

## SCIENTIFIC LIFE

### INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

#### *KANT 300 – CELEBRATING THE 300<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF KANT'S BIRTH*

Institute of Philosophy and Psychology „Constantin Rădulescu-Motru”,  
Romanian Academy, Bucharest

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The international conference *Kant 300 – Celebrating the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Kant's Birth*, organized online in Bucharest by the “Constantin Rădulescu-Motru” Institute of Philosophy and Psychology of the Romanian Academy (Marius Augustin Drăghici, Claudiu Baci, Oana Vasilescu) from April 22 to 26, 2024, was an event of the scale of an actual congress (5 days, 2 sessions daily, 10 keynote speakers) and benefited from the participation of some of the most remarkable contemporary Kantian scholars. The ten prestigious keynote speakers who took part in the congress included Béatrice Longuenesse (New York University), Paul Guyer (Brown University), Michael Potter (University of Cambridge), Eric Watkins (University of California, San Diego), Hernán Pringe (Universidad de Buenos Aires), Dietmar Heidemann (University of Luxembourg), Christian Onof (Birkbeck College, London), Fabrice Pataut (CNRS, Paris), Bryan Hall (Regis University), and Mircea Flonta (Romanian Academy).

Since 2024 marks the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Immanuel Kant's birth, the congress did not adhere to a strictly defined theme, but welcomed a variety of approaches to Kant's work (theoretical, historical-exegetical, disciplinary, epistemological, analytical) as well as relevant research from interdisciplinary, historical-exegetical, and/or theoretical-reconstructive fields (including cognitive sciences, metaphysics, epistemology, general philosophy of science, analytical philosophy, philosophy of mathematics, frame theory, ethics, or moral philosophy). The decision to schedule the congress during this period was made by the coordinator of the Department of Epistemology and Ethics of the Institute of Philosophy and Psychology of the Romanian Academy, Senior Researcher Dr. habil. Marius Augustin Drăghici, the main organizer of the event and a Kantian scholar himself, who intended for it to be explicitly linked to the commemorative date (April 22: Kant's birthday). It is worth noticing that this was not an isolated event but followed a similar congress (5 days, with 2 daily sessions, 11 keynote speakers) organized, also at the initiative of Marius Augustin Drăghici, in 2022 to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Thomas Kuhn's birth.

The event itself deserves a more extensive discussion, but the nature of this type of article compels us to a brief presentation of a few relevant aspects from some of the lectures delivered at this congress dedicated to Immanuel Kant's philosophy.

Taken transcendental idealism to be the doctrine that our thought has a structure the recognition of whose applicability requires us to acknowledge its limitations, the keynote speaker of the first section of the first day of the conference, professor **Michael Potter** (University of Cambridge) asks, in his talk entitled “Transcendental Idealism in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*”, if Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* is transcendently idealist in this sense. He suggested that there are two places in the book where one might look for a structural limitation of this sort, but only one of them is genuinely limitative; and this limitation, he argued, contains the seed of Wittgenstein’s eventual abandonment of the Tractarian project.

In his talk entitled “Kantian a priori Laws of Nature and Quantum Discontinuity”, **Claudiu Baciu** (Institute of Philosophy and Psychology, Romanian Academy, Bucharest) argued that quantum physics has already been seen by its founders as the strongest argument against the idea of a Kantian type of transcendental idealism, i.e., against the idea that the mind gives laws to nature. Attempts to make this classical transcendental view compatible with quantum physics involve reinterpretations of its fundamental concepts. They show the extraordinary fruitfulness of Kant’s philosophy but also fall into the pattern of Fichte’s endeavour to free it from its internal contradictions, i.e., they abandon some of its central assumptions. The talk tried to synthesize some of the sources of the systematic difficulties that impede the original Kantian philosophy from explaining phenomena observed in quantum physics.

