

Husserl and Shestov: philosophical antipodes

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ABSTRACT

The paper contains the general characteristics of the relation between Lev Shestov's philosophy of existence and transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. The analysis was largely inspired by Cezary Wodziński's research on Shestov's writings, including his book published in Polish entitled *Wiedza a zbawienie. Studium myśli Lwa Szestowa* (1991). In 1931, inspired by Descartes' *Meditationes de prima philosophiae*, Husserl began a total transformation of philosophy into a science absolutely founded, assumptionless and developed in the spirit of absolute self-responsibility. Thus, the idea of philosophy as an exact science and Descartes' idea of a science absolutely founded became the aim. It resulted in a project of universal science that — according to Husserl — has been the aim of European philosophy from the beginning. Ultimately, this philosophy was to rebuild the whole model of European culture. Less than two years after the first edition of *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, Lev Shestov published his *Athens and Jerusalem* (1938) in which he agrees with Husserl's diagnosis that the whole of European culture was in a stage of a deep crisis which goes to its very foundations. However, Shestov points at the radically different sources of that crisis. Paradoxically, the remarkable friendship connecting these two thinkers did not affect the similarity of their views. In fact, they are located at the opposite poles of the contemporary philosophical scene. The friendship of Shestov and Husserl was born in the atmosphere of an intense and uncompromising intellectual debate. Both thinkers are strongly convinced that the fate of European culture and European understanding of what it is to be a man are decided in the realm of philosophy. So, the philosophical projects they offer are two extremely critical visions of culture. At the same time they suggest a way in which European culture should be thoroughly reformed at its very basis.

KEYWORDS

crisis of culture; radical criticism; *télos*; the alternative either – or; overcoming the crisis; source of knowledge

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THE TIME IS OUT OF JOINT...

Let us go in together,
 And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.
 The time is out of joint — O cursed spite,
 That ever I was born to set it right!
 Nay, come, let's go together.
 (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 1, scene 5, 186–190)

The metaphorical words said by Hamlet disclose before us the phenomenon of universal crisis. When the world is trembling in its foundations, and the universe is breaking down into small glass pieces, we can see reality only in its mirror fragments. The world in which we live cannot be comprehended in its entirety. Nearly one century has already passed since *The decline of the West* of Oswald Spengler (1921), *The new Middle Ages* of Nikolai Berdyaev (1924), *The agony of Christianity* of Miguel de Unamuno (1924), and *The revolt of the masses* of José Ortega y Gasset were published (1930). In 1936 Husserl published *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*. This work is the deepest expression of Husserl's mature thought, and includes a full anatomy of the crisis of European way of being human. It is entirely subordinated to the question about the essence and causes of that historical turn which brought Europe on the brink of a precipice. On the turn of the twentieth Husserl did not have any doubt as to the occurrence of a universal turning point in the world of European man. A vivid ideal of true science and scientific responsibility was abandoned. Science ceased to believe in its absolute significance. Man was doomed to live in an uncertain and incomprehensible world. According to Husserl, it is a philosopher–scientist who bears responsibility for this state of affairs, and this is why it is only him who is obliged to rebuild (in accordance with the *arché*) the European way of being human. Seeing growing pluralism in philosophy, Husserl writes:

We still have philosophical congresses. The philosophers meet but, unfortunately, not the philosophies. The philosophies lack the unity of a mental space in which they might exist for and act on one another (Husserl, 1977: 5).

Husserl notices the process of the undeniable collapse of Western philosophy, starting already from the half of the nineteenth century. It manifests itself in philosophy's loss of unity as to its methods, problems and accepted purposes. In the nineteenth century the faith of philosophy in its absolute value and scientific rigour was shaken. This is how Husserl sees the state of contemporary philosophy:

Instead of a unitary living philosophy, we have a philosophical literature growing beyond all bounds and almost without coherence. Instead of a serious discussion among conflic-

ting theories that, in their very conflict, demonstrate the intimacy with which they belong together, the commonness of their underlying convictions, and an unswerving belief in a true philosophy, we have a pseudo-reporting and a pseudo-criticizing, a mere semblance of philosophizing seriously with and for one another (Husserl, 1977: 5).

In 1931, inspired by Descartes' *Meditationes de prima philosophiae*, Husserl begins a total transformation of philosophy into a science absolutely founded, assumptionless and developed in the spirit of absolute self-responsibility. The idea of philosophy as an exact science and Descartes' idea of a science absolutely founded becomes the aim. This results in a project of universal science which — as Husserl claims — has been the aim of European philosophy from its very beginning. Ultimately, this philosophy is to rebuild the whole model of European culture.

The genuine spiritual struggles of European Humanity as such — writes Husserl in his last work — take the form of struggles between the philosophies. [...] To bring latent reason to the understanding of its own possibilities and thus to bring to insight the possibility of metaphysics as a true possibility — this is the only way to put metaphysics or universal philosophy on the strenuous road to realization. It is the only way to decide whether the *telos* which was inborn in European humanity at the birth of Greek philosophy — that of humanity which seeks to exist, and is only possible, through philosophical reason, moving endlessly from latent to manifest reason, and forever seeking its own norms through this, its truth and genuine human nature — whether this *telos*, then, is merely a factual, historical delusion, the accidental acquisition of merely one among many other civilizations and histories, or whether Greek humanity was not rather the first breakthrough to what is essential to humanity as such, its entelechy (Husserl, 1970b: 15).

