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WHAT IS RUSSIAN NEO-KANTIANISM: PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the problem of insufficient study of Russian neo-Kantianism in the history of philosophy. The authors point out the specificity and complexity of this topic, which explains the relatively late treatment of it by both foreign and domestic researchers. The article also notes that even though the importance of neo-Kantian influence on Russian thought, literature and culture of the late 19th - early 20th century is recognised, this topic remains understudied. The article is devoted to the peculiarities of Russian neo-Kantianism and its difference from German neo-Kantianism. The author concludes that the Russian tradition did not have such a deep and systematic study of Kant's philosophy as in Germany. The article notes that the representatives of Russian Neo-Kantianism used the critical method and traditions of Kant's transcendental philosophy considering the specifics of the formation of philosophy in Russia. The authors also point out the ambiguity of attributing G. I. Chelpanov to neo-Kantianism. This may be since his views do not fully correspond to the main provisions of this philosophical current.

KEYWORDS

KANTIANISM. RUSSIAN NEO-KANTIANISM. GERMAN NEO-KANTIANISM.
HERMANN COHEN. MARBURG SCHOOL.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps we should start with the not very original thesis that Russian neo-Kantianism is a specific and problematic topic in the history of philosophy and in the history of Russian philosophy. This is also why it is relatively late to become the subject of research by both foreign and domestic specialists. Thus, in the double issue of the journal "East European Thought" (Volume 47, Issue 3-4) for 1995, the author of the Introduction, having pointed out the importance of „neo-Kantianism in Russian thought, literature and culture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries“, states that “it remains an understudied topic” (Rosenthal, 1995, p. 151). What are the reasons for this situation with Russian Neo-Kantianism? They are, of course, different for Russia and abroad. If in Russia, during the 70 years after the revolution, i.e. up to the 1990s, neo-Kantianism was generally labelled as bourgeois philosophy, as that simplification and distortion of Kant which led his transcendental philosophy into the dead end of solipsism and absolute idealism of bare abstractions, then for Western Slavists the obstacle was the biased one-sidedness of the approach and assessments of Russian neo-Kantianism.

As the same author notes in the Introduction:

...until recently, specialists in Russian intellectual history have concentrated on political and social thought, neglecting such subjects as ontology and epistemology except when they touched on political discourse, as in the Bogdanov-Lenin controversy over empiriocriticism. Academic philosophy, spirituality and religion were also neglected for the same reason. (Ibid.)

Fortunately, the situation with studies of Russian Neo-Kantianism in Russia has been changing for the better since the 1990s, so much so that the authors of the Introduction to the 2016 special issue of the American journal *Russian Studies in Philosophy* (vol. 54, no. 5) devoted to Russian Neo-Kantianism could state:

In Russia, Neo-Kantianism and its representatives no longer require a formal introduction. (...) Today, the understanding of the significance and influence of Neo-Kantianism for philosophy in Russia has expanded and differentiated. This is in large part due to a number of recently published fundamental studies on Neo-Kantianism authored by contemporary Russian scholars (such as V.N. Belov, N.A. Dmitrieva, A.A. Ermichev, and J.B. Mehlich), but also as the result of the reprinting and even publishing of previously unpublished works of Russian Neo-Kantians. (Mehlich, 2016, pp. 359-360)

The question of the very existence of such a phenomenon has already been removed, although relatively recently the very fact of the existence of Russian Neo-Kantianism as such has sometimes been questioned, but most of the topics related to it remain debatable: periodisation, personalities, school affiliation, specificity and peculiarities - this is by no means a complete list of controversial topics of Russian Neo-Kantianism.

One can find information about the relevance of this topic today in various publications, including foreign ones, at conferences, in Internet publications, at thesis defences, etc.

Let us dwell, first, on those points that complicate the efforts to any systematisation of this direction. We will come across them if we try to find definitions of the phenomenon under consideration in philosophical encyclopaedias and dictionaries, both domestic and foreign.