In his talk entitled “The *ens rationis* and the Transcendental Problem in Kant’s *Opus Postumum*”, **Davide Puzzolo** (Università degli Studi di Padova) argued that the concept of *ens rationis* is widely used by Kant in some parts of his *Nachlasswerk*. In the first *Critique*, at the end of the Transcendental Analytic, Kant defines the *ens rationis*, or “thought-entity” (Gedankending), as a “concept without object”. The speaker’s aim was to show that, in the so-called *Opus postumum*, there is a significant shift of the notion of *ens rationis*, which lead to a redefinition of the transcendental philosophy itself. Therefore, contrary to a certain interpretative line (Mathieu, Beiser, Hall, Sala), the speaker’s point was that the status of the transcendental philosophy significantly shifts from a mere inspection of the formal conditions of possibility of experience to an activity which discovers the concept that genetically produce the experience. The “thought-entities” are exactly what conveys this genetic function: they must be considered at the same time as ideal and as real. Therefore, they reveal a status which would be not comprehensible only with the speculative tools of the first *Critique*. In this sense, the aim of the talk was not to demonstrate that Kant’s idealism has finally dissipated into a form of absolute idealism in which reality loses any subsistence, but to highlight the new genetic role assumed, in his manuscripts, by the dimension of the a priori.

In her talk entitled “Kant and Freud on Ideals”, the keynote speaker of the second section of the first day of the conference, **Béatrice Longuenesse** (professor *emerita* at New York University, Department of Philosophy) argued that Sigmund Freud’s view of the structural features of our mental life offers striking similarities with Kant’s view. In previous work, she have focused on the similarities between what Kant calls the “unity of apperception” and what Freud calls “the ego” (*das Ich*), on one hand; and, on the other hand, on Kant’s and Freud’s respective views of the categorical nature of moral commands. In her talk, she briefly recalled those earlier results; but her focus was on a further point: the connections and contrasts between Kant’s conception of the ideal of moral perfection, on the one hand; and Freud’s concept of the “ego ideal,” on the other hand. In Kant’s and

Freud's respective views of our mental lives, the two concepts (ideal of moral perfection, ego ideal) play strikingly similar roles, even while their respective ontological grounds are radically opposed. For Freud, our moral ideals are grounded in a generic drive to connection and unity which he calls "libido" or "love." For Kant, moral ideals are grounded in pure practical reason and in our belonging to an intelligible world which escapes natural determinism. B. Longuenesse explored the consequences, for the role of our moral ideals, of this striking ontological reversal, and she argued that Freud's view is closer to Kant's view more than is generally believed, including in their shared pessimism about the power of moral ideals to govern out.

In his talk entitled "Ethics, Aesthetics and Religion: Kant at the Limits of Language", **Ioannis Spiliopoulos** (University of Athens) tried to examine particular notions and expressions from Kant's writings on ethics, aesthetics and religion from the perspective of early Wittgenstein's philosophy (as exemplified in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and his *Lecture on Ethics*). The aim of his talk was not to argue for or against Kant's views but only to point out the fact that their expression in language feels like we are at, what Wittgenstein calls, the limits of language. This comparison was made based on the idea that both the early Wittgenstein and Kant understand the ethical in the same pre-philosophical way (in an absolute and unconditional way) even if they differ enormously in the way they treat it philosophically (e.g., Kant holds that the ethical is essentially rational in character, while nothing analogous holds for the early Wittgenstein).

The keynote speaker of the first section of the second day of the conference, professor **Eric Watkins** (University of California, San Diego) presented, in his talk entitled "Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics", a novel interpretation of one line of Kant's critique of the claims of traditional metaphysics. In its first section, he presented a series of conditions on cognition, according to which cognition requires not only that the object to be cognized must be given in intuition and thought through concepts (the givenness and thought conditions), but also that it be possible to show that the positive properties thought through the relevant concepts are exhibited by the object given in intuition so that an object we are aware of is thereby rendered intelligible (the real possibility, positive content, and subjective sources conditions). In the second section, he showed how Kant argues that even if the most important objects of traditional metaphysics – the soul, God, and freedom – might be thought to satisfy the givenness and thought conditions, they cannot satisfy the other conditions. For it turns out that of the objects of which we can be aware (e.g., by them being given in intuition), we cannot be aware of them as instantiating the positive properties represented by the concepts of the objects of traditional metaphysics, for there is a fundamental mismatch between how we represent objects that are given to us and the content represented in the concepts of the objects of traditional metaphysics.