For Husserl the history of modern philosophy is a struggle for the meaning of humanity and therefore it is possible to settle the question of the meaning of human existence only within theoretical activity. The modern age has its beginning in the acceptance of the Greek ideal of humanity, that of man who derives his entire life from pure reason, in accordance to which he shapes himself and the entire surrounding reality. Thus, the primary ideal of philosophy is that of philosophy as an all-encompassing science speaking about the totality of what is and not divided into any particular disciplines. In its universality philosophy was to embrace all conceivable meaningful problems, thereby ensuring the unity of the area of theoretical research. According to the phenomenologist in the Enlightenment there occurs a radical turn — abandoning the faith in the power of science and philosophy as universal domains. Moreover, an internal disintegration into initially coherent but unrelated systems takes place. The seemingly universal method turns out to be useless when it comes to questions tormenting humankind. The only things that still sustains it are successes of particular sciences. However, the loss of philosophy's "life significance" decided its ultimate fall. Husserl claims, that:

the crisis of European existence can end in only one of two ways: in the ruin of a Europe alienated from its rational sense of life, fallen into a barbarian hatred of spirit; or in the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy, through a heroism of reason that will definitively overcome naturalism. Europe's greatest danger is weariness. Let us as "good Europeans" do battle with this danger of dangers with the sort of courage that does not shirk even the endless battle. If we do, then from the annihilating conflagration of disbelief, from the fiery torrent of despair regarding the West's mission to humanity, from the ashes of the great weariness, the phoenix of a new inner life of the spirit will arise as the underpinning of a great and distant human future, for the spirit alone is immortal (Husserl, 1970b: 192).

Less than two years after the first edition of *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, in 1938, Lev Shestov publishes a book entitled *Athens and Jerusalem*, in which he agrees with Husserl's diagnosis that the whole European culture is in a stage of a deep crisis which goes to its very foundations. However, Shestov points at radically different sources of that crisis. Husserl and Shestov were great friends, even though they stand on the totally opposite poles of philosophical thought. This is an extremely rare paradox in philosophy.

Unfortunately, I am so tired I can barely write half a page each day. It's not much. But I am still happy to do it. The thing is: people still do not understand Husserl, and even less the point of my struggle against him. Look at this short book by a Portuguese writer, it's in French, he speaks well of me in it. You see, in the footnote, he says that I was the first to give "the right answer to a somewhat philistine thinker". But you know very well that this is not it at all. I am so sorry people understand me so badly. People who claim to have read my books, and perhaps to even like me (Fondane, 1982: III).

This is how in conversation with Benjamin Fondane he described his own work on the article in memory of Edmund Husserl, his philosophical opponent and great friend. It was the last text written by Shestov, called his "swan song". The work on the article was very exhausting for Shestov and lasted almost half a year. A correction of the text arrived to him on the day of his death. The text *In memory of a great philosopher: Edmund Husserl* was commissioned by the magazine *Russkie Zapiski*, and contains the most comprehensive interpretation of Husserl's philosophy and its most radical criticism. At the beginning of the twentieth century in Russia there was a quite large group of philosophers inspired by Husserl's phenomenology. First of all they were participants of Husserlian seminars, for example Alexandre Koyré, Aron Gurwicz, as well as thinkers reading extensively works of the master (Nikołaj Łoski, Aleksiej Łosiew, Henry Lanz, Gustav Shpet). Shestov himself for the first time encountered Husserl's work — probably at Shpet's suggestion — in 1908. He started with the *Logische Untersuchungen*, what was very inspiring

for him.¹ In the first article about Husserl Shestov writes: „Among philosophers of the early twentieth century few indeed can rival Husserl in power, boldness, depth, and significance of thought” (Shestov, 1938: V).

The first article about the phenomenologist entitled *Memento mori. Husserl's philosophy* Shestov published in 1917 (Shestov, 1968a: VI). The article was then published in French and was one of the very first texts concerning Husserl's philosophy which appeared in France (Shestov, 1927: 36–74); this is the reason why some claim that Shestov made France acquainted with phenomenology. Shestov's first article caused a great commotion in the environment of phenomenologists and started a dispute between the author and one of Husserl's disciples — Jean Hering.² At the request of Helmuth Plessner and at the same time in response to Hering's article, Shestov published the next critical text against phenomenology: *What is truth? On ethics and ontology* (Shestov, 1968b). These polemics had a great importance for the thinker. In one of his letters he writes:

Dr. Hering's objection [...] has proven me once again, that the fight which I began 25 years ago, is a fight indeed for that, what for us is most valuable and most important. The article of Hering alone in itself does not present [...] anything special. But it is all imbued with Husserl's spirit and through Hering I am talking with Husserl, or better to say — with the “spirit of our time” (Fondane, 1982 as cited in: Wodziński, 1991: 105).

