

REVIEW

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For

participation in the NBU competition for the academic position of professor
in the professional field 2.3 Philosophy
with candidate Assoc. Prof. Boyan Krasimirov Manchev, Doctor of Science

Only one candidate - Boyan Krasimirov Manchev - took part in the competition of New Bulgarian University for a professor in the professional field 2.3 Philosophy. He is already habilitated (associate professor) in the field 2.3 Philosophy and holds two scientific degrees - PhD in 2.3 Philosophy and Doctor of Science in 8.1. Theory of Arts. In addition to the publications with which he participated in the competition for associate professor, Manchev has submitted 11 monographs, 3 co-authored monographs and 3 books of fiction and essays. He has also contributed to 5 collections. The submitted articles and papers are as follows: 36 in scientific journals refereed and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information; 60 in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes; 3 chapters of collective monographs. Cumulatively, this makes a respectable 99 authored articles, most of them in foreign languages (English, Japanese, French, Italian, etc.). There are also 74 proved citations of his works. As his attestation report shows, Manchev meets and in most cases repeatedly exceeds all legal and internal university criteria for the position of professor - academic work, public and administrative activity, development of courses and programs, supervision of doctoral students and graduates, etc. I will not repeat all the scientific metrics, but only emphasize that we are talking about a person with an outstanding academic biography, respectable qualitatively and quantitatively with the presented scientific output and with the demonstrated human and professional qualities and integrity. Manchev is certainly among the most outstanding - including with an impressive international career and renown - Bulgarian philosophers. He developed an original and innovative original philosophical project, with many open valences to other fields (both science and art) and already with many followers and supporters. I have known Manchev for more than 15 years - brought together by our common scientific interests - and since then I have had the pleasure of collaborating with him on numerous scientific and public initiatives.

On the competition Assoc. Prof. Manchev presented his new habilitation thesis "World and Freedom. Transcendental Philosophy and Modal Ontology". Its total volume is 719 printed pages. The work includes an Preface, an Introduction, two Parts, each with three chapters, divided neatly

into subchapters and paragraphs, a Conclusion, two Appendices (independent studies), a Name and Subject Index and a Bibliography. The Bibliography itself is respectable - 30 printed pages of works in Bulgarian, English, German and French. They are all correctly cited in the text of the book.

The candidate exceeds all formal and informal competition requirements many times over. I have no conflict of interest with him.

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Among Manchev's impressive oeuvre, I will here consider only the habilitation thesis "World and Freedom. Transcendental Philosophy and Modal Ontology". It is a large-scale reconstruction of Kant's transcendental philosophy (in the context of the critical tradition more generally) - a reconstruction that develops and transforms Kant's project into an original project of modal ontology in a very careful and original way.

First, a few words about method. Boyan Manchev uses three terms - metacritique, supercritique and fiction. Metacritique is the secondary critical reconstruction of an author or of a problem. It is a hermeneutic procedure that explores the potentials available in the text, the objectified possibilities. Slowly-slowly, however, this reconstructive work passes into deconstructive work by showing what other possibilities are not evident, not captured (by the author under consideration), and hence what more can be done. Here we already have supercritique. But Manchev does not stop here: the over-amplification and problematization of the ideas of the author or the text being worked with, slowly-slowly passes into a thetical phase, which is precisely his - Manchev's - fiction. Fantastic is the moment, fantastic is the place where he, so to speak, with an original flourish solves the problems. In essence, these superimposed hermeneutic procedures are reminiscent of Kolyo Koev's "thinking through", and here they are further radicalized in the last phase: a hermeneutic radicalized in the moment of decision, of thetic. Manchev's methodological terms are best elucidated in the Introduction (pp. 71ff.) and in "Beyond Metacriticism: supercriticism. A Methodological Conclusion" (pp. 564ff.), though as a methodological apparatus they operate throughout the work.

