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Merab Mamardashvili and Immanuel Kant: a dialogue on transcendental consciousness and moral responsibility

Abstract: Mamardashvili always engaged in a dialogue with thinkers of the past, particularly with those philosophers whom he considered to have founded the phenomenological analysis of consciousness. He had a particular fascination for Kant. Not only did Mamardashvili devote to him a series of lectures, but he referenced Kantian themes throughout his whole work.

This article focuses on two of those themes. The first is transcendental consciousness, considered as that which makes experience possible without being itself reducible to experience. Consciousness is at the basis of all the different “forms” that make possible our experience of the world. Thinking is possible only in the context of cultural tradition, which is embedded in language. The second is individual moral responsibility. Everyone everywhere takes a stance at all times, *here and now*, thereby assuming the whole responsibility for their action. Mamardashvili’s dialogue with Kant leads us to consider some of the ethical problems of human civilization.

Keywords: Mamardashvili, Kant, epistemology, ethics, consciousness

In his works, which follow non-linear trajectories around leading themes, Merab Mamardashvili has often been in dialogue with the philosophers of the past. He engaged in a peer-to-peer confrontation justified by at least two fundamental stands. On the one hand, philosophy is always for him a “personal experiment” (Mamardashvili 2012b, 258), and therefore his interest in other philosophers always involves their vital thinking, which cannot be expressed in abstract formulas:

We will not simply reproduce Plato’s thought as knowledge, but we are interested in Plato’s dialogues, Plato’s figure. And not in his psychological figure, but his existential figure, where he was realized in his own flesh and blood, risking his life, in his *body*, a personal-existential experiment, which is passed down to us as an elaborate *form of life*. (Mamardashvili 1994)

It is in the personal confrontation with the philosophers of the past that we become people in our own right, “capable of autonomous thinking, decision-making, etc.” (Mamardashvili 1992, 99)¹. On the other hand, every time a philosophical act is carried out, whether a thousand years ago or a thousand years from now, it will remain infinitely renewable in the minds of all of those who will conceive it, regardless of any historiographical contextualization. We are capable of understanding a philosophical text, writes Mamardashvili, exactly because we can “reproduce that which is said there ... as a possibility of our own thought, in the sense that we can think it too” (Mamardashvili 2002, 572). It is the act of thinking the idea of our predecessors that keeps them alive: “if I can think something Kantian as a possibility of my own thought, and not of erudition, then Kant is alive too” (Mamardashvili 1992, 94). At the same time, Kant’s thought has become mine together with that of all philosophers in general, because “if someone has once carried out an act of philosophical thinking, then there is in this act all that can generally be found in philosophical thinking” (Mamardashvili 2002, 572).

The philosophers that Mamardashvili chose most often as his interlocutors are Plato, Descartes, Kant, Marx, and Husserl. Traced by Mamardashvili in their original genealogy, they were considered at the basis of the phenomenological analysis of consciousness, because they all contributed to study of human consciousness as the conceptual space where all the phenomena of knowledge, morality, aesthetics, and law are determined. Human beings can hear, think, and know only within the objective structures of thought, which are historical realizations of humanity, and can be accessed only by a phenomenological attitude, which in turn reveals itself as typical of every philosophy that can call itself such. In particular, Kant is supposed to have anticipated twentieth century phenomenology, which can be regarded as a “means to identify the horizon within which something can be valued as an objective assertion” (Mamardashvili 2002, 94). For Kant, as reformulated by Mamardashvili, “the world must be constituted according to its physical law in such a way as to admit the empirical event that a sentient being obtains a certain experience: not the

1 □About Mamardashvili’s very serious interest in Kant’s personality, cf. Motroshilova 2007, 89-93.

content within the obtained experience ..., but the act itself, the empirical event of obtaining an experience” (Mamardashvili 1997a, 69). Since Mamardashvili thought that the task of the “*phenomenological procedure of reduction*” consists, “regardless of the mania of human beings to think in terms of content, in investigating the existence where content is thought, as the existence of content and content do not coincide” (Mamardashvili 1997a, 39), Kant’s transcendental investigation can indeed be included in a general phenomenological perspective of this kind.

