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SHESTOV : FAITH AGAINST REASON

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RÉSUMÉ : Selon Chestov, la connaissance est incompatible avec la liberté, qui ne peut être trouvée que grâce à la foi, parce qu'elle établit ses vérités en vertu des principes de nécessité et d'universalité. En fait, le péché originel résiderait dans le désir de connaître, où non seulement la connaissance scientifique est visée, mais aussi la connaissance de la vie quotidienne. La chute s'exprime bibliquement comme un désir de connaître le bien et le mal. Or il semble bien, au contraire, que le domaine de la dimension morale ne devrait pas être au-delà du bien et du mal, ainsi que le suggère Chestov, mais au-delà de la rationalité. Contraster la foi et la raison aussi fortement que le fait Chestov ne peut que conduire à un concept schizophrénique de l'être humain, selon lequel ce dernier posséderait deux facultés irréconciliables, voire hostiles l'une envers l'autre. On peut penser que l'image de Jérusalem et d'Athènes devrait être remplacée par celle de St. Paul et de Minneapolis aux États-Unis : deux cités différentes, à la fois très proches l'une de l'autre et qui ne sont pas dans une relation hostile, mais coopèrent au sein d'une entente amicale. De plus, Chestov privilégie une expression très irrationnelle de la liberté, et ne fait guère face aux conséquences pratiques d'un tel point de vue dans la vie sociale.

ABSTRACT : According to Shestov, knowledge is incompatible with freedom which can be found only through faith because it establishes its truths through the principle of necessity and universality. In fact, the original sin lies in the desire to know, in which not only scientific knowledge is meant, but also knowledge of everyday life. The fall is biblically expressed as a desire to know good and evil. However, it seems that the domain of the moral dimension should not be beyond good and evil, as Shestov suggests, but beyond rationality. Contrasting faith and reason as strongly as Shestov does leads only to a schizophrenic concept of man : man has two faculties that are irreconcilable and even hostile toward one another. It seems that the image of Jerusalem and Athens should be replaced with the image of St. Paul and Minneapolis : different cities that are very close together, not in hostile relationship, but cooperating in a friendly arrangement. Also, Shestov allows for a most irrational expression of freedom. However, he hardly addresses the problem of practical consequences of such a view in social life.

One of the more significant Russian philosophers of the beginning of the twentieth century was Lev Shestov (1886-1938). Born in Kiev, he studied in Kiev and in Moscow, worked in his father's business, since 1895, he traveled and lived in Europe writing and publishing his philosophical works. Since the outbreak of World War I, he lived in Russia, but in 1920 he emigrated to Paris. In France, he became renowned as an existential philosopher and exercised some influence of French existentialism.

From the first pages of his first book to the end of his life, Shestov remains an adamant critic of exaggerated claims of rationalism and scientism. One claim is that reason is the only way of approaching all problems, in inanimate and living nature, in physics and in psychology ; another claim is that nothing escapes scientific approach and science offers the only valid way of explaining the world. If something cannot be explained now, then it will be explained some time in the future or is a pseudoproblem worth no serious consideration. “Science gave an excellent theory, of having limited scope, of the order of external world and called it the law of cause and effect. Its application made it possible for man to subjugate the most concealed and most unbridled forces of nature. But a scholar schooled by the system and used to victories took confidence in his method as in a higher truth” and applies it everywhere (SKB 12).¹ Science’s claims of being able to explain all things are impossible to fulfill and eventually harmful. One way to accomplish these claims is to remove the realm of morality and religion as pure fiction. What started on the wide scale with the so-called enlightenment became widely accepted and approved as valid. This is expressed in the philosophy of positivism ; Shestov dreamed about times when the “unshakeable foundation of positivism will be shaken” (ATP 86), and he saw his role as a philosopher in bringing it to reality.

I. ATHENS OR JERUSALEM

The source of all problems, according to Shestov, is found in the opposition between reason and faith. These are two opposite faculties which compete with one another and, as history of science and philosophy testifies, reason has won. The cause of this victory is that man is afraid of the chaotic, unknowable, fuzzy, undetermined. Order, any order, is a pacifying factor and reason provides order in the most excellent manner. Beginning with the Pythagoreans, for whom everything was a number, and Plato’s academy, which required geometry as a condition for entering it, mathematics was taken to be a model of any rational endeavor. Mathematics is the most ordered of all sciences, uses rules that are said to be universally valid, and makes deductions with clearly specified rules, stringing together assumptions and conclusions with inference rules. Empirical sciences attempt to do something similar by specifying rules of universal validity, validity so universal that the rules do not even require that there exists anything to which they can be applied. So, for instance, as phrased by Husserl, “if all the masses subject to gravitation disappeared, the law of gravitation would not be destroyed but would simply remain without any possible application” (PC 318, 329). This desire for order is projected onto reality and embedded in it in the form of