Manchev also approaches Kant with this methodological prism. On the one hand, "World and Freedom. Transcendental Philosophy and Modal Ontology" is an extremely careful reconstruction of Kant's work, practically his entire corpus. This reconstruction lays bare problems that are caught, absolutely textually, in detail, in Kant's corpus itself. It exposes the problems, amplifies them, and begins to give them unexpected solutions - to the point that the reader sometimes wonders whether Manchev is criticizing Kant or developing his own intention, and how exactly this transcendence of what Kant has done comes about.

I would say that there are two lines of working with the concepts that are superimposed in the book. On the one hand, Kant is read entirely immanently, textually carefully, his own conceptual threads are pulled. On the other hand, however, Kant is read through Nietzsche and through the late Nietzschean tradition: through Deleuze and the tradition of radicalized criticism of the last 150 years. In a sense, Kant's epistemological stakes are skimmed and transcended to open up the problematic of freedom: Kant's epistemology is transformed into a modal ontology. This is how I would define the book's own task: to liberate Kant from his self-imposed epistemological rigidity so that he can begin to work in the ontological field as a "Nietzschean" man.

This task, however, is by no means accomplished arbitrarily. I will try to demonstrate this briefly, in a risky attempt to look at Manchev's work on Kant from above - from a bird's eye view:

Kant's own method of the First Critique - the so-called regressive synthesis - is a method of searching for what the conditions of possibility are of each conditioned, of each phenomenon. Following his method, Kant is like peeling an onion, saying: we can't think this without this, this without this, this without this, etc... Furthermore, there must be one last, final, unconditional condition at the end, which must close the whole analysis and give us the map of what we know or know about the world. It is well known: since the regressive synthesis always goes in three directions - it seeks the conditions of diversity, of unity and of relatedness in experience - it accordingly postulates three regulative ideas which are the final guarantors of diversity, unity and relatedness. These are things-in-themselves - the soul (apperception) and - God.

Manchev follows this regressive synthesis very closely, step by step, only slowly-slightly overturning what Kant tries to epistemologically hold as regulative principles. He overturns them into constitutive principles, and changes them, as I will try to show. He changes them, and not arbitrarily. I would call what he does productive synthesis. But not "progressive" because progressive synthesis is Kant's term and is a didactic term - how once you have grasped the conditions of possibility of experience you can teach them, show them to others. A *productive synthesis*, on the contrary, is one that reconstructs a construction from the moment of its production - from its constitutive moment. Indeed, Manchev assumes that even the most rigorously epistemologically constructed world of the Newton-Galileo type, such as Kant attempts to construct, even it is ultimately freely produced. That is, even the strictest deterministic framework of science is produced due to forces that are indeterministic. Said otherwise, any framework of necessity is produced thanks to freedom, which will also turn out to be the final condition of our experience - its constitutive moment.

I have repeatedly criticized Kant's transcendentalism precisely because of its epistemological method, which makes a strange leap. For what is the way in which possibility is analytically derived? You look at a phenomenon and see -

it may be this way, it may be otherwise, but there are certain things without which it cannot be known. What is it without which that phenomenon cannot be known? And Kant says that no phenomenon can be known without space and time, without the categories of unity, multiplicity, totality, etc. It cannot be known without them, and therefore it is necessary to place every phenomenon in space and time, to synthesize it under the categories of unity, multiplicity, etc. Kant thinks of "cannot not" and "it is necessary to" as synonyms, as tautologies, but, as I will show, there is a leap from one to the other, and it is this leap that Boyan Manchev seems to have captured.

What does Manchev do? He seems to be saying (and here I will freely make an supercritical and fantastic move in his style), "The Kantian 'cannot be otherwise' does not in fact automatically equal 'necessity'"; this 'cannot be otherwise' is rather equal to 'ought not to be' in the sense of 'I do not wish it to be otherwise. This 'cannot be otherwise' is removed, so to speak, from Kant's quasi-objectivist interpretation, and passes into the mode of free will, of free demand, desire. Manchev changes the stakes of this 'cannot be' - he himself uses the term 'point visé' - giving it a slant, a direction. And hence what is necessary is no longer a flat and total necessity, but suddenly turns out to be a projection, a product of freedom. For necessity, it seems, is nothing more than a focus of desire.

