

## **Kantianism and Anti-Kantianism in Russian Revolutionary Thought<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This paper restates and subjects to analysis the polemics in Russian pre-revolutionary Populist and Marxist thought that concerned Kant's practical philosophy. In these polemics Kantian ideas influence and reinforce the Populist personalism and idealism, as well as Marxist revisionist reformism and moral universalism. Plekhanov, Lenin, and other Russian "orthodox Marxists" heavily criticize both trends. In addition, they generally view Kantianism as a "spiritual weapon" of the reactionary bourgeois thought. This results in a starkly anti-Kantian position of Soviet Marxism. In view of this the 1947 decision to preserve Kant's tomb in Soviet Kaliningrad becomes something of an *experimentum crucius* that challenges the soundness of the theory.

### **Key words**

Soviet Marxism, Populism, Kant, ideal, person.

### **Resumen**

Este artículo reevalúa y analiza las polémicas en el pensamiento marxista y populista de la Rusia pre-revolucionaria acerca de la filosofía práctica de Kant. En estas polémicas, las ideas kantianas influyeron y reforzaron el personalismo e idealismo populistas, así como el reformismo revisionista marxista y el universalismo moral. Plekhanov, Lenin y otros "ortodoxos marxistas" rusos criticaron con dureza ambas tendencias. Además, generalmente consideraron el Kantismo como un "arma espiritual" del pensamiento burgués reaccionario. Esto resultó en una fuerte posición anti-kantiana en el marxismo soviético. Teniendo esto a la vista, la decisión de 1947 de preservar la tumba de Kant

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en el Kaliningrado soviético supuso una suerte de *experimentum crucius* que desafía el peso de la historia

### Palabras clave

Marxismo soviético, populismo, Kant, ideal, persona

### Introduction

I would like to begin from what is “given in appearance”. In today’s Kaliningrad, if a flâneur crosses the Honey bridge, one of those seven made famous by Leonard Euler, and then turns right, she will face a panoramic view dominated by three structures. A huge medieval cathedral will be close on the left, empty twenty-one-stored House of the Soviets will rise half a mile away behind the river Pregolya, and in the center there will be Immanuel Kant’s tomb. The tomb is adjacent to the cathedral’s wall, and one could think that the big church supports the philosopher’s memorial, but in fact it’s the opposite: homage that the Soviet authority paid to Kant saved the cathedral from demolition that was the fate of the remnants of nearly all buildings in the war-destroyed center of Königsberg. Soviet Kaliningrad was a war trophy, and the remnants of the culture of the recent mortal enemy were hardly arousing sympathy. The old town of Kant became the test site for what could be seen as the Cartesian dream of replacing the old, composed of many separate parts, upon which different hands had been employed, by the new, planned and executed by a single architect<sup>2</sup>, that is by the Soviet people led by the Communist Party. It seemed that the tomb of the German philosopher was destined to disappear with the old. Suddenly this destiny changed<sup>3</sup>.

In the first months of 1947 a letter came to the editorial office of newspaper “Izvestia”, the official mouthpiece of Soviet government, signed by certain V.V. Lyubimov. The author, probably hiding his real name, suggested protecting the tomb of the originator of German classical idealism. “The process of the restoration of Kaliningrad is accelerating and will soon reach the district, where Kant’s tomb is located. The church is completely ruined, its remains will eventually be demolished, and the tomb might be demolished with it” (Костяшов 2002, 129). Lyubimov argues for the importance of Kant and his heritage by quoting Engels’ Introduction to “Dialectics of Nature”: Kant made “the first breach in this petrified outlook of nature” and drew “conclusions that would have spared them endless deviations and immeasurable amounts of time and labour wasted in false directions” (Marx and Engels 1987, 323–24). The letter was forwarded to the Committee on cultural and educational institutions of the Council of Ministers of RSFSR, which in April of the same year directed Kaliningrad administration to protect Kant’s tomb. Soon a plaque was installed with the text: “IMMANUEL KANT / 1724-1804 / PROMINENT BOURGEOIS IDEALIST PHILOSOPHER. BORN, LIVED WITHOUT LEAVING, AND DIED IN

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<sup>2</sup> See “Discourse on the Method...”, Part II.

<sup>3</sup> What follows is a brief restatement of archival research by Y.V. Kostyashov presented in detail in (Костяшов 2002, 2016)

KÖNIGSBERG” (Костяшов 2002, 126). Much later, in 1960, the cathedral was also awarded the status of architectural monument.

The question arises: what, besides Engels’ brief remark, justifies the attention to Kant’s heritage? What was his role in Soviet canon, by the time already solidified and containing clear-cut appraisals (mostly harsh) of every major figure and current of philosophy<sup>4</sup>? These questions lead us to the pre-revolutionary decades of Russian intellectual history, to works by the Marxists and their opponents. In these battles one finds Kantian ideas to be actively involved both explicitly and – although this has to be assessed with great care – implicitly. For Russian Marxists winning the intellectual battle required confronting Kantian positions at least in three important issues: the role of persons and ideals in history, the relation of revolution and reform, and the status of things-in-themselves. The first issue placed Plekhanov, Lenin and their comrades against Populists (or Narodniks), the second – against so-called “revisionists”. The issue of things-in-themselves and noumenal causality almost wrecked havoc among the Bolsheviks and required an extensive theoretical discussion that we will leave aside, focusing on practical philosophy. While the controversy over “revisionism” was happening on international scale, the campaign against Populists was fully domestic. Here again we will largely forego the well-studied ground of revisionism<sup>5</sup>, instead focusing on lesser-known affair of Populism vs. Marxism. Although Marxism won in Russia, the study of pre-revolutionary discussions reveals Kant as a formidable enemy of Bolshevism. The latter’s eventual victory, which owed more to cunning than to strength of arguments or intellectual grasp, seems to undermine its own theoretical premise of historical necessity and paradoxically reinforce the theories of its opponents, not least those of Kant.

Two basic views come to grips when we try to understand a historical event. One attributes it to human freedom, the other to laws of nature. These views challenge and modulate each other; their collision produces ever more complex combinations, yet the tension remains. Russian revolutionary thought and practice provide a perfect opportunity to observe this collision and appreciate its nuances in writings and actions by figures from two opposing movements, the Populists (or Narodniks) and the Marxists. For the Populists, the revolution is a triumph of freedom over nature, of moral ideal over history, of “ought” over “is”. For the Marxists, it is an objectively necessary event, prepared by the course of history, liberating in the negative sense of removing oppression by the backward, reactionary forces, but not in the metaphysical sense of elevating “pure” individual or personal will above “impure” and contingent natural events, and not in moral sense of

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<sup>4</sup> The so-called “philosophical discussion”, held from January till June 1947, was completing Stalinist view of philosophy. Incidentally, it was provoked by treatment of German idealism in a textbook that Stalin found wrong and ordered removed. (Some details can be found in (Blakeley 1961). Although there are no reasons to connect the discussion to the decision on Kant’s tomb, it reflects the degree of importance awarded to philosophy at the time.

<sup>5</sup> A classical exposition of revisionism is offered by Eduard Bernstein, particularly in “Evolutionary Socialism” (Bernstein 1909). Analysis is offered in, e.g., (Horton 1979, Ойзерман 2005).

invigorating the good in human nature. Yet both views are strained. The Populists admit that ideals, in order to be of any use, have to be causally linked to reality, and this link has to be theoretically laid out and practically engineered, which they failed to provide. The Marxists and later Soviet ideology admit and glorify the fact that the historically necessary event of revolution could not have happened without heroic efforts on behalf of many individuals, who relied on ideals and opposed reality<sup>6</sup>.

