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The First Steps of Peirce in Bulgaria. From Ivan Sarailiev to Today

Ivan V. Sarailiev (1887–1969) was a pioneer convert to pragmatism, incorporating the pragmatic viewpoint in his writings as early as 1909. Born in an educated and intellectual family, his father was a lawyer, who graduated from St. Petersburg. Ivan Sarailiev studied in Paris under Bergson and graduated *summa cum laude* from the Sorbonne in 1909. Although he was fluent in French, English, and German, he wrote almost exclusively in Bulgarian. As a result, his achievements remained largely unknown. To make things worse, his work was heavily suppressed by the communists after they gained power in 1944. However, he might be the first disseminator of pragmatist ideas in South-Eastern Europe and, certainly, the first one in the Balkan.

After his graduation from the Sorbonne, Sarailiev spent a year in England where he had frequent discussions with F. C. S. Schiller (some of Schiller's letters to Sarailiev have survived). Upon his return to Bulgaria, Sarailiev taught at a high school in Sofia for the next eleven years. In 1920, he was appointed assistant professor at the University of Sofia, where he became a tenured professor in 1927. Sarailiev's *On The Will* appeared in 1924 (Sofia, Court Press). That same year Sarailiev returned to Britain where he met again with Schiller and attended H. W. Carr's course on Bergson. In 1934, he published a collection of papers on Bergson under the title *Essays. On Some Unclear Moments in H. Bergson's Philosophy* (Sofia).

In 1931, about six years after his return from Britain, Sarailiev traveled to New York, where he spent a year as a Rockefeller fellow at Columbia University. At Columbia he discussed Peirce with William Pepperel Montague and with Dewey. In his diary, Sarailiev made a special note on the pronunciation of Peirce's name, and in "Charles Sanders Peirce and his Principle," which was published in the Bulgarian journal *Outchilisten Pregled* (vol. 32, June 1933, 725–36) he made sure that the readers knew how to pronounce Peirce's name.

In March of the following year, Sarailiev went to Harvard where he met Ralph Barton Perry, Alfred N. Whitehead, George Allen Morgan, and James Bissett Pratt. Later that year he visited several other American universities. Upon his return to Europe, Sarailiev traveled first to Italy, where he met with several Italian pragmatists, and spent two years in Germany and Switzerland.

In the 1930s, Sarailiev gained recognition among Bulgarian intellectuals because of his debate with a well-known Bulgarian Professor, Dimiter Mikhalchev, on the dilemma between religion and science. Sarailiev used a pragmatic approach with semiotic influences to defend his view that life is not solely a product of physical causality. He argued that we live in a world of "pre-thought" and that we live and act in accordance with *its* rules and laws rather than with physical ones. Those rules and

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laws do not contradict modern science but, rather, complete and prove its validity. As Peirce, Sarailiev sought to unify scientific and religious thought and to show how knowledge of God might be gained through hypothetical (or abductive) reasoning. Sarailiev set out his views on science and religion in two essays that were published as *Contemporary Science and Religion: Response to a Critic* (1931, Sofia, Chipeff Publishing House). With all this we can consider Ivan Sarailiev the first accomplished Bulgarian pragmatist.

In 1944, however, Sarailiev's career came to a sudden halt after the communists took power in Bulgaria. This brought an abrupt end to his extensive international travels, and immediately isolated him from the international scholarly community. In June of 1946, Sarailiev was elected president of the University of Sofia, but because of his unwillingness to cooperate with the communist authorities, he was compelled to resign within the year. Then he was asked to give up his pragmatist ideas and to teach Marxism. Again Sarailiev refused and was saved from the labor camps only because of his reputation as a scholar. A few years later, in 1950, Sarailiev was forced to retire, and he spent the rest of his life in almost complete isolation. He was banned from publishing and his previous publications were blacklisted. Even his name was classified. Sarailiev died peacefully but in total obscurity, in Sofia in 1969. There are few reliable documentary sources on his life and it is still difficult to obtain any of his books, articles, or papers. Sarailiev was all but erased from history.

This story of Ivan Sarailiev's life and work might not have been told were it not for a pure accident by which I stumbled upon one of his books. The book, entitled *Pragmatism* (in Bulgarian), was published in 1938. *Pragmatism*, with a photograph of the famous Ellen Emmet Rand portrait of William James for its frontispiece, is a remarkable book. It is an important record of Sarailiev's involvement with the European spread of pragmatism and of his extensive travels to France, England, Germany, and the United States. It also provides a vivid snapshot of pragmatism at this critical period of Europe's history.

In the introduction, Sarailiev identified Peirce as the founder of pragmatism with a reference to "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" (1878). Sarailiev added, however, that this paper remained unnoticed until 1898, when William James published his "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," in which he credited Peirce with the discovery of pragmatism. The further spread and the European premiere of pragmatism Sarailiev credits to Ferdinand Schiller, in particular his 1891 *Riddles of the Sphinx*.

Sarailiev found the greatest number of pragmatists in Italy, and he discusses Giovanni Papini, Mario Calderoni, Giovanni Vailati, and Giovanni Amendola. Sarailiev also includes a brief discussion of Mussolini. In the London newspaper, *Sunday Times* (April 1926), the Italian dictator expressed his gratitude to pragmatism by saying that it was of great help to his political career, and that he had learned from James that any action must be tested through its results rather than on doctrinal grounds. Mussolini continued: "James has inspired in me a trust in action and a will for living and fighting on which fascism has built its great success." To balance this, Sarailiev also quoted others who were enthusiastic about pragmatism, like the Russian

revolutionist Vladimir Lenin. Sarailiev also made sure to include Giovanni Amendola, who died after being tortured by the fascists.