In 1928 Shestov was invited to Amsterdam to deliver a lecture at the meeting of the Philosophical Society. When he arrived there he found out that they expected Husserl, who was to arrive later. Husserl asked the Russian thinker to wait for a meeting with him. From that moment their friendship began. Later they met three times: 1928 in Freiburg, 1929 in Paris, and again in Freiburg in 1930. Also a lot of letters exist, in which the two philosophers conducted an extensive polemic. Shestov himself was an initiator of inviting Husserl to give the “Paris Lectures” at the Sorbonne. Those lectures were turned into the *Cartesian meditations*. “No one has ever attacked me so sharply as he — and that's why we are such close friends” (Shestov, 1938: 1) — in these words Edmund Husserl presented Shestov to their guests, few American philosophers, in November 1928 in Freiburg. The history of philosophy knows specific paradoxes. An example of them is that remarkable friendship connecting the two thinkers, whose views are situated on the opposite poles of contemporary philosophical streams. The friendship of Lev Shestov and Edmund Husserl was born on the basis of an intense and uncompromising intellectual dispute. The thing that most struck

¹ That is in 1908, when Shestov was still in Saint Petersburg. A Russian translation of volume 1 of the *Logische Untersuchungen* was published in Saint Petersburg in 1909; Substantial Russian studies of Husserl's thought were produced by Boris Jakovenko and Gustav Shpet (cf. Jakovenko, 1912; Shpet, 1914).

² Hering published a paper in response to Shestov (Hering, 1927: 351–364).

Shestov in Husserl's words was his disinterestedness, a rare feature even among great philosophers. Husserl's passion to search for truth and for knowledge absolutely founded was for Shestov very attracting.

The first conversation of the two philosophers began with an acute attack of Husserl:

You have turned me into a stone statue, raised me onto a lofty pedestal, and then with hammer blows you have shattered this statue to bits. But am I really so lapidary? You don't seem to have noticed what compelled me to formulate in such a radical way the question of the nature of knowledge, modifying the dominant theories of knowledge which previously had satisfied me as much as any other philosopher. The more deeply I probed into the basic problems of logic, the more I felt that our science, our knowledge, is shaking, tottering. And finally, to my own indescribable horror, I convinced myself that if contemporary philosophy has said the last word about the nature of knowledge, then we have no knowledge. Once, when I was giving a lecture at the university, expounding ideas which I had taken over from our contemporaries, I suddenly felt that I had nothing to say, that I was standing before my students with empty hands and an empty soul. And then I resolved both for myself and for my students to submit the existing theories of knowledge to that severe and unrelenting criticism which has aroused the indignation of so many people. On the other hand, I began to seek the truth precisely where no one had sought it before, since no one had admitted that it might be found there. Such was the origin of my *Logische Untersuchungen*. But you did not want to see in my struggle, in my impetuous "either-or", an expression of what it in fact was — namely, the consciousness that, if the doubts which had arisen in me could not be overcome by the efforts of reason, if we are doomed merely to go on smoothing over — more or less thoroughly — the fissures and crevasses which have opened up in all of our epistemological constructions, then one fine day all of our knowledge will crumble and we will find ourselves standing amid the miserable ruins of former greatness (Shestov, 1938: 1–2).

In this way Husserl presented to Shestov the original source of his philosophy which completely rejected the fundamental ideas of the greatest contemporary thinkers. According to Shestov the *Logische Untersuchungen* and subsequent works of the phenomenologist became a "slaughter", but not of the "innocents" — as Shestov writes (because the innocents do not philosophize) — but "a slaughter of the old men". For Shestov Husserl's work constituted a wonderful attempt to find a foundation for our knowledge. Questions posed by Husserl are theoretical, but they concern life and death:

Husserl, like Shakespeare's Hamlet, raised the terrible and fateful question, "to be or not to be". He saw with Hamlet (or with Shakespeare) that the time was out of joint. His words had a truly shattering impact (Shestov, 1938: 2).

In response to Husserl's objections Shestov writes:

I was faced by a fearful dilemma: either to accept your whole position and its as-yet-unformulated philosophical implications — or to rebel against you. And if in the next

world I am accused of betraying philosophy because of my struggle against self-evidence. I shall point to you, and you will burn in my place. You have pursued and persecuted me so persistently and inexorably with your intuitive self-evidence, that I could find no other way out. Either I had to submit to you in everything, or else steel myself for the desperate step of revolt, not only against you but against everything that has always been considered the unquestioned foundation of philosophy and of thought. I had to revolt against self-evident truth. You were profoundly right when you said that the time was out of joint. Every attempt to examine the least fissure in the foundation of human knowledge throws the time out of joint. But must knowledge be preserved at whatever cost? Must the time be put back in joint? Or rather, should we not give it a further push — and shatter it to bits? (Shestov, 1938: 1).

Shestov's quite sentimentally approaches Shakespeare's horrifying and filled with melancholy words: the time is out of joint. He writes:

From Shakespeare I turned eagerly to Kant, who, with the incomparable artistry of his *Critique of Practical Reason*, by means of his famous postulates, attempted to gloss over, and for centuries succeeded in glossing over, the ontological fissures laid bare by his own critique of pure reason (Shestov, 1938: 1).

However, Kant's response did not satisfy Shestov, so he turned to the Bible. But can the Bible bear comparison with self-evidence? Shestov did not ask this question yet:

Even those who acknowledge papal infallibility have not come to the point of raising it. Men content themselves with the postulates of practical reason, using them to soften, — or rather to forget, or fail to see — the all-destroying power of the truths of theoretical reason (Shestov, 1938: 1).