In this paper I would like to examine the development of Kantian and anti-Kantian strands of thought by opponents of Marxism and by Marxists in pre-revolutionary Russia. My claim is that Kant emerged out of this polemic as one of prime enemies of Soviet Marxism. This makes the survival of Kant's tomb an interesting case if not of an *experimentum crucius* that falsifies this theory, than at least of an anomaly that defies a Soviet Marxist explanation.

***Populism: enlisting Kant's personalism and idealism***

Populism or Narodnichestvo was an eclectic program that tried to marry the Slavophiles' belief in Russian peasant communal life and Westernizers' scientific positivist outlook, and hoped to enlighten the peasants to demand social change. For Populists Russia, being essentially a peasant country, need not enter capitalism. Instead, it was to aim at expanding the principles found in the remnants of peasant socialism. Intelligentsia was to become the moral force that ought to influence this turn in history. The guilt that the educated and relatively well-off ought to have felt about the exploited masses coupled with passionate desire to redeem it by promoting enlightenment and social justice was to become the main motive for generations of Populists. The leaders of Populists, whose eloquence and pathos drove this movement, also wanted to have a theory that could explain and rationalize their peculiarly moral outlook, defend it from criticism, and help convert those not quite convinced by passionate (meaning merely utopian) appeal to social justice. Influenced by positivism and its norms of scientific inquiry, they wanted no less than a theory that could posit the moral ought, the *ideal*, as a force, or perhaps even *the* force, of history. And this certainly placed them in proximity to Kant, for whom finding a channel for noumenal freedom into the phenomenal world was one of the challenges of transcendental philosophy. Because the Populists, like so many Russian thinkers, thought of themselves not as scholars, but as agents of social change, they cared little about supplying readers with footnotes and references (they'd much rather see their readers "go to the people" or to the barricades than to the library to do further research). This makes tracing their influences a difficult and often futile task. Still, Kant gets mentioned, and some of the premises and arguments bear clear resemblance to those of the Königsberg philosopher.

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, moral, messianic character of Russian revolution, its preoccupation with "the world to come" (or perhaps "kingdom of ends") was noted by Nikolai Berdyaev and Semyon Frank, among others (e.g. (Berdyaev 1960)). Joseph Bochenski, discussing later Soviet Marxism, writes: "in spite of its primitiveness as a philosophy, Dialectical Materialism is a spiritual current which must not be underestimated; as a movement and as a faith, it has a capacity for the most appalling destruction." (Bochenski 1963, 117)

One of the most original developments of Populist thinkers is known as “subjective sociology” or “sociological subjectivism”<sup>7</sup> that aims at resolving precisely the problem of theoretically relating the personal ideal to history. Populists take a pronouncedly personalist stance, treating individual human beings as irreducible to their social roles or appearances, indeed, as ends. Having an ideal is a personal property, nurturing it and making an effort to implement it is a personal process, all of which awards human beings dignity and elevates us above nature. *Pyotr Lavrov* (1823-1900) was the first proponent of this view and became the first leader of Populism. His output is well studied in Anglophone literature, including his proximity to Kant in several epistemological issues (Nemeth 2017, 130–40). However, as often with Russian thought, it was not Lavrov’s theoretical philosophy that became influential. Of chief importance was his philosophy of history, moral philosophy, and related social program that, according to Lavrov himself, had a significant degree of autonomy from his theoretical outlook<sup>8</sup>.

Lavrov, while building his theoretical foundation in his early years, was influenced by phenomenism and positivism. The study of Comte’s “subjective method” and his “religion of Humanity” soon led Lavrov to Kant and his idea that the subject imposes moral law on natural processes. In his early philosophical text titled “Hegelianism” (1858) Lavrov praises Kant, for “all schools of thought have something in common with him,” and characterizes what he takes to be Kant’s main achievement as follows:

Kant saw before him a row of schools, each creating its own theory of the inner and the outer world. These schools were constantly at war with each other [...] Kant stood at once against all present and future theories of this kind. Critique – that was his requirement for any thinker [...]

Having come to the limit of the content given to it by observation, science must stop, because every further step leads already to the realm of fantasy. But Kant himself did not stop. He belonged to his time and his nation. Deeply moral and gifted with a free spirit, he could not but believe in the high ideals of his time, in the value of man, in freedom of thought, in the might of virtue. Having read Hume, he found the strength to refute him, but he wanted to do more. He confessed that the foundations on which the Wolfian dogmatists erected their doctrine of the superiority of the spirit over the body and their moral doctrine were insufficient, but he believed that these principles could be proved and intertwined his gains in favor of science with his beliefs in the noblest aspects of human activity.

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<sup>7</sup> There’s a slight difference between the two names: the first denotes the particular school, the second frames it as the origin or one of the origins of a general sociological approach (see e.g. (Mathura 2004)).

<sup>8</sup> “The absence of the skeptical principle in the construction of practical philosophy awards it a particular robustness and independence from metaphysical theories. From here the foundation of practical philosophy receives [first] *practical* principle[...]It reflects the independence of the person, as one acting, from any questions regarding its essence. *The person is aware of itself as free, wanting for itself and responsible before itself in its practical activity.* This is the *personal principle of freedom* that separates the world of practical philosophy from that of theoretical one.” (Лавров 1965a, 1:485) The second principle is that of “*ideal creation*; just like the actual person in theory opposes to itself the real world as the only source of knowledge, so actual person in practice puts itself against ideals as the only motivation to action.” (Ibid.) Indeed, this is not very promising for bridging the theoretical gap between *is* and *ought*.

The end of the 18th century was a period of struggle. Authorities fell, and man realized his power in front of these ruins, which oppressed humanity for centuries and scattered at once before the bold gaze of criticism. The man believed that his mind, which had destroyed the old, also had the power to recreate the new. But under the influence of the English heirs of Bacon, the French thinkers submitted to the very beginning of the study of nature; they took everything from the outside world, searched for everything in their external feelings. The Germans retained respect for the person in their thinking from their ancestors and could not give it up. Leibniz [...] contrasted the personality of the monads with the all-consuming being of Spinoza. Kant went the same way: he opposed the thinking person to the world that is conceived, the free spirit to the authorities, the unswerving force of moral will to the preachers of sensuality. In the study of the personal spirit, he gathered the power of his scientific data. Believing in the undeniable truth of the principles that the human spirit cherished at the end of the 18th century, he laid them at the foundation of a new, great system.

In the depths of the human person, Kant found a great word for which France was about to shed rivers of blood. The basis of the teaching of practical reason is formed by the consciousness of human freedom. The free spirit itself created an unchanging moral principle, an unconditional practical law; this law was a reasonable duty (kategorischer Imperativ). "Act in such a way that the rule governing your will could at the same time serve as a beginning in general legislation," said the Königsberg scholar.

So, everything is subject to the criticism of reason, all dogmatic ideas before it fall, but the will of man is the foundation that recreates the practical world on the ruins of theories. This very beginning guided the members of the Versailles Assembly in 1789, when on the ruins of every historical tradition they boldly recreated from their personal mind a new public building and put "human rights" at the head of new institutions.