In her talk entitled "The Challenge of Kant's Metaphysics of Nature", **Rodica Croitoru** (Institute of Philosophy and Psychology, Romanian Academy, Bucharest) argued that natural science has a conditioned integration in the system of transcendental philosophy, to be preceded by a metaphysics of nature. The concept of existence is appropriated by human receptivity and is divided into a corporeal nature, according to the outer senses, and a thinking nature, according to the inner sense. By contrast to matter, which is a concept, able to construct a doctrine, the thinking of the I is not a concept, but only inner perception. If the thinking of the I is not a concept, it cannot construct a doctrine, and thus the metaphysics of the thinking I cannot be more than an appendix of the metaphysics of the body, necessary for the completion of the metaphysics of nature, since

nature is thought together with the man for which it exists. In this way, with an unequal metaphysics of nature, Kant concluded the system of transcendental idealism, intertwined and identified with metaphysics.

The keynote speaker of the second section of the second day of the conference, **Paul Guyer** (professor *emeritus* of Humanities and Philosophy at Brown University) argued, in his talk entitled "Kant's Best Ideas, and Worst", that Kant's central ideas certainly include transcendental idealism, his treatment of freedom, and his conception of regulative ideals. The first two are certainly mixed successes: while Kant's arguments that space and time are the conditions of the possibility of experience are powerful his arguments that these are only the forms of our own intuitions are, to say the least, debatable; and while his normative position that freedom is the "inner worth of the world" is profound, his argument that we are always free to act in accordance with this normative ideal depends upon transcendental idealism and goes down with it. However, his argument that in both theoretical and practical cognition all of our norms below the level of the most general and fundamental principles should be understood as regulative principles seems to me an unmitigated success.

In his talk entitled "On Act-Types and Act-Tokens: Or, the Distinction between Practical Reason and Practical Judgment in Kant", **Nicholas Dunn** (Bard College, New York) argued that it is a truism that ethical theories aim to tell us how to act, and it is also a truism that practical reason is the capacity to determine what we should do; and yet both these formulations are ambiguous concerning the degree of generality or specificity with which they fulfill these functions. Do they only tell us about the *kinds* of actions that we should perform, or do they also issue in concrete actions? If they are only capable of the former, then one might worry about their ability to be action-guiding in the fullest sense. Such concerns have motivated particularist critiques of principle-based ethics like Kant's: since principles are inherently general, they cannot spell out exactly what we are to do in every situation. Defenders of Kantian ethics (O'Neill, Herman) have appealed to judgment: rather than assuming principles themselves provide us with complete answers or that the Categorical Imperative provides us with an algorithmic decision procedure, we should instead recognize the ineliminable function of judgment in moral agency. And yet these commentators espouse what is arguably a quite limited conception of practical judgment – one whose primary tasks are the derivation of duties and the formation of maxims. On these accounts, practical judgment is not concerned with picking out the concrete actions we should perform; its primary object is the act-type, not the act-token. While there is a vast literature on Kant's conception of practical reason, there is comparatively little on his conception of practical judgment. In addition, commentators have yet to take up the question of what the distinction between practical reason and practical judgment amounts to, for Kant. The aim of Dunn's talk was to provide an answer by bringing the type/token distinction to bear on Kant's theory of moral agency. He argued that practical reason is concerned with determining the moral status of act-types, while practical judgment is concerned with picking out some act-token that instantiates it. In this, he wanted to highlight the role of the power of judgment [*Urteilskraft*] as a faculty that assists reason [*Vernunft*] in its efforts to be practical. In its determining use, it subsumes particulars under universals, that is, applies general rules to concrete cases. Yet the speaker suggested that the activity of reflection, for which it is also responsible, is also at work in the practical domain. Thus, an answer to the question, 'Is pure reason capable of being practical?' must acknowledge the essential role of judgment in the determination of the will. Indeed, reason