In Mamardashvili’s ideal history of the *ante litteram* phenomenological attitude, Kant has a peculiar role, because, as Mamardashvili states it in one of his first essays,

with Kant we begin to study the categories and the concretization of the forms as thought, which is to say that we begin to consider the objective content in the light of the formal activity of thought, while, at the same time, considering the latter as synthetic. (Mamardashvili 1968, 51)

Therefore, it is not surprising that Mamardashvili dedicated to Kant a whole seminar, which he held in March and April of 1982 at the Institute of General and Pedagogical Psychology of the Soviet Academy of Pedagogical Sciences in Moscow. The previous year, he had held there a successful cycle of meetings on Descartes, which was published posthumously under the title *Cartesian Meditations*². But, while Descartes – he declares – “is for us a white-haired legend, a paladin of the round table in the recesses of history, Kant is our contemporary” (Mamardashvili 1997a, 27). Mamardashvili defines Kant as “genial” (Mamardashvili 2010, 49), his “favorite philosopher” (Mamardashvili 1996, 152; 2000a, 233) – sometimes accompanied by Plato and Descartes

2 □Cf. 2002, 505-816. Regardless of his predilection for philosophy that can be developed in oral discourse (cf. Vernant 1996, 601), during the *perestroika* years, Mamardashvili matured the idea of publishing both cycles of lectures. According to Yuri Senokosov’s testimony, a first attempt to publish the text on Kant was made as early as 1986, when Mamardashvili turned to the vice-president of the Academy of Science of the USSR with a request of support for his publication at the publishing house “Nauka,” which was associated with the Academy itself. The response was initially positive, but the manuscript went through a series of critical filters that suggested important revisions and its publication stalled (cf. Senokosov 1997). The publishing project was finally realized only ten years later (Mamardashvili 1997a).

(Mamardashvili 2004, 167), – “the case so rare in history of deep genius and human plasticity, where the substance of a question is expressed simply and clearly without superfluous words” (Mamardashvili 2012a, 251). Mamardashvili acknowledges that Kant can be difficult and complex, but the difficulty of his texts corresponds exactly to the complexity of their content, and, if we overcome the limit of our intellect, the meaning of Kant’s thought is fully clear. Kant’s writing is therefore opposed to the apparently profound philosophical discourse that uses symbols and obscure images without providing any interpretational tool, “because such a discourse presents itself not as the analytical expression of a clear and comprehensible idea, but as the transmission of a certain spiritual state. It is a sermon” (Mamardashvili 2012a, 13).

Contrary to these wooly sages, Kant is an analytical and rigorous thinker. But, at the same time, Mamardashvili insists on redeeming the German philosopher from the stereotypical image of his obsessive severity. In his lectures, almost as a provocation, Mamardashvili prefers to paint Kant as capable of living socially, of writing in a beautiful style, as a lover of conversation and food, a “cosmopolitan” Kant, heir and fulfillment of a European tradition that has its origin in the Renaissance. It is exactly from Kant that Mamardashvili claimed to have received in his youth the suggestion to become a “citizen of the world”, at a time when the Stalinist propaganda had made an accusation of “cosmopolitism” an accusation of national treason (Mamardashvili 1992, 41). Kant had to be read within the great European tradition (Mamardashvili 2012a, 534), of which Mamardashvili considered himself to be a part, and he had to be understood as a non-systematic but deeply uniform thinker. According to Mamardashvili, Kant spent his whole life discussing some crucial questions that he confronted many times, as in a *work in progress* without end, where he was by and by becoming conscious of his own ideas, elaborating and rethinking them, and finding new words to express them. That is the reason why, in his lectures on Kant, Mamardashvili weaves the precritical writings with the *Opus postumum*, the lectures with the *Critics*, while underlining the importance of his epistolary and of his so-called “minor” treaties. Mamardashvili chose to publish his seminar on Kant under the “musical” title of *Kantian Variations*, exactly because, as a matter of

fact, it is around “notes,” “themes,” and “sonata-phrases,” that the circular expression of his thinking is developed.