But the teachings of Kant did not spread quite quickly; his works, written in a strictly scientific, even somewhat pedantic form, were mostly read by scholars. The society got acquainted with the ideas of Kant more through the works of his pupils, especially Reinhold, than through his own writings. In addition, Kant seemed still not bold enough. According to his theory the person who imposed his own laws on the content delivered to her by the outside world, still faced this world with its unknown essence. The mind was powerless for the knowledge of this essence, but it existed, forever closed from man. The laws of practical reason, the laws of will, were alien to the pure reason, which remained at its question mark in front of the magnificent theory of duty of reason. (Лавров 1965a, 1:116–22)

This view of "all-destroying" Kant-"Robespierre" who escapes from the realm of thought to crush theories and authorities and make room for revolutionary practice in the name of human rights is a little exaggerated. Still, central to Lavrov is the role Kant awards to moral principles and personal dignity. Much later, in his "Foreword to Marx's "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right"" (1887) Lavrov again gives general assessment of what he took to be Kant's philosophical program and laments the disruption in German thought, clearly welcoming the tendency to return to Kant:

In the teachings of Emanuel Kant, on the eve of the French Revolution, idealism was really an attempt at a broader science. He rejected metaphysics, putting it on the same level with the dreams of the spirit-seers. He denied any possibility for man through theoretical thinking to penetrate into the world of substances, or "things in themselves." He offered the man a completely scientific task - to establish the limits of possible knowledge. He tried to develop a strictly scientific and at the same time uplifting theory of moral duty and outlined a sociological task that social forms should be conditioned by the moral requirements of the individual. But the events of this turbulent period put pressure on the thought of contemporaries and provoked, especially in Germany, in the name of national outrage, a reaction against all elements of thought and life associated with the French Revolution. Under this influence, German idealism was increasingly moving away from the tasks set by Kant. Of his teachings, in particular, those elements developed that gave rise to new metaphysical speculations and allowed us to develop methods of thinking that are closest to the religious mood or to the artist's ecstasy. (Лавров 1965b, 2:597–98)

Key to Lavrov's program is the mixture of positivist understanding of natural sciences with the view of history as a unique process where natural laws meet "critically thinking persons" who rely on ideals and can alter nature from this basis<sup>9</sup>. While Lavrov's positivism is hardly original, his personalism is far more interesting. It is elaborated in Lavrov's "Essays on Questions of Practical Philosophy" (1859), where he planned to proceed from treatment of person to treatment of society but completed only the first part. It also comprises significant part of his "What is Anthropology?" (1860). Psychology provides the method of introspection that reveals the foundations of personality in consciousness and self-consciousness<sup>10</sup>. Basic to person is the idea of freedom that defines justice and connected rights and responsibilities. Unlike the knowledge of nature, this intuitive knowledge is not subject to skepticism, is foundational, and pertains to spiritual life irreducible to nature. Lavrov briefly states that his position is different from both theistic personalism and materialist view of person as epiphenomenal to nature<sup>11</sup>. This position between theism and naturalism, as well as the differentiation between theoretical and practical knowledge, between nature and freedom, places Lavrov in the vicinity of Kant's transcendentalism.

Critical capacity of the person becomes subject of Lavrov's most well read work, "Historical Letters" (1868-1991). Here he offers a broad interpretation of a spectrum of social and political theories with emphasis on socialist ones and further elaborates his view

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<sup>9</sup> "Society is in danger of stagnation if it muffles critical-minded persons. The civilization is threatened with death if this civilization, whatever it may be, will become the exclusive property of a small minority. The highest, no matter how small the progress of mankind, [...] rests solely on critical-minded individuals; without them, it [progress] is absolutely impossible; without their desire to spread it, it is extremely fragile. [...] Since for their [...] development the terrible price [of oppressing the people] was paid [...] then the moral duty to pay for progress lies on them" (Лавров 1965b, 2:87)

<sup>10</sup> Lavrov develops this thesis at the beginning of his "What is Anthropology?" (Лавров 1965a, 1:356–60)

<sup>11</sup> See (Лавров 1965a, 1:358 fn)

of the difference between natural sciences that study regularities, and history that deals with unique events<sup>12</sup>, thus predating Windelband's well-known demarcation of nomothetic and idiographic knowledge<sup>13</sup>. Essential to history is the involvement of persons, led by ideals.

Ideal, on the one hand, is something that is developed in critical thought by persons; on the other hand, ideal development is the core of progress, to which every critically-minded person ought to contribute. Lavrov works hard to convince his reader that these two aspects, the personal and the objective, are synchronous and mutually reinforcing. The progress both starts and culminates with "growth of conscious processes in the person, development of the person in the sphere of thought", as well as in movement towards "society of equal persons, solidary in their interests and convictions, living under equal conditions of culture and having eliminated from their environment, if possible, all affections that are hostile to each other, all struggle for existence among the members of society." (Лавров 1965b, 2:269). Here Lavrov's position resembles that of Kant of the "Idea for a Universal History...", where conjectural ends of history and of human moral development are co-directed. With Lavrov, this thesis remains a presupposition rather than a conclusion of an argument. Still, his pathos worked, and thousands participated in "going to the people" movement, trying to project their ideals onto history.

*Nikolay Mikhailovsky* (1842-1904) emerged in 1870s as another leader of the Populist movement. Mikhailovsky was less theoretically proficient than Lavrov, but was a more able publicist. His most notable theoretical contribution concerned "subjective sociology", where he tried to downplay romantic side of the "hero" and give it a more mundane and democratic reading. Some relate Mikhailovsky's personalism to liberal tradition (see (Mathura 2004)), however, unlike liberal individualism, his personalism is non-naturalistic. Mikhailovsky awarded non-natural and ahistorical status to certain values and insists on

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<sup>12</sup> "We have to apply a subjective assessment to the process of history, that is, having mastered, according to the degree of our moral development, this or that moral ideal, to arrange all the facts of history in the perspective according to which they promoted or opposed this ideal ..."

<sup>13</sup> "Natural science expounds to man the laws of the world, in which man himself is only a barely perceptible share; it recounts the products of mechanical, physical, chemical, physiological, mental processes; finds between the products of the last processes in the whole animal kingdom a consciousness of suffering and pleasure; in the part of this kingdom that is closest to humanity, the consciousness of the possibility of setting goals for oneself and striving to achieve them. [...]"

History as science takes this fact for the given and develops in front of the reader, how history as the process of human life originated from the desire to get rid of what a person recognized as suffering, and from the desire to acquire what a person knew as pleasure; what changes occurred in the concept associated with the words pleasure and suffering, in the classification and hierarchy of pleasure and suffering; what philosophical forms of ideas and practical forms of the social system were generated by these modifications; by what logical process the striving for the best and fairest gave rise to protests and conservatism, reaction and progress; what connection existed in each epoch between the human perception of the world in the form of belief, knowledge, philosophical representation and practical theories of the best and most just, embodied in the actions of the individual, in the forms of society, in the state of life of peoples.

Therefore, the works of the historian are not a negation of the works of the natural scientist, but their inevitable addition." (Лавров 1965b, 2:22–23)



their separation from facts, although this never became the topic of thorough philosophical elaboration.