This leap or transition is conditioned by the way Boyan Manchev develops his father's work. Krassimir Manchev's *Ideogenesis* is a major linguistic paradigm based on a study of the work of the French verb (see pp. 567-569, as well as Appendix 2). Krassimir Manchev shows that there is a logic to the unfolding of the verb and its forms: there is a genesis through semantic complexification of modal verbs. The genesis of modals starts from "be", and after "be" the others follow - first is "can", second is "want", third is "must"; and each of them includes and builds semantically on the previous ones. Thus "want" includes and builds on "can," and "must" includes and builds on "want" - must turns out to be a certain kind of maximization of desire, its semantic amplification or, to put it metaphorically, its rise in degree. In fact, in Krassimir Manchev's work "want" is something like a transmitter or differential that switches from "can" to "must". Boyan Manchev makes the same modal transformation in relation to Kant: he transforms "possibility" and "impossibility" by investing them with "desire", "freedom". And thus the status of necessity is changed: necessity is a "willed possibility," a "possibility inclined in the direction of its necessary happening."

Let me demonstrate it through Kant! At first glance, it seems strictly necessary, since the regressive synthesis goes in three directions (reconstructing the conditions of multiplicity, unity and relatedness of experience), to eventually admit also three regulative principles - the three ideas of reason: the "things-in-itself," the "soul" and "God. This strict necessity quickly breaks down, however, if one asks, for example, "Why exactly should 'God' be the regulative principle of relatedness?" "Why

shouldn't the principle of relatedness be 'the Mother Goddess,' 'the Tree of Life,' 'dark matter,' or 'dark energy,' or anything else you can think of?" For all the self-imposed formalism of Kant's system, we see through such questions that a particular content, an specific image, has crept into it - in this case the image of "God" - which content is in fact logically arbitrary. Once we realize that Kant's system is not completely formalistic and that various contents are inscribed in it, then it ceases to be strictly necessary and turns out to be logically arbitrary. Such a formal-logical conclusion however would be purely and simply destructive. Boyan Manchev shows that perhaps the slant of Kant's thinking, perhaps the desire, perhaps the point visé of Kant was such that he saw "God" as a principle of relatedness. But there could have been in another situation another inclination, another desire, another point visé. Different possible worlds would arise in different situations: on another slant of existence, a Manchev's clinamen, on another course of existence, to use my term, or, most simply, on another turn of existence would yield another world. So Kant's "God" is also not just a logically arbitrary assumption, but is such a confluence of existence in which this possibility is born, it tilts according to desire to become instantaneously a necessity. But necessity only there, in that place, in that case: a freely appeared necessity. Necessity with a changed status!

Boyan Manchev and I have been like-minded for many years. In 2006, in my "Freedom and Recognition", I wrote that the status of necessity must change, that necessity is always freely affirmed. But Boyan makes a move that further amplifies this thesis. If for me it sounded like this: every frame, every matrix that frames our experience must be freely affirmed and reaffirmed in order to function, for Manchev freedom through this interpretation gains greater power. It is as if it begins to bend the matrix, the framework of experience, and pass into autopoiesis; hence his project of philosophical fiction. Thus, from Kant's motif - 'it is impossible not to' - we slowly arrive at something I would express as "there are no impossible things". There are no impossible things in philosophical fiction. For the "it is not possible not to" argument is rephrased through the "want to," through the slanting (clinamen) of possibility according to desire, according to direction, according to pressure. When possibility is tilted in a certain direction, it begins to weigh that way, and so slowly-slowly-it begins to become quasi-necessary. Hence philosophical fiction: for when there are no impossible things, the question is what is possible to happen - or even more simply: what will happen? - is an entirely open question. But even though the world is open, not everything is equally possible: it is not a matter of formal relativity. For what will happen depends on when and where freedom will be invested - what slant of the possible and therefore what necessity will be given to the world.

In fact, Manchev carries out a paradigmatic turn in the understanding of the classical modal categories - he inverts them. This turn - revolution - is

second only to Hume's and Kant's "Copernican turn". Manchev carries out a revolution of revolution - he turns Kant's turn.