Among the Kantian themes that Mamardashvili himself has developed throughout his work, two are particularly important: the theme of transcendental consciousness, considered as that which makes experience possible without being itself reducible to experience, and the theme of individual moral responsibility. I will try to sketch out the development of these two themes with reference to several works by Mamardashvili, mainly from his mature period.

The centrality of Kant’s thought on the reflection on the transcendental is evident: it is to Kant that Mamardashvili acknowledges the merit of the “anti-anthropomorphic revolution” (Mamardashvili 1997a, 106), which renounces the idea that the object could be something independent, “figured” by the subject (Mamardashvili 1997a, 100-1). In order for there to be objects in the world, which is to say in order for the subjects to be able to know something of the world, it is necessary that the world be organized according to certain forms and structures. Only within whose boundaries is knowledge possible. “Physics is not an empirical science, but a science of experience”, Mamardashvili repeats along with Kant: if our physical knowledge derives from the experience of its content, it is also true that, without the formal structure that holds the physical laws, we could not have any experience at all (Mamardashvili 2000a, 218; cf. *CPR* A48, B65). Consciousness, the central concept of Mamardashvili’s original thought, has necessarily a transcendental and “constitutive” character, without which we could not put forth any objective argument about the world. Consciousness is always construction, artifact, both in experience and in art or science (Mamardashvili 1995, 144-5; 1997c, 281-97). It is the place where the connection between experience, the determination of the world and ourselves in the world is made (Mamardashvili 1992, 47-8). Because they have consciousness, human beings “can live, experience things and states that they could not receive as a product of any physiological mechanism, so to speak” (Mamardashvili 1992, 43).

Form, which becomes the “leading theme” or the “melody in the *Kantian Variations*” (Motroshilova 2009, 215), is the condition of the conceivability of a phenomenon, of an event, of a sphere of human experience. It is the structure that constitutes it and makes it possible. Mamardashvili writes:

we do not know the world by means of the organs that nature gives us, but through the organs that rose and settled in the space of knowledge, and, in this sense, these amplify the possibilities of human beings, and they outline a knowledge that is relatively independent from the contingency of the fact that human beings are provided by their nature of a given sensorial apparatus and of certain intellectual faculties. (Mamardashvili 1997c, 22)

Form, according to Kant himself, does not reflect, does not represent, does not describe the object, but is always a “*product within a structure*”, in a “*real connection*” (Mamardashvili 1997a, 147-50; Kant AA, I, 10-14), something that really happened and from which one can attribute a sense to the world. Mamardashvili remarks that Kant “does not show the unknowability of reality, but the unreality of the unknowable” (Mamardashvili 1996, 154; *CPR* A 286-288, B 342-344). Indeed, the only thing that makes sense to us, as human beings, is what is given from our “real connection” in the here and now, where not only the forms of our perception and of our intellect are defined, but also – according to Mamardashvili – the historical forms of culture. Here, Mamardahsvili distances himself from Kant in a quite explicit post-structuralist direction (cf. Vladiv-Glover 2006). The forms of culture define that which can make sense to us, since culture is constructed as a group of “forms”, thanks to which the human being is able to confront the complexity of the world and of life. It is necessary for human life, because, as human beings, we only exist within a culture: “human beings are an artificial form (nature does not produce any human beings)” (Mamardashvili 2012b, 85; Leontiev 2009: 87). Concerning this matter, Mamardashvili speaks of a “second birth” (Mamardashvili 1992, 106, 29; Dobrokhoto 2009: 72-73; van der Zweerde 2006: 195) or of a “reverse navigation”, where the first navigation is pure biological life, and the second is “the act of

receiving one's own life in a whole, of receiving one's own consciousness in a whole" (Mamardashvili 2012a, 20)³, starting from the *here and now* where we find ourselves as people.

