

False contradiction: A Critique of Immanuel Kant's Transcendental Dialectic in the Kantological Thought of Valentin Asmus

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Abstract: Valentin Asmus made a huge contribution to the formation of key interpretations, analysis and evaluation of Immanuel Kant's work in the Russian-Soviet tradition of studying the "history of foreign philosophy". This article shows precisely which principles and development models Asmus laid down in his interpretation of the transcendental dialectic section of Kant's philosophical system. We have shown that in his reading of Kant, Asmus actively relies on Hegel's philosophical legacy, namely, on his theory of dialectics, the ontological status of contradiction and the highly significant role of "error" in the formation and advance of knowledge. Asmus reads Kant through the optics of Hegel's philosophy and adheres to Hegelian philosophy as a benchmark of fidelity and heuristics, as a canon and organon, through which Kant's thought should be evaluated. Pursuing this path, he notes the significant progress of Kant's thought compared to the metaphysical philosophy of previous centuries, but points out the insufficiency of Kant's determination to fully think through contradictions ontologically and dialectically. Kant confines himself to pointing out the natural origin of the principle of "appearance" in the limits of reason, but is not ready to revise the foundations of classical logic, where any contradictions should be avoided. As a consequence, he settles on the epistemological interpretation of contradiction seeing it as an error of reason albeit a natural one, leaving Asmus deeply disenchanted with his Hegelian expectations.

Key Words: Valentin Asmus, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Hegel, Soviet philosophy, philosophy in Russia, Kantian studies, Kantian studies in Russia, dialectics, antinomies, transcendental dialectics, reason.

Introduction. A reconstruction of the roots of the scholarly biography of the outstanding Russian philosopher Valentin Asmus, disclosing all those sources and contexts which influenced his intellectual formation would require a more complete study. This approach,

with its inner logic and the construction of a continuity of ideas, could form the basis of a certain doctrine, since it would develop as a certain narrative. As a Doctor of Philosophy, a professor at Lomonosov Moscow State University, laureate of the USSR State Prize, a full member of the International Institute of Philosophy in Paris, an Honoured Scientist, Asmus worked not only as a formidable and highly professional historian of philosophy, but also created a model canon to understand the legacy of Western philosophers. Valentin Asmus' works on philosophy, logic, aesthetics and cultural theory have been translated into German, French, English, Spanish, Italian, Polish, Slovak, Chinese, Japanese, Hungarian, Finnish and other languages. In this article, however, I will attempt to reconstruct Asmus' path, even though it may be an attractive and productive enterprise bearing significant results. Rather, I will immediately proceed to an account of Asmus' intellectual history, to a kind of distillation of his scientific formation. Such is the philosophical legacy of Kant, for the development, popularization and clarification of which Asmus has made an invaluable contribution in Russia. In this text, I will focus directly on this aspect of the philosopher's scientific research, in which he managed to create interpretative versions of the foremost German philosopher and actually create a tradition of Kantian studies in Russia. For many years V. F. Asmus remained the main Kant specialist in Russia, and there is every reason to contend that it was Kant's philosophy that formed the most compelling basis of his worldview.

In his studies of Kant's philosophy, Valentin Asmus paid special attention to transcendental dialectics. It has been established that for Kant himself, this section of the first Critique played a significant role. However, the emphasis that Asmus gives to this section deserves thorough consideration. If for Kant the dialectic is a philosophy of "appearance", absolutely central for coordinating the work of the mind, but incapable of independent philosophical inquiry, which only catapults cognition into the abyss of illusions and fictions, then Asmus sees in dialectical reason the beginning of that peculiarly philosophical potential, which will subsequently be constantly enhanced in Hegel's system. Moreover, what is even more interesting is how Asmus reconstructs productive dialectics in Kant's architectonics of pure reason. Thanks to such an interpretation in Soviet 'Kantology', the attitudes characteristic of European Kantian studies are somewhat transformed. According to the European perspective, Kant seriously weakened the positions of classical ("dogmatic") metaphysics, demonstrating its limits and "weakness" in cases where there were attempts to go beyond any conceivable experience. On the contrary, Asmus' reading of Kant preserves the philosophical potential of metaphysics, but clearly shifts Kant's critical project towards Hegel's dialectic. The project of "laying boundaries" in the interpretation of Asmus is significantly expanded. Such an interpretation is interesting primarily because it is one of the curious illustrations of the differences that lie in the versions of Soviet and Western post-Hegelianism. If Western Hegelianism was also largely inclined to criticize metaphysics, then Soviet post-Hegelianism entirely favoured metaphysics provided that the latter offered a prospect of re-emerging as dialectics.

Kant a great, but not the greatest. Asmus created a conceptual portrait of Kant and the entire Kantian philosophy in his key works "The Philosophy of Immanuel Kant" (1957), "Immanuel Kant" (1973), "The Dialectics of Kant" (1929), etc. In the preface to his main