Almost all of conversations between Shestov and Husserl revolved around these problems. Working on the first part the *Athens and Jerusalem. Parmenides in chains*, Shestov tried to introduce Husserl to the issues tackled in that work, quoting exactly his own words:

In 399 B.C. Socrates was poisoned. Socrates left behind his disciple Plato, who, “forced by the truth itself” (in Aristotle's expression), did not, could not refrain from thinking and saying that Socrates had been poisoned. All of his writings elaborate a single central question: Is there any power in the world which can reconcile us to the fact that Socrates was poisoned? For Aristotle such a question would have been nonsensical. He was convinced that the “truth”, “a dog was poisoned”, like the “truth”, “Socrates was poisoned”, is permanently immune from human or divine objection. The hemlock makes no distinction between Socrates and dogs (Shestov, 1938: 1).

After some time the discussion took a different turn, as if Husserl also started to suspect that the Aristotelian certainty was built on sand and had something to do with falsehood and betrayal.

II. WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

I had said that philosophy is a great and ultimate struggle;
 he had answered sharply, Nein, Philosophie ist Besinnung!
 (Shestov, 1938: 1)

During the visit of the Russian thinker in Freiburg, the phenomenologist found out that Shestov had never read Søren Kierkegaard. Husserl began not to ask but to demand — with enigmatic insistence — that Shestov reads the works of the Danish thinker. Shestov was surprised, that a man whose entire philosophical life is a cult of reason, persuades him to familiarize himself with the cult of absurdity practiced by Kierkegaard. Husserl himself became acquainted with the writings of Kierkegaard only at the end of his life, although in his works we cannot find any evidence that he knew the writings of the author of *Either – Or*. However, Shestov was deeply convinced that the writings of the “recluse of north” strongly influenced the father of phenomenology. Kierkegaard’s category *either – or* discloses the essential plain of the dispute between Shestov and Husserl. The phenomenologist definitely stands on the side of rationalist philosophy and supports the claim on the indisputable value of knowledge, especially scientific knowledge. This assumption is not criticized and is accepted as obvious, with no need for further justifications. Problems and disputes appear only above — along with the question about the nature of knowledge and of scientific knowledge. Replies to some basic epistemological questions circumscribe the area of Husserl’s dispute with psychologism, naturalism, historicism, or even also with objectivism. However, the dispute between Shestov and Husserl takes place somehow below the epistemological tradition; it goes much deeper — where rationalistic criticism does not reach. It takes place on the very foundation of all rationality. Those questions — questions about the indisputable value of our knowledge, about the base of our uncritical confidence in knowledge and in scientific knowledge — mobilize Shestov to develop profound criticism of Husserl’s phenomenology.

At the outset Shestov declares his opposition against the concept of truth formulated in the first volume of the *Logical investigations*. This concept is a result of Husserl’s reaction to psychological attempts to justify *a priori* sciences and knowledge in general. The objection against psychologism is that it mixes up an ideal content of a judgment with a real act of judging, what in consequence leads to relativism. Those categories belong to completely different orders and there is no logical connection between them. The fundamental distinction consists in the fact that the act of judging is done within the order of “factuality” and has nothing to do with the ideal content of that judgment. Yet, the psychologists constantly mix up these two orders, so they identify the necessity of truth with the contingency of facts. Husserl objects, that the psychologist thinkers:

ignore the fundamental, essential never-to-be bridge gulf between ideal and real laws, normative and causal regulation, between logical and real necessity, between logical and real grounds. No conceivable gradation could mediate between the ideal and the real (Husserl, 1970a: 104).

Truth belongs to the ideal order, and therefore it is not possible to reduce it to a fact, which in a way is marked with contingency and changeability in time. Any real or fictional change can never affect truth. Moreover, identifying truth with any experience of consciousness destroys its ideality and above — empirical nature. Every psychological experience is a real unit which arises and disappears in a course of time; truth is by its very nature timeless and bears the seal of eternity. Truth is one idea with a perfect unity of meaning, in contrast with a dispersed diversity of individual acts of judgment. Truth must be absolute, necessarily applying to everything and everyone. It cannot be relativized to human or to any intelligent beings. “What is true — Husserl declares with magnificent passion — is absolutely intrinsically true: truth is one and the same, whether man or not-man, angels or gods apprehend and judge it” (Husserl, 1970a: 140). Truth which remained in any reference to any intelligent beings would arise and die with that beings; any relativization of the category (for example “objectivity”, “subjectivity”, *etc.*) unavoidably results in relativization of each next category; and any relativity of truth would be reflected in the relativity of the existence of the world.

Shestov is strongly convinced that in the very source of rational knowledge there lies an entirely arbitrary and sanctioned by nothing choice, an act of faith of a certain kind into the value of knowledge, into the value of cognition. In phenomenology he sees the rationalist tradition of granting knowledge the status of knowledge indubitable, absolutely certain, absolutely founded. The “eternization” of knowledge in Husserl — similarly as in Kant — is done by appealing to reason — the only authority which provides reliable cognition. In *In Job's balance*, Shestov accuses Husserl that he sides with Kant in the faith that reason does not need to be justified, but everything must be justified by reason. Husserl's straggle against psychologism became the struggle for the autonomy of the rights of reason. What is at stake in this struggle is the existence of genuine science and genuine philosophy, and ultimately the existence of culture founded on them. Husserl gives an alternative: either our human reason is able to discover absolute truths, or we are doomed to an existence deprived of assurance, of certainty, of rootedness. Shestov himself appreciates the determination with which the phenomenologist demands the autonomy of truths of reason:

Either self-evidence is the ultimate court of appeal, at the bar of which the human spirit receives its full and definitive satisfaction, or else our knowledge is illusory and false, and sooner or later a realm of chaos and madness will appear on earth, and those who are not

too lazy to stretch out their hands will begin to usurp the sovereign rights of reason, its sceptre and crown (Shestov, 1938: II).