1. The following abbreviations will be used (all the books appeared originally in Russian) : AJ — *Athens and Jerusalem*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1966 [1951] ; ATP — *All Things are Possible* [1905] and *Penultimate Words and Other Essays* [1908], Athens, Ohio University Press, 1977 ; JB — *In Job’s Balances*, London, Dent and Sons, 1932 [1929] ; KEP — *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1969 [1939] ; PC — *Potestas clavium*, Chicago, Gateway, 1968 [1923] ; SKB — *Шекспир и его критик Брандес* [1898], in Лев ШЕСТОВ, *Анофеоз безпочвенности*, Москва, АСТ, 2000, p. 7-206 ; SR — *Speculation and Revelation*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1982 [1964] ; Vie — Nathalie BARANOFF-SHESTOV, *Vie de Léon Chestov*, Paris, Différence, t. 1, 1991, t. 2, 1993 [1983].

fate, necessity, *moira*. In this way, epistemology enforces an ontological vision of the universe as ordered, and then orderliness of scientific theories is said to reflect the regularities of events in the world.

That much would be acceptable, however, regularity was seen everywhere, and what did not lend itself to rational processing was pronounced irrelevant or even non-existent. In this way, humanity pushed aside or even suppressed what is most important and what should really be a focus of human quest : the sphere that surpasses the reach of reason — the sphere of faith, the sphere of second sight.

Reason wants to be rational all the way ; it strives for understanding. Therefore, non rational references are at once pronounced irrational ; reason finds no room in its dealing with the world for emotions and feelings as a way of understanding the world ; emotions and feelings may at best become material for rational explanation, but not its tool. “The first great law of thought [...] is not to laugh, not to lament, not to curse, but to understand” as phrased by Spinoza (AJ 56-57). When it is said that “mathematics must give us the *norma veritatis*, this only means that there is no place in philosophy for free choice and arbitrariness, and that the truths of philosophy are as compelling and beyond repeal as those of mathematics” (PC 368).

What distresses Shestov is the fact that unbreakable laws and necessary truths

[...] condemn us to the most repugnant slavery. Being independent of God’s will, they themselves have neither will nor desire. They are indifferent to everything. They are not at all concerned with what they will bring to the world and to men, and automatically actualize their limitless power with which they themselves have nothing to do and which comes to them one knows not whence nor why. From the “law” — what has once been cannot not have been — may flow for us a good but also an evil — a horrible, insupportable evil ; but the law will accomplish its work without caring about this. One cannot persuade the eternal truths, one cannot move them to pity. They are like the Necessity of which Aristotle said that “it does not allow itself to be persuaded.” And despite this — or precisely because of this — men love the eternal truths and prostrate themselves before them. We can obtain nothing from them, consequently we must obey them. We have not the power to escape them, we see in our impotence an “impossibility,” consequently we must worship them. This is the true meaning of the *cupiditas scientiae* : a puzzling *concupiscentia irresistibilis* carries us toward the impersonal, indifferent to everything, truth that we raise above the will of all living beings (AJ 307).

If laws are governing nature, we are subject to them, whether we want that or not, and we must expect no mercy, no understanding from them. As general and necessary laws, they make no distinction between men and animals, between falling man and falling stone. They are like bulldozers that crush everything, caring nothing as to what is in their way.

But natural laws pertain only to one level of reality, the less important one. Natural laws may be general, but they do not convey the truth about reality, about what counts in this life and in the afterlife. In fact, “natural explanations remove us from the truth” (PC 72). “The truth lies in the Scriptures” (JB xxxi), in “the book of books, the eternal book” (JB 235), and in particular, when the Bible addresses the problem of reason in the account of the Fall. The original sin lies in the desire to know. “The fruit of the tree of knowledge is what in modern science is called reason, which draws everything

