, the moral interpretation of a personal development stayed to be crucial within European neo-Kantianism. Russian neo-Kantianism was not an exception. Personalistic motives have always played a significant role in it. A. Vvedensky, e.g., was ready to accept the idea of personality and "the belief in personal immortality" as the necessary conditions for moral convictions and "the belief in the meaning of life" [12. P. 129]. P. Novgorodtcev described the idea of an individual as a "moral idea" and recognized the need for solely personalistic criteria while evaluating social ideals and progress. "We have determined the content of the social ideal depending on the personality principle. Proceeding from the said principle, we have established a leadership norm of the social progress. This kind of composition includes already the idea that the social progress is associated with self-development and, consequently, derives from personalistic goals" [13. P. 139]. The topic of personalism received challenging and profound expression in S. Hessen's philosophy of education. Ethical interpretation played a decisive role in his and other representatives of Russian neo-Kantianism works.

Thus, the classical experience of the European philosophical personalism found its expression and development in Russian neo-Leibnizianism and neo-Kantianism. However, the personalistic trend isn't reduced just to these two philosophical schools. Post-classical forms and styles of philosophizing brought to life qualitatively new types of personalism. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the "new personalism" found its vivid expression in the S. Kierkegaard's philosophical position in the West and in the works of F. Dostoevsky in Russia. Conceptual diversity is becoming a distinct feature of the personalistic philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Notable French personalist J. Lacroix wrote: "There are personalistic idealism (Kantianism), personalistic realism (Laberthonnere), personalistic existentialism (Marcel, Berdyaev), personalistic individualism (Renouvier), there are also communist and anarchist personalistic intentions" [14. P. 39-40]. The other versions of personalistic metaphysics are widely and vividly presented in the Russian metaphysics, along with the Leibnizian and Kantian personalism ("personalistic idealism", according to the Lacroix classification).

Historical-philosophical reconstruction and European personalist thinkers' positions comparison create an opportunity for more profound and comprehensive understanding of the Russian philosophical tradition. The topic of personalism in the Russian thought was marked definitely in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in its interrelation with the educational and pedagogical tasks

actively discussed at that time. An interest towards pedagogical issues was, to a significant extent, the result of the reception of the relevant Western European philosophical ideas.

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