All these definitions are characterised by descriptiveness or the allocation of contradictory and/or very broad and vague characteristics, which complicate rather than clarify the situation with the phenomenon of Russian neo-Kantianism. Of course, we can also refer to the fact that the picture with the definition of German Neo-Kantianism is not quite clear and there is a serious difference of opinions and assessments about the history of German Neo-Kantianism, the number of its schools and their specific features. A systematic approach to the phenomenon of Russian Neo-Kantianism as a project of creating philosophy in Russia as an independent and self-sufficient scientific

discipline aimed at the formation of rational-critical thinking in human beings and a just legal civil society is necessary.

And here we should start from the very term Russian Neo-Kantianism, where "Russian", of course, is not only a geographical marker, but also has a significant semantic load, transforming the character of the whole phenomenon in a certain way.

Thus, two points play an important role in the definition of neo-Kantianism: the comparison with Kantianism and O. Liebman's famous call for a return to Kant.

As for the comparison of Neo-Kantianism with Kantianism, we should cite very revealing arguments of two leading Kantologists of our time: the German researcher Norbert Hinske and the Russian philosopher Leonard Aleksandrovich Kalinnikov.

Hinske's article „Kantianism, Kantian Studies and Kantophilology” **four periods in the history of the reception of Kantian thought (earlier Kantianism, German Idealism, Neo-Kantianism and the ontological-metaphysical interpretation of Kant)** are consecutively considered, on the basis of which the thesis is substantiated that the reception of Kantian thought in a particular period can be properly understood only on the basis of the then current position of Kantian studies and Kantian philology.

Period 1 - Early Kantianism - names that tell us little about Kant's contemporaries, some connected to him directly or by correspondence: Johann Schulz, who in 1784 wrote the first commentary on the Critique of Pure Reason, Carl Christian Erhardt Schmid and Christian Gottfried Schütz of Jena, Ludwig Heinrich Jakob, Johann Gottfried Kiesewetter, Lazar Bendavid, Georg Mellin and Jakob Sigismund Beck. Summarising the period, the author notes: "If we were to find a motto for this early, in some ways extremely impressive form of Kantianism, we could probably say: „To march forward with Kant” (Hinske, 2015, p. 159).

Period 2 - German Idealism. The second major phase of Kant's reception is German Idealism. According to their own understanding, they represent a form of Kant's followers that does not stop at the "letter" but endeavours to grasp the "spirit" of Kantian philosophy. The opposition between Kantianism and Kantianism is here for the first time revealed with all its acuteness. "By the way, Kant himself", Hinske remarks, "in this dispute over the Kantians who sought to free themselves from the letter of their author in order to remain faithful to his spirit, after many years of growing estrangement, had only the words of an old Italian proverb: 'God, protect us from our friends, we can cope with our enemies ourselves'" (Ibid., p. 160). The fictitious motto of German idealism could therefore be "To surpass Kant", "To overcome Kant".

Period 3 - Neo-Kantianism - a small section, here it is important to note the author's idea that the dominance of the cognitive-critical formulation of questions within Neo-Kantianism was not only the result of subject-systematic interest. In the author's opinion, it was also a forced consequence of serious gaps in Kantian studies. A peculiar, one must admit, interpretation of the specifics of neo-Kantianism: the weakness of Kantian studies gave rise to neo-Kantianism.

Period 4 - Ontological-metaphysical interpretation: at the time when Neo-Kantianism is developing its own philosophy and creating its various schools, the initial philological situation changes again, namely due to the gradual publication of Kant's manuscript heritage.

