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Reviews and Annotations
Рецензии и анотации

MANCHEV, BOYAN. WORLD AND FREEDOM: TRANSCENDENTAL PHILOSOPHY AND MODAL ONTOLOGY. SOFIA: NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING, 2023, 719 PAGES.

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The book intertwines two main interpretative lines. On the one hand, it offers an immanent, textually attentive reconstructive reading of Kant, encompassing practically his entire corpus. On the other hand, Kant is critically reexamined and productively transcended. In this critical rethinking of Kant, Nietzsche and the late Nietzschean tradition are powerfully engaged: most notably Deleuze, but also the radicalized critique of the past 150 years has become a resource for Manchev's specific transformative hermeneutics.

What are the goals? In short, the book brackets Kant's epistemological stakes to open up the problematics of freedom. Through freedom, Kant's epistemology is to be transformed into a modal ontology. This is the book's central task: to liberate Kant from his self-imposed epistemological rigidity, enabling him to operate within the ontological field as a "Nietzschean" or "Bataillean" figure.

However, this task is by no means carried out arbitrarily. I will attempt to demonstrate this briefly, in a bold effort to take a bird's-eye view of Manchev's work on Kant.

Kant's own method from the Critique of Pure Reason – the so-called regressive synthesis – is a method of seeking the conditions of possibility for any given conditioned phenomenon. Since the regressive synthesis always proceeds in three directions – it searches for the conditions of multiplicity, unity, and affinity

in experience – it correspondingly postulates three regulative ideas: things-in-themselves, the soul (apperception), and God.

Manchev closely follows this regressive synthesis step by step, but gradually overturns what Kant tries to uphold as regulative principles, transforming them into constitutive principles. I would call what Manchev does a *productive synthesis*. However, it is not "progressive," because progressive is a Kantian term, used didactically – to describe how, once you grasp the conditions of possibility of experience, you can teach them, demonstrate them to others. A productive synthesis, on the other hand, reconstructs a given structure from the moment of its production – from its constitutive moment.

In fact, Manchev assumes that even the most rigorously constructed epistemological world of the Newtonian-Galilean type, which Kant seeks to build, is ultimately produced freely. That is, even the strictest deterministic framework of science is created thanks to forces that are undetermined. Every framework of necessity is created through freedom, which turns out to be the ultimate condition of our experience – its constitutive moment.

Kant's epistemology relies on the predefined correlation between the impossible, the necessary, and the possible. We examine a phenomenon and observe – it could be one way, it could be another, but there are certain things without which it cannot be known. What is it without which this phenomenon cannot be known? Kant answers that no phenomenon can be known without space and time, without the categories of unity, plurality, totality, and so on.

A phenomenon **cannot** be known without these; therefore, **it is necessary** for every phenomenon to be given in space and time and to be synthesized under the categories of unity, plurality, and so forth. Kant equates "cannot" with "it is necessary to", treating them as synonyms or tautology. Manchev deconstructs this tautology by demonstrating that it conceals an illegitimate leap.

What does Manchev do? It seems as though he is saying: Kant's "it cannot be otherwise" is not automatically equivalent to necessity. Instead, this "it cannot be otherwise" is closer to "it must not be otherwise" in the sense of "I/we do not wish it to be otherwise." This "it cannot be otherwise" is, so to speak, stripped from Kant's quasi-objectivist interpretation and shifts into the domain of free will, of free desire or intention. Manchev changes the stakes of "cannot be" – he himself uses the term "visée" – giving it an inclination, a direction.

From this point, what is necessary is no longer a flat or total necessity; it suddenly turns out to be a projection, a product of freedom. Necessity becomes the focus of desire or – avoiding anthropomorphism, as Manchev himself urges – necessity is the target point of a drive or striving.

This is precisely what Kant seems to forget – what he skips over.

The insertion of desire between possibility and necessity, the formation of the triad can – want – must, is grounded in the Ideogenesis of Krasimir Manchev,

Boyan's father. Ideogenesis is a linguistic paradigm in the tradition of Gustave Guillaume, based on the study of the functioning of the French verb (see pp. 567-569, as well as Appendix 2). Krasimir Manchev demonstrates that there is a logic to the unfolding of the verb and its forms: there is a genesis through the semantic development of modal verbs.

The genesis of modalities begins with "to be," and after "to be" come the others – the first is "can," the second is "want," and the third is "must." Each of them includes and semantically builds upon the previous ones. Thus, "want" includes and builds upon "can," and "must" includes and builds upon "want." Must turns out to be a specific kind of maximization of desire, its semantic amplification, or, metaphorically speaking, its intensification.