Unlike Kant, Mamardashvili maintained that the only context of cultural forms where thought and human action are possible is embedded in language. Language, understood as a "form of life" rather than as a system of signs, is a creative storage of forms and structures of knowledge and experience. It provides a "map" of our possible experience of the world. Indeed, a topological structure and the possibility of tracing a design of oneself and of one's world are typical of language, as they are of consciousness: "What I have defined as a topological problem is the problem of the relationship between the intellect and itself, between the intellect and things and others" (Mamardashvili 1997b, 413). According to Mamardashvili, the problem that Kant formulated in the terms of the transcendental can be understood as concerning language, since "human subjects ... are bearers of the language that can describe the world" (Mamardashvili 1997a, 183). In this context, he specifies that language is not conceived as empirical language, the ensemble of words and rules, but as

the fact that a human being, as an existence that occurred in the world, would be a transcendental existence; in other words, he would refer to what happens as an admissible fact according to the laws of the world, which are formulated in the content of this fact. (Mamardashvili 1997a, 237)

In Mamardashvili's phenomenological interpretation, the principle of the Enlightenment that was so dear to Kant, that of autonomous thinking (Mamardashvili 1997a, 61; Kant AA VIII, 35), consists in finding one's own place within that which is talked about, that which is lived, since language is understood as "expressibility and intelligibility of the world" (Mamardashvili 1997a, 244). Language is the *here and now* where "we are as suspended" (Mamardashvili 1997a, 248) and where we define ourselves. It is that which allows us to formulate a certain picture of the world and not a

3 □For the reference to Plato cf *Phaedo*, 99a-102a.

different one. Mamardashvili remarks: “in the beginning, when there is no language, we cannot say anything, but when there is a language, we cannot say everything” (Mamardashvili 1997a, 247).

The decennial experience of the Soviet Union represented a kind of paradoxical confirmation with the systematic destruction of language as a creative storage of forms substituted by a dead, impoverished, and rigid pseudo-language where human beings have become zombies, “dead” men and women, ghosts with no reality⁴. In order for an ideology to be imposed on everyone, it had not even been necessary to convince them of its truth. It had been enough to destroy the linguistic space that would have allowed a different kind of thinking:

People now may disbelieve in every word of any ideology, but if they are made to exist only in a space that is given by certain material symbols, then they cannot think on the basis of these symbols, not because it is forbidden, but because the fundamentals of the language have been destroyed (Mamardashvili 2012b, 236-237).

Indeed, when Mamardashvili repeats that human beings find their place in the world following the determination of their consciousness, we must never forget that, at the same time, it is the relationship between this consciousness and the world that builds the latter. The world is not independent from human beings and from their thinking acts, because it is built with the same “prolonged effort” with which they build themselves in their own “space of language” (Mamardashvili 2011, 31). In the same “experiment of being a person”, we find the person on one hand, and on the other “the picture of the world where this person could reasonably live, move, understand and reproduce oneself as a person” (Mamardashvili 1994).

While elaborating his conception of a person, Mamardashvili finds the second significant field of dialogue with Kant, which connects epistemology and ethics in a very specific manner (cf. Regnier

⁴ □Cf. Mamardashvili 1992, 203; 1991, 50; 2011, 13-26; Motroshilova 2011, 179-190, 201-210; Mostroshilova 2001.

