

IMMANUEL KANT AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE – CONFISCATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL POSITIONS (2024)*

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Abstract. The present article dedicated to *Immanuel Kant and the War in Ukraine – confiscations and international positions* (2024) aims, by arranging the analysis in and on three interrelated levels (*Kant on the anniversary – 2024 – in the context of international debates; Kant as a “confiscated argument” in the Russian interpretation of the War in Ukraine. O. Schulz’s response and An updated debate – International Kant Congress, Kaliningrad, 2024*) to verify punctually and updated the impact of Kantian philosophy in and for the current political thought, validating and strengthening the statement-hypothesis according to which Immanuel Kant is (considered) a relevant landmark for the theory of International Relations.

Keywords: *Immanuel Kant; The War in Ukraine; International Kant Congress, Kaliningrad, 2024*

Introductory Framework

The statement-hypothesis according to which Immanuel Kant is (considered) a relevant landmark for the theory of International Relations requires to be proven through two reference frames.

The first is focusing on the way in which the philosopher represents the *object* and *subject* of H. Kissinger’s undergraduate thesis defended at Harvard University, entitled “The Meaning of History: Reflections on Spengler, Toynbee and Kant” (1950), Kant not being only a theoretical landmark, but also of action for the one who will become the Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor, theorist and diplomat *par excellence*, Henry Kissinger, not coincidentally whose biography is also geographically (not just structurally!) linked to the Germanic space, being born in Fürth.

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The second recovers and extrapolates the statement from *Die Zeit*, according to which, in the context of current debates, there would be at least two Kants (*one confiscated, the other returned to the space of thought – s.n.*), one eminently preserved as a philosopher valued to the point of veneration in the German and European space, and another second, in the guise of a “thinker buried in Kaliningrad” and hijacked, confiscated by “Putin’s vision of the world”.

Hence the verification of the hypothesis according to which Immanuel Kant does not only represent a point of reference in and for the theory of International Relations, his philosophy constituting the epicenter of a controversial space not only as a reaction, but also as a use of ideational arguments, with tensions explicitly felt between the Russian Federation and the Western world. Thus, we will validate the perspective according to which, even in the anniversary context, Immanuel Kant, the philosopher, has no real connection with Germany or with today’s Russia, this becoming the core point of some subjectively determined and constructed axioms.

The present approach will use *discourse analysis* as a method, quantifying in a table, the identification of a relevant triad, composed of explicit and correlated indicators (*emitting actors – discursive practices – discursive resources*) the report and relationship identified and analyzed between and between the Russian Federation and Germany, respectively, Kant and the Kantian work, substantiating a debate with the valences of a tool for generating a particular grid for interpreting the meanings of reality.

Discourse analysis reveals specific *communication behaviors*, through the act of *diagnosis* (identification and description in the corpus of a statement or discourse of the mechanisms, strategies and communicative tactics used) and *interpretation*, by determining the intentionality of the discourse strategy, including reference to the expected (constructed) effect and the intended meaning. The *theme, content* and premeditated (strategic) *cognitive* side remain relevant in this context.

In this regard, we will insist on Anton Alikhanov’s speech and the response given by Olaf Scholtz, on the Philosophical Congress dedicated to the three hundredth anniversary of the philosopher’s birth in Königsberg, currently Kaliningrad (April 22-25, 2024) and the official commemorative event in Berlin (April 22, 2024).

Two additional clarifications are required. The first concerns the balanced reporting of two speeches – one of confiscation, the other of taking a position – both part of a crisis tension, by resorting to the reality of the War in Ukraine. The second concerns the obstacles encountered in the documentation and research process, the information regarding the conduct of the Congress in Kaliningrad, being part of an approach with blocked access, resorting to specific extensions to be accessed from the European space, an action that confirms the specific policy (of confiscation, confinement!) of the Russian Federation, including with regard to the updated destiny of the philosopher and his thinking.

*Kant on His Anniversary (2024)
in the Context of International Debates*

The invasion of Ukraine begins on February 24, 2022, with a direct attack by the Russian Federation, an aggressive act that confirms the fears of European actors in recent decades regarding the potential hostility of the Eastern neighbor, but also a moment that marks the transition to a multipolar-unstable world (see also the Middle East and beyond). The event demands to be perceived as a true “turning point”, foreshadowing and warning of a state of affairs within which “(...) the risk of war and uncertainties will be greater and will leave its mark on future developments. Therefore, the war triggered by the Russian Federation is, rather, a catalyst that accelerates a process of rethinking strategic competition, defined, most often, as a simple hegemon – challenger dyad”¹.

