

TWO THEORETICAL SYMPOSIA IN BULGARIA DEDICATED TO THE 300TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF IMMANUEL KANT

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On 22nd and 23rd April 2024 at the South-West University “Neofit Rilski” – Blagoevgrad, a national theoretical conference was held on the topic “Critical Mind. 300th anniversary of Immanuel Kant’s birth” (<https://300years Kant.org>). It was organized by the Faculty of Philosophy of the South-West University and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The key motivators were Prof. DSc. Valentin Kanawrow, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Silviya Kristeva and Assist. Vera Lyubenova, PhD. 29 participants presented papers.

The papers were only in Bulgarian because – along with the commitment to honour Kant’s jubilee and to demonstrate the epochal significance of his critical philosophy - the leading goal of the conference was to ruminate on and incorporate critical paradigm and transcendental conceptuality into contemporary Bulgarian language and culture.

In strictly theoretical terms, the conference thematized four conceptual fields: (1) the topicality of Kant’s critical metaphysics, (2) its relations with its prior and contemporary ideas and philosophical systematizations, (3) historical-philosophical interpretations of aspects of Kant’s philosophy, and (4) its influence on present philosophising in Bulgaria and the world.

A leading focus was the hermeneutic refinement of critique both conceptually and in a broader social and cultural context with a focus on today. By critique Kant means not contestation, rejection, denial, denunciation, condemnation, etc., but a reflexive, i.e. a clear, reverse and self-conscious assessment of reason in terms of its principles, sources, possibilities, power, scope and field of activity. Kant’s critique is a kind of prelude to the systematic construction of philosophy, which the Königsberg thinker understood solely as metaphysics. Critique does not destroy metaphysics, but displaces from formal-rational philosophy the previous scholastic and rational-dogmatic metaphysics. Kant clearly states that metaphysics

will succeed in its philosophical quest, „if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge ... This experiment succeeds as well as could be desired, and promises to metaphysics, in its first part ... the secure path of a science“ (KrV, B XVII, XVIII). Metaphysics is not an end in itself. It only matters if it is realized in a patterned way in a person's experience to legitimize it „as a highest ultimate purpose in himself“ (KpV, AA 05: 215).

Participants agreed that “Kant's philosophy is not merely necessary, but categorically and imperatively necessary, in order to confront philosophy's rupture with the world; and in order to overcome it“. Many conceptual issues related to Kant's philosophy were discussed: world history, philosophical logic, philosophy of medicine and, of course, the specific projection of Kant's transcendental approach to the actual ontologizing and existentializing of artificial intelligence. A deep research was initiated towards Kant's understanding of the different types of presentations, the correlation between the unity of apperception and the unity of the object, the transcendentalist aesthetics and others. In a historical-philosophical perspective connections were sought for of Kant's philosophy with the ideas and developments of Dante, Descartes, John Locke, Leibniz, Fichte, Herder. Its influence was interpreted in shaping the views of Leonard Nelson, Freud, Sartre, Heidegger, Levinas, John Hick, Philip Quinn, Clive Caseaux, Paul de Man and other philosophers, scientists and intellectuals.

The conference began with an exhibition of Kant portraits by young artists (mostly students at the South-West University), secondary literature by Bulgarian authors on Kant's philosophy, and music by Mozart and Goshev (professor of music at the South-West University). And it ended with a report on theme *Music, Kant and Kantians*.

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On 26 and 27 April at Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski” were held the traditional Scientific Readings, in the present year dedicated both to the 300th anniversary of the birth of Immanuel Kant and to the 125th anniversary of the birth of Tseko Torbov under the title “Law, Duty and Freedom” (<https://law.uni-sofia.bg/kant300>). The eighth annual forum, jointly organized since 2017 by the Department of Theory and History of State and Law and the Department of Penal Law of the Law Faculty, acquired a philosophical-legal focus in order to acknowledge Kant's contribution to legal thought and, with it, the work of the Tseko Torbov (1899 – 1987). The organizing committee (Dean Prof. Daniel Valchev, Prof. Malina Novkirishka-Stoyanova, Assoc. Prof. Simeon Groysman from the Faculty of Law and Prof. Ivan Kolev from the Faculty of Philosophy) regarded the merging of the Kant and Torbov celebrations as a logical step both in view of the contribution of Torbov's translations of Kant and because of his role as the first major researcher of the philosophy of law in our country.

A number of presentations at the conference, dealing with various dimensions of Kant's moral theory, added to the understanding of the basic dispute between jurists and philosophers, already outlined by the great Königsberger, writing on distinguishing, what is due "according to the law," (was Rechtens sei), and what makes the requirements of the laws right, (ob das, was sie [die Gesetze] wollten, auch recht sei), as he famously asked in the very second paragraph of his Introduction to the Doctrine of Right. Legal entrance into this discussion in Bulgaria has traditionally been based on the contributions of the legal philosopher Hans Kelsen (1881 – 1973) with his "legal normativism". Kelsen built on Kant in constructing his classic work "The Pure Doctrine of Law" [1934]. Prof. Daniel Valchev examined Kelsen's key idea of the Basic Norm as a formal assumption validating the entire legal system, placing it "in the shadow of Kant" and regarding it as a thought experiment based on the Marburg School of Neo-Kantianism.

Any presentation of the Kelsenian conception to a philosophical audience is a recipe for debate because of the Viennese thinker's idea that the law can be arbitrary in content, it is defined by its coercive sanction, and its "pure knowledge" should be "purged" of moral reasoning. These ideas are as controversial, "leaving aside" the ethical dimensions of legal norms, as they are realistic in their description of legal procedures. The participants in the conference exchanged their views on the hypothesis that through his described paradigm, Kelsen (and much of the subsequent jurisprudence) interpreted the Kantian path of knowledge, while rejecting Kant's moral theory. On the latter were built the presentations of the guest philosophers - prof. Ivan Kolev with his examination of the evolution towards Kant's treatment of duty and virtue, prof. Stiliyan Yotov with an analysis of the mythologization of some key passages in the works of Kant and the opposing possibilities for alternative interpretations, prof. Valentin Kanawrow with reflections on why, in a systematically applied Kantian terminology, "man is beyond law", assoc. prof. Silvia Kristeva, with a talk on a priori foundations of the "notion of pure law" in Kant's doctrine of law.

The legal view on Kant through the perspective of the Kant-Kelsen relation provided the participants with insights into the basic opposition of views of law as interpretations on the dimensions of the just law (in Kant) contrasted with research on the mechanics of coercion-based law (in Kelsen). Beyond this, however, Kant's key contributions on the ideology of legislation found a place in the discussions, in particular his steps towards viewing law as a system for the common reconciliation of freedoms in a state of law (Rechtsstaat), furthermore seeking the global dimensions of a more just world on the way to eternal peace.

The imprint of this liberal ideal, which Tseko Torbov adopted from Kant under the patronage of his teacher Leonard Nelson, was in turn developed in a presentation by Assoc. prof. Iwaylo Staykov on Torbov's pioneering studies of social legislation in Bulgaria during the interwar period. Chief asst. Tihomir Rachev spoke to the

conference audience about Torbov's implementation of the use of the Socratic method in legal education.

The scientific conference traditionally included a number of papers from the fields of legal history, criminal law, private law and the law of information technology, in which authors from different Bulgarian law faculties aimed to show the relevance of Kant's to a variety of questions in different sectors of legal knowledge. The printing of a collection of the scientific papers of the event is in preparation.

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