work, he writes: "Kant is a great name in the history of world culture, in the history not only of the German people, but of all humankind. He was an innovator in the scientific field as well in that of philosophy. He is not only the creator of the great cosmogonic hypothesis, which proclaimed that our universe is an evolving universe, that our Earth has a history in time. In philosophy, he was a renovator of ideas and even a pioneer of dialectics. It is precisely from Kant that the current of dialectical materialism originates.¹" The whole history of Asmus' adoption of Kant and his philosophical legacy will be characterized by this final sentence. Asmus will try to show that Kant's philosophy is based on a specific transformation of attitudes towards dialectics, which can be considered a transitional point from modern metaphysics to Hegel's dialectics. Asmus remarks that from a purely critical and cautious attitude to dialectical rationality, which admits contradictions, European thought proceeds to represent the necessity and naturalness of these contradictions. It is while pursuing this trajectory that Asmus intends to consider Kant as one of the most influential figures. This approach represents firstly the distinctly 'Asmusian' and then the entire Russian-Soviet tradition of reading Kant's philosophy by interpreting it as an intermediate stage on the path towards Hegel and the entirety of late German classical philosophy. Asmus' position, which we will consider in detail below, can be formulated as follows. Classical metaphysics, inspired by the formulas of ancient philosophy, deemed that the existence of contradictions in thought entailed a complete collapse of rationality, a deeply unnatural state of thinking. This position is strengthened and cemented by the Cartesian tradition of rationality, which definitively postulates standards of Aristotelian logic as the canon and organon of philosophical reason. However, in his well-known third part of the architectonics of reason, transcendental dialectics, Kant outlines a certain naturalness and inevitability of garbled reason. Reason falling into contradictions is vexatious and should be avoided; however, such contradictions are not the result of reason "playing up", "fracturing", or acting abnormally. On the contrary, the contradictions in which reason is garbled are a consequence of the fact that reason fully follows its own nature. According to Kant, reason is obliged to err in order to do the work that is intended for it (namely, to indicate the path and the direction towards reason).

However, despite such groundbreaking intuitions, Asmus believes that Kant still did not make any progress towards affirming the absolute dialectics of cognition and the fundamental limitations of analytical thinking. He was obstructed from following the path to this single true claim because of his loyalty to the ideals of analytical rationality – Aristotelian logic and Cartesian evidence, i.e., broadly speaking to that pre-critical metaphysics, which Kant failed to fully eliminate. It seems that Asmus assumes that Kant could not do so given the vestigial dogmatism of his doctrine, resulting from his commitment to the foundations of the Christian faith. Kant's critical project, which was supposed to chart new boundaries, had boundaries set from the outset. According to Asmus, Kant failed to display a thoroughgoing criticality in the way that Hegel had. It is easy to understand from which of Kant's philosophical theses Asmus draws his arguments. It is clear already in Kant's major demand to limit reason in order to give place to faith, there is not simply a call

¹ Asmus V.F. *Immanuel Kant* Leningrad, Moscow, ed. "Nauka", 1973, p.2.

to be careful with the ambitions of reason but a hint, too, that reason cannot always carry out its function. We should be critical not so much of the workings of reason itself as of its application. One cannot go all the way but must stop somewhere. That is why the modern philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who adheres to Hegelian doctrine, criticizes Kant for his indecision, his unwillingness to step over the boundary of the phenomenal towards the noumenal. Kant's philosophy becomes a hostage of the world of phenomena, since Kant's criticality of reason has its limits, it is not boundless and not without borders. Further progress is off-limits, namely, it cannot reveal its own reasons, criticize reason itself. It is interesting that Asmus, who takes into account and largely follows the rules of dialectical materialism in his reasoning, has the same intuitions that we subsequently encounter with modern post-Hegelians and Freudo-Marxists. In general, the overlap of Asmus' ideas with the European philosophers of the second half of the 20th century, rooted in Hegel's legacy, cannot be anything other than conspicuous. Of course, Asmus himself makes no claim about this in any way. However, when reading the works of Asmus today, we see a certain internal isomorphism of his ideas with those of structuralism, Freudian-Marxism, Lacanism, and other variants of Hegelianism. What, in general, was designated in the European tradition as the direction of postmodernism contains the same guidelines and patterns of thought that Asmus follows, defending the colossal potential of Hegel in comparison with the entire previous philosophical tradition. Representatives of the above-mentioned trends either drew close to the exhaustive correctness of Hegel, or shied away from it, but in any case they were formed as philosophers within the radius of future Hegelian thought. The well-known idea of the end of philosophical thought, undertaken within and through Hegelian philosophy, most ably and influentially expressed by the French philosopher of Russian origin Alexandre Kojève, is clearly traceable in and is used by Asmus. In his philosophical analysis, he is not ready to go further than Hegelian philosophy, but, on the contrary, this uses philosophy as a compass to ascertain standards of accuracy and heuristics of all other philosophies. In this sense, it can be clearly stated that Asmus reads Kant in a Hegelian way, and his optics are Hegelian too. This imposes certain obligations on the philosophical research undertaken by Asmus. Firstly, he believes that it is the lot of all philosophers to either agree with or dispute Hegel. Secondly, that any given philosopher is not obliged to vociferously and consciously declare his attitude to Hegel – this attitude is already declared by the very act of philosophical reasoning undertaken by the philosopher. And, finally, thirdly, the key tools and apparatus of the Hegel system is the framework of genuine philosophical reasoning, which must be sought in every philosophical doctrine. It is not surprising that given such premises of Asmus' own philosophical reasoning, his analysis of Kant's legacy will be highly Hegelian-oriented, and in this sense, critical. One of the most important indicators of the depth and fidelity of a philosophical theory will be its use of dialectical methodology. It is clear that Asmus, following Hegel, assumes that dialectics is unique in that it is not only a method, but also the subject itself. This unique identity of method and subject, which constitutes the identity of doctrine and reality, determines the great ontological turn of dialectical philosophy. According to this criterion, Kant, who clearly expresses a pronounced epistemological dualist stance, certainly does not fit into the ideals of ontologism shared by Asmus. In his opinion, Kant was moving in the right direction, but failed to follow through to the end. Below we will

consider precisely which version of Kant's "inconsistency" with Hegel Asmus will defend, and what role dialectics plays in this.