out of itself” (AJ 180, 196). The fruit of the forbidden tree also represents knowledge, and by biting the fruit man cuts himself off from God by becoming a rational being, a being that possesses knowledge ; through this knowledge and its rational use, man becomes self-sufficient. “In its very essence, knowledge, according to the Bible, excludes faith and is the sin *par excellence* or the original sin” (AJ 255) ; “the supreme sin of our forefathers was trust in ‘reason’” (JB 236) ; “sin and knowledge are only different words to denote one and the same ‘subject’” (KEP 267). The result of the original sin was catastrophic : “[...] knowledge has enslaved us, has put us wholly at the mercy of eternal truths” (KEP 25) because “knowledge is constraint” and thus “submission, loss, and privation, which finally hides in its depths the terrible threat of ‘contentment with oneself’” (AJ 116). If a law establishes some causal connection between two types of event, it imposes limits on what can happen and what cannot happen. The law limits what can be done because free choice has to consult rationally established laws in order to make a decision. Free choice ceases to be free ; it turns into slavery in the chains of laws. Consequently, “the birth of knowledge was a violation of man” (AJ 130). Because knowledge establishes its truths through the principle of necessity and universality, it is incompatible with freedom which can be found only through faith.²

Philosophy and theology take science as their model and try to establish their systems in a reasoned, rational way. Theology sees God through the eyes of reason, and therefore the image of God it presents is tailored to human rational abilities. In particular, all proofs of the existence of God are attempts to subjugate faith to the dictates of reason, and “the Bible God, if He wished to attain the predicate of existence, had to seek it on His knees in Athens,” that is, in human reason (JB XXIV) and this, in effect, shows that those who proposed such proofs are unbelievers (PC 18). Also, because reason does not easily tolerate an idea of a supreme being, rational philosophy excludes any references to God (AJ 54). There remain idle reasonings of analytical philosophy that have nothing to do with what is important — with life on Earth and the hereafter. This clinging to reason in philosophy originated with the Greeks and became philosophical heritage for the following centuries. But this has to change, says Shestov, if the truth can be reached : “[...] either the Bible or the Greek ‘knowledge’ and the wisdom founded on this knowledge” (AJ 279), either Jerusalem or Athens. For Shestov the choice is clear : Jerusalem, faith, and rejection of reason. “Philosophy will begin only when man has lost all criteria of truth, when he feels that he cannot have any criteria and that there is even no need of any” (PC 186). Philosophy should “teach man how to live in uncertainty” ; it should not reassure people, but upset them (ATP 12). It must have nothing in common with logic (ATP 18) and “on every occasion [...] the generally-accepted truths must be ridiculed, and paradoxes uttered in their place” (ATP 13).

2. “The opposition : faith - knowledge can be described best by another : freedom - necessity” (Georg JANOSKA, *Kant und Schestow, ein Beitrag zum Glaubensproblem*, Graz, Schmidt-Dengler, 1952, p. 26).

II. KNOWLEDGE AS SIN

Shestov's constantly repeated message — that knowledge is an enemy of faith, that knowledge is sin, that knowledge is slavery — seems to condemn all of knowledge. Shestov's view on the matter was often presented in a comprehensive manner by his followers and commentators. Knowledge was the sin, nothing else.³ For Shestov, “the sin did not consist in disobeying God but in renunciation of the creative liberty to acquire knowledge.”⁴ “According to him, the biblical account of the original fall does not signify that knowledge was perverted, but rather that it by itself constitutes the perversion [...]. The original perversion strictly constituted the desire to *know*”; in other words, “according to Shestov man was not created as fundamentally rational.”⁵ However, some marginal remarks of Shestov may indicate that some qualifications could be needed.

Knowledge that Shestov considers insidious is under the supervision of reason — rational knowledge that has a claim of universality according to necessity with its “eternal, universal, inflexible principles” (KEP 16). However, “Holy Scriptures did not repudiate or prohibit knowledge in the strict sense of the word” because in Paradise “man was summoned to give names to all things” (KEP 15-16). What is this knowledge in the strict sense? Shestov states that “first man possessed certain knowledge” as exemplified by naming animals. But this was the “that” knowledge, not the “why” knowledge that relies on “universal and necessary judgments” (AJ 280). It may appear that the “that” knowledge is factual and the “why” knowledge is inferential. Shestov says that “instead of looking, listening, touching, *seeking*,” people “want to infer and conclude [...]. But nothing comes of their ‘conclusions’ save metaphysical systems and empty prattle. It is surely time to give up conclusions, and get truth *a posteriori*, as did Shakespeare, Goethe, Dostoevsky; that is, every time you want to know anything, go and look and find out. [...] Every new experiment is interesting; but our conclusions, *i.e.*, synthetic judgments *a priori*, are mostly pompous lies, not worth the scrap of paper on which they are recorded” (ATP 101). Purposely or by mistake, Shestov confounds here inferred knowledge with the *a priori*. The *a priori* by definition is not based on experience, whereas each inductive inference, by definition, is. The inference that if one touches hot iron he is burned, is far from empty prattle, and Shestov very likely would not try a new, interesting experiment of disregarding such an inference by touching a hot rod.