The author's conclusions and perspectives can already be assumed: further progress is linked to the possibility of mastering new sources and studies on Kant: whether contemporary philosophy has the patience to delve into these texts burdened with many philological difficulties remains an open question. But it is possible that the changed textual situation a generation later will once again lead to a new form of Kantianism. (One thinks of the Davos controversy when Cassirer, drawing on Heidegger's interpretation of Kant, labelled the latter a greater neo-Kantian than he himself.) As follows from the

introduction to *Being and Time*, the interpretation of Kantian philosophy was to constitute one of the sections of Part II of this work, which remained unwritten, and centered on the notion of time, the essence of which, according to Heidegger, only Kant was able to reveal. According to Heidegger, Kant laid the foundation for a new type of ontology, although he did not realize the underlying tendencies of his philosophy.

The Russian philosopher is in full solidarity with his German colleague, only in even sharper terms, assessing the claim of Neo-Kantianism to become a new Kantianism. In his opinion, neo-Kantianism “is spoilt, deteriorated, deprived of its true force!” (Kalinnikov, 2010, p. 57). Or this remark: “if it seems to you that Kant is wrong about something, look first for the error in your own mind!” (Ibid. p. 61).

The first conclusion is as follows: Kantians believe that the letter and the spirit of the Kantian system are inseparable, believing that it is impossible to change a single letter lest the spirit change and the whole system of Kantian philosophy be destroyed. Neo-Kantians, on the contrary, proceed from the fact that the letter is something that is historically conditioned, and therefore not only can, but must change, but the spirit is an eternal motive, which allows the philosophical system not to be exhausted with the course of history, thus constantly ritualizing the letter itself. On this basis, the Neo-Kantians see the development of Kantianism into Neo-Kantianism as a natural and natural process, while the Kantians assert their complete incompatibility.

Thus, Kantianism appears as a kind of apologetic hermeneutics of Kantian philosophy, the formula of which can be labelled as follows: **Kantianism is to Understand Kant and that is it.**

Neo-Kantianism, on the other hand, has a small but essential extension: **Neo-Kantianism is to Understand Kant in order to.** Another question is how deeply the Understanding is realized in Neo-Kantianism, whether it does not remain superficial. Such cannot be said for at least one major representative of German Neo-Kantianism, Hermann Cohen.

Neo-Kantians more boldly and in a new problematic way introduce the historical context into the field of philosophy to contrast it with metaphysics and dogmatism. And in philosophy itself they put the question of the correlation between the history of philosophy and theoretical philosophy, as well as between the humanities and natural sciences, in a new way.

But by making the Kantian conception dependent on the historical context, they found a more, in their opinion, justified basis for the search for the original in the study of consciousness, thinking and cognition - it is science, not the subject. Kant himself, no matter how much he strives for some invariant, transcendental structures in philosophical foundations, begins with the subject as such, accordingly, engaging its psychological elements and thus making transcendental enquiry dependent on psychological enquiry in this original.

In fact, the Neo-Kantians' general idea was to get away from such subjective-psychological dependence in the very beginning, as the foundation of all further research, and to provide philosophy with a more correct and worthy foundation. And such a foundation becomes for the Neo-Kantians science, mathematics and mathematical natural science. It is the Neo-Kantians who return historicity to the Kantian "spirit". It is no coincidence that Nicholas Hartmann calls Neo-Kantianism a philosophy without a subject. Hence the nuances of neo-Kantianism's prevalence of the general over the singular.

Whether this understanding of Kant by neo-Kantians leads to his perversion, we would not say so; rather, one should emphasize, indeed, an independent approach to the understanding of the transcendental method, which was also pointed out by P. Natorp in his article "Kant and the Marburg School", making it the core of the "spirit" of Kantian philosophy. That's where the methodology of neo-Kantianism comes from.

We believe that in this case we are confronted with the fundamental dualism of the very beginning: subjective-psychological or transcendental-intersubjective, equally objective. In our opinion, in the fundamental formulation of the problem of cognition in its very origin, in its archetype, the

object-subject dilemma is insoluble, and it will give its positive results in its further implementation. Which will undoubtedly lead to the following historical distribution in the authority of one or another approach to transcendental philosophy: Kantianism will dominate in relatively calm years in scientific terms, and neo-Kantianism will dominate in the years of fundamental scientific upheavals, since in these years man will be adapting to new scientific realities, and philosophy will provide him with worldview grounds for this.

