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in *Sententiae* (2020–2024)

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Kant's Anniversary in Light of Recent publications in *Sententiae* (2020–2024)

Reviewed by Ivan Ivashchenko



This year, the global philosophical community is celebrating the 300th anniversary of the birth of the eminent German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who, in his own words, brought about a change in the way of thinking (Umänderung der Denkart, KrV B XVI),¹ completing the processes in modern philosophy that were initiated by Descartes' discovery of the *ego cogito* as a source of epistemic certainty. Kant's philosophical revolution can be characterized as a normative turn in both theoretical and practical philosophy, as he decisively shifted the focus from the question of being – i. e., the assumption of the epistemic independence of the external world, which had dominated the previous tradition – to the question of the validity of our epistemic relationship to the world. In other words, he was one of the first to develop a theory that justifies the epistemic dependence of external reality on the constitution of the cognizer and her faculties.

In his theory of synthetic judgments *a priori*, Kant offered an original solution to the classical philosophical problem of the connection between the universal (thinking) and the particular (intuition), demonstrating that the objective validity of this connection is determined not by sensory experience but by self-relation (self-consciousness), which he considers a normative principle rather than merely an empirical phenomenon of awareness (as the British empiricists believed it to be). Although Kant emphasized the role of self-consciousness in the structure of synthetic judgments *a priori* – which, admittedly, does not allow us to classify his philosophy as a philosophy of consciousness – this theoretical step was crucial for the emergence of German idealism.

In practical philosophy, Kant further developed his theory of synthetic judgments *a priori* – here, imperatives – by justifying the autonomy of the will and pure practical reason and showing how this autonomy conditions the moral law (categorical imperative). In this way, Kant offered one of the most compelling alternatives to Christian ethics.

Thus, both Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy outlined the possibility of a world without transcendence for the first time in the history of Western philosophy, which makes his figure revolutionary and his intellectual legacy incredibly influential.

Of course, Kant's influence is also tangible in Ukraine, as confirmed by the attention given to his ideas in our academic journals. I will illustrate this thesis by

1 See Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Reimer, & De Gruyter, 1900-).

reviewing publications on Kant's philosophy in the historical-philosophical journal *Sententiae* over the past five years. The main focus will be on articles and book reviews.

Among the book reviews, it's worth mentioning the reviews of Allison Laywine's book on Kant's transcendental deduction², Viktor Kozlovskiy's monograph on Kant's anthropology,³ Jeffrey Church's book on Kant and liberalism,⁴ and Jan Kerkmann's book on Berkeley's influence on Kant and Schopenhauer.⁵

Four articles published over the past five years examine various aspects of Kant's aesthetics, specifically his theory of genius⁶ (in Ukrainian), Hume's influence on Kant in the context of the critique of the principle of sufficient reason⁷ (in Ukrainian), the role of "I think" in the representation of the empirical self⁸ (in English), and the difference in the interpretation of humanism by Kant and Heidegger⁹ (Ukrainian translation from German).

I will start with the article on Kant's theory of genius,¹⁰ in which the author attempts to reconstruct Kant's concept of genius and thoroughly summarizes the research literature that seeks to identify who influenced Kant in this regard. In the first part,¹¹ the author presents his reconstruction of Kant's concept of genius in §§ 46–50 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, treating this theory as a separate (partial) theory outside the context of Kant's theory of judgments of taste. The entire reconstruction is a paraphrase of Kant's argument without any original interpretation, where between numerous quotes from Kant's text, the author adds conjunctions, prepositions, and adverbs, attempting to "objectively" reproduce Kant's argument. In the second part of