Mikhaylovsky presents his most developed argument for personalism in an essay titled *The Struggle for Individuality* (1875)<sup>14</sup>. This essay builds a philosophical foundation for a series of his works on crowd psychology<sup>15</sup> predating similar studies by Gabriel Tarde (1843-1804) and Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931). Mikhaylovsky begins the essay with providing a list of chief factors that constitute history, including the change of morals, growth of scientific knowledge, and economic development. Mikhaylovsky then argues against economic fundamentalism, which for him comes in three disguises: classical economics, Marxism, and “ethical economics”, which he also calls “professorial” or “*Kathedersocialismus*”. The latter amounts to various strategies of claiming that economic development leads to moral development, none of which have succeeded in explaining the causal mechanisms linking economics to morals. The former two are guilty of ethical blindness, and this is especially true for Marxism, as the chief proponents of classical economics (Smith, Ricardo, and Mill) at least felt the necessity to augment this discipline with some sort of moral sentimentalism, however weak. In order to cure this blindness we need to recourse to German idealism that makes excellent exposition of the strained yet fundamental and “eternal” relation between I and not-I, subject and object, and therefore between subjective moral motivation and the multitude of objective factors (Михайловский 1998, 2:240–42). This exposition, for Mikhaylovsky, arrives at irreducibility of both members of the pair.

Although Mikhailovsky does not specify the exact origins of his ideas (only Fichte gets mentioned once in passing), the reader can discern a sort of dualism characteristic to Kant: history, subject to causal laws of nature, interacts with human persons, affected by moral ideals that are independent of nature. A noted historian of Russian philosophy Sergey Levitsky (1908-1983) noted in his “Essays on the History of Russian Philosophical and Social Thought” (“Ocherki po istorii russkoi filosofskoi i obshchestvennoi mysli”, 1968):

He [Mikhailovsky] was inspired [...] by the idea of integral person that carries within the moral law. However, this idea, being thought out consistently, would have led Mikhailovsky to the recognition of the kingdom of moral ends, with which a person ought to conform to be integral. In other words, with consistent thinking through of his worldview, Mikhailovsky would have approached ideas close to those developed by Kant in his “Critique of Practical Reason”. But this would mean overcoming positivism and affirming an idealistic or even religious worldview — a conclusion, which Mikhailovsky could not organically reach due to the positivistic prejudices that were rooted in him, so characteristically of that time. (Levitzky 1968, 163).

<sup>14</sup> Note the terminological inconsistency: Mikhailovsky uses the words “individual” and “person” interchangeably both in contexts where he restates and criticizes doctrines of economic naturalism, and in contexts when he propounds the non-economic, non-historical status of the ideals and persons.

<sup>15</sup> Namely, *Heroes and Crowd* (1882), *Once More on Heroes* (1891), and *Once More on Crowd* (1893). For exposition and analysis see e.g. (Gorbatov 2014).

Mikhailovsky's views on persons and ideals, just like those of Lavrov, clearly set him against Marxism, for which his stance amounted to a retreat to unscientific utopianism. The early Populist movement failed for well-studied reasons<sup>16</sup> that basically amount to lack of sociological understanding of the particular circumstances of Russian peasantry, i.e. of the "object", to which the Populists tried to reach out as idealistic "subjects". However, the turn of the centuries revitalized Populism.

The heritage of the leader of later Populism *Victor Chernov* (1873-1952) has received relatively little attention in Anglophone literature. Chernov was not only a prolific author of theoretical works and journalism. Unlike his predecessors Lavrov and Mikhailovsky, he was an acting revolutionary leader who founded and headed the Social Revolutionary Party, which continued the Populist line. After the February Revolution of 1917, Chernov became Minister of Agriculture in the resulting Provisional Government, but his radical socialist ideas did not find support, and he soon resigned. After the October Revolution, Chernov opposed the Bolsheviks, whom he accused of opportunistic putchism, and had to leave the country in 1920, however, continuing his scientific, journalistic and party activities abroad until his death in 1952.

Chernov published his most fundamental theoretical work titled "Philosophical and Sociological Studies" in 1907. Here he develops views of Lavrov and Mikhailovsky, continuing to build a synthesis of positivism (this time inspired by empirio-criticism rather than Comte) and "subjective sociology." The political economy of Marx also becomes a significant topic. Chernov devotes significant attention to Kant, whose "Critics", in his own words, he thoroughly studied in exile along with the works of Marx, Darwin, Spencer, Haeckel, Lange, Struve, and Plekhanov.

Most explicitly Chernov juxtaposes Populist idealism to the naturalism of Marxism in the chapter "Marxism and Transcendental Philosophy" of the above mentioned work. This chapter presents an analysis of the work of Engels "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy" (1886) and the attached "Theses on Feuerbach" by Marx (1845). Chernov begins with a critique of the Feuerbachian materialism: "... in his mental and social life, a human being is considered solely as a *passive* element. Having consolidated on the *contemplative* point of view, materialism both there and here, misses the effective and teleological side." (Чернов 1907, 31) He then he tries to "appropriate" the position of the early Marx, which, he believes, is similar to the position of the Russian supporters of the "subjective method" (i.e., Lavrov, Mikhailovsky, and Chernov himself) and oppose its "ingenious germ" to the development that the position of the "Theses" later received from Marx himself, and especially from Engels. In later works, the theorists of Marxism "became more and more willing to take an objective, contemplative point of view, and allowed practical, subjective to the smallest dose," moreover, Engels

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<sup>16</sup> E.g. (Pedler 1927; Fedotov 1942)

“fundamentally rejected the practical, ethical point of view and wrote scathingly and ironically about it, not recognizing any value behind it.” (Ibid., 32)<sup>17</sup>

Further, Chernov criticizes Engels’ “primitive” interpretation of the thing-in-itself and instead defends a more subtle and modern neo-Kantian one, in which the thing-in-itself does not constitute noumenal reality, but acts as the ultimate concept in the process of cognition, “rounding up our world view”, just like mathematical ideas of infinity or limit do (Ibid., 43). Without going into the details of Chernov’s well-explained, though not original, argument, we note that it casts doubt on the standard, ascending to Lenin, assessment of Chernov’s ideas as thoroughly positivist<sup>18</sup>.

The purpose for Chernov’s attention to Kant’s theoretical philosophy lies in practical philosophy. This purpose is criticism and overcoming of dualism of thought and action, the ideal and its implementation in life. As we shall see, criticism takes Chernov’s main attention, while the positive part of his model remains sketchy. About Kant’s transition from theory to practice, he writes:

... theoretical reason has fully prepared the work of the practical. Since the world of things-in-themselves is accepted as fundamentally different from the world of phenomena, the very tendency of the human mind to think in opposites invites in a negative way to determine the main features of the world of things-in-themselves. Our world is a kingdom of oppressive necessity - there is a kingdom of freedom. In our world, everything is mortal, everything is transient - there is a kingdom of immortality. In our world, everything is finite, limited and only relatively real: there is a realm of an infinite, unlimited, “most real being (entis realissimi)”. A whole range of elements of the “practical reason” come to the rescue here: our indestructible consciousness of moral freedom, insulted by the recognition of the dominance of universal necessity; a whole series of ethical tendencies too high to receive satisfaction in the brief interval of personal life and often, moreover, still cruelly cut short by the harsh and prosaic reality; the quest for “higher meaning of life”, etc. etc. (Ibid., 52).

Chernov also considers, in his words, a more subtle and deep attempt to bridge the gap between the phenomenal and the noumenal, undertaken by F.A. Lange (1828-1875) in his “History of Materialism and Critique of Its Present Importance” (1873-75). In theory, approaching the positivist interpretation of the thing-in-itself as the ultimate thought of the phenomenon, in the practical philosophy of Lange still makes a “logical fall” of not parting with the noumenal reality, to which he transfers the ideal unattainable for us in the empirical world (Ibid., 56).