Concerning the roots of Kantian “inadequacy”. Asmus starts from the proposition that all German philosophy after Kant reproaches him for a certain lack of courage, for an inability to bring his suggested framework to its logical conclusion. According to this criticism, Kant should have shown great insight and care, and not set himself limits. Then he would have noticed that for a truly correct answer to the question "How is synthetic a priori knowledge possible?" one should not resort to any limits between the unknowable and the knowable. In no case should the structure of cognition serve as a kind of border condition between the world that is open to us and the world that remains beyond our cognition, since, according to Asmus who follows Hegel in this matter, we will never arrive at a world that can truly be accessible to us under such limiting procedures. Kant started out correctly, but at some point could not reach a conclusive end. The correct solution would be to show that there is no unknowable dimension; the subject's cognitive abilities are not just tailored to the knowable, but the subject is a continuation of a large project of the world's self-cognition. Asmus assumes that Kant was correct in his fundamental intuition: one can know and be successful in one's cognition only by interacting with this tailored world, that is, with the world for oneself, "for one's own", with the world that has already been processed by us. In this Kant was correct, but he erred fatally and dramatically in explaining how it occurs. He maintained dualistic relations, relations of duality between subject and object. As a result, two objects emerged in his system: one is actually real, and the second is fictitious, temporary. The proper object is noumenal reality itself, with which the subject can interact, resulting in a fictitious object from the point of view of the object's ontological prospects.

Criticizing the mainstay of Kant's philosophy, the division into phenomena and noumena, Asmus fully sides with Hegel and all subsequent critical thought, arguing that Kant retains the classical, subject-object, dualistic relations typical of Modern European epistemology. It is this false dualism of subject and object that makes it impossible for Kant to properly answer one of his central questions, "what can I know?" What was Kant's mistake? Kant, on the one hand, limits knowledge to the phenomenal world, and on the other hand, limits knowledge to the possibilities of the mind. The task of the mind consists only in establishing connections and following the rules of logic, that is, as Kant suggests, its own laws. Asmus is sharply critical of this representation of knowledge. And Asmus is not satisfied by the relatively modest claims of the mind, and its peremptory adherence to the laws of logic. He insists that the mind is fooling itself by putting false obstacles in its way. In this his stance is akin to Žižek's, indicating that Kant, psychologically almost lacking courage, does not dare expand the possibilities of rational activity in the direction of going beyond mere logic.

All indications are that Asmus clearly follows the Hegelian formula: "knowledge is an outcome." Hegel means by knowledge that which we assume to be the shift from ignorance to knowledge. Knowledge emerges when we have a conscious experience of ignorance, when we feel and know what it is like not to know, after which the experience of knowledge arises, and we have a phenomenological sense of grasping what it is like to know. That is why all

knowledge is cognition; knowledge exists - when it is cognition. In this sense, all knowledge is not just a statement of fact, but a history of passing through different states of clarification, elucidation, from twilight to clarity, from clarity to yet greater clarity and so on. And this in turn means that the experience of errors of inclusion in the experience of knowledge is not an obstacle on the path to knowledge, but an integral part of it. Cognition is dialectical, because it must know not only the truth, but also how it was arrived at. Without an accumulation of errors, the truth will not become the truth. The very announcement of the truth to someone who has never made a mistake, proceeding cognitively, will not allow the possibility of understanding this truth. But if so, then the experience of errors is included in cognitive activity, and actually constitutes it. It is here where Asmus reproaches Kant and demands from him respect for contradictions and errors in which reason is regularly garbled. This is not an innate affliction of human rationality, it is an absolutely necessary and useful foundation of thought. Understanding without making mistakes does not work out, and each new error should be written into the concept, and not forgotten and discarded. It is from these positions that Asmus proceeds to analyze the third and final part of Kant's architectonics of human reason, in which the concept of transcendental dialectics and its designation as the "logic of appearance" first appears.

The Key Role of Dialectics.

Dialectics had been at the centre of Asmus' philosophical research virtually throughout his entire creative life. This interest also persisted in the case of his works on Kant. This is already indicated by the titles of his main works: "Dialectical materialism and logic. An essay on the development of the dialectical method from Kant to Hegel" (Kiev, 1924). Subsequently, his work "The Dialectics of Kant" appeared (Moscow, 1929; 2nd edition, 1930). Many years later, shortly before his death, his fundamental monograph "Immanuel Kant" (Moscow, 1973) was published.

The broad scope of the term "dialectics", as it was interpreted in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, provided Asmus with additional opportunities to consider the major issues of philosophy. This is especially evident in "Kant's Dialectics" (1929); this work, revised and expanded, formed the basis of a substantive volume "Immanuel Kant", published in 1973. Asmus' analysis of Kant's legacy is built on an initial vein of highlighting Kant's alluring eminence which is then followed by a sense of disenchantment and debacle: Kant had promised much, but was unable to fully realize his conception; he outlined the way forward, but did not reach his goal; he aspired, but failed. A discourse of frustration and disenchantment is the key to the emotional tension in which Asmus maintains the reader studying Kant's influence on the Soviet philosopher. Asmus becomes disillusioned with three of Kant's key claims. First, Kant calls dialectics a "philosophy of appearance." Secondly, he believes that the existence of contradictions in acts of thought is a scandal, provoking discomfiture in every thought and in philosophical thought in particular. Thirdly, it presents antinomies as contradictions while at the same time stating that they are not. All these three propositions arouse indignation in the Soviet philosopher. In his stance, Asmus still starts from Hegel, which means that he believes that for dialectics, the existence of contradictions in the system is absolutely normal as an ontological and epistemological phenomenon. If

Kantian analysis is marked by a sense that "there should be no contradictions", then for dialectics the main stance is that "contradictions must exist".

