

Kant and Eastern Europe in Vienna 2015

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Abstract

The text deals with the theme of Kant and Eastern Europe at the University of Vienna in 2015. Except the section of contributions to the theme “Kant and Eastern Europe” at the 12th International Kant Congress, it focuses on other activities of the organizers connected with the theme, namely the exhibition and publication “Detours. Approaches to Immanuel Kant in Vienna, in Austria, and in Eastern Europe”.

Key words

Kant. Kant Congress. Nature and Freedom. University of Vienna.

The main Kantian event of the year 2015 was the 12th International Kant Congress “Nature and Freedom” in Vienna organized by the Kant-Gesellschaft and the University of Vienna celebrating its 650th anniversary in 2015. Although the congress was dedicated to the antagonism of nature and freedom, there were twenty-one thematic sections covering wide range of topics (Kant’s Precritical Philosophy; Metaphysics; Epistemology and Logics; Philosophy of Science and Nature; Teleology; Ethics and Moral Philosophy; Philosophy of Law and Justice; Philosophy of Politics, History and Culture; Anthropology and Psychology; Religion and Theology; Aesthetics; Kant and Precritical Rationalism and

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Empiricism; Kant and his Poets; Kant and German Idealism; Kant and the Vienna Circle; Kant and Phenomenology; Kant and Neo-Kantianism; Kant and Eastern Europe; Kant and Traditional Asian Philosophy; Kant in Schools; Kant in the Present).

The section “Kant and Eastern Europe” was introduced as a separate section at such an event for the first time and there were three participants in the section: Tomasz Kupś and Mirosław Żelazny from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland and Sandra Zákutná from University of Prešov in Slovakia. Tomasz Kupś in his paper “Die erste Rezeption der Philosophie von Kant in Polen im Lichte neuer archivalischer Entdeckungen” focused on the current state of research of the earliest phase of reception of Kant’s philosophy in Poland between 1800–1830. Both, the reformation activities of the National Education Commission and the criticism of metaphysics by Jan Śniadecki, were influenced by political attitudes of the era. The National Education Commission almost completely removed philosophy from university education, creating conditions primarily for the development of natural sciences and mathematics. Institutional changes introduced by the Commission remained for the longest time at the Imperial University of Vilnius and the Rector Jan Śniadecki eliminated the German scholars from the university. Kupś pointed out that only thanks to the new discoveries in the archives in Vilnius, Poznan, Krakow and Kiev it is possible to re-interpret this period of Polish philosophy independently. This is being done by a research of Polish, Russian, Lithuanian, and Belarusian scholars who work on a challenge to form a complete picture of the situation of Polish science in the period of the partitioned Poland.

Mirosław Żelazny in the paper “Der Begriff von der Polnischen Freiheit in der Kantischen Rechtsphilosophie” dealt with Kant’s political philosophy and his understanding of the republican constitution in comparison with the democratic one. He described the different understandings of democracy and explained Kant’s description of democracy. Mirosław Żelazny then focused on particular examples from Kant’s lectures in which Kant directly refers to an example of the neighbouring country, which is Poland. The Polish freedom, characterized by rampant selfishness and injustice, was for Kant an excellent example of an excess of freedom that can lead to democracy.

Sandra Zákutná in the paper “Andrej Vandrák’s *Elements of Philosophical Ethics* as a Reflection of Kant’s Philosophy at the Evangelical College in Prešov, Slovakia” focused on developments that took place in the region known today as Slovakia from the end of the

eighteenth to the first half of the nineteenth century and on one of the most influential personalities in the region's history: Andrej Vandrák (1807–1884), whose *A philosophiai ethica elemei (Elements of Philosophical Ethics, 1842)* developed a system that he called 'philosophical ethics'. The paper aimed to show how Kant helped Vandrák to develop his own systematic practical approach as for both, Kant and Vandrák, historical progress is gradual, and people slowly approach the full development of their predispositions. A necessary step in the achievement of this end is civil society. A parallel to Kant's civil society can also be seen in Vandrák's work. He uses the term *vita publica* to describe a state in which every individual is understood as an inevitable active part of the whole. Human ends can be achieved only in public life, and this united power helps every single individual because it is impossible to live outside of society. Vandrák presented his philosophical ethics mainly as a system of values, and although his project was not very innovative, Kant certainly helped him to develop his own systematic anthropological-practical approach based on morality and a view to the future development of humanity.

There was also a plenary lecture thematically corresponding with the section "Kant and Eastern Europe", although it primarily dealt with poetry in connection with Kant. It was Alexei Krouglov's lecture "Kants Lehre von Raum und Zeit und die Möglichkeit einer Freiheit in der russischen Poesie" in which Krouglov introduced the Russian poetry of the beginning of the 20th century (represented by V. S. Solovyov, A. A. Blok, A. Bely, S. D. Kržyžanovskij) that intensively reflected Kant's transcendental aesthetics. Kant's theory of space and time was then interpreted as a "screen" that separates the human existence from transcendence. Kant was perceived as a "wrinkled" old man who preaches the illusion of the world, or was interpreted as a policeman who forbids the way to true freedom of life and art and who is frightened by its own doctrine of space and time.

In connection with geographic and cultural closeness of Vienna to other Central and Eastern European countries, the University of Vienna opened during the congress the exhibition "Detours. Approaches to Immanuel Kant in Vienna, in Austria, and in Eastern Europe" in the University library. The exhibition, devoted particularly to reception of Kant's philosophy in the region during the 18th and 19th century, focused on six main thematic areas (Kant and Censorship, Kant and Karl Leonhard Reinhold, Kant and Eastern Europe, Kant and his Poets, Kant and the Vienna Circle, Kant and Phenomenology) that

were explored in greater detail in a publication¹ of the same title as the exhibition and which was edited by the main organizer of the congress in Vienna, Professor Violetta L. Waibel.

The authors who published in the part of the book called “Kant and Eastern Europe” focused on various regions and themes. Mădălina Diaconu and Marin Diaconu dealt with Romania, Peter Egyed, Béla Mester, László Percz, Márton Tonk, Imre Ungvári-Zrinyi focused on Hungary, Jakub Kloc-Konkolowicz on Poland, Jure Simoniti on Slovenia, Jure Zovko on South-Slavic countries, and Jan Zouhar, Jindřich Karásek and Jörg Krappmann on the Czech Republic. The author of the introductory paper “The Advent of Kant’s Philosophy in Eastern European Countries” is Olga Ring.

The congress as well as the exhibition and the publication organized and published by the University of Vienna has proved that there is an interest in the theme of Kant and Eastern Europe in the Kantian research and it has hopefully opened a space for further research and discussion in the topic of uncovering traces of Immanuel Kant in the region that was, on the one hand, marked by the censorship, but on the other hand reflected intensively.



¹ The book was published in two editions, in German and in English: Waibel, V. L., (Hrsg.), *Umwege. Annäherungen an Immanuel Kant in Wien, in Österreich und in Osteuropa*. Wien, Vienna University Press at V&R unipress 2015; Waibel, V. L., (Hrsg.), *Detours. Approaches to Immanuel Kant in Vienna, in Austria, and in Eastern Europe*. Wien, Vienna University Press at V&R unipress 2015.