

Chapter 2

First Acquaintances – The Eighteenth Century

Abstract This chapter concerns the introduction of Kant's name and works into Imperial Russia from 1758–1800. Some young Russians studied in Königsberg and brought knowledge of Kant's ideas back to Russia proper. However, as a result of the Seven Years' War, Königsberg was under Russian occupation for a time, and as a result Kant himself was in a sense in Imperial Russia. Here, we look at both these young Russians as well as Kant's own relations to occupying military units stationed in his hometown.

Keywords Moscow University • Karamzin • Schaden • Mellmann • Russian Orthodox faith • Königsberg

Unlike so many other European countries, Russia had no universities before 1755, at which time Moscow University was founded. Education, such as it was both before and for decades afterward, was intended, from the government's point of view, to help young noblemen acquire modern technical skills useful to the state. From the individual's point of view, schooling in general, or at least a certain bare minimum, was necessary for promotion within the official Table of Ranks, introduced by Peter the Great in 1722, and to be able to conduct oneself properly within social circles. Consequently, the standard curriculum itself was framed with these attitudes and needs uppermost in mind. Emphasis was placed on such subjects as classical literature, good manners and modern languages, particularly French, the language of diplomacy at the time and of all things that would interest an aspiring young man. *Gimnazija* instruction included as much time devoted to ballroom dancing as to the Russian language. Obtaining an education for its own sake was certainly not a prevalent attitude within Russia, and it certainly was not encouraged. As Russian-born Alexander Koyré, an eminent 20th century historian of science and philosopher, remarked, pure philosophy was always considered “perfectly useless.”¹

Nevertheless, out of this stress on mindlessness there were those, such as Mikhail Lomonosov, the greatest Russian-born scientist of his day, who, along with his patron Ivan Shuvalov, co-founded Moscow University and sought to encourage and foster the love of learning. Lomonosov had been sent at government expense to Marburg, where he studied philosophy and natural science under the great German

¹ Koyré: 47 f.

rationalist Christian Wolff. These men realized that unless higher education directly benefited the prospective students they would not attend a university even for a brief time. Such an institution would be successful only if its students would be rewarded with the one thing that really mattered to them, a proportionately high rank in the Table. Within years, this basic idea became accepted and the awarding of an academic degree bestowed on the individual such a rank. Nonetheless, most young noblemen realized that there were other, faster ways of moving ahead and so found no tangible motive for seeking advanced learning.² Many who did matriculate at a university did so only for a short time, learning little, and thereby further promoted an image of university education as a sheer waste of time.³ This situation was not remedied until the 1830s, when the young aristocracy began flocking to the universities, particularly the one in Moscow. Until then, enrollment, such as it was, was largely confined to the sons of priests, free peasants and townspeople.

Yet, the picture was not entirely bleak for higher education and, in particular, for philosophy – or at least at the time it did not appear so. Already by the mid-1700s, there was a general relaxation of the requirement instituted by Peter the Great that all noblemen perform military or civil service. This gave them sufficient opportunity to pursue their own interests. Even the curriculum at many of the military training schools was lax enough to permit many of the cadets ample free time, which they could have used for education but generally did not. Lomonosov prevailed over Shuvalov in allowing Moscow University to accept students of all social classes. However, this possible mingling of classes served only as an additional reason for noble parents to discourage their teenage sons from furthering their education. There was only one undergraduate law student in 1765, and only one medical student passed the final examination for his degree during Catherine the Great's entire reign. Nevertheless, there were mixed signs for the future of Russian education and philosophy for a period under Catherine, who at least for a time gave lip service to Enlightenment ideals. By 1789, the press affiliated with Moscow University published more books in the previous 14-year period than in all prior years together. The prospect of a government-sanctioned enlightenment, however, came to a sharp end with the Revolution in Paris.

2.1 Kant's Königsberg Under Russian Occupation

The Seven Years' War, which erupted in 1756, originally pitted Prussia and her new ally Britain against France, Austria and Russia. Königsberg, the capital of the Province of Prussia from 1701 to 1773 and from then of the province of East Prussia, was the home of Immanuel Kant for his entire life. In early January 1758, the Königsberg garrison abandoned the city when word was received that Russian troops had crossed the border. A civilian delegation proceeded to meet the

²Raeff 1966: 135.

