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Kant in Finland

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Abstract

In the editorial note, we shortly outline the reception of Kant's philosophy in Finland and how Kant's philosophy became an academic topic from the late 18th century onwards. We also provide some details about the translations of Kant's works into Finnish. Finally, we introduce the contributions to the special section on Kantian studies in Finland.

Keywords

Kant, Kantianism, Finland

Abstrakti

Toimittajien saatteessamme kuvailemme lyhyesti Kantin filosofian saamaa vastaanottoa Suomessa ja miten Kantin filosofiasta tuli akateemisen kiinnostuksen kohde 1700-luvun lopulta alkaen. Lisäksi kerromme Kantin teosten käännöksistä suomen kielelle. Lopuksi esittelemme tämän päivän suomalaiselle Kant-tutkimukselle osoitetun erikoisosion sisältämät tutkimusartikkelit.

Asiasanat

Kant, kantilaisuus, Suomi

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In a letter to a friend in 1795 Henrik Gabriel Porthan, a Finnish Enlightenment thinker who became a conspicuous critic of Kant's work in both his lectures and dissertations, wrote the following regarding the German philosopher's work:

Its mysterious language and own terminology, which can be understood only by the adepts, has excluded me from it; I am already too old to waste my time for it, and so I believe that I can get along with my old philosophy [...] I really am afraid that whole this seething enthusiasm for Kantianism will suffer the same fate as Cartesianism and Wolffianism before it, namely that when it has made a noise for a while, it will calm down and be put aside. (Quoted in Oittinen 2012)

While Kantianism was not well perceived by all (Klinge et al. 1987, 724), his philosophical ideas, especially those related to morality and religion, soon found firm support in Northern Europe, including Finland – which at the time was the eastern part of Sweden.

The first “Finnish pro-Kantian dissertation” (Oittinen 2012), *De principio ultimo officiorum hominis*, was published by Frans Michael Franzén in 1798. Other early writings on Kant's philosophy include Anders Johan Lagus's *Immanuelis Kant de tempore doctrina* (1804) and Fredrik Bergbom's *Dissertatio metaphysica Kantianorum de re in se (Ding an sich) doctrinam breviter examinans* (1811). These academic works were publicly examined in the Royal Academy of Turku, the sole university in Finland until the early 20th century, when Finland gained its independence (after being a part of the Russian Empire from 1809 to 1917).

While Turku (Åbo in Swedish, Aboa in Latin) – which Kant mentions in his 1756 article on the Great Lisbon earthquake to indicate how far away from Lisbon the tremors were felt (AA 1:436) – might be considered remote in the days of the horse and carriage, its Academy, founded in 1640, was a well-established university at the turn of the 19th century. New intellectual ideas like the philosophical movements of Cartesianism, Leibniz-Wolffianism and Kantianism came quickly to the region, perhaps most often through Uppsala University in Sweden. Moreover, Turku is not far geographically from Königsberg; the Baltic Sea connecting many of the northern European universities from early on.

Today, despite Porthan's prognostication, Kant's legacy holds firm in philosophical education and research in Finland's many modern universities. Since Franzén's thesis, the pile of Finnish PhD and Master's theses on Kantian philosophy has indeed grown high. Several Finnish philosophers have been inspired by Kant's work, among them influential figures like Georg Henrik von Wright and Jaakko Hintikka. More recently, the University of Turku has been particularly active in Kantian studies, largely thanks to Olli Koistinen who also supervised the first ever translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* into Finnish.

It is telling, we think, that the complex language of Kant has been translated into the complex language of Finnish, the most recent comprehensive contributions being the Finnish language editions of all the three *Critiques*. The *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Markus Nikkarla, one of the contributors to this issue, and Kreetta Ranki, was published in 2013, followed by the *Critique of Practical Reason* in 2016 (also translated by Nikkarla), and in 2018 the *Critique of Judgement*, translated by Risto Pitkänen. Of these, only the second *Critique* had been available in Finnish before; the first translation, by Jalmari Salomaa, a seminal figure in early Finnish Kant scholarship, came out in 1931 together with the first Finnish translation of *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. The first of Kant's books to appear in Finnish was, however, *Perpetual Peace*, in which Kant mentions Finns as a group of people with their distinguished language living in the northernmost part of Europe (AA 8:364). The Finnish translation of *Perpetual Peace* was published in 1922.

When we first began to put this special selection together, we wanted to highlight the variety of contemporary Finnish – and more broadly Nordic – Kant scholarship. The purpose was not to exercise any form of nationalism, which would have jarred with Kant's cosmopolitan vision, but to offer Finnish scholars a space to illustrate the richness of Kantian scholarship in the 21st century. *Con-textos Kantianos* therefore provides an excellent platform for such an academic exercise: a truly international and, importantly, open access, refereed journal. The papers submitted to this special section demonstrate that Kantian philosophy – from politics to ethics and metaphysics – continues to be an active subject of research among Finnish scholars.

In recent years, Kant's conception of space has been, and continues to be, an area of special interest among scholars in Turku. Markus Nikkarla touches this issue in his article, which focuses on Kant's conception of the extralogical grounds of existence in the *New Elucidation*. Nikkarla examines the articulation, in this early text, that God contains the grounds both of the existence of things and their interaction and change, arguing that Kant's conception of these ideas implies the view, which he later explicitly held, that existence is not a predicate of things.

Kant's account of perception has always been the subject of active interest and even more so in the recent years. In his article Hemmo Laiho proposes that, according to Kant's phenomenologically plausible view, the cognitive functions of sense perception are twofold: on the one hand, that of singling out things; on the other, gaining perceptual information about the configuration of their features. Laiho examines the distinction between the two functions in relation to Kant's notions of 'manifold' and 'synthesis' in order to explicate the theoretical role of perceptually locatable particular things (or distinguishables, as Laiho calls them) in Kant's philosophical system.

Pärtyyli Rinne explores the role of love in global politics and reflects on Kant's work through John Rawls' and Martha Nussbaum's discussion of moral psychology. Rinne argues that Kant's understanding of love as a duty toward everyone helps us to investigate and articulate non-communitarian and non-nationalist feelings of love and empathy towards The Other. Kant's practical and universal ethics provide background theory that is useful in utilizing moral psychology for the analysis of global politics. Rinne acknowledges the limitations of Kant's ethics, but also demonstrates the possibility of culturally sensitive, universally sharable attitudes of love.

Sami Pihlström continues the exploration of the human condition by offering a comparison of Kant with the American pragmatist William James (1842–1910). Pihlström argues that James was much more of a Kantian than he was willing to admit. Pihlström points out, more specifically, that both Kant and James can be seen as sharing a pessimistic conception of humanity, which in turn is perfectly compatible with meliorism (i.e. the idea that progress towards the better is possible). Pihlström evidences this through an exploration of the two critical philosophers' views of religion.

In his contribution to this issue, Lauri Kallio examines Arvi(d) Grotenfelt's (1863–1941) reaction to Heinrich Rickert's (1863–1936) views on history as science, historical knowledge and historical values. Kallio argues that in many respects Grotenfelt was cautiously critical of Rickert, one of the leading neo-Kantians of the time, and that some of his own views are more akin to those of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911). Grotenfelt, a Helsinki-based professor of philosophy who was heavily influenced by Kant's ethics, was a pioneering figure in the philosophy of history in Finland.

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