2006, 143-144). Mamardashvili agreed with Kant that being a person, acting as a person always means stating one's freedom, performing an act of self-determination, which is not determined by the many causal chains at the crossing of which that act can be put, nor by the ends to which it is directed. The circumstance that the action descends from certain causes and, in its turn, causes certain effects does not change its "pure" nature of free action. For this purpose, it is enough to consider the formal aspect of the act. According to Mamardashvili, when the single action is performed here and now, the epistemological antinomy of necessity and freedom finds a solution on the practical and ethical level. In the concrete single action, freedom becomes "a property of the form of the world", since

the phenomenon of the action exists and we can clearly show that the way in which the whole previous chain of events has unfolded, putting us in the condition where we have to act, bears no significance in it. (Mamardashvili 1997a, 118)

Because of our condition of human finitude, everyone is compelled to act here and now,

without waiting for the ultimate reasons, or for the fulfilling of the whole world and the clarification of everything. Because each of our actions is actually an element of infinite connections and infinite interlacements, if we waited for the denouement of such a bundle of innumerable links in order to act according to the truth, then we would never act. (Mamardashvili 1997a, 152)

I can assume truth as a moral direction, but it is always here and now that I decide whether to tell the truth or to lie. The whole process is always repeated all over again, and the choice does not necessarily derive from moral conscience, from truth, or from the sphere of the intelligible, but from the actual assumption of responsibility for the act that I am performing. Indeed, everyone who takes

a certain position at a certain moment, here and now, takes responsibility for the whole of their choice and action. Mamardashvili does not deny that the reasons of an action may be infinite, “that a theft or a lie may be motivated by bad education, poverty or anything else”, but, if we consider the moment when the action is undertaken, “all responsibility is one and indivisible. Because we can still not lie, we can still not steal” (Mamardashvili 1997a, 269). Mamardashvili remarks that, in the Russian tradition, the expression “he is a victim of circumstances (*sreda zaela*)” exists, which presupposes the intrinsic goodness of the subject. For this reason, a “European philosopher” such as Kant has had a hard time in finding an audience in Russia (Mamardashvili 2000a, 101). For Kant, Mamardashvili writes, someone has lied “because of his education, or because he got an advantage from it, or because of fear, or to avoid a danger”, but “with this his competence or responsibility starts to subdivide; a part of the fault goes to genetics, another to family and education, a third to the environment, a fourth to fear, and so on”, thus providing the event with a psychological or a social description that becomes a kind of justification. Nevertheless,

Kant says: yes, it is all so (the mean parents, the environment, the bad influences), but, when a person lies, he lies by himself in an absolute act, indivisible in its responsibility. (Mamardashvili 2000a, 102; Kant AA VI, 429-31)⁵

We cannot hide behind divine will or necessary historical laws: at the very moment we act, we take responsibility for the whole of our cultural tradition itself, for who we are and who we can become. Mamardashvili writes:

we must act now and every act of life, performed now, holds in itself life in its entirety. We are fully present in it, independently from what we will come to know in a year, from how we will find our way in five years, from the light with which the slowly proceeding theory

5 □ This example appears many times in Mamardashvili, for instance in 2012b, 69-70.

will illuminate our real position in the world and the consequences of our actions.
(Mamardashvili 1997a, 153)

For this reason, “nothing can spare us ... from the fatigue of life, the fatigue of experience”
(Mamardashvili 1997a, 197), both in the theoretical and practical fields.

The theme of the moral sphere is treated by Mamardashvili in explicitly Kantian terms⁶. In his lectures on Kant, his reasoning is constantly intertwined with the discourse of his philosophical interlocutor:

What is moral conscience? *The voice of the categorical imperative in me*, says Kant. This is why I cannot act differently, regardless of the motive. Therefore, moral conscience is the motive of itself. This is at the same time the definition of freedom and of necessity. Not of the necessity in terms of which we formulate physical laws that link phenomena to experience, but of the necessity that only conscience can possess and of which Kant says: conscience is just the form of conscience. When I say “I cannot act differently”, I am only speaking of form. It is the supreme law of morality. (Mamardashvili 1997a, 231; Kant AA V, 20-21)

While in dialogue with Kant on the themes of ethics, Mamardashvili was confronted by the anthropological and political writings and by the essays in philosophy of history, as if they composed a “fourth critic”⁷, where “the maxims (instead of ‘maxims’ we can say ‘ideals’, or ‘moral and theoretical intentions’) that demand a public domain for their realization to be possible correspond to politics” (Mamardashvili 2004, 152). During his transition from epistemology to political philosophy, and to a more open concern with the domain of social life, which took place

⁶ On Mamardashvili confrontation with Kant about action, consciousness, and freedom, cf. Regnier 2006.