One of Asmus' reproaches lies in the fact that Kant understands the definition of logic by contradiction – "contradiction is a conflict of claims."² For example, when it is said that "non-existence prevails," this judgment contains a contradiction, because it does not correspond to the axioms "existence prevails" and "non-existence does not prevail." And reasoning in this way, we do not go beyond logic itself. Coming from Asmus, this means that we do not even begin to reason philosophically. But who told us, and this is the main issue of dialectics, that beyond the realm of logic but namely in the world itself there are no contradictions? Why should we restrict ourselves to the realm of thought, are we all solipsists and do not assume a reality external to our thought? And if we recognize its existence, shouldn't we also ask ourselves whether the rule "there should be no contradictions" works in nature? An entirely dogmatic, arbitrary belief, based on nothing and not proven by anyone, that there should be no contradictions in the description of reality, creeps into the relationship between reality and the researcher. What does this faith involve? The hidden statement "the researcher then describes the world correctly when their description is devoid of contradictions." But this provision, in turn, means that *reality is free from contradictions*. However, according to dialectics, this provision is unconditional, namely it is effectively the dogmatic belief of metaphysics in the non-contradictory nature of reality. From here dialectics takes a subsequent step. It says: if we assume that reality itself contains contradictions, then our description, which will also contain contradictions, will quite adequately describe this reality. We said above that a contradiction is a lack of correspondence. Here, the correspondence is observed – if reality contains contradictions, then its description cannot be deprived of them. Otherwise, the researcher falsifies the world (which is exactly what the classical metaphysician, including Kant himself, does, according to Asmus). But then the description of a dialectician who acknowledges contradictions in his theory is completely consistent with the subject of the description, i.e. it corresponds to it, and is therefore devoid of contradictions. In other words, there is no contradiction in the fact that when describing a contradictory reality, we describe it inconsistently. Much will become clearer if we understand what the thesis 'reality contains contradictions' means for dialectics. Throughout his analysis of Kant's theory of knowledge, Asmus does not tire of making provisos that dialectics has no intention whatsoever to call out metaphysical (based on analytical logic) reason as false. Indeed, this would mean that logic, axiomatic systems and the whole corpus of apodictic knowledge are fallacious! Dialectics is by no means ready for such sacrifices! The statement that Asmus himself makes is much more reserved – according to dialectics, metaphysical reason is not wrong (it is broadly true), but simply insufficient to describe the whole world. It is in this sense that dialectics distinguishes analytical reason from dialectical reason. First comes metaphysical reason, completely dependent on classical logic and axiomatic systems. The error of Kantian philosophy and of all classical metaphysics was merely that it considered this reason universal, comprehensive and final. Dialectics, in turn, will call out metaphysics solely for the fact that the latter has taken the first stage of reason

² Kant I. *Kritika chistogo razuma*. Moscow, ed. Mysl', 1994, p. 11.

for reason as a whole. The whole, and therefore dialectical, can only be that reason which describes the world in its entirety. From the point of view of dialectics, the division of the world into the knowable and the unknowable is fundamentally erred. This is due to the fact that the real world is concrete, not abstract. The dialectical method consists, therefore, in the application of such a conceptual apparatus that will allow us to describe the world as it is, without considering it either an illusion or a second-order world. Dialectics, rather, presents itself as a philosophy of common sense, and not at all the logic of appearance. Therefore, further, the main target of Asmus' reading of Kant will be the concept of "appearance", i.e. the fallacy into which reason falls. Asmus clearly intends to replace the minor tone, in which Kant communicates the error, with a major one.

Contradiction as cognition's criterion for effectiveness. Hegel, whose philosophy formed the basis of Asmus' methodology, was entirely convinced that humans necessarily produce error in the process of understanding the world. That is why in those passages where Asmus highly commends the last section of Kant's trilogy of the mind, he writes that the merit of the Königsberg philosopher was to be the first to naturalise the ability of reason to err since the onset of modern philosophy. The illusory nature ("appearance") of our cognition is the flip side of its outstanding potentials. Let us recall that, according to Kant, reason controls the mind and determines its teleology and semantic guidelines. Without reason, the mind could not function, because in order to establish connections, a connection between the connections itself is also needed. Reason is actually trying to provide an answer to the question (of the mind) for the sake of what connections should be established in principle. By its nature, reason strives towards generalization, to absolutization or limit. This occurs because the mind cannot be perpetually carrying out its operations, that is, it cannot be permanently establishing connections. So a sentence that never ends loses its meaning for us. At some point, the mind must halt, or at least have an image, an "appearance" of stopping. Reason generates this image, which is essential for regulating the work of the mind. This image is a cast of the work that reason makes ceaselessly – it is constantly completing the construction of a limit for any series of actions. However, the lot of reason is the same as that of the mind – to be a pure function that avoids objectification and subjectivation. This is an action without an active subject. But when reason ceases to function, it tends to stop "processing data" and turns itself into a given, into a given in order to observe itself from the outside, going beyond its own limits, as well as beyond any possible experience. It is on this path that it suffers an invariable fiasco. Reason cannot stop functioning because this would immediately demolish the very prospect of being aware of something, but it also cannot stop striving towards that place where it is basically supposed to strive by virtue of its powers. Hence, the paradox of reason's tendency to errors and fictions. It is not at fault, it simply cannot behave otherwise. Garbled reason is not corrupted, but a completely healthy reason. It is another matter that one needs to make an incessant effort to overcome one's nature. However, the theme of the naturalness of error leads Asmus to trustingly engage with the stance of Kant and highly appreciate his initial positions in the analysis of cognition. Asmus points out, as we have stated previously, that Kant is actually taking revolutionary steps, pointing out that reason tends to err in the process of cognition itself. However, Asmus further regretfully states that Kant is not ready to pursue his thought to its logical conclusion in his exposure of the