I believe that Kant's Copernican turn is not so much about changing the point of view and privileging the knowing subject, as is the classical understanding. Much more important and radically revolutionary is the Kantian reworking of the modal categories begun by Hume. Kant, leaning closely on David Hume and his critique of causality, largely broke with all essentialist metaphysics up to that point and set the paradigm for modern mathematical science: he set the framework for probabilistic thinking and computation. This is the core of the transcendental turn.

How does this first turn happen? Kant steps on Hume's critique of causality. Let us start there:

Cause has been a fundamental concept since Aristotle, a concept that implies that from one existent necessarily follows another existent: A implies B. Moreover, Aristotle, and especially the tradition after him, thinks the appearance of an existent - its becoming, its coming into being - as the realization (actualization) of possibilities. Cause is therefore a concept according to which the realization of one possibility necessarily follows the realization of another possibility. Reason imposes a strict necessity on existence as the realization of possibilities: possibilities are actualized by necessity.

What Kant does, and Hume before him, but Kant terminologizes it, is to remove existence from the field of strict necessity. And this is done by Kant splitting the table of the six categories in two: the modal categories in his work are now grouped three by three. For Kant splits off possibility, impossibility and necessity and leaves them on one side: between these three categories he finds an autonomous logical correlation: impossibility is a limit of possibilities which sets their - of possibilities - (only formal) necessity. On the contrary, existence and non-existence are detached from possibility and left on the other side: on the side of contingency. This is the logic of the die. The die has six sides, that is, six possibilities, and there is no seventh side, and it is not possible to have a seventh side, therefore it is necessary to fall on one of the six. Hence the existence is inscribed in necessity, but only insofar as necessity is a framework of the possible. However, existence or actuality is subtracted from possibility - from any particular possibility - and the particular possibility is realized only by contingency. Knowing the limit of possibilities, we can calculate in advance the probability of a given possibility happening ($1/6$), but we can never calculate in advance which possibility will actually occur. Because existence is detached from possibility - it is a matter of chance, it is happening and it is random. And the only limit of contingency is the impossible, which frames it only formally and brings it back into the field of possibilities without determining the realization of any particular possibility. Possibilities are only generally framed, but their validity or invalidity is a matter of contingency.

The separation of possibility from existence is the core of the transcendental turn. Through it, existence is freed from direct determination - it is determined only indirectly, from the frame of the possible, but not as a direct realization of possibilities. This reworking of the modal categories, according to which possibility, impossibility and necessity are kept on one side, and existence, non-existence and contingency on the other - and without "mixing", to keep the rigour of the probability calculus - sets the paradigmatic framework of modern mathematical science: it is the algorithm of the twentieth century, and it is still dominant today.

Of course, even Kant in the second Critique assumes a causality of freedom that transcends the strict separation between possibility and existence (for freedom implies that the impossible can and does become not merely possible but actual - existent) and that is unknowable. Nevertheless, according to Kant, we have to admit it in order to believe that we have a step in the world, that we can make a difference, in the simplest terms, that it is not all a matter of chance, blind fate and probabilistic calculations. After Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel are known to start from the idea of freedom and break down Kant's strict demarcations between possible/impossible and knowable/unknowable. They re-implant freedom, but they implant it not in possibility but in necessity - they turn freedom into an absolute subject thus, without intention, sacrificing it, rehabilitating the heavy determinism of pre-Kantian dogmatic metaphysics.

Boyan Manchev also wants to bridge the gap between possibility and existence - to rehabilitate freedom, not just as a regulative but as an constitutive ontological concept - but he is looking for another way. He explicitly formulates something like his own imperative - I call it "Boyan Manchev's imperative": "We must be careful not to carry out the reduction that has been carried out for centuries with respect to Aristotle's *dunamis*, namely, that the possible be thought in opposition to the actual and as not actual" (p. 402). Boyan Manchev invests existence - energy, freedom - but not in necessity, not in an absolute subject as the German idealists did, but in the possible - in the concrete possibility that is not merely reductive mathematical abstraction but is always singularity. From his earliest works, he carried out a systematic reworking of the category of possibility, of Aristotle's *dunamis*, which should free it from later reductive readings and open up another nondeterministic intuition of possibility, detectable in Aristotle himself. Namely, that the *dunamis* or possibility is an active possibility, an energetic possibility in which existence, possibility-force, possibility-energy, clangs: this primordially indeterminate "dynamic" possibility is the actual, or, more precisely, it is its unconditioned condition. In the habilitation thesis, this decades-old Manchev's interpretation on Aristotle's *dunamis* is background-suggested throughout, but, lest the reader be left in the dark, it is also explicitly developed in "Appendix 1: Possibility and Change. Aristotle's task today".