Putting such an alternative to some extent settles the reply in advance. Shestov considers phenomenology as a bold expression of the eternal longings of mankind:

what Husserl expresses philosophically is finally only the free and bold expression of the state of mind of the immense majority of men: let the world perish, provided justice is saved; let life disappear, but let us not sacrifice reason! So men have thought, so men will think, and one can predict for rationalism a long, peaceful, almost "atemporal" existence (Shestov, 1968a: VI).

Shestov supports Husserl's belief that there obtains a correlation between "truth in itself" and "the existence in itself". He claims, however, that a different principle governs that relation. This is why when Husserl says that the relativization of truth leads to the relativization of beings, Shestov claims that the principle of inverse proportion there obtains. He accuses the phenomenologist that he does not notice the danger arising when truth is fully absolutize, and writes:

we discover, then, between the ideal and the real or, to use Husserl's terminology, between reason and reality, an irreducible antagonism, a cruel struggle for the right to exist. In the measure that reason triumphs, there remains less and less place for the real [...] to affirm the absolute existence of the ideal is to relativize and even destroy all reality (Shestov, 1968a: VI).

Any attempt to connect the real with the ideal, the real to the rational with regard to one transcendental ontological category is leading not to solving a problem, but to eliminating it. Shestov therefore regards Husserl's theory of ideal objects as erroneous, for it leads to nihilistic results. Thus, according to Shestov each of our ideas, each of our truths, has in fact a purely empirical origin, for in this concrete reality that we experience there are far more elements of "eternity" than in all the ideas discovered by phenomenology. Over the centuries from a true premise that reason made "a lot of", an entirely false conclusion was drawn that reason is capable of "everything". A limitless expansion of the prerogatives of reason is a pure fiction, a myth. "A lot of" does not mean "everything", for these are in fact two separate categories, irreducible to each other. This myth falls down in the moment when it turns out, that reason that justifies everything and uncritically justifying itself as well, must ultimately be justified by something else. Shestov denies reason the power to establish the limits of what is possible and impossible:

there is a judge and lawgiver above reason, and philosophy cannot remain a “rational” philosophy insofar as it seeks the *rhizômata pantôn* [the roots of all things]; it must be *epekeina nou kai noêseôs* [beyond reason and knowledge] (Shestov, 1968b: VII).

Thus, Shestov tries to demythologize the character of reason. In this perspective, a dream of the rational mankind about truth, about absolute knowledge, remains only a dream. This dream cannot come true, because with its roots it reaches down to a-rational or before-rational, improvable, impossible to justify beliefs. Does then — in the horizon of the illusoriness of our aspirations to absolute truth — remain for us to drop hands in the resignation? Are we doomed to wandering amongst illusions and falsehood? And does the consequent epistemological demythologization which Shestov shows lead straight to a nihilistic wasteland? Finally the author of the *Potestas Clavium* does not give up the search for truth. He makes attempts to deconceptualize the idea of truth. In his case however it is difficult to speak about any concept or theory of truth alternative to that of Husserl. Already at the point of departure a conceptual character of truth is questioned in favour of creating a certain vision — or rather a metaphor — of truth, in a deliberate way escaping any conceptualization with its antinomicity and incoherence. Abandoning any attempts to find any *veritates aeternae* or *verites de raison* becomes a new task of philosophy, for those truths do not exist. Shestov is deeply convinced that truth by its essence is illogical, internally contradictory. Thanks to contradictions we may suppose that we are on the best way to discover truth, that we are just dealing with it, because contradictions simply constitute the nature of truth. There is no way to prove the truthfulness of truth, for its kingdom extends beyond any evidence and arguments. Truth cannot be locked in the cage of notions, in frames of one idea — it is completely deprived of an abstract character; moreover, along with the increase of the degree of abstractness, a degree of its falseness increases. The genuine attitude towards truth is the attitude of disinterestedness, for truth can be achieved only when we do not want to dominate it, to use it in order to meet some historical needs within the limits of the only dimension of time which is well-known to us. Secondly, truth is entirely incommunicable; it does not have an interpersonal character; it disappears in the moment when we are trying to relate it to the universal common denominator, to the universally understandable interpretation. Shestov’s final conclusion is: objectivisation slays truth, because truth — being completely independent and transcendent with regard to the human subject — undergoes only a process of interiorization, whereas any attempt of exteriorization means the total annihilation of truth.

Truth gets through life without showing any sort of documentary titles. [...] The ultimate truth, that for which philosophy seeks, that which is to *timiôtaton* for living men, comes “suddenly”. It knows no compulsion and compels none (Shestov, 1968b: 7).

Here through Shestov his spiritual master Plotinus speaks: *Tote de chrê heôrakenai pisteuein, hotan hê psychê eksaiphnês phôs labêi* [but then indeed we must believe that we have seen IT, when a light suddenly dawns on the soul] (Plotinus, 1984: V, 3, 17).

III. EITHER – OR

There are scales upon which human suffering
weighs heavier than the sands of the sea.

