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Introduction: The Issue With Kant

With this issue of *Filozofski vestnik*, its editors would like to once again bring up the ‘issue of Kant’. And without any hesitation one should perhaps at first consider the vagueness and ambivalence of this ‘issue of Kant’ to be a precise indication of a specific problematic. Like many other philosophical names of the past, the name ‘Kant’ is torn between different traditions, exegeses, and territorial claims. But there is one line of division that the name Kant shares with his central and impassioned opponent Hegel in a way that distinguishes these two names from other names. This is, of course, the line of division between the so-called analytical and continental traditions of philosophy. And of these two, it is perhaps the name of Kant in which the lines of conflict multiply. Not only the fragmentations of the dispute between these two strands of philosophy seem to be blurred in Kant, but also the lines of the inner fragmentations of the continental discourse.

While continental philosophy has shifted its focus to the Hegelian themes of German idealism in recent years, on the analytical side the debate on Kant’s works has never ceased. Thus, on the continental side, the tradition of the debate about the Kantian philosophy seems to be broken, not only at a certain point, but at several points. Was it not perhaps always the case that the debate about Kant’s oeuvre in the continental discussion had the shape of a dissected and disseminated contiguity? The list of authors that have engaged with Kant is long and varied: Various thinkers, such as Lyotard, Foucault, Adorno, Heidegger, Deleuze, Derrida, Badiou, Žižek, and Lacan, have dedicated works, books, and concepts to the heritage of the founder of transcendental philosophy. And as heterogeneous as they might appear, these thinkers have influenced contemporary continental philosophy to a great extent. They have paved the way, in many respects, for what could be considered a second “revolution in the mode of thought”. That is to say: there is a strong Kantian moment in contemporary continental philosophy. The aesthetics, the thought of autonomy, the transcendental, the moral question, the figure of critique – all these issues of Kant, to

name just a few, have been elements of these discussions. But is there an ‘issue of Kant’ as such in the debate on contemporary continental philosophy? Maybe one should thus accept the vagueness of this formulation – ‘the issue of Kant’ – and take it to be a question mark. The question is, then, what is that Kantian moment in contemporary philosophy, and what about it in the present?

One of the central tasks in this respect would be to analyse how the two conceptually fundamental figures of thought – that of the subject and that of the object – of Kant’s first revolution become apparent in the aforementioned approaches. In what ways are they carried on, productively interrupted, or pursued and misunderstood? Another necessity, associated with the former, is the question of in what way the three Kantian critiques should be understood as achievements of one coherent philosophical project. Can the practical philosophy in Kant be considered as being a departure from some of the theoretical foundations of the first Critique? Is the third Critique a continuation of the transcendental problematic or does it rather generate a field of its own? More generally, the question is whether it is possible to pry out some parts of this oeuvre and to incorporate these parts in a modern continental philosophy that is mainly centred on the battleground – as Kant would have it – of the subject. If these two aspects are considered together, the question is twofold: if the central stake in contemporary continental philosophy is the subject – from its apparent abolition up to its recurrence – is the role of Kant then to be ascribed to the unity of the three Critiques or rather to certain specific aspects of this oeuvre?

Be it the former or the latter, in wider parts of contemporary continental philosophy a reigning scepticism towards the works of Kant is to be recognised. This scepticism is above all directed against the Kantian notion of politics, against the generality of the transcendental, and perhaps also against his reluctance as regards ontology. Thus, while on the one hand the reconsideration of the notion of the subject is one of the major tasks of any contemporary philosophy worthy of its name, the Kantian heritage seems, on the other hand, to be too deeply inscribed into the tradition of philosophy as a guardian of the actual state of things, a philosophy unworthy of its name. Kant’s claim to the generality of the transcendental might be too rigid to account for any differences, while the transcendental gap between thought and practice possibly inhibits any autonomy of the practical differences themselves. Thus, the Kantian subject might be too bloodless, and too frozen in its shape. Too bloodless, too transcenden-

tal, but also not ontological enough: This is only an apparent contradiction, for the question of the subject in contemporary continental philosophy is directly linked to the ontological as a foundation of the possibility of change, of difference. Too much transcendentalism encloses the possibility of change in the laws of the given world. Thus, the Kantian subject is sceptically suspected of being a statue rather than an agent of (social) change.

It is the exaggeration of this sceptical stance that also allows one to point out the moments of its inconsistency. In contrast, it becomes important to reconsider the Kantian moment in continental philosophy – precisely in its dissected and disseminated contiguity, as it is perhaps this multiplicity of Kantian constellations that demand to be systematised. Again, the subject: If it is a task of current continental philosophy not only to reconsider the theory of the subject, but also to have to break with the subject as the formalised and generalised form of the subject, then the ‘issue of Kant’ becomes even more problematic. Apart from the first critique, Kant continues his engagement with the subject throughout the second and third critiques. And it is especially in the third critique that one might understand the transcendental subject to be supplemented by a specific and determined process of subjectivation. But then again, already the transcendental subject in Kant is characterised by a fundamental ambiguity: Although the transcendental structure determines the subject as one, in Kant, the transcendental subject is at the same time split in its inner core. It is the one that cannot appear to itself, although it needs to be thought. In the understanding of our self, there is always a fleeing point that we are unable to grasp. It is not as if Kant would have deemed the transcendental point to simply be some dry theoretical construction; it is also empirically missing in the practical self-understanding of a self. The subject in Kant is thus in itself a multiple correlation of instances. It is in constellations like this that the inner multiplicity of Kant arises. And we might adopt this multiplicity for the necessity of a contemporary Kant: Not *a* Kant in continental philosophy, but an inherent multiplication of Kant in continental philosophy is needed. So to speak, to create two, three, many Kants.

Following from this, questions such as whether there is any use of Kant for a materialist renewal of the theory of the subject might have a different ring. It might also become possible to make the conceptual changes in Kant’s theory of the subject – throughout the three critiques – fruitful for an elaboration of a materialist notion of the subject. And eventually Kant’s philosophy might also

be used as a possible conceptual basis for the determination of a materialist notion of the object.

It might be the case that not all of the articles gathered in this issue share these demands for a contemporary Kant. They will impose their own demands on us as readers – but in any case, the articles gathered in this issue share the common claim that a continental philosophy of the subject cannot do without Kant. This is the issue with Kant.