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- 2 Juriy Fedorchenko, "Kant and Metaphysics. Laywine, A. (2020). Kant's Transcendental Deduction. A Cosmology of Experience. Oxford: Oxford UP," *Sententiae* 40, no. 3 (2021): 124–8, <https://doi.org/10.31649/sent40.03.124>.
 - 3 Vlada Davidenko, "Kant: morality, anthropology, conscience. Kozlovskiy, V. (2023). Kantian Anthropology. Sources. Constellations. Models. Kyiv: Duh i Litera," *Sententiae* 42, no. 2 (2023): 111–18, <https://doi.org/10.31649/sent42.02.111>.
 - 4 Elvira Chukhrai, "The life's meaning crisis and the history of philosophy. Church, J. (2022). Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life. Oxford: Oxford UP," *Sententiae* 43, no. 1 (2024): 158–69, <https://doi.org/10.31649/sent43.01.158>.
 - 5 Ivan Ivashchenko, "Another Idealism: Berkeley, Kant and Schopenhauer. Kerkmann, J. (2024). Unendliches Bewusstsein. Berkeleys Idealismus und dessen kritische Weiterentwicklung bei Kant und Schopenhauer. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter," *Sententiae* 43, no. 1 (2024): 176–80, <https://doi.org/10.31649/sent43.01.176>.
 - 6 Vitali Terletsky, "Kant's Theory of Genius: Some Questions of Sources Reconstruction," *Sententiae* 39, no. 1 (2020): 29–53, <https://doi.org/10.31649/sent39.01.029>.
 - 7 Victor Chorny, "Kant and the 'awakening' from the Rationalist Principle of Sufficient Reason," *Sententiae* 39, no. 2 (2020): 104–23, <https://doi.org/10.31649/sent39.02.104>.
 - 8 Patricia Kitcher, "What Is Necessary and What Is Contingent in Kant's Empirical Self?," *Sententiae* 43, no. 1 (2024): 8–17, <https://doi.org/10.31649/sent43.01.008>.
 - 9 Heiner Klemme, "Humanity and Self-Preservation. Kant or Heidegger?," *Sententiae* 43, no. 1 (2024): 18–28, <https://doi.org/10.31649/sent43.01.018>.
 - 10 Terletsky, "Kant's Theory of Genius."
 - 11 *Ibid.*, 30–7.

the article,¹² the author provides a detailed summary of a whole body of research literature on Kant's theory of genius, allowing the reader to follow the main debates among scholars. However, he does not offer his own interpretation of this concept without even intending to contribute to the current debate. Nevertheless, this article serves as a good summary of the current discussion on Kant's theory of genius. It could furnish a solid basis for anyone who dares to engage with it, providing her own original interpretation.

The next article¹³ examines Hume's influence on Kant's rejection of the principle of sufficient reason as a universal metaphysical principle of reason. Its starting point is an alternative reading of the notorious "awakening from dogmatic slumber," offered by Abraham Anderson in his recent book on the topic,¹⁴ advocating for a so-called "early" awakening regarding the validity of speculative claims about the supersensible as opposed to characteristically modern epistemic skepticism regarding the claims of natural science (more commonly associated both with Hume and with Kant's problem of the synthetic *a priori*). The author attempts to weigh this lucratively simplistic and systematically elegant hypothesis against numerous autobiographical passages from published and unpublished work, only to discover numerous minor inconsistencies and loose ends crowding the PSR reading, which he nonetheless fails to generalize or present in a systematic fashion. Overall, it can be viewed as an ambitious, albeit somewhat convoluted, attempt at contributing to the recent revival of the PSR debates both in historical-philosophical studies and contemporary literature on metaphysics. It offers a sufficiently detailed survey of textual evidence regarding the origins of the Critical project and Kant's self-avowed indebtedness to his predecessors, as well as an adequate overview of the recent secondary literature on the topic without much original input or unconventional readings. The article provides skeptical censorship in the Kantian sense of the word by disproving individual claims of the PSR hypothesis in a somewhat piecemeal fashion rather than clearly identifying its principal internal incoherence or (as one would hope) ameliorating it or suggesting an equally or more compelling alternative in view of the textual evidence.

The article exploring and juxtaposing Kant's and Heidegger's views of humanity and humanism, as well as the extent and ways we are able to partake in them as rational beings and/or rational animals,¹⁵ is of interest to us here only insofar as it sketches a rough general outline of Kant's conceptions of humanity, personhood, and the interest of human reason in pursuing its ultimate end.