In Krasimir Manchev's framework, "want" functions as a kind of transmitter or differential that shifts from "can" to "must." Boyan Manchev performs the same modal transformation in relation to Kant: he transforms "possibility" and "impossibility" by investing them with "desire" and "freedom." In doing so, the status of necessity changes—necessity becomes a "desired possibility," a "possibility inclined toward its necessary realization."

Let us demonstrate this through Kant! At first glance, it seems strictly necessary, given that the regressive synthesis proceeds in three directions, to ultimately posit three regulative principles: "things-in-themselves," "the soul," and "God." However, this strict necessity quickly collapses if we ask, for example: Why specifically "God" as the regulative principle of affinity? Why not "Mother Goddess," "Tree of Life," "dark matter," "dark energy," or anything else you can think of?

Despite Kant's self-imposed formalism, such questions reveal that a certain content has slipped into his system – a representation, in this case, the image of "God" – a content that is, in fact, logically arbitrary. Thus, Kant's system also turns out to be logically arbitrary. Boyan Manchev, however, shows that while Kant's system is logically arbitrary, it is existentially necessary.

The inclination of Kant's thought, his visée, was such that he saw "God" as the principle of affinity. Yet, in a different situation, there could have been a different inclination, a different desire, a different visée. Different possible worlds arise in different situations: with another inclination of existence – what Manchev calls a clinamen – existence could have taken a different turn and produced a different world.

Thus, Kant's "God" is not merely a logically arbitrary assumption; it is the result of a convergence of circumstances that gave rise to this possibility, which, inclined by desire, instantly transformed into necessity. But a necessity only there, in that place, in that instance: a necessity that emerged freely. A necessity with a changed status!

I once wrote that the status of necessity must be changed: necessity is always freely affirmed. Boyan Manchev, however, makes a move that amplifies this thesis

even further. While I insisted that every framework, every matrix that structures our experience must be freely affirmed and re-affirmed in order to function, Manchev's interpretation grants freedom even greater power. Freedom begins to bend the matrix, the boundaries of experience, and transitions into autopoiesis – hence Manchev's project for philosophical science fiction.

Thus, from Kant's motif of "it is not possible not to," we gradually arrive at "there are no impossible things." In philosophical science fiction, there are no impossible things because the argument "it is not possible not to" is reshaped through "I want." Possibility is inclined by aspiration, by an energetic investment, through pressure, until it becomes "must". When possibility is tilted in a certain direction, it begins to weigh that way, gradually becoming quasi-necessary.

This is why it is philosophical science fiction: because when there are no impossible things, the question of what is possible to happen – or, more simply, what will happen? – becomes an entirely open question. But although the world is open, not everything is equally possible – this is not about formal relativism. What will happen depends on when and where freedom is invested—on what inclination of the possible, and thus what necessity, will be given to the world.

In fact, Manchev accomplishes a paradigmatic turn in the understanding of classical modal categories – he overturns them. This turn – this revolution – is the second after the "Copernican revolution" of Hume and Kant. Manchev executes a revolution of the revolution—he turns Kant's turn inside out.

I believe that Kant's Copernican revolution is not so much in the shift of perspective and the privileging of the knowing subject, as is the classical understanding. Much more important and radically revolutionary is Kant's reworking of the modal categories, which began with Hume. It is precisely Hume's critique of causality that sets the paradigmatic way of thinking for modern mathematical science: it establishes the framework for probabilistic thinking and calculation. This is the core of the transcendental reversal.

Let us recall:

Causality is a fundamental concept dating back to Aristotle: If one thing exists, another will begin to exist after it – A implies B. Furthermore, Aristotle, and especially the tradition following him, thinks of the appearance of a given existent – its coming into being, its emergence – as the realization (actualization) of possibilities. Therefore, causality is a concept according to which the realization of one possibility necessarily leads to the realization of another. Causality imposes strict necessity on existence as the realization of possibilities: possibilities are actualized by necessity.

What Kant does, and before him Hume, but Kant terminologizes, is to remove existence from the realm of strict necessity. And this happens as Kant splits the table of the six categories into two: his modal categories are now grouped in threes. Because Kant separates possibility, impossibility, and necessity and sets them aside:

between these three categories, he discovers an autonomous logical correlation – impossibility is the boundary of possibilities, which determines their (only formal) necessity. On the other hand, existence (reality and non-reality) is detached from possibility and placed on the other side: on the side of chance. This is the logic of the die. The die has six sides, these are six possibilities, and there is no seventh side, and it is impossible for there to be a seventh; therefore, it is necessary for one of the six to come up. Existence is inscribed in necessity, but only insofar as necessity is the framework for the possible. However, existence or reality is separated from possibility—from any specific possibility – and the specific possibility is realized only by chance. Knowing the boundary of possibilities, we can calculate in advance the probability of a given possibility occurring (1/6), but we can never calculate in advance which possibility will actually occur. Because existence is detached from possibility – it is a matter of chance, it is an event, and it is random. And the only boundary of chance is impossibility, which formally frames it and returns it to the realm of possibilities without determining the realization of any specific possibility. The possibilities are only generally framed, but their actuality or non-actuality is a matter of chance.