International relations theory also identifies the phenomena that influence the dynamics of the international system, through a multitude of perspectives on the constant “metamorphosis” of the anarchic international space, from the Hobbesian vision to the analogies of Henry Kissinger. In fact, H. Kissinger comments on Thomas Hobbes’s perspective, associating it with the international order that emerged following the Peace of Westphalia (1648): “The Peace of Westphalia in its early practice implemented a Hobbesian world. [...] After the Peace of Westphalia, the balance of power emerged as a system; in other words, its achievement was accepted as one of the key goals of foreign policy”².

It is an apt landmark to mark the beginning of the constitution of the modern international system, in the corpus of which the notions of state, balance of power or balance of power exist and can be understood. In other words, in this punctual and punctuated context the classical actors of international relations come to have “self-awareness”. There is a consensus regarding the concept of “nation-state” and sovereignty. H. Kissinger associates this moment with the onset of a Hobbesian world since the actors are part of a system devoid of any central authority, each pursuing their national interest, the space becoming an anarchic one.

H. Kissinger inventories, on the one hand, the way in which and through which the balance of power was maintained in Europe, until the Age of Enlightenment, in particular thanks to England, which counteracted any hegemonic tendency, and France, which tried to prevent the unification of the Germanic states, and, on the other hand, the evolution of the process through which such phenomena generated new paradigms³. In the aforementioned argument, several philosophically and ideologically established names are invoked, whose ideas determined decisive trends in and for the international arena, among whose series Immanuel Kant is also individualized⁴.

¹ Claudiu Degeratu, “The Black Sea Region after Moscow’s War against Ukraine”, in *Western Romania*, vol. 2, no. 1/2023, Bucharest, Monitorul Oficial, 2023, p. 10.

² Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*, Penguin Group Publishing, New York, 2014, p. 25.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

H. Kissinger highlights the transition that the French Revolution produces and defines the Age of Enlightenment as one in which “Europe has never been more united or more spontaneous”⁵, exemplifying through the discoveries made, through the “spirit” that dominated the old continent, but especially through perspectives such as those of Montesquieu or I. Kant, thinkers who innovate the theory of international relations. This “united” Europe has nothing to do with a union proper, but aims at the “direction” adopted simultaneously by the European states. H. Kissinger calls Immanuel Kant “probably the greatest thinker of the Enlightenment period”⁶, invoking the relevance of the concepts that the philosopher postulates, from “unsocial sociability” to the eternal peace. In fact, H. Kissinger correlates this statement with the pacifist doctrine, in favor of which the thinker advocates, explaining I. Kant’s certainty regarding the way in which citizens play a fundamental role in maintaining peace, when relating to aspects of the power system⁷.

Immanuel Kant is considered a relevant landmark for the theory of international relations, the philosopher being the object and subject of H. Kissinger’s undergraduate thesis at Harvard University, entitled “The Meaning of History: Reflections on Spengler, Toynbee and Kant” (1950). The dilemma of the paradox between necessity and freedom is positioned as a relevant point of research, in relation to the analogical paradigm of the empiricists, Henry Kissinger highlighting the questioning of the source of freedom in a “phenomenological” world, in which the only “tangible” landmark existing would be that of resorting to empirical examples⁸, a contextuality to which he asserts, a century earlier than Spengler or Toynbee, a “faithful” articulation: “A hundred years before Spengler and Toynbee, in the Prussian provincial town of Königsberg, the problem of the meaning of life, the paradox of the experience of our freedom, in a world of occasional laws, received its most profound formulation. Kant was confronted with the legacy of a philosophy that reduced freedom and morality either to the technical knowledge of objective necessity or to a simple catalogue of pleasant perceptions”⁹.

For H. Kissinger, Immanuel Kant himself becomes a “turning point” for the European philosophy of the time, in the sense that Kantian thought transcends contemporary empiricism and rationalism, through a “reformulation of the possibilities of human knowledge”¹⁰. H. Kissinger synthesizes the Kantian perspective, in the sense of the limits of knowledge through the “incompleteness” of human reason, which makes room for faith (not necessarily religious faith), the phenomenological world becoming “an emanation of pure reason”¹¹.