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<sup>17</sup> Let us note that Soviet Marxism addressed to Kant exactly the same accusation of passive contemplation - the only difference being that this contemplativeness is a consequence not of “objectivism”, but of “subjectivism.”

<sup>18</sup> Lenin attacked Chernov’s interpretation of this part of Engels’ teaching in “Materialism and Empirio-criticism”, Ch. II, Part I.

For Lange, the ideal is needed to “take a break from the struggle and suffering of life, rising in thought to this realm of harmony,” whereas for a positivist-subjectivist the ideal is the least call to rest and oblivion, it’s rather a trumpet sound, calling for a campaign and resembling about a close fight. For Lange, it is a healing balm spilled on the wounds of disabled people in the struggle, instead of being a refreshing and invigorating drink before the battle. (Ibid., 58)

From this figurative criticism of Lange and neo-Kantianism in general, Chernov proceeds to a brief description of his understanding of “effective, active, militant practical idealism” (Ibid., 151). Alas, a reader who, after a nuanced critique, waited to be treated to an equally systematic and detailed positive part is unlikely to remain satisfied with this description:

Let the ideal never be realized in the empirical world. Sadness and complain about this is nothing. It is not the only way to save this ideal, transferring it to an area lying “on the other side” of human experience. It suffices only to treat the ideal correctly, as also a kind of limiting concept, which only indicates a trend, a direction of movement, and which would cease to be an indicator of the path if it were fully embodied along one side or the other, in one or another point of our human existence, our spiritual life. Then the ideal would cease to be a symbol of life and progress, but would become a symbol of stillness and carrion. (Ibid., 58).

Thus, Chernov began by theoretically bringing together neo-Kantian transcendentalism and positivism, which from different sides solved the same problem of the manifestation of the world in experience mediated by feelings. To him, both came close to abandoning dualism and transitioning to the position of scientific monism. However, the neo-Kantian explanation of practical life made a return to the passive dualistic construction, where the moral ideal is isolated from activity in noumenal reality and cannot be clearly associated with it causally. The positivist program can be expanded with the already familiar Populist doctrine of the critically-minded person, who struggles to realizes her own ideas of the ought without hoping to partake in the victory. At the same time, Chernov leaves us without explaining the principles of the emergence and development of personal ideals, without the methods of their criticism<sup>19</sup>.

### **Marxists: disarming the “spiritual weapon”**

*Georgi Plekhanov* (1856-1918) was the first and most eminent Russian Marxist, who provided theoretical basis for revolutionary efforts of Russian Social Democratic Labor Party that later split into Bolshevik and Menshevik fractions. Despite his eventual siding with the Mensheviks, who by early 1920s lost in political struggle against Bolsheviks,

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<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that despite Chernov’s theoretical ambiguity his Socialist Revolutionary Party turned out to be the most popular of all those acting in Russia during the revolution (58% or 20.9 million votes in Russian Constituent Assembly elections in November 1917).

Plekhanov's works remained essential to Soviet canon<sup>20</sup>. Lenin solidified Plekhanov's reputation by, among other things, advising young party members to carefully study "all written by Plekhanov in philosophy, for it is the best of the whole international Marxist literature." (ЛЕНИН 1970а, 42:290). Trotsky gave a brief but penetrating qualification of Plekhanov in his "War and Revolution" (1923):

Plekhanov did not create the theory of historical materialism, he did not enrich it with new scientific achievements. But he introduced it into Russian life. And this is a merit of enormous significance. It was necessary to overcome the homegrown revolutionary prejudices of the Russian intelligentsia, in which an arrogance of backwardness found its expression. Plekhanov "nationalized" the Marxist theory and thereby denationalized Russian revolutionary thought. Through Plekhanov it began to speak for the first time in the language of real science; established its ideological bond with the world working-class movement; opened real possibilities and perspectives for the Russian revolution in finding a basis for it in the objective laws of economic development (L. D. Trotsky 1943, 92).

Plekhanov's purpose was not to develop or alter Marxist theory – quite the opposite, he was among the first to adopt it as a comprehensive worldview meant for revolutionary practice. The primacy of practice for Bolsheviks meant that at some (early) point all abstract discussion and critical questioning had to be stopped in order not to deprive the already existing theoretical tool of its robustness and efficiency, and the party of its cohesion and readiness for action. As Plekhanov saw it, this power was in turn granted by confidence in the historical necessity and faith in one's role on the pinnacle of historical development. The unsure are weak, and their fate is to waste their lives "winning and reflecting", "like Hamlet" (ПЛЕХАНОВ 1956а, 2:302). In a footnote to this remark in *On the Role of the Individual in History* (1898) Plekhanov invokes Moses, Calvin and Cromwell, who, he writes, were assured of their destiny, and whose deterministic worldview was the source of their "indomitable power" (Ibid.). The creation of a powerful revolutionary "order" was the subject of Plekhanov's conscious effort, in which he, despite some issues, was following the likes of Louis Blanqui and Pyotr Tkachev (1844-1886). A dogma, an intellectual discipline that would channel the "revolutionary thrust" and prevent it from dissipating in sophisticated discussions on remote topics was seen as a necessity. This explains why Plekhanov meant his philosophical output either to explain and propagate Marxism in Russia and beyond<sup>21</sup> or to defend it against critical attacks from outside and revisions from inside.

Plekhanov's most prolific activity falls roughly into three decades between mid-1880s and beginning of WWI. It began with the books "Socialism and Political Struggle" (1883) and

<sup>20</sup> As part of this canon, Plekhanov's output is subject to general analysis in major studies of Marxism (e.g. (Kołakowski 1978)) and its Russian branch (e.g. (Walicki 1979, 1995); it is also the topic of several monographs (Baron 1963, 1995; Steila 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Plekhanov's international stance is significant due to his active participation in key Marxist debates starting in 1880s, perhaps most importantly through Kautsky's *Die Neue Zeit*.

“Our Differences” (1884), where the author announced his departure from Populism and mounted an attack on it, based on newly acquired Marxist platform. Personalism and idealism of the Populists was one of the chief targets, and Plekhanov later dwelled on this topic in the first appendix to the first edition of his book “The Development of the Monist View of History” (1895) and in essay “On the Role of Individual in History” (1898). The 1995 appendix is titled “Once more Mr. Mikhailovsky, Once More “Triade””. Here Plekhanov presents dialectical materialism as a kind of materialist view of history that best compensates for our perhaps temporary inability to causally link “atoms in the brains” to historical events.

Modern dialectical materialism cannot discover the *mechanical* explanation of history. This is, if you like, *its weakness*. [...] The genius of whom Laplace dreamed would have been, of course, above such weakness. But we simply don’t know when that genius will appear, and we satisfy ourselves with such explanations of phenomena as best correspond to the science of our age. Such is *our* “particular case.” (Плекханов 1956b, 1:732)

Dialectical materialism allows reducing the remnants of idealism that invade Populist views in the form of ideals that motivate persons. Plekhanov presents this feature of Populism as belonging to reaction against Hegel’s absolute idealism that subjugated “heroes” to the *Weltgeist* and places Mikhailovsky and his party in line with Bruno Bauer (1809-1882). Marxism, he claims, is more consistent in this same effort of freeing people from the false metaphysical ideal – by getting rid of it completely, thus achieving the synthesis:

And so we have suddenly received the elements of a new “synthesis.” The Hegelian cult of heroes, serving the universal spirit, is the *thesis*. The Bauer cult of heroes of “critical thought,” guided only by their “self-consciousness,” is the *antithesis*. Finally, the theory of Marx, which reconciles both extremes, eliminating the universal spirit and explaining the origin of the heroes’ self-consciousness by the development of environment, is the *synthesis*. (Ibid., 735).