As for the second point - the return to Kant, it is necessary to emphasize the nature of this return, namely systematic (unlike other returnees - the same Liebmann, Lange, Helmholtz, Zeller, Weise, etc.). Which, in turn, has a direct connection to cultural philosophy. We will consider this point in more detail below in the context of discussing the characteristics of Russian neo-Kantianism.

RUSSIAN NEO-KANTIANISM: ORIGIN AND GENERAL CHARACTERISATION

A general characteristic of Russian Neo-Kantianism (as well as of Russian philosophy in general) is its independence in relation to its Western analogues (this kind of independence, perhaps, is more difficult to identify in Russian Neo-Kantianism than in Russian philosophy in general), which opened Russian philosophy, including Russian Neo-Kantianism, to a serious influence of general cultural tendencies on it. And philosophical themes and problems became significant and interesting only in the context of general cultural themes and problems.

In particular, one of the authoritative researchers of the history of Russian philosophy V.V. Zenkovsky notes:

Russian Neo-Kantianism, as we shall see, with all its philosophical "primness" and strict observance of the requirements of "criticalism", also does not break with the fundamental problems of the Russian spirit. We shall find, for example, in Alexander Vvedensky, the recognised head of

Russian Neo-Kantianism, curious echoes of the familiar "pan-moralism"; these motifs, as we shall see, are repeated (though not with such clarity) in other representatives of Neo-Kantianism. Not only that: next to 'pure' Neo-Kantianism, we will (already in other chapters) meet with a Neo-Kantianism that builds metaphysical systems! (Zenkovsky, 2001, p. 641).

The peculiarity of Russian philosophy is that it was originally formed as a philosophy of culture, while Western philosophy also came to this, culture being understood as the basis for the systematicity of philosophical creativity. Russian philosophy was originally (Slavophiles and Westerners) formed as a reflection on culture, as a philosophy of culture. Not as a philosophy of the school, outside the framework of university departments, so the rigor of philosophical directions did not include the rigor of too fine and narrow distinctions. Everything that Russian philosophers thought contributed to the development of culture in the field of philosophy was to be included in their interest. Here it is even possible to propose such a term to replace the delimitations of certain philosophical schools and trends - Russian philosophy of culture (It is no coincidence that the well-known journal *Logos* had such a subtitle). It was through this kind of philosophical position that Russian philosophers sought to find national originality in the world's philosophical themes, problems, and their solutions, and to find and express the universal philosophical meaning in national-philosophical originality.

Let us agree with the opinion of the modern Russian researcher V.A. Zhuchkov. about Kant's "Critique of the Ability to Judge", according to which the ability to judge is not just a connecting, but the third, missing link in the system of Kantian criticism, creating the integrity that brings this system to the level of conceptual understanding of culture.

Thus, Kant transforms the critique of reason into a critique of culture, not cancelling or overcoming the first critique, but implying it. Culture becomes in this case a quasi-reasonable basis on which only a productive critique of reason is possible.

According to the Neo-Kantian position, culture is a kind of claim, an orientation - in a certain sense even a principle - towards systematicity, which in turn is presupposed by rigorous scientificity.

Already in the preface to the "Logic of Pure Knowledge", Cohen refers to the fact that "if logic is directed towards a system of philosophy, it thereby joins the directions of culture which correspond to the sections of this system" (Cohen, 1977, p. 9). The connection to culture is recognized here as a self-evident prerequisite of systematic philosophy. Cohen's project of the system is understood in the sense of a theory of the consciousness of culture. The unity of the consciousness of culture is to be "recognized as a systematic interest of philosophy" (Ibid., p. 17).