The relevance of such certainties lies in the fact that Kant’s theory of knowledge generates fundamental concepts for interpreting the dynamics of the

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 145.

⁸ Henry A. Kissinger, *The Meaning of History (Reflections on Spengler, Toynbee and Kant)*, Harvard College, 1950, p. 260.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 261.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

international system and history. A prime example is the role that H. Kissinger attributes to the categorical imperative: "The categorical imperative provides the framework for Kant's philosophy of history. If the transcendental experience of freedom is the condition for the emergence of the greater truth at the core of all phenomenal appearances, then its maxims must constitute norms in the political realm. Peace is therefore the noblest goal of human endeavor, the affirmation of the supremacy of man's moral personality"¹².

By referring to the Kantian essay "Towards Eternal Peace", a perpetual peace becomes the only desirable end for humanity. The perspective reflects not only the pacifist doctrine, but also the need for classical actors of international relations to act in accordance with maxims desirable for all, those that involve giving up some of one's own freedoms for the purpose of peaceful coexistence.

H. Kissinger also resorts to naming and evaluating the "syncopes" of Kantian philosophy, by pointing out some textually detectable contradictions. For example, the idea is highlighted that the "plan of nature", in the metaphysical sense of its desirable "finality", contradicts the limits of reason that I. Kant establishes in the "Critique of Pure Reason" and in the "Critique of Practical Reason". Basically, what is supposed to prevent humanity from achieving perpetual peace would actually be part of this "plan of nature". H. Kissinger states that "necessity cannot contain sanctions for moral action"¹³, the statement not aiming at an absolute contradiction, since these "tensions" between the determinism of the "plan of nature" and the autonomy of rational morality can be complementary from certain perspectives. The categorical imperative does not exclude free will, so it does not imply inevitability. Man is free to act or not in accordance with this law. What H. Kissinger does is to expose these potential errors, his approach thus gaining an additional legitimate objectivity.

The role and place of I. Kant within the field of international relations research is significant. Henry Kissinger, one of the greatest theorists of international relations, is particularly concerned with the landmarks of Kantian theory, analyzing the cultural, temporal and "doctrinal" coordinates in which this philosophical system was born¹⁴. Through Kantian philosophy, H. Kissinger explains the exclusion of pre-modern concepts of universality from the Enlightenment era, but also the indispensability of reason and international institutions in the progress of humanity. H. Kissinger presents the existence of moral law as a *sine qua non* "premise" for humanity's chance to coexist peacefully.¹⁵ Moreover, he claims that the "moral politician" is the one for whom the categorical imperative represents the absolute norm, through the existence of the "symbiosis" between the metaphysics of morality and the particularities of empiricism.¹⁶

Immanuel Kant is not only a point of reference in and for the theory of international relations, his philosophy has been – including, during the year 2024

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 262.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 263.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 290.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

– the epicenter of a point controversy regarding the tensions between the Russian Federation and the Western world.

On February 12, 2024, at a conference held in Svetlogorsk, the governor of the current Russian region of Kaliningrad, Anton Alikhanov, stated that “Immanuel Kant has an almost direct connection with global chaos”¹⁷, associating his philosophy with the way the Western world positions itself in relation to the war in Ukraine and accusing him of the West’s “globalist” rhetoric. Moreover, at the same conference, the philosopher is also considered responsible for the First World War: “Today, in 2024, we are bold enough to state that not only did the First World War begin with Kant’s work, but also the current conflict in Ukraine. Here, in Kaliningrad, we dare to propose – although we are actually almost certain of this – that it was precisely in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [...] that the ethical, value-based foundations of the current conflict were established”¹⁸.

Two months later, in April 2024, in the context of the three-centennial anniversary of Immanuel Kant’s birth, Anton Alikhanov stated that the philosopher was “a Russian trophy”.¹⁹ Between April 22 and 25, 2024, the Russian Federation organized the Philosophical Congress dedicated to the three hundredth anniversary of the birth of the philosopher in Königsberg, currently Kaliningrad. Anton Alikhanov’s act has all the elements of the confiscation of the philosopher, an explicit move by which the authorities and ideology try to appropriate the rhetoric of a personality.