Plekhanov’s arguments against the Populists are essentially the same as the ones he addresses to Kant. First, both are theoretical exposition of *petit bourgeois* worldview. The difference is that Mikhailovsky and Lavrov are eclectics, whereas Kant is highly systematic. This systematicity makes all the more explicit the few profound mistakes (or manipulations) that Kant makes, which in turn makes him a perfect target for Marxist criticism, as this criticism would also overwhelm lesser thinkers. Kant’s “class consciousness”, just like that of the Populists, who share the same social standing, is manifested in attempts to secure a dualist worldview.

He who takes the object as his starting point, if only he has the ability and courage to think consistently, arrives at one of the varieties of the *materialist world-outlook*.  
He who takes the *subject* as his starting point and again if only he is prepared to think the matter out to the end, will turn out to be an *idealist* of one shade or another.

And those people who are incapable of consistent thought stop halfway and are content with a mish-mash of idealism and materialism. Such inconsistent thinkers are called *eclectics*.

To this it may be objected that there are also adherents of ‘critical’ philosophy, who are equally far from materialism as from idealism and yet are free of the weaknesses commonly associated with the eclectic mode of thought. [...] But I refer the reader to Chapter Six of Deborin’s book [“Introduction to the Philosophy of Dialectical Materialism”, 1916] (‘Transcendental Method’). There he will see just how unfounded this objection is. Deborin clearly and convincingly demonstrates that the ‘critical’ philosophy of Kant suffers from *dualism*. And since *dualism is always eclectic*, it is only by a misconception that one can cite Kant in refutation of my contention that every consistent thinker is bound to choose between idealism and materialism. (Плеханов 1957, 3:615)

Kant, too, was blinded by the same desire [to defend his traditional beliefs at all cost]. His ‘critical’ system was, indeed, an attempt to reconcile certain views inherited from his Protestant predecessors with the conclusions of the really critical thought of the eighteenth century. Kant thought they could be reconciled by separating the domain of *belief* from the domain of *knowledge*:

*belief* to be related to *noumena*, and the rights of science to be restricted to *phenomena*. And he, too, did not hide from his readers why it was necessary for him to limit the rights of science. In the preface to the second edition of his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, he says outright that he was induced to do this by a desire *to make room for faith*. (Ibid., 625-26).

For Plekhanov later Kantian critical philosophy is “guilty of *dualism*” (Ibid.), but this is not the result of an oversight or a mistake in reasoning. Dualism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century reactionaries comes as a theoretical device that is needed to build a “spiritual weapon” against the oppressed. He borrows the phrase “*geistige Waffe*” from Conrad von Massow (1840-1910), a German politician, who in his 1894 work “Reform oder Revolution!” called not only for reforms, but also for extinguishing materialism with a specifically designed idealist philosophy. Plekhanov sees the spread of neo-Kantianism as precisely this attempt, and he is scornful of fellow Russian revolutionaries who commit the dualistic fallacy. To him the Populists, like Kant and to a greater extent Kantians, do this deliberately. The difference, however, is that Kant and his followers are anti-revolutionary, whereas the Populists intend to use the idealist domain to ignite revolution. For Plekhanov this is clearly fallacious, for no explanation is given regarding the mechanisms connecting the ideals of the critically thinking persons to reality – indeed, no such mechanisms can exist. Plekhanov goes as far as saying that this dualism attempts to revive the medieval doctrine of two truths in order to augment scientific materialism with moral and political idealism. (Ibid., 268)

Fighting against dualism, Plekhanov himself runs into difficulties. On the one hand, every now and then he declares that “*history is made by people, and so the activity of persons cannot be insignificant*” (Плеханов 1956a, 2:311). On the other hand, in his more elaborate arguments he attempts to undermine precisely this position – to questionable results. In a series of works dedicated to the development of the monist view of history Plekhanov seeks to eliminate the plurality of factors that influence history. First and foremost these factors include ideals and persons driven by them. Particularly Plekhanov’s treatise “On the Role of the Person in History” (1898) was hailed in the Soviet literature as delivering the decisive blow to historical idealism and personalism. Plekhanov’s argument here starts with the denial of the very idea of “factors”: their plurality is a case of eclecticism. At best it comes as the result of inconsistency and can be corrected, at worst it is an attempt of ideological struggle against the advances of objective development of history. Plekhanov also sharply criticizes “sociological hypostases” of “individual consciousness” as a historical actor.

However towards the end of his treatise Plekhanov differentiates between general, particular, and individual causes of historical events, i.e. the development of productive forces, particular circumstances of this development, and individual participation in these processes (or lack thereof). The questions that he faces now seem to be the same as the ones he used against his opponents: are what he admits as “causes” any different from what he dismisses as “factors”? Isn’t differentiating between causes a case of eclecticism that he rejected in Populists and in Kant? Or if the particular and individual causes are ultimately reducible to the general one, why introduce them at all? The same seems to be true regarding “hypostasizing”, on the one hand, “social man” and “social mentality”, on the one hand, some “I” that is at the same time in position to assess the logic of social development and is fully inside of or determined by it:

... who makes history? It is made by the *social man*, who is its *sole “factor.”* The social man creates his own, i.e. social, relationships. But if in a given period he creates given relationships and not others, there must be some cause for it, of course; it is determined by the state of his productive forces. [...]

Social relationships have their inherent logic: as long as people live in given mutual relationships they will reel, think and act in a given way, and no other. Attempts on the part of public men to combat this logic would also be fruitless; the natural course of things (i.e. this logic of social relationships) would reduce all his efforts to naught. But if I know in what direction social relations are changing owing to given changes in the social-economic process of production, I also know in what direction social mentality is changing; consequently, I am able to influence it. Influencing social mentality means influencing historical events. Hence, in a certain sense, *I can make history*, and there is no need for me to wait while “it is being made.” (Плеханов 1956a, 2:333–34).

Obviously this attack, explicitly targeting Mikhailovsky and other “subjectivists”, was also intended by Plekhanov to reject any non-materialist reading of history, including Kantian one. The same year 1889 finds Plekhanov in a more direct controversy against explicitly



Kantian thought, this time expressed by several younger thinkers in Germany. led by Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932) and Conrad Schmidt (1863-1932)<sup>22</sup>.

The emergence and development of revisionism was influenced by at least three factors: the “back to Kant” movement and the philosophy of neo-Kantianism, the demand felt for a moral theory by certain Marxists, and the development of post-Marxist economic theory that questioned some key Marxist assumptions including the confrontational and revolutionary change of socioeconomic formations (of which the founding fathers themselves were ambivalent, but which was starkly defended by Plekhanov and other Russian “orthodox Marxists”). All of these tendencies were imbued with Kantian ideas: Kant’s moral philosophy was the prime candidate to augment Marxism, and his reformism was the chief alternative to revolutionary violence. Plekhanov became one of the staunch critics of this trend.

His criticism is presented in a series of articles, mostly written in 1898 (“Bernstein and Materialism”, “Conrad Schmidt Versus Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels”, “Materialism or Kantianism”, “On the Alleged Crisis in Marxism”), and subsequent follow-ups (e.g. “Cant Against Kant” in 1901). Their titles reveal the two chief opponents of Plekhanov.