³Alston 1969: 10.

commander of the Russian forces, William Fermor, to ask for terms of surrender only to be astonished at the generous terms the Russians offered. When the Russian troops entered the city on the 22nd, they were met with celebration befitting liberators rather than occupiers. Within the structure of the Russian Empire at the time, administrative control was established, and shortly thereafter all the city officials were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the empress Elizabeth.⁴ Together with all university professors and lecturers, Kant swore to recognize Elizabeth's position and not to intrigue against the Russian authority. The daily routine of life within Königsberg remained largely unchanged. In February, Elizabeth proclaimed that all preexisting privileges and rights were to be maintained as well as religious freedom. All the local officials continued to collect their usual salaries, and the university budget too remained unaltered. General Fermor was appointed governor of East Prussia.

According to German accounts, the general and his officers regularly visited the university and even attended lectures there including those by the *privat-docent* Kant, who in addition gave private lectures on a variety of practical military topics, such as construction and fortification, as well as mathematics.⁵ It should be added that the Russian officers paid Kant well for these services. He also enjoyed the many parties and the relaxed social atmosphere that came with the occupation. General Fermor was replaced in time as governor by Baron Nikolaj Korf, a very wealthy nobleman who owed his position to his connections at the court and who spent much of his time in Königsberg entertaining the city's social circles and the friends of the Count Keyserlingk family, which included Kant.⁶

In December 1758, the professor of logic and metaphysics at Königsberg, Johann David Kypke, died, thereby opening a position in philosophy. Availing himself of this opportunity, Kant wrote first to the university rector and senate and the next day to the philosophy faculty. Two days later, he wrote to the Russian empress stating his interest in filling the vacancy and summarizing his own academic background and duties. Kant closed the letter, writing "Your Imperial Majesty's Loyal Servant Immanuel Kant."⁷ He, of course, was not the only one who sought the position, but only he and the eventually successful candidate Friedrich Buck (1722–1786), who taught mathematics at the university, were deemed competent. The precise reason for Kant's candidacy being passed over never entered the public record, although the usual explanation is that Buck had a longer tenure at the university.⁸ In any case, years later Buck moved to the professorship in mathematics, and Kant, applying again, obtained the position he had sought for so many years.

⁴Apparently irritated by Königsberg's swift allegiance to Russia, Frederick the Great never returned to the city after the Russian occupation ended.

⁵Reicke 1860: 40.

⁶Kuehn 2001: 114.

⁷Kant 1902- : vol. X, 5–6.

⁸Gulyga writes that, "Evidently, the question of vacancy was settled in Königsberg, not in Petersburg." Gulyga 1987: 35.

By the end of 1761, Prussia's military fortunes looked bleak, its army gradually dwindling. Talk of the possibility of a complete Prussian collapse was spreading. Then on 5 January 1762, Prussia's luck suddenly changed: Russia's Empress Elizabeth died. Her successor and son, Peter III (1728–1762), a clear Prussophile, himself half-German with a German wife, ordered the withdrawal of Russian troops and formed an alliance with Prussia. Frederick, who had thought he would have to make major territorial concessions including the ceding of East Prussia, now found all his Russian-occupied lands restored without any additional cost to himself.⁹ On 8 July, the last of the five Russian governors of East Prussia issued a proclamation releasing the people of Königsberg from their oath of allegiance to the Russian throne. Peter's reign and his total Prussophile foreign policy, however, were short-lived. He sat on the Russian throne for a mere six months. His wife and successor, Catherine the Great, herself an ethnic German and the daughter of a Prussian general struggled with her dual but conflicting allegiances. To Prussia, she was linked by birth and ethnicity, but as the new ruler of a vast country she was linked by duty and love to Russia. She, at this moment, compromised. She respected her late husband's peace with Prussia but would not let Russian troops march into battle together with the Prussians. For a brief period, the last Russian governor again took over governmental authority and Russian guards took up positions. In August, the Russians finally left East Prussia. With their departure, the first, initial phase of Kant in Russia came to an end. Thus, if for the purposes of this study we consider Russia to be not a fixed geographic region but the area governed by an administration centered in and directed from St. Petersburg, then Kant himself was for several years in Russia just as his city of Königsberg, now renamed Kaliningrad, is today.