(Shestov, 1938: IV)

All authentic cultures immanently have an idea of pluralism, multitude, tolerance and freedom against which any totalitarian culture of reason opposes. Thus, in order to overcome the crisis of the European way of being human one must liberate himself from the authority of reason and find an authentic origin of culture. The *arché* of culture — Shestov suggests — lies outside of the scope of reason and rational knowledge. The source of our civilization has been hidden and defamed by the rationalistic tradition. Athens governed by the despotic reason cannot be the first and the only spiritual capital of Europe. If Europe is to rise up from the fall and regain freedom it once possessed, one should look somewhere else for its spiritual capital. Shestov indicates that the original meaning of culture is preserved only in the Book of Books, in the Bible, the capital of which is Jerusalem.

We stand between two “madnesses” — between the madness of a reason for which the “truths” which it reveals about the horrors of real being are ultimate, definitive, eternal truths, obligatory for all, and the madness of Kierkegaard’s “Absurd”, which ventures to begin the struggle when, on the testimony of reason and self-evidence, struggle is impossible, is foredoomed to humiliating failure (Shestov, 1938: IV).

In the perspective of the crisis which we are facing there remain only two alternatives: Athens or Jerusalem. However, what is madness for Athens, for Jerusalem is wisdom, what is a truth for Jerusalem, for Athens is a falsehood. This attack conducted by the Russian thinker on the philosophical tradition does not only aim at negating the entire tradition, but above all to help finding “the authentic and true philosophy”, which originates from a tradition — forgotten and distorted, but constantly present in European culture — of religious thinking, the source of which is Divine revelation from Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the only alternative to enslaving reason which totalizes the entire culture of the West. So Athens and Jerusalem are either – or of the European thinking. Accepting one of them excludes the other. There is nothing in between, there is no compromise.

What is the place and the function of Husserl's phenomenology in Shestov's vision of the rationalistic tradition? Can one justly accuse the philosophy of the author of the *Logical investigation* of a strong tendency towards a tradition employing the category of totality and violence? There is no doubt that Shestov considers phenomenology not merely an element integrated into the rationalistic tradition but above all the most consistent and radical expression of it, giving it an inner unity and coherence. So, phenomenology becomes a perfect realization of the idea of philosophy as a pure, universal and absolutely grounded science. Husserl adopts the role of a zealous advocate of a "scientific character" of philosophy. He grants science privileges, till now belonging only to the Highest Being. The infallibility of a scientific judgment in phenomenology is to have the same power as Pope's infallibility and superiority of his authority within Catholicism. Shestov passionately fights against self-evidences:

Phenomenology, the faithful disciples of Husserl declare, ignores the difference between *homo dormiens* (sleeping man) and *homo vigilans* (waking man). This is true. It does ignore this difference, and herein lies the source of its power and persuasive force. [...] the man who is asleep tends to consider the conditions from which his dreams flow as the only possible conditions of existence. That is why he calls them "self-evidences" and guards and protects them in all kinds of ways (logic and the theory of knowledge: the gifts of reason). But when the moment of awakening comes (the rumbling of the thunder is heard: revelation), one will begin to doubt the self-evidences and to put up a struggle against them that is completely unreasonable — that is to say, one will do precisely what, for the man who is asleep, is the height of absurdity. Can there, indeed, be anything more absurd than to answer logic with claps of thunder? (Shestov, 1966: IV, 55).

This preposterous struggle against self-evidences, which Husserl sees as the foundation of rational knowledge, is for Shestov the one and only authentic aim of philosophy. Everything what we regard as *claire et distingue*, all evidences science is based on, ultimately turns out to be an enigma and a mystery. The power of necessity which is the end of human enquiry, an understanding of reality — distorted by reason and transilluminated by rationality, constitutes for a real philosopher the proper area of a struggle for regaining lost freedom. Shestov's conception of authentic philosophy presents to us anti-rationalism and anti-totalitarianism. "Self-evidence is only a hypocritical *sine effusione sanguinis* (without effusion of blood) behind which pyres and tortures are hidden" (Shestov, 1966: III, 6), and on those self-evidences Husserl grounds his transcendental phenomenology, a validity of its cognition. Husserl was the first philosopher who ascribed strictly philosophical meaning to the notion of "evidence" as knowledge "absolutely grounded". This was the most daring and radical representation of the traditional aspiration to complete rationalization of knowledge and reality. According to Shestov in order to comprehend fully the radicalism of the phenomenologist's research

one needs to confront him with ideas taken from antipodes — Kierkegaard's existential philosophy. Grasping a deep and internal connection between Husserl and Kierkegaard allows us to see the meaning and greatness of achievements of the author of the *Cartesian meditation*. Shestov writes:

for Husserl, as for Kierkegaard, moderate solutions were a turning away from philosophy. Both of them faced the gigantic problem of the “either-or” in its full dimensions. Husserl despaired at the thought that human knowledge is conditional, relative, transitory, that even an eternal, unshakeable truth like “Socrates was poisoned” might totter, that indeed it has already tottered and does not exist for angels and gods, and that we have no ground for asserting that it will not someday cease to exist even for ordinary mortals. At this point, the reader will recall, Husserl formulated his own “either – or” with unprecedented power: either we are all insane, or “Socrates was poisoned” is an eternal truth, equally binding upon all conscious beings. Kierkegaard's “either – or” has just as resolute and threatening a sound: either the “eternal” truths which reason discovers in the immediate data of consciousness are only transitory truths, and the horrors which Job suffered, the horrors which Jeremiah lamented, the horrors of which John thundered in his “revelation,” will be turned into nothing, into an illusion, by the will of Him who created the universe and “all that swell therein,” just as the horrors of a nightmare which absolutely dominates the consciousness of the sleeping man turn into nothing when he awakens — or we live in a world of madness (Shestov, 1938: V).