Sarailiev continued his overview of the European expansion of pragmatism with an outline of its influence in German speaking countries. Although weaker than in Britain and Italy, it had some influence; Sarailiev mentioned George Wobbermin, Wilhelm Jerusalem, Julius Goldstein, Ernst Mach, Wilhelm Ostwald, Georg Simmel, among others who were influenced by pragmatic ideas. He then continued to show how pragmatic ideas influenced several of the Logical Positivists in Vienna.

Sarailiev finally follows pragmatism to France, where it was met with more appreciation and played a role in the development of a new religious philosophy founded by Alfred Loisy and George Tyrell. In the 1930s, Sarailiev continued, with further contributions from thinkers such as Maurice Blondel, Laberthonière, Le Roy and others, this developed into a French movement for a renewal of philosophy and religion known as “modernism.”

The introduction is followed by the essay “Charles Sanders Peirce and his Principle” as well as essays on the pragmatism of James, the humanism of Schiller, and the instrumentalism of Dewey. The book included also an essay on Italian pragmatism, a conclusion, and a supplement with an essay on the meaning of the words “pragmatism,” the adjective “pragmatic,” and Peirce’s term “pragmaticism.” The book finishes with a lightly annotated and remarkably complete bibliography of pragmatic thought in 20 pages.

Sarailiev’s account of pragmatism’s invasion of Europe is scrupulously researched and very well written. He described pragmatism as a new theory of truth, marked its crucial points, and concluded that after the death of its chief representatives the debate about it had begun to fade away.

Also in his own work Sarailiev followed a model of thinking that exemplified Peirce’s “logic of science.” In his *Genetic Ideas* (1919, Sofia, Court Press), his *Socrates* (1947, Sofia), and in his debate on science and religion, he closely followed the pragmatists’ doctrine for the clarification of meaning.

Under more fortunate circumstances, Sarailiev would have enjoyed an influence, perhaps a great influence. Instead, he suffered under harsh political persecution and was forced to be a social outcast. His thought was suppressed and was left to drift in the darkness of the following ignorant decades. As Peirce understood so well, thought must not be imprisoned in the monastery of a single consciousness, but it must be let out to fight in the street with other thoughts – for the sake of truth.

“The drift in darkness” continued for decades until the fall of communism in Bulgaria. It was not before then when the first writings on pragmatism became possible. But maybe it is worth noting that the first penetration of pragmatist ideas in Bulgaria occurred as early as in 1902 with the appearance of William James’ book *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* translated from Russian.¹ This alone is an amazing fact having in mind that talks in the US about pragmatism at that time were just growing wings. The interest in James’ and especially Dewey’s pragmatism in

1. William J., (1902), *Besedi s uchitelite varhu psihologiata*, transl. from Russian, Ilia Kraev, Lovetch.

Bulgaria continued after the First World War, so that, for example, three lectures from James under the title *What is Pragmatism* were translated and published in 1930.² Pragmatism was the third big philosophical tendency that influenced Bulgarian philosophy until the First World War after the German and French schools. In the interwar period the impact of Dewey's education methods was considerable with the translation of many of his articles. Still, there was hardly a pragmatic philosopher in Bulgaria before Ivan Sarailiev.

The span between Sarailiev and next writings on pragmatism in Bulgaria stretched over three decades. Scattered mentionings of pragmatist's names can be found in the writings of several Bulgarian philosophers such as Atanas Iliev, Asen Kiselichev, Ceko Torbov, Sava Ganovski, Todor Pavlov, Ljuben Sivilov and others. Those were mainly officially critics of pragmatism from the standpoint of the ruling Marxist ideology. The first large presentation of Peirce's thought after the fall of the communist regime occurred in the introduction of a two-volumes collection of semiotic papers, *The Matter of Thought and Between Objects & Words* in 1991 (Mladenov Ivan, 1991). Several articles on Peirce's thought followed, as well as conferences and translations of few of his most-known essays. I started teaching Peirce's thought as early as 1994 and continue until today. This became possible, after my two-years stay in Bloomington as a Fulbright researcher, when I worked with Thomas Sebeok, and took the once-only postdoctoral course on Peirce given by Nathan Houser from the Peirce Edition Project at Indiana University. Occasionally, I returned to the Peirce Edition Project, including a second stay on a Fulbright grant in 2010. Finally in 2006 my book on some of Peirce's ideas was published under the title *Conceptualizing Metaphors. On Charles Peirce's Marginalia*. The book was translated and published also in Japanese in 2012. Thus, the road for the new undertaking of Peirce's ideas was paved and a whole new generation of young scholars took it. As a great example I would mention a new book by a Doctoral student of mine, Andrey Tashev, on the first penetrating and spreading of pragmatism in Bulgaria and the ideas of Ivan Sarailiev, which appeared in 2013.

The recent discovery of Sarailiev's work most assuredly confirms, at least, that no authority can hope to forever "fix" the truth. A good example might be the renaissance of Sarailiev's contribution. Several conferences on his behalf, some with international participation, took part in Sofia. His books were reprinted and used as textbooks or introductions to pragmatism at the Bulgarian universities. Doctoral theses and books on his thought were published, slowly but steadily he gained the reputation he was denied throughout all his lifetime. It is an open question whether today's digging out of Sarailiev represents a pure accident, or resumes a logical end of a human attitude best described in Peirce's beloved quotation of Shakespeare:

Proud man,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence.

2. William J., (1930), *Shto e pragmatizam*, transl. N.S. Nonev, Sofia.

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Ivan Sarailiev as Diplomat in Bern, 4th of May 1918.