2.2 Students and Travelers in Königsberg

Regrettably, the names of the Russian officers who heard Kant lecture have not come down to us. Quite possibly, they included Grigorij Orlov, a future lover of Catherine the Great, and Aleksandr Suvorov, who went on to become the last Generalissimo of the Russian Empire. If they were among the Russian auditors of Kant's lessons, their respective careers were hardly affected by hearing his pre-Critical teachings. If they had heard him, they surely did not preserve for posterity what he said.

Independently of the events linked to the Seven Years' War, a number of Russian students were studying, however briefly, in Königsberg. For example, Semen G. Zybelin, the first Russian professor of medicine at Moscow University and a graduate of that institution in 1758, studied in Königsberg as well as in Leiden and Berlin. He along with six others arrived in Königsberg in September 1758. The principal mentor of all seven was Professor Buck. All seven took courses in philosophy, mathematics and physics, but the surviving records do not so much as even mention

⁹Madariaga 1981: 24.

Kant by name.¹⁰ Russia sent another ten students the following year to Königsberg, two of whom had studied some philosophy in Moscow. Again, in none of the surviving reports is Kant mentioned. In short, whatever gifts the future Critical philosopher possessed at the time as a teacher and a thinker and whatever charm he could display in society, the pre-Critical Kant went unnoticed by the Russian students.

In May 1789, several years after the publication of the first two “Critiques” and just a year before the publication of the third “Critique,” a young Nikolaj Karamzin, the son of a Russian army officer and the future official state historian, embarked on a journey through Europe determined to visit Germany, Switzerland, France and England. On 18 June, he arrived in Königsberg, and the next day he decided to pay a visit to Kant. Although he lacked a letter of introduction, Kant graciously received Karamzin. They talked of foreign lands, of history and, of course, of broad metaphysical concerns, such as the afterlife. In all, the meeting lasted some three hours. In the course of the conversation, Kant mentioned the “Second Critique” as well as the *Metaphysics of Morals* and wrote down the titles for Karamzin.¹¹ Later on his return to Russia, Karamzin wrote an account of his meeting with Kant in one of his *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, which began their serial publication already in January 1791.¹²

Since Karamzin gave no indication that he had only a short time earlier heard Kant’s name mentioned as someone worth visiting upon his arrival in Königsberg, how did Karamzin know of Kant and how much of Kant’s philosophy did Karamzin know before embarking on his European sojourn? Before relating the details of his visit with Ernst Platner in Leipzig in mid-July, Karamzin wrote that Platner’s philosophy was an eclectic blend of Kant’s and Leibniz’s views but yet “is at variance with both of them.”¹³ Which field of philosophy did Karamzin have in mind? Since Karamzin had revealed that he was not familiar with Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* and yet could say with self-confidence that Platner agreed with some of Kant’s views, we can conclude Karamzin had in mind metaphysics. Indeed, in the same letter Karamzin mentioned that Platner’s writings are easy to understand even for someone, presumably like himself, not well versed in either that topic or logic, i.e., basically what we today call epistemology.

What, then, was Karamzin’s source of information about “the illustrious Kant” that led him to pay the latter a visit? Karamzin explicitly credits Jakob Lenz, a German poet, who resided in Moscow from 1781–1792, for helping him to speak German so well.¹⁴ In 1768, Lenz enrolled at Königsberg University on a scholarship

¹⁰ Andreev 2005: 37.

¹¹ Kant’s *Die Metaphysik der Sitten* [*Metaphysics of Morals*] did not appear until 1797. Yet, Karamzin clearly had Kant writing down that title along with that of the “Second Critique.” Surely, Karamzin had in mind the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, which originally appeared in 1785. Whether Kant wrote down the abbreviated title on his note or Karamzin wrote down the abbreviated title on his own can only be decided if we had the original note in Kant’s hand.