While the German neo-Kantians have as an indispensable component of most of their works a critique of other idealism, a systematic and problematic approach to Kant's philosophy, and most importantly, clear efforts to dissociate themselves from other systems of Kantian transformation (Fichte, Hegel, The pioneers of Russian Neo-Kantianism, Alexander Ivanovich Vvedensky (1856-1925) and Ivan Ivanovich Lapshin (1870-1952), do not claim to be followers of Kant or to support the endeavors of the Neo-Kantians (as Vvedensky put it). Familiar with both, both domestic philosophers consciously choose an independent path, the path of philosophical substantiation of the possibilities of cognition of the external and internal world of man.

In particular, Alexander Vvedensky already in his master's thesis "The Experience of Constructing a Theory of Matter on the Principles of Critical Philosophy" states:

(...) the author takes upon himself the responsibility of agreeing his views with Kant and subsequent critical philosophers only in spirit, but not in letter - in general, not in detail. For this reason, he often expresses thoughts that contradict many of the individual statements of both Kant and the systems that emerged from his Criticism, and he also allows himself to give to some terms a different meaning than their authors intended (Vvedensky, 1888, p. 10)

His student and follower Ivan Lapshin, in his master's thesis, which the committee deemed worthy of a doctorate, also emphasizes:

„... we must constantly keep in mind the spirit and not the letter of the Kantian theory of cognition, steadily moving towards the intended goal - to find out gradually the mutual connection of the elements of cognition". And he calls Kantophilology petty and picky" (Lapshin, 1906, p. 12).

The next point in the characteristic of the independence of Russian philosophers is concluded, in our opinion, in the specificity of their attitude to Western originals, which was laid in the very birth of Russian philosophy in the dispute, discussion of Slavophiles and Westerners, namely, in the opposition of their philosophical and spiritual position and the philosophical and spiritual position of the West on the part of religious philosophers, soil-roots and the position to immediately stand as equal, if not more advanced partners in the philosophical dialogue between Russia and the West on the part of Westerners. Even their apprenticeship did not have the character of a school-like insularity and unidirectionality towards the philosophy of their Western European teachers.

Therefore, in general, to the difficulty of distinguishing neo-Kantianism as such, one adds these three features of **Russian neo-Kantianism: independence, non-scholastic orientation, and national-cultural conditioning.**

It is this circumstance that gives rise to very different assessments of the work of Russian philosophers based on Kantian criticism. In particular, the attribution of A.I. Vvedensky and I.I. Lapshin not to the Neo-Kantians but to the Kantians, as well as differences in the assessment of belonging to the Kantian-Neo-Kantian direction in relation to Georgiy Ivanovich Chelpanov (1862-1936).

As for the latter, there are already few who defend his belonging to neo-Kantianism. Even Vasily Zenkovsky, the most famous apologist of attributing Georgiy Chelpanov to neo-Kantianism, writes that from

conversations with him he found out that he belonged to neo-Leibnizianism in metaphysics.

We will not cite here the arguments for and against the neo-Kantianism of Vvedensky and Lapshin; there are plenty of them both in reviews on the history of Russian philosophy by Russian philosophers themselves and by their contemporary researchers. But we would like to emphasise that this is a rather thankless task, since it is difficult to determine which arguments are weightier and more convincing. In our opinion, the position of Russian philosophers - Alexander Vvedensky and Ivan Lapshin - presents in combination features of both Kantianism and neo-Kantianism, and to characterise this position as neo-Kantianism in a broad sense, as modern Russian researchers of the history of Russian neo-Kantianism Varvara Popova and Vladimir Brushinkin¹, for example, tend to do, is, in our opinion, insufficient, since their Kantian attitudes are not taken into account here. In this position they show a realistic assessment of the essence of scientific philosophy in Russia and in Europe. In Europe - Kantianism, German idealism and only then a return to Kant in neo-Kantianism, in Russia there was no such sequence, there was, if we turn to the same Alexander Vvedensky and his three phases of development of Russian philosophy, the second period - the period of domination of German idealism in the first half of the XIX century, and not with Kant in the first place². Therefore, in the third period, when, in fact, Vvedensky himself began to create, he had to assume the role of both a Kantian, an apologist and defender of Kant's philosophy against no other idealist systems, but against the theological claims of philosophy teachers in theological schools and academies, and a neo-Kantian, who understood the historical limitations of Kantian philosophy and the possibility and necessity of its development based on the facts of new scientific discoveries.