The separation of possibility from existence is the core of the transcendental turn. Through it, existence is freed from direct determination – it is determined only indirectly, from the framework of the possible, but not as a direct realization of possibilities. This reworking of the modal categories, according to which possibility, impossibility, and necessity are kept on one side, and reality, non-reality, and chance on the other – without "mixing" them, in order to maintain the rigor of probabilistic calculation – sets the paradigmatic framework of modern mathematical science: this is the algorithm of the 20th century, and it remains dominant today.

Indeed, even Kant in the second Critique admits causality from freedom, and this causality transcends the strict distinction between possibility and existence (because freedom implies that the impossible can and does become not just possible, but actual) and which is unknowable. After Kant, as is well known, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel start from the idea of freedom and break down Kant's strict demarcations between possible/impossible and knowable/unknowable. They once again implant freedom, but not in possibility, rather in necessity – turning freedom into an absolute subject and thus, unintentionally, sacrificing it by reintroducing the heavy determinism of the pre-Kantian dogmatic metaphysics.

Boyan Manchev also seeks to overcome the divide between possibility and existence – to rehabilitate freedom, not just as a regulative, but as an ontological concept – but he follows a different path. He explicitly formulates something like his own imperative – I call it "the imperative of Boyan Manchev": "We must be careful not to make the reduction that has been made for centuries with respect to Aristotle's *dynamis*, namely, to think of the possible in opposition to the real and as non-real" (p. 402). Boyan Manchev invests actuality – energy, freedom –

not in necessity, nor in an absolute subject as the German idealists did, but in the possible – in the concrete possibility, which is not simply a reductive abstraction but always singular (i.e., real). Thus, freedom becomes ubiquitous – it is always already permeated into every possibility, which means – and into every reality. And insofar as it is a force transcending and transforming reality/possibility, it is always "more than reality."

If Kant's concept of freedom is anthropomorphic, then ubiquitous freedom cannot remain so. Manchev provides a detailed analysis of the works of Kant's disciple and heretical critic Solomon Maimon – a separate book within the book (chapters 4 – 5). He shows how Maimon tries to break through the epistemological limitations in Kant's understanding of experience by demonstrating that the thing-in-itself is not just a regulative idea, an unknowable noumenon, but that, in order for there to be experience at all, it must have direct *constitutive power*. In other words, Maimon deliberately and conceptually justifies blending the formal and material aspects of experience, which Kant attempts to separate, in order to return its "dynamic magma" to the realm of possible experience. In fact, it is through the reworking of Maimon, Nietzsche, and Bergson (as well as Hume, Leibniz, and Spinoza) that Gilles Deleuze transforms Kant's transcendental epistemology into ontology: into "transcendental empiricism," where "the goal of philosophy is not to grasp the conditions of knowledge, but to discover and mobilize the conditions for creative production" (p. 309).

The return through Deleuze to Maimon in Manchev's work has another meaning: it shows how freedom can enter experience not through the acting or knowing subject, not through the human, but through the things themselves. In other words, freedom is fully de-anthropomorphized. It is an immanent force of the world: "Freedom is the force of the self-overcoming of the world. Freedom is not internal otherness, but the force that makes the world world through its own surpassing. Thus, the transcendental will be understood as the force of the world's self-overcoming, coming from the world itself. In other words, transcendental idealism will be grasped as super-realism: as hyper-critical realism." (p. 598)

The new ontology that Manchev develops through and beyond Kant – his modal ontology – is based on a fundamental axiom: "The existence of freedom: existence as freedom." (p. 598)

Finally, I would like to pose an open general question. I agree that Kant's epistemological program should not be read rigidly but should be overcome toward a dynamic ontology that recognizes the emergence and transformability of the world, investing creativity and freedom in it not only on an anthropomorphic but also on a fundamental ontological level. Still, could it be that the mathematical probabilistic thinking, whose conceptual apparatus was developed by Hume and Kant, should not only be preserved but also further developed as a specific mode of maximally impartial investigation of inert processes and, consequently, for their practical pre-

diction? In other words, is the paradigm of probabilistic thinking not complementary to the paradigm of freedom and transformability? My point is that, here—as in many other instances—there is no significant ontological difference, but only practical differences between the modes of interaction with the world, different ethoses?

REFERENCES

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