violations of logic as a constituent element of thinking. Kant halts at the level of prescription – reason should do everything possible to resist the temptation to make errors and think in contradictions. Asmus is sincerely disappointed that Kant is not ready to follow Hegel's path and assert that the history of human fallacies is not just a history of local errors and disillusionments of humankind, but in fact the history of knowledge itself. In order to better imagine with what eyes Asmus reads Kant, we shall briefly return to the Hegelian legacy.

Cognition, according to Hegel, is above all the history of the life of the spirit, cognizing the world and thereby more completely attaining self- understanding. It is a uniform and objective spirit in the sense that different individuals at different times were incorporated in the spiritually meaningful history of mankind to the extent that they were able to engage themselves with the affairs of the generations preceding them. To do so, they needed to comprehend the achievements of the spirit ("... the result of the work of all previous generations") and enlighten (develop) their private subjectivity to optimal knowledge; in Hegel's terminology, to the level of logic. To do this, the universal spirit, embodied in its objective achievements (books, tools, works, institutions), requires the *subjectivity of individuals*. For its part, an individual's subjective thinking can acquire historically significant truth (to understand the meaning of events, to grasp the logic of things) only by being formed in this spirit, emerging and being manifesting within it, becoming its active centre of attention. This means that the entire history of mistakes and errors – perhaps due to a person's capability for negation – is significant and, accumulating in the history of the cognitive process, brings it closer to the truth. The inner connection of historical experience, events compressed by thought and logic, constitutes the experience of the history of humankind. It is precisely this subject matter of Hegelian philosophy that for Asmus serves as a compass for Kantian thought and a criterion for evaluating Kant's legacy.

As he begins his analysis of the entire corpus of the Kantian theory of knowledge, Asmus departs from the Hegelian teaching that an individual must pass through the formative stages of the universal spirit, which means that they must necessarily commit errors on the path of understanding, otherwise they are on the path not towards truth, but veering away from it. What was acquired through the experience of errors during historical digression in the past becomes a functional logical skill for the single subject in the present. The original theories of scientific and philosophical schools held by generations, fateful decisions, significant revelations that determine the epochs and destinies of peoples, everything that the "mature spirit of man" has absorbed in the course of formation is reduced to "boyish games", and everything in knowledge itself is reduced to momentary steps of immediate comprehension. The work carried out in cognitive movement, striving for the ultimate truth, should not be too hasty, should not avoid necessary and, in fact, *erroneous* steps or avoid difficulties (for example, logical paradoxes, ambiguities, failures in explanation and other cognitive failures). All the negative aspects of the thinking spirit's cognizing movement (one focusing upon its self) are necessary. That is why Asmus is extremely positive about the fact that Kant speaks of the logic of appearance as an almost inevitable by-product of reason, which raises everything to the Absolute. According to Hegel, truth is not something found at the conclusion of research, but the work of research itself. In addition to the objective content of

truth, "is subjectively defined in and through its individual acts; conversely, its acts provide a subjective certainty, whose goal is objective truth"³ as Hegel observes. There is a more significant problem behind this rethinking: the question of the truth (that is, the purpose) of history, the question of how it turns out that history does not just stretch out like some colossal misunderstanding, but enters into truth precisely in the guise of human history.

This claim is illustrated by the fact that each subsequent stage, being disavowed, is maintained at a new turn of the historical spiral. For, as already mentioned, the history of errors plays a fundamental role in history as such. However, this mechanism of ascent to truth, where the latter is equal to the path itself, could not be understood if the subject of cognition itself (a person committing errors) were constant. Strictly speaking, with each new twist of the spiral, the human being itself (namely, their cognition) changes – that is why the errors of the past, transformed into the truths of the present, do not shock anyone. This leads to the fact that ignorance, or, if you like, temporary ignorance of the absolute must be objectified. This mechanism is not a hoax, but works in reality itself: possessing nuclear energy, genetic engineering, subconscious "mechanisms" of consciousness, the laws of societal functioning, a person is in principle able to create and destroy worlds, organize societies. The human being acquires here not only the means of cognition (for example, by mastering the productive forces of nature), but also nature itself, and in this true form the subject is the truth of being, so that in this productivity it is the goal in itself.

Thus, the development of the cognizing spirit is by no means reduced to a simple increase in knowledge about the world. Knowledge is not some kind of gold sediment obtained as a result of the long labour of knowledge, and therefore the history of science is not at all the accumulation and theoretical systematization of knowledge generalized in textbooks. Scientific knowledge does not lie in a store of extracted truths, it immediately becomes an instrument of cognition, and each cognitive step rearranges the tools (transforms the subject itself). In the language of Hegel: the cognizable substance becomes for the cognizing subject a force (concept) and a "tool for attaining an outcome"⁴. Thus, not only the objective content of the concept changes, but also the form of understanding, and ultimately the idea of understanding itself. And knowledge eventually discovers what it means to be knowledge. Therefore, as Hegel wrote, "the development and unfolding of thoughts occurred with them from the very beginning, and in order to apprehend them through philosophy, we must remain with them, not requiring any search for subsequent, external influences." It is only through mistakes and errors that the spirit understands what really needs to be understood.