¹² For an English translation of the “letter” in which he described his meeting with Kant, see Karamzin 1957: 38–41.

¹³ Karamzin 1957: 73.

¹⁴ Karamzin 1957: 90. Karamzin in a short letter devoted entirely to Lenz dated 22 July wrote of the latter’s peculiar, if not odd, character. Apparently, Lenz was more than a mere acquaintance of Karamzin’s.

to study theology. However, while there he heard Kant lecture on metaphysics, logic and science. He abandoned his theological studies in 1771, and after a long series of unsuccessful employments he ended up in Moscow, where he learned Russian. Lenz, conceivably, could have imparted to Karamzin some knowledge of the pre-Critical Kant. Whatever the case, Lenz never prospered in Moscow either and depended on others for his daily sustenance. His life ended on a Moscow street in June 1792 at the age of 41. Another possible, certainly more likely, source of Karamzin's knowledge of Kant is Johann Schaden, who maintained in Moscow a boarding house/school separate from the University and where Karamzin resided and studied from 1778–1781.¹⁵ We will return to Schaden in more detail in the next section.

While Karamzin obviously had some knowledge of Kant as a philosopher, his direct familiarity with Kant's writings – whether they be from the pre-Critical or the Critical period – at any time of his life remains an open question.¹⁶ Based on Karamzin's account of his meeting with Kant and the topics discussed, we cannot conclude that the former had read any of Kant's works in advance of the meeting. Additionally, although Karamzin does say that he would keep the note on which Kant wrote the titles of his two recent ethical treatises “as a precious memento,” Karamzin did not remark that he would read those titles or even that he had any interest in doing so.

Another traveler through Königsberg who made a point of visiting Kant at home was the Russian diplomat Ivan M. Murav'ëv-Apostol, who served in several different posts and who was in command of a number of languages. His meeting, arranged, though, with some difficulty, took place in 1797 and thus some six years after the publication of Karamzin's account. Murav'ëv-Apostol found Kant to be a gracious and kind host. They spoke of German literature, but apparently – and unfortunately – not of Kant's philosophy, despite Murav'ëv-Apostol's knowledge of the great philosophical figures in history.¹⁷

2.3 Correspondents

Although not given to corresponding frequently, Kant did from time to time make exceptions. In 1790, Aleksandr M. Belosel'skij, a Russian diplomat and envoy in Dresden published there in French a tract entitled *Dianologie ou tableau*

¹⁵In his comments on a German translation of that portion of Karamzin's letter describing the visit with Kant, Palme wrote that Lenz also stayed at Schaden's boarding house/school. Palme 1901: 122.

¹⁶Amazingly, there is divided opinion in this matter. In his highly informed work on the subject, Kruglov writes that Karamzin had not read Kant's writings. See Kruglov 2009: 80. On the other hand, Cavel'eva writes, “Judging from everything, he [Karamzin – TN] knew Kant's works quite well.” Cavel'eva 2006: 38. She goes on further to write that “Kant's works were known in Russian intellectual circles” as shown by Karamzin's remarks in his *Letters*. Cavel'eva 2006: 40. As we saw, the *Letters* provide no such evidence. The most we can conclude is that Kant's name, but not necessarily his works, were known in Moscow circles.

¹⁷Murav'ëv-Apostol 2002: 90.

philosophique de l'entendement, a copy of which he forwarded to Kant. What prompted Kant's reply to Belosel'skij was most likely the latter's attempt to establish the limits of human reason in its speculative employment from a different direction, an anthropological one.¹⁸ There is no record of any further communication between the two.