In parallel with the aforementioned Congress, on April 22, 2024, an official commemorative event took place in Berlin, through a festive ceremony, which was also attended by Olaf Scholtz. The German Chancellor’s speech was firm, solemn and representative of the West’s response to Russia, forbidding Vladimir Putin from pronouncing the name of Immanuel Kant²⁰. “«The destruction that Russia is causing to Ukraine speaks of a desire for destruction, the scale of which few could have imagined in the 21st century»”, said the German Chancellor, in his speech titled «Reflections on the Treatise of the German Philosopher Kant «Towards Eternal Peace»»”²¹.

To understand the basis of these tensions and to approximate the extent of the legitimacy of each discourse, a historical perspective is indispensable. Although in the Enlightenment era Prussia could have been more associated with the “eastern” states, in the sense of a predominant conservative component, Königsberg

¹⁷ “Governor of Russia’s Kaliningrad says German philosopher Immanuel Kant «directly tied» to war in Ukraine”, in *Meduza*, last edited on 12 February 2024, consulted on 5 March 2025, URL: <https://meduza.io/en/news/2024/02/12/governor-of-russia-s-kaliningrad-says-german-philosopher-immanuel-kant-directly-tied-to-war-in-ukraine>.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ “Why Russia can’t have Kant?”, in *Propa-stop*, last edited on May 2, 2024, accessed March 5, 2025, URL: <https://www.propastop.org/en/2024/05/02/why-russia-cant-have-kant/>.

²⁰ Radu Benea, “«Kant is our trophy». Russia tries to appropriate the legacy of the German philosopher”, in *Europa Liberă Moldova*, last edited on April 27, 2024, consulted on March 5, 2025, URL: <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/kant-este-trofeul-nostru-rusia-incearca-sa-si-insuseasca-mostenirea-filosofului-german/32922209.html?>

²¹ *Ibidem*.

never belonged to the Tsarist empire. In fact, Immanuel Kant carried out his entire activity at the Albertina University of Königsberg, and his manuscripts were written exclusively in German or Latin, although he knew and mastered several languages²².

For centuries, with few exceptions, Königsberg remained part of Prussia, the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, and the Third Reich. Until the mid-20th century, there was no officially expressed intention by the Soviet Union to annex the region. As evidence, the secret Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact stipulated that the Königsberg region would remain under German influence²³. After World War II, however, following the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the region was annexed by the Soviet Union and renamed Kaliningrad. Kaliningrad became an integral part of the U.S.S.R. 141 years after the death of the philosopher, whose name does not go unnoticed. In 2005, Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder announced that the University of Kaliningrad would have a new name: Immanuel Kant University, in a context in which Russian-German relations were not tense²⁴.

The aforementioned discursive confiscation represents a historically illegitimate act and a conceptual recourse applied defectively and arbitrarily, exposing a premeditated directed intention: “By associating Kant’s name with the University, Russia could use its reputation as the «father of modern ethics» to consolidate its own image as a nation with moral principles, even in the face of accusations of committing serious war crimes”²⁵.

The immediate evidence is that Russia’s actions are diametrically opposed to any “universal history with cosmopolitan intent”, as preached by I. Kant.

In essence, the role of Immanuel Kant and the pacifist doctrine are becoming acutely relevant sources in the area of interpreting international relations in the context of the conflict in Ukraine, a war that has “shaken” the global international scene, with new tensions between the Western world and the Russian Federation. Given the current warlike context, the pacifist doctrine requires more attention than ever, and Kantian concepts a necessary, just and obligatory recourse.

*Kant as a “Confiscated Argument”
in the Russian Interpretation
of the War in Ukraine. O. Schulz’s Response*

The article uses discourse analysis as a method, emphasizing its socio-linguistic valences²⁶, quantifying in a tabular manner, through the triad of emitting actors – discursive practices – discursive resources, the report and relationship built between and between the subject (here, the Russian Federation and Germany)

²² “Why can’t Russia have Kant”, *op cit.*

²³ *Ibidem.*

²⁴ *Ibidem.*

²⁵ *Ibidem.*

²⁶ See in this regard, Cristian Teleagă, “Discourse Analysis and the Study of Attitudes: An Introduction to Discursive Social Psychology”, ResearchGate.org, last edited in January 2002, consulted on March 6, 2025, URL: www.researchgate.net/publication/234865418.

and the object (Kant and Kantian work), the debate (discourse) being an instrument for generating – voluntarily-premeditated – a particular grid of interpretation of the meanings of reality. Social-discursive analysis does not focus exclusively on the function of language, but interprets discourse as a self-standing “object” and a means by which reality is “constructed”²⁷.