The splendor and poverty of the doctrine of antinomies.

If we now apply all that was stated and implied above, the substance and basis of Asmus' beliefs, then the disenchanting critical nature of the reading he has undertaken of Kant will seem inevitable. Kant himself considered his discovery of antinomies to be entirely innovative, a fact to which Asmus also refers. "Here — Kant wrote in the "Critique of Pure

³ Hegel G. W. *Nauka Logiki*. Moscow, ed. ACT, 2019, p. 112.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 115.

Reason”— a new phenomenon of human reason shows itself”⁵. 1. Kant expresses himself equally enthusiastically in the “Prolegomena”. He writes: “Here now we see the strangest phenomenon of human reason, no other example of which can be pointed to in any of its other uses.” 2. It consists of the fact that whenever we think of the phenomena of the sensory world as things in themselves (and this is the case in rational cosmology) “then an unexpected conflict comes to light, which can never be settled in the usual dogmatic manner, since both thesis and antithesis can be established through equally evident, clear, and incontestable proofs – for I will vouch for the correctness of all these proofs – and therefore reason is seen to be divided against itself.”⁶

Asmus writes that “... Kant himself perceived [his own teaching] as something previously unheard of, something extremely paradoxical, difficult to apprehend.”⁷ The renowned Kantian antinomies represent four pairs of claims that collectively exhaust the entire corpus of the major problems of Western metaphysics. These are the origin of the world, the divisibility or indivisibility of its substantial base, spontaneity or causality, as well as the existence or absence of design. As Kant shows, with the same degree of logical perfection and persuasiveness, two mutually exclusive solutions to each of the problems can be proved. In effect, Kant draws already existing solutions from philosophical tradition to each of the four basic problems and gives form to them so successfully that an extremely inconvenient truth is revealed: not only are there far fewer solutions than previously thought (only two main ones), but also the decisional schema are heuristic and compelling in equal measure. Asmus again emphasizes that Kant's merit lies in the fact that he insists on the naturalness, inevitability and even the “necessity” of antinomies. This is not an incongruity, but a natural state of affairs within cognitive mechanics. As we have already stated above, the ability to make absolute (the absolute generalization of a sequence) is inherent in reason by its own nature. This is absolutely vital for the mind to function. However, it is almost impossible for reason to stay within the scope of the work that it should carry out. Difficulties arise because reason takes its own activity as object. While it should remain a pure function, without resorting to self-substantiation, reason periodically sees substance (*substantia*) in its work, namely the Absolute. Asmus carefully selects those quotations in which Kant emphasizes the nature of mistaken reason. “We have drawn upon each of our proofs from the very substance of the case, leaving aside the benefits that could have been furnished us by the erroneous conclusions of dogmatists of both camps”; antinomy “not conjectured arbitrarily but based on the nature of human reason and therefore inescapable”. In light of the above, Asmus writes “... the antinomy of pure reason played the role of a powerful impetus to the awakening of dialectical thought. For the first time (after a long break) Kant showed that reason is dialectical at its very core.”⁸ Asmus believes that Kant's discovery of the antinomic “potential” of reason seriously undermined the analytical dogmas of Aristotelian logic and the entire classical tradition of Modern European Cartesianism. The doctrine on antinomies

⁵ Kant I. *Kritika chistogo razuma*. Moscow, ed. Mysl’, 1994, p34. (translation from *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge 1998 (translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Alan W. Wood p.460)

⁶ Kant I. *Prolegomeny*. Moscow, OGIZ, 1934, p. 230. (Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics §52 p.91 Cambridge, 2004)

⁷ Asmus V.F. *Dialektika Kanta*. Moscow, ed. “Kommunisticheskoy Akademii” академии», 1929, p. 78.

⁸ Ibid. p. 90.

"struck at the main stronghold of metaphysical logic - the interdiction of contradiction." The fundamental requirement of logic that "there should be no contradictions"⁹ was made problematic by Kant due to the fact that contradictions may be hidden in logic itself. Of course, philosophers had already previously surmised logical paradoxes (invariably trying to resolve them until their complete elimination), but the idea of implanting a contradiction into the very essence of rational practice really sounded revolutionary.

Asmus' own rhetoric in his arguments about the merits of Kant is of particular interest and, in a way, an example of how philosophical thought could be constructed in the Soviet period. From documenting the merits of the thinker, whereby the most meaningful analysis of any philosophical legacy could be given, the thinkers moved on to a critical view, in which a comparative analysis of the correspondences and inconsistencies with the dialectical-materialistic tradition was provided, a tradition maintaining its leading position. That is why, shortly after Asmus affirms Kant's good intentions he is forced to state the immaturity and under-realized nature of Kant's efforts to 'legalize' contradictions. According to Asmus, all these efforts could not shake logic's authority, which remained for Kant the sole bastion of cognition and thought.