Arguably of more interest is a letter from Woldemar Ungern-Sternberg (1750–182?) dated 12 May 1796 to Kant that reveals some knowledge of Kant's "Critical Philosophy." Written from St. Petersburg, Ungern-Sternberg presented himself as a cavalry officer in the Russian army who, traveling through Königsberg, requested an opportunity to meet with Kant. Ungern-Sternberg related that in his homeland of Livonia Kant's philosophy is studied with pleasure and great industry. As for himself, he wrote, "Long did I err in philosophical forests and morasses until the truth in the form of your *Critique of Pure Reason* guided me out and taught me to be aware of every wrong path."¹⁹ It is unknown with assuredness whether Kant replied. In any case, no reply has survived. There is the distinct possibility that Kant replied to Ungern-Sternberg but only after the latter had long departed from St. Petersburg. As a result, he quite possibly never received the letter.²⁰

Another figure – albeit another rather odd one – we must mention is Friedrich Hahnrieder, born in Lötzen in what then was Prussia, later East Prussia, and now named Giżycko in Poland. Accounts of his life vary, but all agree that he enrolled at Königsberg University in 1782, where he studied under Kant.²¹ At some time afterward, he entered St. Petersburg. According to one account, presumably based on Hahnrieder's own, he served as a lieutenant in the Russian Army during the Second Turkish War (1787–1792). However, owing to certain injustices (*Ungerechtigkeiten*) he was sentenced to a long prison term, from which he escaped in some manner. This account has recently been challenged as almost totally false. Hahnrieder did not spend time in a Russian jail. What is indubitable is that Kant exchanged several letters with Hahnrieder already in 1796 and later when the latter had left Russia. Most peculiar, however, of these is one from 31 July 1800 in which he wrote, "During my stay in Russia, I learned so much that was useful in terms of economics and anthropology, but mainly I studied there in the prisons of the Inquisition your writings, which were my greatest luck. For without their guidance, I would have remained a mere fragmentary man."²² As mentioned, whether Hahnrieder was ever in a Russian prison may be doubted. However, if he did spend time in prison, it was hardly comparable to the Inquisition, since he had access to Kant's writings and the opportunity

¹⁸ Kant 1999: 417–420.

¹⁹ Kant 1902- : vol. XII, 82.

²⁰ In the manuscript known to us as *Opus postumum*, there is an intriguing note in the margin on one page where Kant writes of two letters, one being by Ungern-Sternberg. Kant 1902-: vol. XXI, 471. Unfortunately, this note is of little help. Also see Kruglov 2009: 90, where there appears to be a misidentification of three letters, not two.

²¹ For a more thorough discussion of Hahnrieder, see Kruglov 2009: 94–110. Also see his German-language account, Krouglov 2012. Also see Ritzel 1985: 610–613.

²² Kant 1902- : vol. XII, 319.

to study them. How he acquired them in Russia, and, moreover, in a Russian prison, is of interest but something that we cannot know. Since many of the basic details of Hahnrieder's account may be incorrect, it is possible that his acquisition of Kant's writings is also mistaken. That he knew something of Kant's moral philosophy, however, is clear from his invocation of the categorical imperative in his decision to become a farmer (!) expressed in his letter to Kant of 18 November 1797 from Berlin. Hahnrieder writes, "I can vindicate myself before all rational beings, since the maxim to till the land can be applied as a universal law, and the maxim to abandon any situation at any moment in order to take up the position of a farmer can also be shown to be a universal law."²³ Of course, such a sweeping application of the categorical imperative does not speak well of Hahnrieder's penetration into Kant's ethics.

2.4 University of Moscow

When it opened in 1755, Moscow University had three faculties and ten professorial chairs. The philosophical faculty contained the chairs of philosophy, physics, rhetoric and history. All students studied in the philosophical faculty for their first three years, after which they could either stay or transfer to one of the other two faculties, viz., law and medicine, for a total of seven years. Although the university was given wide autonomy in its governance, professors could not simply teach whatever they wished in their respective fields. Lesson plans and textbooks had to be approved in advance.