The dual nature of discourse reveals the need for a double focus: on discursive practice and on discursive resources. The difference between practices and resources lies in the fact that the elements of the first category involve a process of selection and application of the elements of the second. For example, practices are diversified, from the invocation of a reality, apparently factual, to populisms or antagonisms as means of construction. On the other hand, resources involve symbols, words, ideas, etc.

Emitting actors	Discursive practices	Discursive resources
Russian Federation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Discursive confiscation; – Antagonization of the West; – Instrumentalization of Kantian philosophy; – Discursive legitimation; – Appeal to national history; – Reshaping of reality; – Labeling; – Invocation of directed narratives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Keywords – <i>trophy, lie, shaping/influencing, warlike context, expansionism</i>; – Identity symbols – <i>boldness, counteraction or offensive</i>; – A narrative directed towards Kantian landmarks; – The crisis in Ukraine
Federal Republic of Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Highlighting the current context; – Historical claim of Kantian work and its fair reception; – Appeal to national history and international coordinates; – Counterarguments offered to the Kremlin perspective and regime; – Instrumentalization of Kantian philosophy; – Premises and arguments for peace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Keywords – <i>geopolitical tensions, European unity, common identity</i>; – Universal-universalizable symbols: <i>peace, moral/morality: democratic values</i>; – A narrative based on Kantian landmarks; – The crisis in Ukraine

When the governor of Kaliningrad states that Immanuel Kant is a trophy, the discursive confiscation is evident through specific resources, including the suggestion that the “trophy” is won in a warlike context. In the discursive situation where he claims that “[...]«the Western block, which was shaped by the US in its own image», is an «empire of lies»”²⁸, uses several discursive resources: keywords, appeal to morality, a narrative and specific symbol, directing the debate towards antagonizing the West, reshaping reality, labeling. For example, the phrase “empire of lies”²⁹ involves the “demonization” of the West, based on apparently moral considerations, through which one seeks to legitimize one’s own actions. Anton

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ “Governor of Russia’s Kaliningrad says German philosopher Immanuel Kant «directly tied» to war in Ukraine”, *art. cit.*

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

Alikhanov was referring to the image and actions of a Western bloc with expansionist tendencies, which it justifies through pseudo-morality and apparently democratic values.

The speech given by German Chancellor Olaf Scholtz is a broader, more structured and more complex one, representing a direct response to the Kremlin's demands and the reaffirmation of the European position regarding the tense geopolitical context. The discursive practices used aim at: the instrumentalization of Kantian philosophy, highlighting the current context, reporting on the crisis in Ukraine, condemning the Kremlin regime and valuing peace, resorting to an international system in which moral decisions and actions take precedence: "Ladies and gentlemen, all these attempts to justify Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine are exaggerated. They are absurd and artificial. They imply threats to Russia that do not exist. Kant himself was clairvoyant in his criticism of the bad habit engaged in by someone who «invents evil purposes that [he] attributes to others». This is exactly what we are dealing with here".³⁰

The attribute-concept of morals and morality constitute an indispensable discursive resource, a landmark within conflicting geopolitical contexts. The phrase "the good side of history" is revalued in a balanced way by valuing and maintaining a democratic *status-quo*, of explicitly condemning and proving a "war of aggression" or a "brutal war"³¹. The philosopher's historical claim (Immanuel Kant belongs to Königsberg, not Kaliningrad!) becomes in this context a pivotal discursive landmark, by underlining some key phrases – "still" and "far": "Königsberg is still the city of Immanuel Kant. And this city is not further from us today [...] However, it seems to us that it is much further. [...] This year's Kant anniversary speaks of this all-encompassing act of self-harm. It was inevitable that the German side decided not to organize the international anniversary congress in Kaliningrad this year, as planned. At the end of the day, it is obvious that the Enlightenment and the war of aggression cannot be spoken of at the same time."³²

Olaf Scholtz condemns Russia's actions through Kantian philosophy, itself an explicit response and positioning towards the discursive confiscation operated by the Russian Federation. Russia's hostility contradicts Kant's pacifist doctrine itself: "(...) Putin's regime continues to strive to appropriate Kant and his work at almost any cost. Michael Thumann, a long-time correspondent in Russia for «DIE ZEIT», puts it succinctly: «There are at least two Kants, a philosopher we venerate in Germany and a thinker buried in Kaliningrad who is connected to Putin's worldview.»"³³