⁷ In this matter, he directly referenced “a great political scientist, I think one of the French contemporary philosophers,” according to whom “it is as if a fourth Kantian critic existed : his socio-political theory” (Mamardashvili 2004, 152).

during the last ten years of his life, Mamardashvili declared to be following the steps of Plato and Kant (Mamardashvili 2004, 201). If it has been noted (Mamardashvili 2000b, 17) that as early as his famous essay of 1968 *Analysis of Consciousness in the Works of Marx*, Mamardashvili linked the theme of consciousness with the “personal development of human beings and their responsibility in the field of culture and historical action” (Mamardashvili 1992, 254), it was no sooner than in his mature years that these same themes acquired a more direct political flavor (cf. Leontiev 2009, 90). If the original evil of human beings is, for both Mamardashvili and Kant, “the surrender to the spontaneous course of things” (Mamardashvili 1997a, 87; Kant AA VIII, 375-377) against the determination of the form, the same holds true at the historical-political level: “The *polis* is that which is based on form, while barbarism is inertia and the flow of history” (Mamardashvili 1997a, 94). Civilization as a form is the space of human communication, which as such will tend to overcome not only the divisions between classes but also the divisions between nations and states. But, if on the one hand Mamardashvili enthusiastically underwrote Kant’s Enlightened and cosmopolitan perspective, on the other hand he saw in Kant’s thought the awareness that, even at a social level, definitive accomplishments are impossible to attain, and that every single individual is responsible in his every action of the preservation and improvement of a civilization in its entirety. The realization of an ideally perfect society would be possible only if human nature changed, if actions were performed with mathematical precision by “spiritual robots”, by “zombies” that move on the scene of the world and nevertheless are not alive. In this case, remarked Mamardashvili,

obviously, the norm, the supreme law, is observed, but, because it is a tested law (as the object in the world that acts on our perception organs), then we would either hold back in fear, or show the fear of violation, or build an ideology in order to keep thought from destroying the edifice of our automatism. (Mamardashvili 2000a, 256)

Kant would have understood that the risk of fanaticism is itself inscribed in every non-critical theory of knowledge as it is in the ambition of the perfect society:

He has warned us that, if we try to substitute with knowledge that which must be an object of conviction, then the greatest of fanaticism is born: the fanaticism of ideas. (Mamardashvili 2000a, 287)⁸

In the lifeless world of the zombies, in the dystopia of the Great Inquisitor (Mamardashvili 2000a, 284-5), where human beings are reduced to robots without freedom, but are also lightened from the weight of responsibility, Mamardashvili saw the realization of the fanaticism that Kant feared, and the creation of the inverted world described by Kafka. Mamardashvili described the Soviet “experiment”, where he had grown up, in these exact terms, as a “world of dead ghosts” where everything was inexistent and unreal (Mamardashvili 1991, 50). The whole of the Soviet culture was based

on the fact that your place, which you must occupy with your live movement, is always already occupied by the imitation of yourself, of how you must be, and therefore you are expected to be that imitation. Which means that you have to provide the sign of a sign, the sign that confirms the sign of yourself. And it is this way everywhere, starting from the microstructure all the way to greater phenomena, every particle, nucleus, cell of our life was impregnated with this and it still is. It is a kind of anti-life system; it really is an anti-world in the fundamental and non-metaphorical significance of the word. (Mamardashvili 2012a, 546)

⁸ □Mamardashvili makes numerous references to this passage by Kant (Kant AA VIII, 13): “but [we do not take into consideration] that which we could and should do *by ourselves* as authors. From this the roughest fanaticism must spring, which would get rid of every influence of healthy reason” (for example, 1997a, 110).