Thus, the characteristic trope in the Soviet history of philosophy of how earlier philosophers "lacked full understanding" (*nedoponimaniye*) of more progressive ideas to emerge later (due to the increasing presence of dialectics in the history of thought), was notably present in Asmus' work too. His disillusion, as we see, is due to the lack of a "dialectical solution", namely, the demonstration of the incompleteness of the formal and logical picture of the world. Of course, nowhere in his texts does Kant say that rational logic, although true, is incomplete, and also that it describes only a part of existence, and not existence as a whole, taken in its concreteness. On the contrary, Kant undertakes to discover a hidden error in the reasoning that leads to antinomies. He intends to unravel the knot of contradictions, almost like logicians do, dealing with paradoxes or sophisms. At the same time, Asmus, to some degree, superimposes different sections of the "Critique" one upon the other; to be precise, the section of rational cosmology, which basically deals with antinomies, with the sections on rational cosmology and psychology. Indeed, in the last section Kant is using the term "paralogism" and shows quite clearly what it consists of. Next, he shares a recommendation on how to avoid such logical curios. Kant also gives a clear-cut solution to the difficulties of proving the existence of God in rational theology. And, finally, he provides his solution of antinomies, effectively the least clear and simple solution, but Asmus gives this solution the same assessment as the previous two – it clearly indicates a logical error in the construction of proofs, and therefore negates the whole sense of dialectics. This very principle of eliminating the intractable provides Asmus with a reason to talk about Kant's achievements in terms of "lack of understanding". A promising beginning was not brought to a conclusion. Asmus does not hide his disappointment: "Kant did not fulfill his promise to provide a genuine and irremediable dialectic of the contradictions of reason. In fact, without exception, all antinomies are resolved not dialectically, but in such a way that the laws of formal logic

⁹ Ibid. p. 102.

are at the same time unshakable, preserved in all their former force.¹⁰ In general terms, Kant shows that in rational cosmology, rational theology, and rational psychology, the error of substituting a thesis was committed. In particular, in rational psychology, when proving the substantiality of the soul, a paralogism arose – the same concept was used with different meanings. In fact, Kant demonstrates that Aristotle's famous clarification that a contradiction should be established "at the same time, in the same place, and also the same meaning" should always be fulfilled. And if it is not fulfilled somewhere, then a contradiction arises. In all three sections, Kant shows that previous generations of metaphysicians followed the path of replacing concepts and therefore slipped into trivial logical contradictions. However, for Asmus, these contradictions are only "imaginary". Therefore Asmus, disappointed, acknowledges a kind of simulated contradiction. In the spirit of dialectics, he prefers to call the ontological discrepancy a contradiction, rather than an epistemic fault. Asmus even decides to adopt a rather harsh tone: "The result obtained cannot but be recognized as extremely pathetic. Having expended enormous efforts to prove the natural antinomic nature of reason, Kant, as a result of the intense work of thought, arrives at pure nothingness. Dialectics is resolved into a simple illusion, and contradictions, put forward as a necessary condition of reason, are declared non-existent and non-objective.¹¹" It is unsurprising that Asmus explains such an outcome through dominant formal logical thinking, which Kant could not part with. Asmus notes that "the purpose of antinomy, according to Kant, is not to reveal the contradictions inherent in cognition, but to keep knowledge within the boundaries of the comprehensible, i.e. within the limits of the empirical application of categories. "The purpose of antinomy is not theoretical and dialectical, but only pedagogical and rather even defensive, policing thought. The contradictions conceivable in antinomies do not expand our knowledge of the nature of conceivable objects. Antinomies only guard the doctrine of the ideality of phenomena and the unknowability of things in themselves¹²". It is clear that such outcomes of the Kantian project are not completely consistent with what we will later encounter in Hegel's philosophy. In the latter, as we have already written above, the division of the world into the knowable and the unknowable will be sharply negated. The dominant dialectic and the removal of duality are the most important subjects for Asmus as well. In them, of course, one can hear an almost canonical adherence to Hegelian thought, based upon which Asmus proceeds to the most significant part of his work – the analysis of Kant's philosophical legacy. It is not surprising that one of the impressive sections of Kant's first Critique, the section of transcendental dialectics, is the focus of his close attention. Asmus managed to show that Kant's idea of dialectics as appearance into which reason involuntarily falls, charted the dividing line between Kant and the metaphysics of the Modern Era. If all previous metaphysics considered logical contradictions to be a scandal of reason and its profoundly unnatural state, then according to Asmus Kant made a revolutionary breakthrough by declaring contradictions to be the natural state of reason. This nature stems from the very structure of reason, as bringing every mental effort to the level of the absolute limit. Striving to substantiate its functionality, namely, to make absolute and set limits, reason becomes

¹⁰ Asmus V.F. *Dialektika Kanta*. Moscow, ed. "Kommunisticheskoy Akademii" академии», 1929, p 77.

¹¹ Asmus V.F. *Dialektika Kanta*. Moscow, ed. "Kommunisticheskoy Akademii", 1929, p. 119.

¹² *Ibid.* p 121.

obfuscated in contradictions that are of a conflicting nature. Reason cannot help but get garbled, because in order to ensure the smooth operation of the mind, it is obliged to maintain within itself an orientation towards an exit from its own limits. If at the same time one always works with an outside source for materials, then there will be no problems, but it is worth turning one's magnificent capacities to oneself, as well as substantiating them or objectifying them once the gravest contradictions become a sad reality. From this point, Asmus begins to rethink the Kantian verdicts in order to study the nature (whether authentic or counterfeit) of the Kantian dialectic.