This Aristotelian task - the energizing of possibility or the vindication of the power-possibility (*dunamis*) - is also central in the opus on Kant, but here the same task is posed in terms of freedom. What is curious is this convergence in Manchev of a basic ontological concept - the power-possibility (*dunamis*) - with freedom, which is usually a concept of a higher order, anthropocentric or at least presupposing some form of rationality or reflexivity. But Manchev's intention seems to be the opposite: not to limit freedom to the realm of human or rational forms of life, but to reveal it as an unconditioned condition of the real in general - of any concrete phenomenon. Here is how he himself defines his task: "Is unconditionality possible at the level of the empirical order of phenomena? Kant's answer, as we know, is no. But instead of attacking the foundations of the idea of freedom in Kant, the possibility of spontaneous causality, we will try to uncover the necessary grounds of its possibility. To mobilize this possibility and thus to oppose the conception of freedom, of the transcendental idea as unreality. To show that a more than reality is impossible without the struggle for the real. Such is precisely the task of this chapter" (p. 402) - and, for that matter, of the book as a whole. That is, what Manchev is directly stating is that that which is "more than reality" - freedom - and which according to Kant is, if not impossible, at least unknowable, this same "more than reality" is the unconditioned condition of all reality. But this means that reality is no longer limited to a set of pre-given possibilities to which impossibility sets a framework of necessity. With Manchev, there are no impossibilities. And reality through freedom is always open to the future - it is fantastic".

Of course, this task is solved by a super-deep immanent reading of Kant, but it also implies a constant immanent deconstruction of Kant's dogmatic assumptions. Manchev elaborates in detail the issue of the so-called transcendental Subreption (Subreption is a substitution, a hidden replacement of a regulatory with a constitutive dimension), which Kant makes (see Chapter Three). However, Manchev does not want and does not blame Kant for it. Whether in Kant the replacement is done latently, unconsciously, whether due to a mistake or inertia, or because his great idea remains unread, and the replacement came from later misreadings, this question is deliberately left unanswered by Manchev. Yet in the end Kant replaces reality with necessity and existence with essence. Of course, the entire stake of the book is to show that this substitution (Boyan Manchev calls it "contraband" in one place) is unnecessary and that Kant must be freed from it in order to show that, in the end, every a form of the world (and every necessity) is freely asserted.

Kant's exoneration of his own contraband assumptions goes through a detailed analysis of the works of Kant's disciple and heretical critic Solomon Maimon - a study of Maimon, however, is a separate book within the book (chapters 4-5). Manchev shows how Maimon tries to break through the epistemological limitations in Kant's understanding of experience by demonstrating that the thing-in-itself is not just a regulative idea, an

unknowable noumenon, but in order to have experience at all, it must also have direct constitutive power: that is Maimon deliberately and conceptually juxtaposes the formal and material aspects of experience, which Kant sought to separate, in order to bring back into the field of possible experience his "dynamic magma." After all, it was precisely through reworkings of Maimon, Nietzsche and Bergson (and Hume, Leibniz and Spinoza) that Gilles Deleuze transformed Kant's transcendental epistemology into ontology: into "transcendental empiricism", where "the aim of philosophy is not to grasp the conditions of knowledge, but to discover and mobilize the conditions for creative production' (p. 309).