So both — Husserl and Kierkegaard — grasped the essence of the alternative “either – or”. The alternative which is faced not only by the philosophical tradition, but by most of the entire European culture, and thus by the whole humanity. Either we accept the absolute value of knowledge, along with all consequences of that fact (if knowledge is to have meaning and importance, it must be rational, absolute, total), or we reject the value of knowledge facing all consequences: abandoning self-evidences together with necessary, indisputable and enslaving truths, abandon reason for the sake of total “irrationalization” of reality. For Shestov the alternative takes the following form: either we absolutize truth and relativize life, or we absolutize life and relativize truth. *Tertium non datur*. Husserl favors the first possibility. The entire phenomenology is a conscious and radical expression of this choice. The second possibility is adopted by Kierkegaard. Thus, his existential reflection became an uncompromising rebellion against self-evidences and enslaving truths of reason in order to defend an individual human existence. For Shestov the second possibility is a leap into the reality of Absurdity, at the same time opening a new dimension of thinking and existence — faith. In the perspective of the ultimate alternative phenomenology is the final element of the rationalistic tradition of European philosophy and the “ultimate nail in its coffin”. It is because it has enlarged a nightmare of humanity which entrusted reason and recognized knowledge as the only path to salvation. The radicalism of phenomenology is the greatest threat to philosophy which — following Kierkegaard's example — should reject reason, and which —

according to Shestov — has the power to wake up the humanity from an eternal dream and to give it back freedom — the freedom of ignorance.

IV. ATHENS OR JERUSALEM. HERMENEUTICAL DILEMMAS

Husserl and Shestov are strongly convinced, that the fate of European culture and European understanding what it is to be man are decided in the realm of philosophy. So, the philosophical projects of these two philosophers offer two extremely critical visions of culture, and at the same time they offer a way by which it should be fully reformed at its very basis. The postulate of salvation usually appears as a result of connecting philosophical notion of “crisis” of European culture with the phenomenon of its fall in the perspective of cultural and religious categories. Along with the awareness — growing among thinkers — of a universal crisis, decline of cultural and existential significance in the way of being human, there are proportionally growing soteriological aspirations of philosophy. Let us then try to look again at the European way of being man in the perspective of Husserl’s and Shestov’s philosophies.

Asking a question of what is a “European way of being man” in Husserl’s project, one should discover the sense of the idea, which constitutes the foundation of the “spiritual character of Europe”, show its immanent teleology, its innate entelechy, which in a way determined the history of European culture by defining its ideal aim of “spiritual becoming”. Greece from the turn of the seventh and sixth century BC as a spiritual birthplace of Europe is essential for Husserl — and he does not mean the birthplace as understood in geography or history, but he means a certain topography of sense. Husserl’s question on the source of European culture:

does not concern the relation between facts and empirical dependences, which are not affected by perturbations and difficulties of empirical enquiry, since they belong to another order and domain of research. [...] “Back to the ultimate source” of sense can mean reconstructing and repeating, reactivating situation of question (another words an intentional spiritual situation), in which there occurred an articulation of certain theoretical basis — and not reconstruction of facts (Syski, 1980: 215).

Transcendental historicalness becomes a purpose of an inquiry of a phenomenologist, who asks about an intention accompanying the birth of European culture in ancient Greece. According to Husserl there then occurs a new kind of spirituality, completely different from a religious — mystical spirituality antecedent it. Thus, a “proto-phenomenon of spiritual Europe” comes into being, a new autonomous cultural form — a philosophical culture whose essence is constituted by its tasks which take the form of infinite ideas. In Husserl’s view:

scientific culture in accord with ideas of infinity means, then, a revolutionizing of all culture, a revolution that affects man's whole manner of being as a creator of culture. It means also a revolutionizing of historicity, which is now the history of finite humanity's disappearance, to the extent that it grows into a humanity with infinite tasks (Husserl, 1970b: 164).

This specific cultural metamorphosis is a result of arising a new kind of Greek's attitude towards reality — entirely theoretical one. Man cut to the heart by passion to cognize the world which goes beyond practical interests, aims at “pure theory” that is free from all practical applications. In that new attitude he notices an opposition between a representation of the world and the real world and therefore asks new questions concerning truth. Yet, he does not ask questions about common truth practically understood but about truth binding all beings with theoretical attitudes — universally about truth in itself. This new type of attitude constitutes a new way of being human. This is how a new community arises, a community connected by ideal, theoretical interests. It is the universal community since for a philosophical culture there are no national boundaries. Ideal and universally valid truth and universal *scientia* become absolute values, a common good of initially alien nations that in those values have found the principle of the unity of a supranational community. Thus, the spiritual form of Europe realizes itself in a community directed at infinite ideals. Husserl writes:

the expanding synthesis of nations too has its infinite ideals, wherein each of these nations, by the very fact that it strives to accomplish its own ideal task in the spirit of infinity contributes its best to the community of nations. In this give and take the supranational totality with its graded structure of societies grows apace, filled with the spirit of one all-inclusive task, infinite in the variety of its branches yet unique in its infinity. In this total society with its ideal orientation, philosophy itself retains the role of guide, which is its special infinite task. Philosophy has the role of a free and universal theoretical disposition that embraces at once all ideals and the one overall ideal-in short, the universe of all norms. Philosophy has constantly to exercise through European man its role of leadership for the whole of mankind (Husserl, 1970b: 177–178).