Peace becomes the central argument of the debate, with Olaf Scholtz referring to I. Kant's ethics, in "Towards Perpetual Peace", to condemn Russia's hostilities: "For Kant, it was clear that «the state of nature [...] is not a state of peace [...] but a state of war. [...] The refore, the state of peace must be established». [...] Ladies and gentlemen, after decades of peace, we Europeans must get used again

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*.

to the idea that the peace that most of us have enjoyed for so long as an obvious normality and a «natural state» is not what it seems. In fact, it is not «natural». It still needs to be «established» today – and again today.”³⁴

The Kaliningrad Congress, in April 2024, was not only about Immanuel Kant, but especially about the discursive-politicized construction of realities, with the aim of legitimizing the official positions of the classical actors of international relations.

Historian and director of the Swedish Defense Research Institute, Ingmar Oldberg, devoted an article exclusively to the controversy surrounding the appropriation of Kantian philosophy and the holding of the Kaliningrad Congress, confirming that the three-centennial anniversary of the philosopher’s birth was politicized and that the very essence of the meetings was omitted: “In a panel on I. Kant’s «Eternal Peace», an institute director accused Estonia of supporting Ukraine, which he called aggressive «Estonization» in the Baltic region, and proposed that the region become nuclear. [...] In another on the Baltic and Arctic regions, the grandson of Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko attacked Finland and Sweden for increasing tension by joining NATO”³⁵.

Balanced and equidistant, Ingmar Oldberg also exposes the West’s reluctance to participate in the Congress, a reality that serves Russian propaganda to the fullest: “The Russian press reported that «despite Western attempts to encircle Russia with sanctions», over 700 researchers, including 87 foreigners from 23 countries, participated in the four-day Congress, the majority from outside Europe, for example from Azerbaijan, Brunei, Cameroon, Argentina and China”³⁶.

This certifies that there were German, American, or Finnish professors who participated in the Congress, but that the Western attitude itself remained clear and refractory.³⁷ The “schism” between the West and the Russian Federation is also reflected in the way in which official Russian websites, which contain information regarding the Kaliningrad Congress, are blocked, requiring certain specific extensions to be accessed from the European space.

A relevant point of debate remains the dispute over the cultural heritage, attached to the history and political-ideological geography of the Kaliningrad region. Ingmar Oldberg resorts to the Kaliningrad Cathedral, where the philosopher’s tomb is located, a space preserved precisely for the ideological landmarks attributed to him: “Most of the city was destroyed in the war, but Kant’s tomb next to the cathedral survived. It has been argued that the tomb was restored, and the cathedral avoided destruction during the Soviet era because Kant was of crucial importance for the development of Marxism”³⁸.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ “Greetings to participants and guests of International Congress ‘The World Concept of Philosophy’, President of Russia”, 2024, *apud*. Ingmar Oldberg, “Russia and Germany in tug-of-war over Immanuel Kant”, in *Balticworlds.com*, accessed 20 March 2025, URL: BW-2024.4.p.106_108.OldbergPDF.pdf.

³⁶ “Kaliningradskaia oblast vstrechaet uchastnikov Kantovskogo kongressa [The Kaliningrad region welcomes participants of the Kant Congress]”, in *Interfaks*, 2024, *apud*. Ingmar Oldberg, *art. cit.*

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ It remains debatable to what extent I. Kant’s philosophy was “crucial” for the development of Marxist concepts, Marxism itself being based on a materialist rhetoric. See in this regard, “Kant’s tomb has been preserved thanks to the Izvestia newspaper”, URL: <https://kant300.kantiana.ru/>, *apud*. Ingmar Oldberg, *art. cit.*

Another element that contributes to the nuanced understanding of the region's transition and the legitimacy issues attached to it is the way in which the media exposes certain aspects of the controversy, also facilitating the emergence of more or less truthful arguments in the public space. For example, Mick Hart, a British citizen living in Kaliningrad, presents his point of view on how arguments in the public space influence the collective perception of the legitimacy of the appropriation of the region, in the context of the war in Ukraine: "The British media delight in labeling Kaliningrad as a «brutal concrete place» – a play on words derived from brutalism, as in architecture, and brutal in effect. This description, as intended, is anachronistic and imperfect"³⁹.