cannot be practical without the help of judgment. In section 1, Dunn motivated the problem of the distinction between practical reason and practical judgment in Kant by showing how commentators tend to conflate these two notions, and in section 2, he discussed Kant's conception of the faculties of judgment and reason in general, as well as their practical uses. Practical reason is the capacity to derive an action from an abstract moral principle, while practical judgment is the capacity to determine whether an action falls under such a principle. The ambiguity in the notions of an 'act' and an 'action,' which was discussed in section 3, may be clarified by appealing to the distinction between an act-type and an act-token: practical reason is concerned with act-types, while practical judgment is concerned with act-tokens. Commentators focus almost exclusively on the moment of moral agency in which we determine the moral status of an act-type, neglecting the subsequent moment in which we pick out an act-token that instantiates it. In section 4, Dunn considered the interplay of practical reason and practical judgment from two different angles: first, the practical syllogism, and second, reflecting judgment. The former provides us with a 'top-down' model in which actions are justified from principles, and on the latter, we get a 'bottom up' approach – one that accords better with the phenomenology of moral agency. Rather than deducing an action (act-type) from the Categorical Imperative, we reflect on an action (act-token) via its maxim. The speaker concluded, in section 5, by making explicit the essential role that judgment plays in the overall process of practical reasoning.

In his talk entitled "The Critical Project's Theoretical (Meta-)Regulative Principle", the keynote speaker of the first section of the third day of the conference, **Christian Onof** (Birkbeck College, University of London) maintains that Kant's assumption that we are affected by things-in-themselves, that is flagged by Jacobi and, arguably, spelled out at the very outset in the Transcendental Aesthetic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is problematic on two counts at least: first, setting aside the worry arising from knowledge claims made about things-in-themselves, this assumption is apparently a dogmatic claim for which no support has been adduced; second, as has been pointed out by many commentators, it potentially creates a problem of double affection. Indeed, it affirms that our sensations are the result of affection by things-in-themselves. But, it is also the case that, once the framework of Transcendental Idealism is set up – in particular once the Principles of the Pure Understanding have been established – sensations, qua natural events, must have an empirical cause. This leads the famous problem of Double Affection: since our sensations are also caused by empirical objects, they are apparently overdetermined with both transcendental and empirical affection accounting for their occurrence. While there are proposals for dealing with this problem (e.g. Allison, Stang), Onof argued that these worries are best assuaged by identifying a covert regulative principle enjoining us to endorse a claim of transcendental affection that dispels any concern that there is a double affection. To identify and justify such a principle requires looking at the Resolution of the Third Antinomy.

In his talk entitled "Unlocking Kant's First *Critique*: A New Interpretation Regarding the Structure and Content of the Deduction of the Categories", **Marius Augustin Drăghici** (Institute of Philosophy and Psychology, Romanian Academy, Bucharest) argues that the structure of the Transcendental Deduction in the B edition of the first *Critique* reflects the overall framework of B *Critique* precisely because it is developed within the context described by the structure itself of the „transcendental experiment of pure reason" (B Preface). The use of both methods (*synthetic* and *analytic*), which are present in Kant's earlier works but are *reinterpreted* in a transcendental manner in the context of this

„experiment” (with B edition), contributes to validate the argumentation within the *Critique* overall. This argumentation is presented cohesively, based on the initial hypothesis developed through these two approaches: we refer to phenomena and not to things-in-themselves precisely because the intellect determines sensibility regarding the transcendental content in relation to the object.

The keynote speaker of the second section of the third day of the conference, **Dietmar Heidemann** (Institute of Philosophy, University of Luxembourg), in his talk entitled “Material Dependence and Kant’s Refutation of Idealism”, argued that in the *Critique of pure Reason* Kant develops two anti-sceptical strategies. In the fourth paralogism (CPR A) he believes to be able to refute the sceptic by demonstrating that external perception is immediate (a rather weak strategy). In the Refutation of Idealism (CPR B) Kant promotes material dependence of inner on outer sense. The speaker showed that Kant’s argument for material dependence has been widely overlooked, although it is the strongest argument against external world scepticism he develops, since it forestalls mental content externalism while preserving transcendental idealism and empirical realism.