Husserl believes that philosophy in its ideal project is throughout rational, and that *ratio* is its pan-ideal which encompasses absolute, eternal, timeless and absolutely valid norms and ideas. So, if philosophy is to fulfill an archontic function for the whole humanity, if it is to be considered a “brain”, as Husserl claims, on which normal functioning and health of the European spirituality depends, then European culture should become through and through rational and European way of being human necessarily becomes “being towards reason”. For Husserl man is a creature governed exclusively by reason, and at the basis of culture there lies the endless and limitless idea of similarly endless and limitless reason. In order not to fall into barbarism and actual non-existence, European

culture must follow the path to reason, to its source, to the original *arché*, the *télos* instilled in the moment of its birth and to authentic *eidos*. Thus, Athens is the spiritual capital of Europe, whereas eternal and infinite reason is the star of salvation of the whole humanity. European humanity is the one which constantly aims at its original intention of being rational.

The all-encompassing *ratio* constitutes the original *arché* of culture, its ultimate foundation which ensures durability and continuity. Reason as a timeless *eidos* is the warrant of the unity of culture. Phenomenology is to restore an authentic sense of that *ratio*, once lost in the meanders of history. Transcendental archaeology is to reach the very sources of this sense, the sense revealed in the moment of the spiritual birth of Europe which was in history mysteriously obscured and above all distorted. Only through leading the “strayed rationalism” to the true path compatible with its immanent teleology we may save the “European way of being human”. A Husserlian search for a transcendental *télos* is a constant and conscious act of going beyond history. The *télos* as well as authentic *eidos* of humanity give history the sense in its continuity, but they are not its creation, a product or an element, but an un-empirical potency fulfilling itself in history.

Going beyond history is the price which — according to Husserl — we need to pay in order to preserve continuity of rational European culture. Phenomenology in an extraordinary way purifies the culture of reason from erroneous theoretical influences and certain historical accumulations. Husserl is ultimately fighting for reinforcement and grounding of the transcendental foundation of European culture through a restoration of the original sense. Shestov, however, radically aims at breaking the cultural continuum through a negation of the paradigm of European culture. If one agrees with Husserl that the edifice of human knowledge is falling apart at its very basis, then Shestov offers not its reconstruction, but its complete destruction in order to lay a foundation for “spiritual Europe” with an *arché* contradicting the idea of reason. We then have here a radical approach with two faces: a “critical affirmation” and a “critical destruction”. What the two radically different conceptions have in common are their inefficient, mystifying hermeneutical categories, leading to analogous deformation. One may wonder whether “metarationalism” many times postulated by philosophers is not a more efficient way of interpreting the phenomenon of culture — that is an idea of “reason aware of its limits”, ready to recognize the existence of the different, does not aim at imposing its “rationality” on all domains of culture. However, there occurs a question of whether “metarationalism” as a rationalism aware of its limits is not a self-contradictory concept and whether it can stem from the idea of total and expansive reason. European culture probably will never reject its *ratio*. Probably it is a task for philosophy to determine the limits of competences for reason, since the internal sense of culture consists in its tolerance, plurality and dialogi-

cality. This is why culture should originate from many sources and take its sense from many *archés*. Subordinating culture to only one *arché* renders it dangerously one-sided. This leads to intolerance, totalitarianism, and monologue what in effect becomes a negation of the very idea of culture. Therefore neither Athens nor Jerusalem can ultimately become a capital of spiritual Europe. European culture needs a place for meeting, the place where in the face of an apparent “philosophical Tower of Babel” both sense and understanding are possible.

Shestov, just like Husserl, searches for a spiritual form of Europe. Shestov’s style of philosophizing immanently stems from the same fundamental principles on which European culture as a whole is based, and is a result of some evolution of their original sense. Thus, it inscribes itself as a certain model of thinking into the spirit of the epoch. Yet, Shestov’s research does not inscribe itself into a scheme of strictly historical or empirical research, but it constitutes a certain archaeology of sense which at its beginning influenced a further development of the European way of existence. One can say that Shestov does not fully appreciate the originality of phenomenology in relation to the whole philosophical tradition. He does not develop a discussion with Husserl on the level of particular theses and solutions, and even considers insignificant those views which do not directly correspond to a general vision adopted by him or are neutral with regard to it. On the other hand it allows him to detect and expose totalistic dangers hidden in phenomenological realism, and grasping an essence of those dangers becomes for Shestov a prevailing aim of his criticism. A view of the author of *Athens and Jerusalem* bring charges against European culture in general, and above all against the European way of being human; and those charges are expressed in a final conclusion that a culture through and through rational, a culture of reason is effectively a totalistic culture. Considering non-philosophical consequences it is hard to disagree with that thesis that in some way presents potential dangers. Of course, one can debate about the true sense of the idea of reason or the idea of rationality. Yet, one needs to consider that this original vision of European culture is one of the first ones in the philosophy of the twentieth century, the vision which makes us more sensitive for dangers of totalitarianism, despotism and intolerance that reside in our culture. This is why it is worthwhile to listen intently into Shestov’s vexation and take a critical look at European culture *qui sola ratione ducitur*.

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