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Vrüshtaneto prez Del'oz kŭm Maïmon pri Manchev ima i drug smisŭl: chrez negovite raboti Manchev pokazva kak svobodata mozhe da vleze v opita ne prez deïstvashtiya ili poznavasht subekt, ne prez choveka, a prez samite neshta: „Transtsendentalniyat idealizŭm kato empiricheski realizŭm, za da ne izprati svobodata vŭn ot sveta, iska – tryabva? – da ya „raztvori“ na yadreno nivo. Dinamichnite skhemi na manifestatsiyata na neshtata (opit za chieto postigane pravyat Maïmonovite diferentsiali) tezi transversalni transtsendentali – predpolagat edna svoego roda subektivnost predi subekta.“ (s. 597). Toest svobodata e napŭlno deantropomorfizirana. Tya e imanentna sila na sveta: „Svobodata e silata na sebenadmogvaneto na sveta. Svobodata ne e vŭtreshna drugost, a silata, koyato pravi sveta svyat v sobstvenoto mu nadskachane. Taka transtsendentalното shte bŭde

razbirano kato sila na sebe-prevūzmoḡvane na sveta, otkūm samiya svyat. S drugi dumi, transtsendentalniyat idealizūm shte būde skhvanat kato svrūkhrealizūm: kato svrūkhkriticheski realizūm.“ (s. 598)

Returning through Deleuze to Maimon in Manchev also has another meaning: using Maimon, Manchev shows how freedom can enter experience not through the acting or knowing subject, not through man, but through the things themselves:

"Transcendental idealism as empirical realism, in order not to send freedom out of the world, want - must? – to "dissolve" it at the nuclear level. The dynamic schemes of the manifestation of things (an attempt to achieve which Maimon's differentials make) these transversal transcendentals - presuppose a kind of subjectivity before the subject" (p. 597). That is, freedom is completely deanthropomorphized. It is an immanent power of the world: "Freedom is the power of self-overcoming of the world. Freedom is not an internal otherness, but the power that makes the world world in its own transcendence. Thus the transcendental will be understood as a power of self-overcoming of the world, from the world itself. In other words, transcendental idealism will be understood as hyperrealism: as supercritical realism." (p. 598)

And more: "It is precisely for this reason that we must assume the potentially open series of the phenomenon: reality is open. The real is both permanence and change, that is, persistence. Its substrate is the very transformability of the thing. At the same time, the thing for itself is nothing; it is not cast into the apophatic hell. It is something for other senses, for other appearances, for non-human modalizations.

Although Kant does not assert such a supercritical possibility—the possibility of a modal ontology par excellence—it is our task, our duty even, to suppose it." (p. 431)

The new ontology that Manchev makes through and beyond Kant - his modal ontology - rests on a basic axiom: "The existence of freedom: existence as freedom" (p. 598).

Finally, I will allow myself to ask a question, quite general, opening a horizon for future reflections. We agree with Prof. Manchev that Kant's epistemological program should not be read rigidly, but should be overcome in the direction of a dynamic ontology, recognizing the emergency and transformability of the world and investing in it creativity and freedom not just in an anthropomorphic sense, but also on a basic ontological level. And yet, whether mathematical probabilistic thinking, whose conceptual apparatus was developed by Hume and Kant, cannot and should not be preserved and developed as a specific mode of maximally impartial study of inert processes and, accordingly, for their practical prediction? Put another way, isn't the paradigm of probabilistic thinking complementary to the paradigm of freedom and transformability? My point is that here - as in many other respects - there is no heavy ontological difference, but only practical differences between modes of interaction with the world, different ethos?

In conclusion, the habilitation work of Assoc. Prof. Boyan Manchev, Doctor of Science, «World and Freedom. Transcendental philosophy and modal ontology" is an exceptional philosophical opus, respectfully deep and innovative, challenging and surpassing the best examples not only of Bulgarian but also of world modern philosophy. In addition, Manchev covers and repeatedly exceeds all formal and substantive legal and internal university requirements for holding the position of PROFESSOR. Therefore, I strongly recommend to both the members of the Scientific Jury and the Academic Council of the NBU to select and appoint Boyan Krasimirov Manchev as a PROFESSOR of the NBU in the field of 2.3 Philosophy.

Sofia,
25.09.2024

Sincerely:

Prof. Dr. Dimitar Vatsov