Plekhanov’s main theoretical argument against Kant revolves around the ubiquitous inconsistency of noumenal causality. It is neither new nor is presented as such. On the contrary, Plekhanov supplies it with detailed references to F.H. Jacobi’s “On Faith, or Idealism and Realism” (1787), G.E. Schultze’s “Aenesidemus” (1792), and subsequent literature, up to and including, of course, Marx and Engels. To sum it up, Kant is inconsistent in claiming that things-in-themselves cause appearances yet are unknowable. For Plekhanov, there are two ways out of this problem: one is shown by Fichte and leads to subjective idealism, which is itself incomprehensible and self-defeating, the other is Marxist materialist solution:

It goes without saying that materialism is a *metaphenomenalistic* doctrine because it questions neither the existence of things outside of our consciousness nor their effect on us. But since it at the same time acknowledges that we cognise things-in-themselves only thanks to the impressions *caused by their effect on us*, it has neither the need nor the logical possibility to regard phenomena as things-in-themselves. In this respect, it in no way deviates from Kantianism, despite its *metaphenomenalistic* nature. The difference between materialism and Kantianism comes to light only subsequently. By considering things-in-themselves the *causes* of phenomena, Kant would assure us that the *category of causality* is wholly inapplicable to things-in-themselves. On the other hand, materialism, which also considers things-in-themselves the causes of phenomena, does not fall into contradiction with itself. That is all there is to it. (Плеханов 1956а, 2:436)

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<sup>22</sup> The topic of revisionism is covered in Teodor Oizerman’s “Justification of Revisionism” (“Opravdanie revisionizma” (Ойзерман 2005)).

We will not look into Plekhanov's theoretical arguments<sup>23</sup>. What concerns us is his assessment of practice that follows from it. Here he is also explicit: Kantian philosophy, he warns Schmidt, is no less than a weapon, and was seen as such from the start:

Carl Leonhard Reinhold - that first vulgariser of Kantianism - already saw as one of the chief merits of that system its '*obliging natural scientists to abandon their groundless claims to knowledge*'. He wrote that atheism, which is now so widespread: "... under the guise of *fatalism, materialism and Spinozism*[...] is presented by Kant as a phantom that deludes our minds, with an effectiveness beyond the reach of our modern theologians, who engage in exposing the Devil; if there still remain fatalists, or if they will appear in due course, they will be people who have either ignored or failed to understand the *Critique of Pure Reason*." (Ibid., 2:439-40)

According to Plekhanov, the task of bourgeoisie is to "edify" the proletariat, and Kantian philosophy is best suited for this task. This becomes his main concern in the polemic against the revisionists and his reproaches to Karl Kautsky and *Die Neue Zeit* for supporting revisionism (in his open letter from 1898 "What Should We Thank Him [Bernstein] For?"). It is very telling that Plekhanov finds his (and his predecessors') theoretical arguments to be a sufficient and thorough refutation of Kantianism as a whole. The territory of moral philosophy is of no interest to him, and he has no intention to enter it – thus reinforcing the revisionist's concerns about moral blindness of "orthodox Marxists". Morality, being a product of class consciousness, which is in turn determined by one's position in relation to productive forces, is epiphenomenal to him.

*Vladimir Lenin* (1870-1924) addressed Kant and his ideas in two major respects. On the one hand, he repeatedly qualified Kant as "agnostic"<sup>24</sup> and discussed the topic of things-in-themselves at length in "Materialism and Empiriocriticism" (1908). Lenin, as is evident from his 1908 letter to the writer Maxim Gorky, was upset with the lack of unity regarding the "main question of philosophy" among his comrades, some of whom leaned towards empiriocriticism and attempted to give Kant a positivist reading, criticizing him "from the right". Lenin intended the aforementioned work to settle the discussion that distracted the chief Bolsheviks from the revolutionary struggle, and this required settling once and for all the controversy regarding noumenal reality and causality by criticizing Kant "from the left". Lenin's reasoning throughout this text again follows that of Engels and Plekhanov and is not offering new philosophical insights.

On the other hand, scattered over Lenin's written output one finds general assessments of the role and use of Kantianism during the day. In these assessments, concentrated in letters

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<sup>23</sup> Daniela Steila offers an extended discussion in (Steila 2012).

<sup>24</sup> E.g. "We, materialists, following Engels, call Kantians and Humists *agnostics* for they deny the objective reality as the source of our perceptions. [...] The agnostic says: I do not know if there is an objective reality reflected by our sensations, I declare it impossible to know this (see above the words of Engels, who set forth the position of the agnostic). Hence the denial of objective truth by agnosticism and tolerance, the petty-bourgeois, philistine, cowardly tolerance for the doctrine of wood-goblins, house holders, Catholic saints, and the like." (Ленин 1968, 18:129)

and in “Philosophical Notebooks” (ca. 1910-16), he also follows Plekhanov and his “spiritual weapon” thesis:

All philistine currents of social democracy are fighting most of all against philosophical materialism, they pull us to Kant, to neo-Kantianism, to critical philosophy. (Ленин 1970b, 47:138)

They don't want to return to Kant because this great thinker delivered a strong blow to the tale of an immortal soul imprisoned in dirty clay — he really did it; but because its system, on the other hand, left a gap through which they could smuggle a little bit of metaphysics. (Ленин 1969, 29:400)

[...] so, the faith was saved, the supernatural was saved, and this came in very handy not only for Lampe the servant, but also for German professors in the “cultural struggle” for “public education” against the hated, radical atheistic Social Democrats. It was then that Immanuel Kant turned out to be the right person; he helped them find the desired, if not scientific, then very practical point of view of the middle. (Ibid., 29:402)

The reactionary slogan "back to Kant!", Which is now heard from all sides, comes from the monstrous tendency to turn back science and subordinate human knowledge to a "more general way of knowing." In it, there is a noticeable desire to once again abandon the already dominated human domination over nature and to get the crown and scepter from the pantry for the old bogey, so that superstition reigns again. The philosophical striving of our time consists in a conscious or unconscious reaction against the clearly growing freedom of the people. (Ibid., 449)

Since the fourth estate made its claims, our official scholars have been forced to pursue a conservative, reactionary policy. Now they persist, they want to legitimize their delusion and move back to Kant. (Ibid., 29:450)

In his 1920 speech “The Tasks of the Youth Leagues” Lenin formulates his vision of morality and communist moral education that is in stark contrast to Kantian ideas:

The entire purpose of training, educating and teaching the youth of today should be to imbue them with communist ethics.

But is there such a thing as communist ethics? Is there such a thing as communist morality? Of course, there is. It is often suggested that we have no ethics of our own; very often the bourgeoisie accuse us Communists of rejecting all morality. This is a method of confusing the issue, of throwing dust in the eyes of the workers and peasants.

In what sense do we reject ethics, reject morality?

In the sense given to it by the bourgeoisie, who based ethics on God's commandments. On this point we, of course, say that we do not believe in God, and that we know perfectly well that the clergy, the landowners and the bourgeoisie invoked the name of God so as to further their own interests as exploiters. Or, instead of basing ethics on the commandments of morality, on the commandments of God, they based it on idealist or semi-idealist phrases, which always amounted to something very similar to God's commandments.

We reject any morality based on extra-human and extra-class concepts. We say that this is deception, dupery, stultification of the workers and peasants in the interests of the landowners and capitalists.