¹ See *Neo-Kantianism in Russia: Alexander Ivanovich Vvedensky, Ivan Ivanovich Lapshin*, p. 7.

² "It was mainly Schelling's doctrine that spread among us; it was only in the late 30s that he gave way to Hegel". See Vvedensky, *Fates of Philosophy in Russia*, p. 14.

The pan-European call "Back to Kant" had a special meaning in Russia. It was in Kant's philosophy that Russian philosophical thought in the nineteenth century saw the support for a worthy response to the two main challenges addressed to it, namely, on the one hand, the religious-metaphysical (in Germany it was Hegel's metaphysics), and on the other hand, the positivist (Marxist materialism, empirio-criticism). And if the dependence of Russian philosophical thought on Orthodox Christianity was a habitual and throughout the intellectual history of Russia up to the 19th century dominant phenomenon, the interest in positivist ideas was largely determined by the growth of scientific knowledge and the desire of the scientific elite to free themselves from religious spiritual domination. However, even in this case philosophical thought did not gain independence, but "was given in the service of science: its activity was reduced to the role of a generaliser of scientific data" (Yakovenko, 2000, p. 653).

It should be noted that in the middle and second half of the 19th century a whole cohort of Russian scientists of world renown appeared in various spheres of natural sciences: botanist K.A. Timiryazev, physician N.I. Pirogov, chemist D.I. Mendeleev, biologist I.I. Mechnikov, physiologist I.M. Sechinov and others. The founder of Russian neo-Kantianism, V.I. Vvedensky, noted the importance of another figure from this cohort, namely N.I. Lobachevsky, who "excited in the West the so-called meta-geometric studies, as it is known, extremely important for the theory of cognition" by the fact that, according to the philosopher, the latter "under the influence of the critical theory of cognition found his new point of view on geometric axioms"³ (Vvedensky, 1901, p. 4).

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

³ K. Yevtuhov, analysing the influence of Lobachevsky's geometry on the emergence of neo-Kantianism in Russia, points to Lobachevsky's research as a "home-grown" context for the renewed interest in Kant in the 1890s". See Evtuhov, *An unexpected source of Russian neo-Kantianism: Alexander Vvedensky and Lobachevsky's Geometry*, p. 245.

Therefore, it is possible to designate very conventionally **the period of the birth of Russian Neo-Kantianism 1888** - the year of Vvedensky's defence of his master's thesis "The Experience of Constructing a Theory of Matter on the Principles of Critical Philosophy" and make **general conclusions on the main characteristics of Russian Neo-Kantianism:**

1. In Russian Neo-Kantianism we find not such a convergence with Kantian philosophy as in German Neo-Kantianism. In the Russian philosophical tradition, there was no such Kantianism as in Germany, so also in Russian Neo-Kantianism there was no such refined, versatile, deep and systematic discussion with Kant as in German Neo-Kantianism, especially Hermann Cohen and Wilhelm Windelband.

2. Russian neo-Kantianism, as well as German neo-Kantianism, is marked by a sharp rejection of materialism, metaphysics and psychologism.

3. Russian Neo-Kantianism demonstrated an independent, considering the historical and professional specifics of the formation of philosophy in Russia, use of the critical method and the tradition of transcendental Kantian philosophy.

4. In Russian Neo-Kantianism there is a priority of the theoretical, logical part of the Kantian system, which makes it like the Marburg variant of German Neo-Kantianism

5. In view of the presence of metaphysical features in his doctrine it is necessary to state the ambiguity of attributing Georgy Chelpanov to Russian Neo-Kantianism.

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