Mick Hart admits that the region was rebuilt by the Soviet Union to a certain structure following World War II, when many parts were destroyed, however a good deal of old Königsberg survives: "Of course, at first glance, it looks like Königsberg has completely disappeared, but once you start investigating, with the help of the right people, you will be pleasantly surprised by how much of the old city survived the conflagration of World War II and the subsequent, understandable, mentality of eradicating most things German"⁴⁰.

Russia's response and positioning is to address the issue of the claim to this region and the antithetical interpretations, including the use of the name Königsberg, in the sense of a return to "Germanization". Russia's decisive argument, according to which "thousands of Russian soldiers died wresting this place from Nazi Germany"⁴¹, cannot be contested, but it needs to be nuanced and properly contextualized.

The congress dedicated to the three hundredth anniversary of the birth of Immanuel Kant in Kaliningrad became the equivalent of a "forum" for political statements and subjective interpretations of his philosophy, which led to the act of confiscation in and with the aim of legitimizing official positions in and from the international arena, including retorts to counteract and correct the perspectives issued.

An Updated Debate – International Kant Congress (Kaliningrad, 2024)

The anniversary context (April 22-25, 2024) in Kaliningrad was marked by the statements of Governor Anton Alikhanov ("Alikhanov invited all those present to offer a new interpretation of Kantian philosophy in the light of current events, because «Russia is at the center of a powerful cognitive war, in which the enemy is partially avoiding Kant's legacy». A review of this philosophical tradition is therefore necessary, in order to arrive at a necessary «Russian interpretation of Kantianism»"⁴²), the assumption that Immanuel Kant is a "Russian trophy",

³⁹ Mick Hart, "Expat in Kaliningrad, Russia", in *Expatkaliningrad.com*, consulted on 25 March 2025, URL: <https://expatkaliningrad.com/>.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Vladimir Rozanskij, "The «Russian trophy» Immanuel Kant: Moscow «re-reads» the 300th anniversary of his birth", in *Asianews*, last edited on 24 April 2024, consulted on 8 March 2025, URL: <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/The-%27Russian-trophy%27-Immanuel-Kant%3A-Moscow-%27re-reads%27-the-300th-anniversary-of-his-birth-60607>.

tending to project a “reality” totally divergent from that of the West. Rhetorically, over-valuing the register of perception, Russia’s discourse is constructed in antithesis to the Western perspective: “Kant is like a trophy for us Russians, along with everything else here in Kaliningrad. We must appreciate what we have inherited.”⁴³

Immanuel Kant, the philosopher, has no connection with Germany or today’s Russia, which has become the nucleus of subjectively determined and constructed axioms, as well as international confiscations and stances. Through Anton Alikhanov, the Russian Federation is trying to convince with its own version of the right to appropriate Kant’s legacy, invoking a term such as “trophy”, intended to designate a kind of “merit”, a gain obtained through sacrifice. The idea of sacrifice, in turn, refers to the historical context in which Kaliningrad became part of the Soviet Union and to the sacrifices of Soviet soldiers in World War II.

The emitted discourse becomes a tool through which the transmitter constructs a reality based on a specific narrative: *we sacrificed ourselves, therefore we deserve what we obtained*: “A prudent owner must clarify – what has come to him by inheritance”.⁴⁴ Therefore, the discourse becomes a directed construct, the product of a process of confiscation of the terms “trophy”, “inheritance”, “owner”.

The explicit response of the West to the assumption made by the representative of Kaliningrad considers the statements of German Chancellor Olaf Scholtz, during the festive ceremony in Berlin, on April 22, 2024. He forbids Vladimir Putin to pronounce the philosopher’s name and accuses the Kremlin regime of trying to “confiscate” the Kantian legacy. Moreover, the German Chancellor condemns the hostilities and states that the rhetoric of Russian international policy contradicts the foundations of Kantian theory.⁴⁵

The statement that “Putin’s regime has no right to appropriate Kant’s legacy”⁴⁶ has, in turn, a combination of historical, but especially cultural, valences. The construct emphasizes, on the one hand, the philosopher’s belonging to Königsberg, not to Kaliningrad, and, on the other hand, exposes the actions that the Russian Federation initiates in the arena of international relations. The message that Olaf Scholtz conveys is that the Russian Federation cannot appropriate the Kantian heritage just because it “owns” Kaliningrad, at least as long as it does not act in accordance with the pacifist ideas promoted by I. Kant. A first point of evidence is that it is no longer so much about Immanuel Kant, but about international politics.