The first to occupy the chair of philosophy was Nikolaj N. Popovskij (1730–1760), a former student of Lomonosov's with a degree from the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg in 1753.²⁴ However, in May 1756, after barely a year, Popovskij was shifted to the chair of rhetoric. Since at the time the philosophy professor taught logic, metaphysics and morals, Popovskij's reassignment was most likely more to his taste, having translated Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*.²⁵

Not surprisingly, at its opening the University had a difficult time finding qualified domestic instructors. Thus, Russia sent out invitations to Germany to help fill the new positions. The first group of three, consisting of Johann H. Frommann, Johann M. Schaden and Philipp H. Dilthey, arrived in 1756 and were among the first in what was to be over the course of the next several decades a steady stream of German professors lecturing to Russian students mostly in Latin but also in French and German. Popovskij did attempt to lecture in Russian at first but was rebuked for doing so. Many of the foreign professors simply dismissed the idea that Russian could ever replace the other mentioned languages in higher education. Dilthey also attempted to learn Russian, but his poor pronunciation did little to help make his

²³ Kant 1902- : vol. XII, 220.

²⁴ For extensive information about Popovskij, see Modzalevskij n. d.: 111–169.

²⁵ Popovskij also prepared a translation of Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* in 1757. However, Popovskij used an existing French translation as the basis for his own Russian one, not the English original.

lectures intelligible to the students. Scandal soon revolved around Dilthey, who was accused of poor attendance and prioritizing private lessons, which legally he was allowed to do provided they did not interfere with his official duties.

Frommann taught philosophy for just short of a decade after Popovskij's shift to rhetoric. He then returned to Germany, where he taught in Tübingen. Of far more significance here is the case of Schaden, a Hungarian from Pressburg (today's Bratislava), educated in Tübingen, who taught philosophy using the manuals popular in Germany at the time. For logic and metaphysics, it was the manuals by Winkler and Baumeister, and for practical (moral) philosophy it was the manual by Feder. Yet, Schaden was politically astute enough to realize that despite his broad educational and cultural background the convenient and efficacious method to resolve thorny issues in metaphysics was simply to appeal to the tenets of the Russian Orthodox faith. As he once remarked, "The Orthodox faith lifts the veil that hides these mysteries; it is the incarnation of wisdom and possesses the absolute truth."²⁶ Despite his background in Wolffian philosophy, Schaden kept up with the latest developments in Germany. Of greatest interest for us here is the testimony that during the late 1770s "judging from the references he made in his lectures while teaching philosophy, we can see that he followed the progress of the disciplines in Germany and was already acquainted with the philosophy of Kant."²⁷ Clearly, he continued to monitor German philosophy through the decades as we see from the fact that in the university catalogue for the 1796–1797 academic year we find the mention that Schaden would continue a course on moral philosophy, started the previous year, "conforming to the principles of Critical Philosophy...."²⁸ Fortunately, a manuscript of the course has survived that shows Schaden had studied Kant's works from his "Critical" period that had appeared up to that time and also some literature on them.²⁹

Of importance also is that in addition to his professorial duties Schaden, as mentioned earlier, ran the boardinghouse/school attached to the University where Karamzin stayed and studied for four or so years. The instruction there relied more on appealing to morality rather than strict discipline, a novel idea at the time. The curriculum placed stress on German literature, and there students, such as Karamzin, acquired a good knowledge of the German and French languages, which, as we saw, helped Karamzin greatly during his sojourn through Western Europe. Quite probably, it was during his stay with Schaden that Karamzin learned at least of Kant's name, if not some of his ideas.³⁰

Even though Schaden knew of the turn in Kant's thinking, the first to bring information about the Critical Philosophy into Russia proper was the philologist Johann

²⁶ Koyré 1929: 47.

²⁷ *Biograficheskij* 1855: 567

²⁸ *Biograficheskij* 1855: 573.

²⁹ Kruglov 2009: 177.

³⁰ Pipes 2005: 23–24.

Wilhelm Ludwig Mellmann.³¹ Invited in 1786 from Göttingen, where he had become familiar with Kant's thought, Mellmann's first assignment was at the academic *gimnazija* attached to Moscow University. However, during the 1792/93 academic year Mellmann began to teach at the University itself, where he served as extraordinary professor of ancient literature and languages, i.e., Latin and Greek. His Latin address of June 1790 contains the first known published reference to Kant in Russia, and Mellmann, apparently, was none too shy explaining metaphysical and ethical issues from a Kantian standpoint.