In his talk entitled “Kant, Truth, and Epistemic Necessity”, the keynote speaker of the first section of the fourth day of the conference, **Fabrice Pataut** (CNRS, Paris), argued that if what we think and talk about were constituted independently of its accessibility to us, two questions might turn out to be unanswerable: How could we know anything about it?; How could we form a bona fide conception of it, or even of its possibility? The speaker considered two answers to the twin questions about knowledge and concept formation, by Kant and Dummett respectively, and argued that in spite of appearances, transcendental idealism and semantic antirealism share common concerns about knowledge, content and truth. Against both Kant and Dummett, Pataut proposed an argument from contingency in favour of the constitutive independence of the subject-matter of thought and talk, and of the independence of truth from epistemic constraints.

**Constantin Stoenescu** (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest) argued, in his talk entitled “Kantian Reconstructions in the New Philosophy of Science: Kuhn’s Case”, that although the first critical reaction from a Kantian standpoint to the epistemological relativism proposed by Kuhn in *SSR* was to contrast it with a normative epistemology through the distinction of Popperian origins between the logic of research and the psychology of discovery, later Kuhn’s project received a Kantian interpretation. Thus, Hoyningen-Huene suggested that Kuhn’s idea that empirical observation and tests require the presupposition of a paradigm is a Kantian assumption. Friedman, starting also from the history of science, argued for an anti-Kuhnian conclusion and support the moderate normative claim, previously anticipated by Reichenbach and Carnap, that the development of modern physics required theoretical principles that have a relativized a priori status at the level of its mathematical and mechanical parts. In fact, Kuhn himself tried to specify his own philosophical position in relation to Kant and accepted that, indeed, the assumptions of a paradigm are a priori in the Kantian sense, but that they can be different from one paradigm to another.

In his talk entitled “Kant on Circularity and the Thing-in-itself as Negative *Noumenon*”, **Yadi Oren** (University of Potsdam) argued that Kant’s notion of appearance is one of the most discussed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant famously distinguishes between the appearance and the thing-in-itself and restricts our cognition to the realm of phenomena, and he further argues that this restriction does not eliminate the role of the thing-in-itself, but creates a necessary connection between phenomena and things-in-themselves. In the A edition of the *Critique*, Kant further argues that without the thing-in-

itself, appearance would point to appearance thus leading to a “constant circle”. To avoid circularity, one must recognize the thing-in-itself to which appearance refers. This argument, which the speaker called the Circular Argument, has received various interpretations in contemporary scholarship. The talk considers three current interpretations of the Circular Argument, each of which represents a different approach to understanding the appearance-thing relationship: Oberst, who interprets the circular argument according to the *causal interpretation* (in his view, the argument addresses the inability of the appearance to explain its own *production* or *creation*); Jauernig, who interprets the argument according to the *two-world* or *two-object interpretation* (for him, the circularity indicates that appearance cannot explain its own “matter”, and thus needs a mind-independent thing, which “ontologically” precedes the appearance); Allison, who follows his *two-aspect interpretation*, and understands the circular argument as a demonstration that there is a thing-in-itself that is beyond space and time, and therefore that space and time are ideal and not real. By reevaluating the text, Oren showed that none of the above readings provides a sufficiently clear explanation of the text. All three interpretations overlook that the circularity is resolved by the negative *noumenon*. By carefully distinguishing between the negative and positive *noumenon* in the text, the speaker showed that the negative *noumenon* has the role of *unifying* rather than *causing* the appearance, and thus rejected Oberst’s causal interpretation. Furthermore, in contrast to Allison’s interpretation, he showed that Kant denies an understanding of the thing-in-itself even as epistemologically separable from the appearance. To support his reading, Oren elaborated on the historical context against which Kant had developed the Circular Argument: by recognizing the unifying function of the *noumenon* and its inseparability from appearance, Kant intended to engage and critique both the empiricist and rationalist traditions. On the one hand, the necessity of the *noumenon*, as a purely intellectual element, undermines the empiricist view that reduces experience to sensibility; on the other hand, the negative sense of this *noumenon* denies any independence of the intellectual element, and thus rejects the rationalist view that sees the unifying element as a positively cognizable entity that can be perceived without sensibility (monad).