However, the statements made by Anton Alikhanov in February 2024, two months before the anniversary Congress, will indicate a differently guided approach, through the very attention directed towards the Kantian work itself. The Kantian work becomes a means through which the West is attempted to be antagonized, but the direct reference to the “Critique of Pure Reason” or the

⁴³ “Why can’t Russia have Kant”, *art. cit.*

⁴⁴ Radu Benea, “«Kant is our trophy». Russia tries to appropriate the German philosopher’s legacy”, *op cit.*

⁴⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*

“Fundamentals of the Metaphysics of Morals” points to the “dual orientation”⁴⁷ of the emitted discourse. The Kantian work becomes a resource that the emitter uses to provide a certain directed “reality”. Anton Alikhanov argues that there is a cause-effect relationship between the Kantian work and the European conflicts, through selective recourse, with appeal to certain discursive resources chosen to the detriment of others, the criterion depending exclusively on the intentions and subjective interests of the emitter.

Anton Alikhanov calls Immanuel Kant “one of the «spiritual creators of the modern West»”⁴⁸, in the sense that the West would be the result of applied Kantian ideas. Therefore, the war in Ukraine would be a consequence of illegitimate actions undertaken by actors in the Western world: “[...]«the Western block, which was shaped by the US in its own image», is an «empire of lies». Kant, he said, is called «the father of almost everything» in the West, including freedom, the idea of the rule of law, liberalism, rationalism and «even the idea of the European Union»”⁴⁹.

Anton Alikhanov’s “reality” is complementary to Vladimir Putin’s perspective on the crisis, that we cannot speak of a local conflict in Ukraine, but of a conflagration with the West. From the perspective of the “constructive” nature⁵⁰ of the discourse, the ideas of the Enlightenment philosopher, which aimed at the nature of knowledge, freedom or cosmopolitanism, generated an “imperialist” West, which pursues an interdependent world, whose eventual hegemon would be the United States of America.

Olaf Scholz strongly condemns the Russian invasion, placing Kant at the core of the international world: “And so Kant, whose anniversary we are celebrating, stands at the heart of the geopolitical upheavals of our times, at the heart of the upheaval that Russia’s leader, Putin, has unleashed with his brutal war of aggression against Ukraine. [...] Kant’s great question about the conditions for the possibility of lasting peace in times of war is also once again at the top of today’s agenda.”⁵¹

Olaf Scholz, in turn, invokes Kantian texts, especially “Towards Eternal Peace”, claiming that it is a work that inspires “confidence”⁵² for the future. Moreover, the German Chancellor also states that the tense geopolitical situation should not transform the Kantian vision into a confiscated fiction, Russian hostility being condemnable, despite Vladimir Putin’s statements that Immanuel Kant is one of his favorite philosophers.⁵³ The Kantian work becomes a discursive resource, which reveals, on the one hand, the dual nature of discourse, and on the other

⁴⁷ Cristian Teleagă, *op cit.*

⁴⁸ “Governor of Russia’s Kaliningrad says German philosopher Immanuel Kant «directly tied» to war in Ukraine”, *op cit.*

⁴⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁰ Cristian Teleagă, *op cit.*

⁵¹ “German Chancellor Scholz Pays Tribute to Immanuel Kant on the 300th Anniversary of His Birth”, in *Sogerman.ca*, last edited on April 22, 2024, accessed on March 8, 2025, URL: <https://sogerman.ca/scholz-pays-tribute-to-kant/>.

⁵² *Ibidem.*

⁵³ *Ibidem.*

hand, a means of “manipulating” the collective perception of reality. The narrative promulgated by Olaf Scholtz points out that Ukraine is the victim of Russian aggression, whose actions are illegitimate and inconsistent with the ideas of I. Kant, and *we* (the West) condemn this act of aggression, which produces imbalances at the global level.

In conclusion, the conflict in Ukraine generates a more or less direct “exchange” of “replies” between Russia and the West, but above all it highlights two antithetical realities. Kant and Kantian work become a discursive resource, used according to the conjuncture and the subjective interest of the actors, with the aim of constructing a “reality” within which their own actions become justifiable.

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