That Mellmann knew something of Kant's philosophy cannot surprise us, since he hailed from Göttingen, at the time the "most progressive and prestigious university in Germany," and where J. G. Feder, whose quarrel with Kant is almost legendary, was professor of philosophy.³² Unfortunately, not everyone was as enthusiastic about these new ideas as Mellmann. The outcome of Mellmann's case would prove to be an ominous portent for the introduction of Kant's philosophy into Russia in the ensuing decades. Regrettably, the official public record of events surrounding Mellmann leaves more questions than answers. A 19th century history of Moscow University summed up the affair stating, "But despite his learning and other good qualities, Mellmann, often getting carried away by the new philosophy, too freely and carelessly expressed his one-sided and erroneous beliefs on religious subjects. For this reason by the determination of the university authorities he was dismissed from his position in January 1795 and forced to leave our country."³³ Despite its terseness, we have one specific clue in this statement. Mellmann was dismissed not for, say, discussing Kant's "Transcendental Deduction," but for what he said concerning religious issues. His views came to the attention of the Moscow high Orthodox Church official, Metropolitan Platon. According to his report to Count Samojlov, a general procurator, Mellmann, by chance, was at Platon's house, where they discussed philosophy and religious matters. In the course of the conversation, Platon found Mellmann's views to be both "blasphemous and insulting to the Christian religion."³⁴ Platon's report also stated that Mellmann himself had expressed that he was a Kantian and could not avoid moral and religious issues when teaching ancient writers. A further inquiry found him to have depraved ideas that were contrary to revealed religion. In his report, written in March 1795, Count Samojlov, in

³¹ The spelling of Mellmann's name is rendered variously in the secondary literature. Giving it as "Mellmann," is that as it appeared in his own Latin language works of this period. See Mellmann 1786. Mellmann was the first to introduce Kant's philosophy and "its fresh concepts into Moscow academia. He often gladly discussed its novelty and interest with his colleagues, acquainting them with its most important principles." *Biograficheskij* 1855: 46. Another candidate for being the first to introduce Kant's thought into Russia is H. G. Wielkes, who studied in Königsberg in 1758 and defended a dissertation in Halle in 1763. Some time later he lived in Moscow. However, even if he did "introduce" some elements of Kant's thought into Russia, Wielkes could only be one of several such candidates and whatever he introduced it would not have been the "Critical Kant." See Filippov 1893: 12.

³² Beiser 1993: 180.

³³ *Biograficheskij* 1855: 46–47.

³⁴ Solov'ev 1861: 199.

effect repeating Platon's position, wrote that Mellmann "in explaining the ideas of classical authors to his students mixed in his blasphemous and insulting ideas that were contrary to the Christian religion, and moreover that he, while staying here, was suffering from a mental disorder."³⁵ The ultimate result of Mellmann's interrogation was that he was dismissed from the University, expelled from Russia and forbidden ever to return. Sadly, Mellmann, after being escorted out of Russia was in a desperate physical and mental condition. He died of starvation and was buried where he was before reaching his homeland.³⁶

As part of the interrogation process in Russia, Mellmann responded to a number of questions and stated that concerning religion he owed his "exact conviction on the most important issues to a study of Kant's works and those similar to it."³⁷ We can hardly judge today in the absence of written works how well Mellmann had read Kant's writings and how he understood them. Indeed, we cannot be certain that he had read all of Kant's writings published up to that date. Mellmann specifically mentioned that regarding his views on philosophy, theology and morality he referred to "Kant's works, of which the most recent and well-nigh most important is the 'Law within the bounds of pure reason'," presumably meaning *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason* from 1793. Mellmann went on to say that the substance of that work is that there is only one moral law, i.e., the inclination to respect and to fulfill all of one's obligations as God's commandments. In terms of fulfilling this law, it is divided into natural law, or law of reason, and revealed law. The latter must not contradict the former but contain it within itself. It is impossible to reject the possibility of supernatural revelation, since our knowledge of these matters is insufficient. If someone were to claim these things to be true, then this person is at least obliged to respect the beliefs of all others and the books that they respect as revelation.