In his talk entitled “Extensive and Intensive Magnitudes in Hermann Cohen’s Interpretation of Kant’s Anticipations of Perception”, the keynote speaker of the second section of the fourth day of the conference, **Hernán Pringe** (CONICET-UBA, Universidad Diego Portales) argued that the goal of his talk was to analyze the connections between Cohen’s approach to differential calculus and his doctrine of pure thinking. Pringe claimed that Cohen’s logic of origin is firmly based on his interpretation of the Kantian principle of the anticipations of perception, where Cohen investigates the relations between the concepts of infinitesimal, extensive magnitude, intensive magnitude, and reality (Realität).

**Timothy Franz** (Universidad Pontificia Católica de Chile), in his talk entitled “A Hypothesis about Kant and the Idea of Logical Consequence”, argued that we must understand the *Critique* as, at heart, an entirely novel justification of the laws of formal logic and of logical necessity, for Kant does not, like the Leibnizians, try to *derive* rules of thinking from ontological laws, but instead *transcendentally reflects* on the logical principles of *how we try to prove anything at all*. This is why he lists singular, infinite, categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive judgments, along with their modality, in the Metaphysical Deduction: these are the essential elements of how we actively prove thoughts to be true or false. Moreover, this helps us understand Kant’s need for both the Transcendental Analytic and the Transcendental Dialectic: the former argues that we must be able to prove our thoughts true or false and derives transcendentally ideal principles of

nature from that argument; the latter then proves that only cognition inherent to experience of nature is formally valid. Thus, by “bounding pure reason”, Kant demonstrates that we can justify logical necessity only for objectively valid cognition. This ‘bounding’ is his novel justification of the laws of logic and the science of formal logic based on them, and it means that we *autonomously* constitute the logical structure of science qua science. And this, Franz argued, is the actual significance of the *Critique*.

**Ageel Al-Fadli** (University of Ottawa) maintained, in his talk entitled „Kant’s Argument in the Third Analogy”, that in the Third Analogy of Experience of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant argues that the simultaneous coexistence of substances in space requires mutual interaction. The speaker argued that the objective of Third Analogy is to demonstrate that reciprocity between different substances (or systems) involves a conservation of energy between substances in space, i.e., it involves the instantaneous configuration of different systems in space. It shows that the instantaneous communication between these systems in different spatial points underlies the fragmentation of single temporal coordinate or a universal “now” across space. This communication demands a “reversal” or “doubling” of spaces in the construction of a single time-coordinate. In order to clarify this point, Al-Fadli relied on Kant’s early work *An Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes*, where Kant discusses the conservation of relative quantities, including physical forces, because it helps us understand how the relativization of physical forces is required for the conservation of forces in space: it abandons the absolute concept of force, where a substance is thought to possess an internal power of self-motion without interacting with other substances in space. And this is useful, in Al-Fadli’s view, for understanding Kant’s objective in the Third Analogy, where time as a magnitude is conserved across space through mutual interaction.

In his talk entitled “The Development of Kant’s Concept of Relative Spontaneity”, **Alin Vârciu** (University of Western Ontario) argued that examining Kant’s lectures on metaphysics can help understanding why in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant thinks that compatibilism cannot deliver a concept of transcendental freedom. The key element that the lectures can shed light on is how Kant thinks that under compatibilism certain mental states (but not all) are part of a causal chain. In his  $L_1$  metaphysics and Mrongovius metaphysics lectures Kant discusses at length the issue of external conditions that ground our maxims and our spontaneity, thus arriving at a distinction between a power of free choice (Willkür) that is intellectual and free only in some regard, and a power of free choice that is intellectual and free without qualification. The former is externally conditioned despite being an act of maxim-formation, and thus can explain why Kant in the second *Critique* believes that under compatibilism our actions are part of an external causal chain.

In his talk entitled “The Kantian Concept of Duty”, the first keynote speaker of the fifth day of the conference, **Mircea Flonta** (professor emeritus at the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Philosophy, member of the Romanian Academy), proposed a clarification regarding the place of the concept of duty in Kant’s moral philosophy, in relation to the concepts of reason, autonomy, and freedom. The autonomy of human beings is characterized by the supremacy of reason, both in decision and action. The speaker argued that freedom and duty are for Kant two complementary and inseparable aspects of affirming autonomy, of the supremacy of reason. In conclusion, Flonta made some considerations regarding the relevance of this concept of duty today.

(Andra Luisa Preda)