We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle. Our morality stems from the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat. (Ленин 1981, 41:309)

Other Bolsheviks followed Lenin's suit. In 1925 *Anatoly Lunacharsky* (1875-1933), People's Commissar of Education (to be more precise, of *Prosveshenie*, literally – and ironically – meaning “Enlightenment”) expressed official Soviet position on morality:

This presentation is titled “Morality from Marxist Point of View” not because I want to retain the word “morality” in our vocabulary. If the upheaval, of which our revolution serves as the decisive beginning, will come to an end and the change of social life that we expect will occur, we will probably have to drop the word “morality” altogether. (Луначарский 1925, 5)

An even more colorful assessment of Kant's moral idealism was given by another notable Bolshevik *Evgueny Preobrazhensky* (1886-1937) in what was one of the first and few Soviet books on ethics, titled “On Morality and Class Norms” (1923):

The vaunted theorist of *petit bourgeois* morals Emmanuel Kant in his days advanced a moral claim: never look at another human being as a means to an end, but always as an end in itself. Many tears were shed over this and other principles of Kantian morals by sentimental philistines from all countries, who saw in them general demands of so-called “common human morality”. There emerged holy fools, calling themselves Marxists, who tried to connect this point of Kant to Marx, tried to combine theory and practice of scientific communism with this commandment of a small bourgeois, attempting to erect this demand of an individualistically-minded philistine – “don't touch me” – into a moral dogma. One can imagine, how far working class would have gone in its struggle, were it to follow this, and not the opposite, demand while pursuing its class interests.

Proletariat is cruel and merciless in its struggle for power. It does not spare not only enemies, but also, if necessary, the best representatives of its own class. The highest wisdom of proletarian struggle consists not in messing about with the insides of one's person and proclaiming about its rights. It demands that each could devotedly, almost spontaneously, without phrases and excessive gestures, without demanding anything for oneself personally, pour in all of one's energy and enthusiasm into common flow and push through to the goal together with one's class, perhaps, having fallen dead on the way [here perfect tense is used by the author]. (Преображенский 1923, 72–73)

It seems appropriate to mention that Preobrazhensky was accused of treason and executed in 1937 during the Great Terror.

Finally, *Leon Trotsky* (1879-1940), although by that time in exile, gave his qualification of Kantian practical philosophy in “Their Morals and Ours” (1938) and “The Moralists and

Sycophants Against Marxism” (1939). This qualification again places Kant among the most sophisticated theorists of “their” morality. Categorical imperative is the highest generalization of social norms of bourgeoisie and carries out an ideological function in class struggle. So, Trotsky again calls the categorical imperative and surrounding theory a weapon used against Marxism. He also attacks revisionists, who tried

to graft Kantianism onto Marxism, or in other words, to subordinate the class struggle of the proletariat to principles allegedly rising above it. As did Kant himself, they depicted the "categorical imperative" (the idea of duty) as an absolute norm of morality valid for every-body. In reality, it is a question of "duty" to bourgeois society[...] However, if their ideas are plumbed to the bottom, it appears that they have joined an old cause, long since discredited: to subdue Marxism by means of Kantianism; to paralyze the socialist revolution by means of "absolute" norms which represent in reality the philosophical generalizations of the interests of the bourgeoisie... (L. Trotsky and Novack 1966, 60–61).

The list of Bolshevik critics of Kantian view of person and moral ideal can be further extended to include lesser figures like Abram Deborin (1881-1963), the first notable Marxist to become a Soviet academic philosopher, or Mark Mitin (1901-1987), who became instrumental in conducting Stalin’s policy in Soviet philosophy aimed at creating for Stalin the image of the greatest living Marxist thinker. Stalin, although never discussing Kant’s philosophy in writing, in an important and well documented episode named the qualification of Kant, along with Fichte and Hegel, as conservatives among the mistakes made in the textbook “History of Western European Philosophy” (1946). He explained that they were rather reactionaries, scared of the French revolution and looking for means to revert it (Сталин 2004, 17:635). Of course, this stands in sharp contrast to Marx’s qualification of Kant as a “German theorist of French revolution”, but in 1946 and in Soviet Union Stalin’s word outweighed that of Marx. The book had to be rewritten, the author, a prominent academic philosopher Georgy Alexandrov (1908-1961) was lightly punished. The decisive change in the reception of Kant only came in 1974, when Kant’s 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary became an occasion for moderately favorable reassessments of his historical role. Throughout the period discussed here Kant was an active and dangerous contender or perhaps even an enemy.

### **Conclusion: Kant’s tomb against historical necessity**

Where does this survey of Kantian discussions in Russian revolutionary literature of late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century leave us? Evidently, Kantian philosophy was a significant force in socialist movement of the prerevolutionary decades. On the one hand, Kantian values inspired the Populists. Although the leaders of this movement did not engage in systematic development of philosophical foundations of their personalism and idealism, they constantly proclaimed that person is the true end of their efforts, and that persons are led by ideals, among other factors. As we saw, however, the Populists offered no theoretical explanation of the connection that has to exist between the ideal and reality in order for

persons to influence history. Despite this, one can agree with S.A. Levitzky, who noticed the similarity between the moral basis of Populism and Kantianism, and the unrealized possibility of synthesis. On the other hand, and this time intentionally and explicitly, revisionists adapted Kant's views in an attempt to morally enrich Marxism. Revisionism called to Kantian reformism that would return to the ideal its original status – that of being out of immediate and revolutionary reach. Its function should again become regulative, and the movement towards it should be understood as piecemeal and at best long. Bernstein pointed at the organizational role of tradition that, far from being sacred or absolute, serves as the object of reformist change. The fact that revisionist motto “the ultimate aim of socialism is nothing, but the movement is everything” was supported by optimistic economic data made it even more dangerous to the revolutionary Marxists. These two trends made Kant an ally to both outside opposition, i.e. the Populist with their numerous following, as well as to inside one, i.e. the revisionists.

As if this was not enough, Kantian moral philosophy was actively used by the forces that to revolutionary Marxists in Russia and beyond were clearly reactionary. The “back to Kant” movement, which penetrated academia as well as other parts of cultural establishment, was qualified as an attempt to stupefy the exploited masses by religious “opium”, smuggled through the metaphysical crack left open by Kant and supported by his authority. The colorful epithets of “the spiritual weapon” and “the last trench of theism” were a staple of Marxist calls to arms against Kant.

Why then, given this univocal and systematic Bolshevik rejection of Kantian philosophy, the decision was made to save and make a monument of Kant's tomb that ended up in the very center of a Soviet city? Was it an attempt to somehow impress foreign observers? In 1947 and in a thoroughly ruined, closed and militarized town on the margins of devastated Europe this was hardly necessary. Was it a concession to domestic enlightened public? No, Soviet regime was not known for concessions, and at the time there was no one to protest<sup>25</sup>. Were Kant's scientific merits, mentioned in the letter to “Izvestia”, sufficient reason to preserve his tomb? Perhaps, but scientific merits, for instance, did not save the grave of the great astronomer Friedrich Bessel, who's ideas never became a “spiritual weapon” of the exploiters. Was it a gesture of grace on behalf of the victors? A retreat from revolutionary morality and the immorality of war? A betrayal of Marxism as it was understood by the Soviet classics? A victory of ideal over history? A symbolic reemergence of the “metaphysical crack” through which the noumenal somehow connects to the phenomenal? One way or another, the most close and immediate encounter of Kant's heritage with Soviet Marxism marked a victory for Kant – as well as for Soviet Marxism.

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<sup>25</sup> There were protests against the demolition of the remains of Königsberg Castle in 1967, but the protesters were few, and they were easily suppressed.

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