Mellmann's plea for religious tolerance, seeing it as the essence of the moral law, could hardly have found a receptive audience in late-18th century Russia, and this he should have realized. It also fails to provide us with a clear idea of Mellmann's penetration into Kant's ethics and none with respect to epistemology. However tragic Mellmann's ultimate personal fate turned out to be, another aspect of the tragedy was the unequivocal rejection of Kant's ideas by a select, though influential, few. Still, this early introduction of Kant to Russia could not be stilled so quickly and so quietly. Already a few months after the conclusion of the Mellmann affair, i.e., in August 1795, Schaden, who himself played a role, albeit minor, in it, attempted to revise his teachings, abandoned his earlier manual on ethics and began offering a course in conformity with Kant's principles. A surviving but unpublished manuscript of his lectures shows, according to one contemporary scholar, that Schaden had studied practically all of Kant's mature writings that had appeared up to that time as well as some commentaries. Moreover, Schaden did not omit mentioning Kant's transcendental idealism, explaining it as non-empirical, or transcen-

³⁵ Samojlov 1863: 120.

³⁶ For a more detailed discussion of Mellmann's fate in Russia, see Kruglov 2012: 28–33.

³⁷ Mel'man 1863: 109.

dental, knowledge. What is transcendental cannot be represented. Its concern is transcendental objects.³⁸

Although neither Schaden's course nor Mellmann's aborted teachings provided a significant impulse to the dissemination of Kant's philosophy in Russia, a new century was about to dawn and with it a new tsar raised on more enlightened ideas than most of his predecessors. True, some scoffed at these ideas. Mikhail I. Skiadan, for example, who taught law at Moscow University, called Kant's philosophy "warm cabbage soup." Yet, the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg proposed Kant for election to that body as a foreign associate as early as 1794.³⁹ Finally, we should mention the possibility that at around this time the future public official and advisor to Tsar Alexander I, Count Mikhail Speranskij (1772–1839), devoted some time to the study of Kant's position. Although educated in a theological seminary, a not untypical route to obtaining a measure of learning, especially for those whose families lacked great wealth, Speranskij was undoubtedly familiar with the ideas of Voltaire and Diderot as well as of Descartes, Locke and Leibniz. From unfortunately undated surviving statements, we know that at some point he acquainted himself, however crudely, with Kant's attack on sensualism and, connected with it, the latter's conception of space and time. Speranskij adopted, at least temporarily at an early date, terminology reminiscent of Kant. The former in notes probably from the 1790s described sense cognition as a "course screen" that impedes our knowledge of the universe and in another "...the concepts of time and distance are based on our way of sensing and understanding things, on a weakness and distinct functioning of our mind."⁴⁰ It is important to recognize, however, that in none of the remarks allegedly from this early date is Kant's name ever mentioned in any way. Thus, based on textual exegesis alone, we can only conjecture whether Speranskij knew of Kant's teachings in the 1790s.

³⁸ Kruglov 2009: 178. To such a presentation, of course, the critic could reply that such a conception is thoroughly problematic. On Schaden's definition, transcendental objects cannot be represented. If they cannot be represented, how can we speak of having knowledge of them?

³⁹ Kant's election, however, was in recognition of his work in science, not in philosophy. See Gromov 2009: 77 f.

⁴⁰ Speranskij 1862: 140 and 137. Marc Raeff claims Speranskij had acquainted himself with Kant's ideas while at the theological seminary but offers no evidence for the statement. Raeff 1953: 446. In his now classic biography, M. A. Korf held that Speranskij became familiar with Kant's views only in the 1810s if for no other reason than that the *Critique of Pure Reason* was not accessible to him at an earlier date, since he did not read German very well before that time. Korf 1861: 33 f. However a Latin translation was available in the 1790s and Speranskij's personal library contained a four-volume Latin edition of Kant's works. Kruglov 2009: 358 f.



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