Eventually, Asmus comes to the conclusion that the Kantian dialectic is not genuine. All the inconsistencies allow a disaffected Asmus to conclude: "Thus, after a long journey travelled together with Kant, we returned to the starting point of formal logic: to the principle of contradiction in its most orthodox form." It turns out that "... Kant's dialectic not only does not lead to the assertion of the reality of contradiction, not only does it not root it in things, but, on the contrary, it even expels contradiction from thought."¹³ The error in which reason is obfuscated does not indicate the historicity of the formation of understanding itself, which has yet to arrive at certain claims. As a consequence, the existence of errors in cognition does not indicate the mutability of the person themselves and the practice of their understanding. Kant's anthropology presupposes the immutability of the cognizing subject, its absolute and complete fulfillment at the very beginning of thought. That is why classical logic in the spirit of Aristotle and Descartes remains the only relevant methodology of Kantian idealism. "The most convenient logical form for the realization of Kant's ideas turned out to be metaphysical logic."¹⁴ It is not surprising that Asmus becomes disillusioned with such a finale, because the whole architectonics of Kant's rationality was devoted only to the claim that classical logic was triumphant. "It was to the scale of this logic that Kant subordinated his entire 'dialectical' teaching"¹⁵.

Conclusion.

The question arises as to why Asmus thought that Kant should be read through the lens of Hegel's absolute idealism? Why did he not simply need to show the continuity of ideas, but to apply Hegel's philosophy as a universal criterion? Of course, this was due to the ideological climate and the need to comply with the philosophical canon in Soviet humanitarian thought. Asmus does not abandon this tradition. He broadly follows the official philosophical line in Soviet Russia, which considers Hegel to be if not the pinnacle of philosophical reflection, then occupying some such proximate position. At the same time, by the very line of reasoning and the rationale provided by Asmus, we see that not only are we dealing with a case of the prevailing ideology, but also with certain enduring beliefs of Asmus. At one point, Asmus' fascination with Hegel even provided grounds for marking him down as a Menshevik idealist. Hegel, highly valued by Lenin, although initially interpreted as a "materialist to be stood on his head," on the whole retained the leading position in the philosophical canon, due

¹³ Asmus V.F. *Dialektika Kanta*. Moscow, ed. "Kommunisticheskoy Akademii" академии», 1929, p.145.

¹⁴ Asmus V.F. *Immanuel Kant* Leningrad, Moscow, ed. "Nauka", 1973, p. 339.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 341.

to the potential for contextualizing him in a materialist perspective. Moreover, just at the time that a benign attitude towards Hegel prevailed, his philosophy was considered as having completely wiped out Kant's philosophy. However, in the 1930s, the persecution of adherents of Menshevik idealism began, and support for this approach was far from welcome among Soviet ideologues. However, this did not prevent Asmus from continuing to defend his vision of Hegelian philosophy as encapsulating the whole history of the German classical tradition at the very least; and seen more broadly, that of the entire history of Western European metaphysics as a whole. Correspondingly, Kant is placed by Asmus on a lower rung of a hypothetical philosophical ladder, where Hegel, in the eyes of Asmus, deservedly occupies the top rung.

This hierarchy of philosophical potential is based on a number of internal criteria. The first and major criterion, as we have already understood, is that of full-fledged dialectics, namely the reality of contradictions. The second criterion is its ontological status. According to Asmus, progressive philosophical thought ascends from epistemology to ontology. In this sense, Asmus, in his basic philosophical intuitions, can be regarded as an ontologist. In this context, Asmus not only fits into the tradition of European post-Hegelianism, in which dialectics was conceived as replacing naive metaphysics centred on analytical logic, but also into the context of a great ontological turn that gave birth to phenomenology, structuralism and a number of other philosophical trends. Since Kant clearly stands out, that is, he "precedes" these "turns", then despite all the undeniable genius, originality and grandiosity of his project (having the force of a Copernican revolution), Kant had practically no chance of bearing further fruits from within his philosophical path. "It is quite understandable why Kant did not notice the antinomianism inherent in all propositions and statements of thought in general.¹⁶" This is due to the structural limitation of the Kantian system, one analytical and epistemological at its core. Together, both of these "limitations" lead to the fact that the contradiction is thought of as "a mistake, an error, a pathological state of cognizing thought."¹⁷ Reason's error here is localized within the limits of the cognitive procedure alone and, of course, does not contribute to the development and complication of the world as a whole. According to Asmus, analytical rationality, based solely on logic, only represents a limited set of philosophical instruments. From the point of view of the totality of cognition, it is not only insufficient, but also purposeless and vacuous. In this matter Asmus, to a large extent, follows the Hegelian manner of limiting formal logic to the limits of rational cognition. Moreover, Asmus tends to Hegelian absolutism, which means he does not accept a dual ontology, in particular, an ontology dividing the world into phenomena and things-in-themselves), as well as dual epistemologies, where there is the knowable and the unknowable.

In the Soviet tradition, the very way in which systems and theories were aligned in the history of philosophy was nearly always inextricably linked with dialectics. This trend, of course, first of all corresponded to official ideology. However, the analysis of Asmus' oeuvre, with all the richness of the arguments he developed and the steadfastness of his stance, forces us to

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 341.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 152.

believe that he followed dialectical optics not for opportunistic reasons. His key arguments add up to a coherent picture and a well-defined philosophical stance, which though at times may have turned into a philosophical "creed", still retained both consistency and conviction. Of course, Asmus had to rely on the manifold claims of Marxist "classics", however, it seems that referring to them and citing their claims did not just permit publication, but also provided Asmus with something to claim that was akin to his own stance. It can be said that his philosophical conviction was fully revealed in his analysis of the work of Kant, whom he almost idolized, but whom at the same time he found the strength to treat critically.

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