Its two most contentious claims would be the idea that Kant abolished natural teleology and banished all final causes from the scientific study of nature and the controversial presentation of pure practical reason and the moral law as a faculty of

12 Ibid., 37–50.

13 Chorny, "Kant and the 'awakening'."

14 Abraham Anderson, *Kant, Hume and the Interruption of Dogmatic Slumber* (Oxford Academic, 2020).

15 See Klemme, "Humanity and Self-Preservation. Kant or Heidegger?"

ensorship (imposing limitations on what qualifies as an acceptable end to pursue) rather than offering a constitutive principle *a priori* of what a worthy end ought to be. The first claim (as much as the author attempts to qualify it) is either a trivial consequence of transcendental idealism (where nature itself, alongside any and all mechanistic and teleological modes of explanation, reflects the subject's form of cognition rather than some fundamental feature of things in themselves) or blatantly incorrect.

It is quite obvious that the central focus of the article and the ultimate purpose of its mosaic patchwork account of Kant's concepts of reason and humanity is precisely the presentation of a characteristically Modern rationalism "with a human face" as opposed to Heidegger's anti-Enlightenment technocratic terror of instrumentalist reasoning. However, the author's strangely one-sided negative account of pure practical reason as the taskmaster and disciplinarian of humanity and its ends defeats its own purpose and creates the divide between reason and humanity, forgetting that reason, for Kant, is always already distinctly human.

One of the highlights of the recent Kant anniversary issue was Patricia Kitcher's⁶ input into the debate on Kant's concept of the empirical self as an object of study in empirical psychology and the conceptual framework *a priori* required for thinking and/or cognizing it. The author begins by presenting the three rival interpretations of the concept of the empirical self and the category of substance while attempting to steer clear from the two radically opposed mainstream positions on the applicability of the concept of substance to thinking subjects as they appear to themselves in inner sense, she suggests that the only conceptual scaffolding required.

What she fails to address is precisely the notion of absolute unconditional unity that gives rise to transcendental illusion if applied to an object of possible experience. What transcendental unity gives rise to is the totality of all possible experience and the persisting identity of the thinking subject in all time – neither of which successfully picks out its corresponding object within the experience. In fact, it is first and foremost unclear whether Kant's concept of "empirical apperception" can be identified with the self as an object of psychology. In other words, the sum total of all the representations of the inner sense could be considered an "object" of empirical psychology, but only in the same sense in which "nature" is the object of natural science.

It is not obvious that the empirical self (soul) as the putative object of empirical psychology is nothing over and above the empirical unity of apperception, and explaining the latter is the only motivation behind thinking of it as a substance. After all, we think of the soul as itself determined and, most importantly, persisting in time (throughout life) and standing in temporal relations with objects of outer sense, which requires the category of substance. Are we mistaken in representing ourselves as such (as in it being itself the product of transcendental illusion), or is its persistence derivative and accounted for by, say, the corresponding representation of ourselves in the outer sense? Overall, it is not clear what the author understands the empirical

16 See Kitcher, "What Is Necessary."

concept of the self to be – even if “I think” gives us the object of the inner sense, it is unclear what is understood thereby.

The relation between transcendental and empirical unity of apperception must be more complex than that between a regular empirical concept and its *a priori* counterpart, for the formal logical unity of “I think” is the unity of the subject’s activity and determines the manifold of intuition only by means of (schematized) categories. The thesis, thus, appears trivial, and the argument seemingly proves what Kant himself explicitly states – the empirical unity is derived from the transcendental unity – but fails to flesh out the relation between “I” as I think myself and I that presents itself in inner sense as appearance determined in time – something Kant was notoriously vague about.

Overall, as showcased by these few examples, the current state of Kant scholarship in Ukraine betrays a certain lack of originality, academic rigorousness, and awareness of contemporary interpretative debates. With few exceptions, it remains isolated from the mainstream discussion. It hesitates to align itself with any side of the debate and remains a passive, non-committed, and “impartial” observer (which often betrays implicit unquestioned interpretative commitments inherited from the Soviet scholarly tradition). In other words, Kant scholarship in Ukraine does not yet appear to have escaped its historical minority and still too heavily resembles heavy-handed biblical commentary rather than critical engagement with the material.

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