For this reason, referencing the theme of freedom in Kantian terms was for Mamardashvili an urgent task, the attempt “to turn our irresponsible world into the world of responsibility” (Mamardashvili 1992, 196), since responsibility in particular has been “the most repressed moment in the society of the 20th century” (Mamardashvili 2012a, 144).

The dialogue with Kant leads Mamardashvili to think not only about transcendentalism and epistemology, but also about some ethical problems of human civilization, which were particularly acute in the 20th century. During an interview with an English magazine shortly before his death, Mamardashvili answered the following to the direct question of what political lessons he had learned from Kant:

Kant believed that the structure of consciousness was the same in everyone, and therefore bringing intelligence to bear on social problems was by the same token within the grasp of all. He believed that the spread of reason by its own logic would result in greater freedom and more civil liberties. He spoke about governments treating people with the dignity that should be accorded to rational people. The particular idea I like in Kant is what he says about “the citizen of the world”. One of Kant’s rules of thought was to always think through the eyes of another and thus become cosmopolitan in outlook. Today we must all think from each other’s perspectives and thus become citizens of the world. (Mamardashvili 2011, 214)⁹

Confronted by the powerful revival of nationalisms in the fragmented Soviet Union of 1989, Mamardashvili identified the source of the problem in the “*absence of a civil society*, which, what is more, had not been there for many centuries” (Motroshilova 2007, 125). Nevertheless, the contradiction between the form of the “civil citizenship” and the actual social reality was also applicable to the analysis of the West (Motroshilova 2007, 131). Everywhere, we must pursue the transformation of ourselves through the assumption of our place in the cosmopolitan world as it is

9 ⁹ English original text was published in *The Civic Arts Review*, 1989 (2), 3, available at <https://updocs.net/download/merab-mamardashvili-interview-a5b35e1578837c> (last visit October 19th, 2018).

defined by the form of culture and of human activity. For Mamardashvili, it is clear that Kant, and with him all the great philosophers of the past, cannot provide any direct answer to the existential unrest of those who, today, are not content with the preconceived schemata of ideologies, but who

would like to think their own ideas and not other people's, [who] would like to be moral not because they must follow certain standards, but because morality derives immanently from the laws of their beings and their souls. (Mamardashvili 2012a, 42)

Nonetheless, it is possible to produce in the dialogue with Kant a fruitful encounter that could lead to autonomous thinking and to a full ethical conscience.

The lectures on Kant are interesting not only because of the themes they cover, but also because of the way in which Mamardashvili leads his listeners through the labyrinthine meanderings of his journey of reflection. The large public that went to his lectures regardless of where they were held was confronted by complex themes, and by a language that was sometimes purposefully obscure, because the content of philosophy could not be “the object of an all-round entertaining show”, and because “the language of philosophy demands an effort to be understood” (Motroshilova 2011, 286). But this is why, in Mamardashvili's intention, the encounter with the public had to provide the audience with a live example of authentic language, independent from official rhetoric. This was for him not only a theoretical gesture, but also an ethical one. He wanted to guarantee the action of language as a “form of life”; he wanted language to produce authentic human experiences, problems and discussions. As Nelly Motroshilova has written, “*in Mamardashvili's case, deep philosophical thought, complex and well-articulated, became the specific weapon of social protest*” (Motroshilova 2007, 180).

Mamardashvili was never a dissident, and, notwithstanding the difficulties to keep his teaching job, he was not a “martyr” of the repression. In a conversation with Bernard Murchland, while he recalled the destiny of his generation, he admitted: “Some of us ended up in a lager, [...] some

teaching in the countryside, some have gone into internal exile, and some have taken my path: they have hidden in the shadows, trying to avoid trouble” (Kruglikov 1994, 194). He acted as a “spy”-philosopher, and not as a captain on the barricades (Mamardashvili 2011, 210-211). Nevertheless, Mamardashvili represented an actual example of an individual who holds to the “moral form” of freedom and to the full responsibility of his every action.

Translated into English by Lucia Pasini

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