Also, the naming of animals in the Biblical account can be taken to mean that Adam classified them according to some unspecified criteria (Gen. 2:19-20). But classification is a rational endeavor, even when criteria may not be considered quite rational. For such a classification to be meaningful, the criteria used should be of universal applicability: they could be applied to any animal at any time. Shestov seems

3. Benjamin FONDANE, “Chestov, Kierkegaard et le serpent”, in his *Conscience malheureuse*, Paris, Denoël et Steele, 1936, p. 251.

4. André DÉSILETS, *Léon Chestov : des paradoxes de la philosophie*, Québec, Beffroi, 1984, p. 109.

5. Paul ROSTENNE, *Léon Chestov : philosophie et liberté*, Bordeaux, Bière, 1994, p. 92-93.

to espouse this view when he says that “when the names were given, man had thereby cut himself off from all sources of life. All the first names were names of species : man named things, he divided them into species, that is, he determined which things he would be able to use so long as he lived on earth, and in what way. Then he was no longer able to comprehend anything except what fell under its name” (JB 207). The criteria should make sense even if there is no animal meeting them. Naming of animals would mark a fall before the Fall. However, if naming animals is simply ascribing names to them, such as Spot, Elmer, etc., the process is not limited to pure factuality. Shestov himself admits that

[...] proper nouns themselves are general ideas : each proper noun indeed is the product of abstraction, for it presents such or such a concrete object not in a determinate place and time but always and everywhere. Caesar is Caesar, as a child, as an adolescent, as a mature man, in Rome, in Gaul, awake, asleep. When we have called a man or an object by name, we have immediately passed from the complex, enigmatic contingency, inexpressible in words, that belongs to everything real, *i.e.* “particular,” into the domain of the general, with its simplicity, its clarity, its necessary laws and, consequently, its comprehensibility (PC 250).

Necessity inevitably indicates the undesirable knowledge, an enemy of truth, and yet such was the knowledge used by the first man in his innocence state, knowledge in the strict sense of the word.

Rationality was exercised before the Fall not only in naming animals. Adam received a commission to tend the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and take care of it (Gen. 2:15). Would that be possible to accomplish without planning, predicting, and reasoning about it? The agricultural knowledge was of divine origin (Is. 28:24-29), but its use depended on the rationality of man. Moreover, the divine interdiction speaks to man’s reason : “[...] on the day you eat of the tree, you will surely die.” This is a reference to a cause and effect mechanism even if the nature of the causal connection between eating the fruit and death may not be entirely known. Also, this is a reference to a verbalized valuation : life is preferable over death and thus a prospect of death should be a strong enough deterrent.⁶ It was not.

The element of necessity seems to be present even in the simplest rational act, such as naming something. And science as we know it is considerably more than naming. Shestov says that “empirical knowledge consists in knowing how things happen in reality (*to hoti*) but it is not yet the knowledge why (*to dioti kai hē aitia*) what happens must happen precisely so and could not happen otherwise” (AJ 276). However, empirical knowledge relies on observations and experiments that, in turn, rely on recording results, that is, on naming elements of events in as unambiguous way as possible, and so an element of necessity is detectable in empirical knowledge as well. Naming certain things can very often be a theory-laden enterprise : two curves on a photograph can indicate a collision of two elementary particles, and such

6. “There exists at the same time something desirable above all : life, and something threatening above all : death. Before even biting of the prohibited fruit, man comprehends the menace” (Rachel BESPALOFF, “Shestov devant Nietzsche”, in her *Cheminevements et carrefours*, Paris, Vrin, 1938, p. 234 ; cf. Adam SAWICKI, *Absurd, rozum, egzystencjalizm w filozofii Lwa Szesztowa*, Kraków, Nomos, 2000, p. 47-48).

an interpretation of the curves is possible with quantum physics as theoretical justification — theoretical justification with all its laws and strictly established regularities. Also, he states that “whether you like it or not, you have to admit the law of gravitation. Some people find it necessary to admit the origin of man from the monkey. In the empirical realm, however humiliating it may be, there are certain real, binding, universal truths against which no rebellion will avail” (ATP 97). Law of gravitation ? Can it be simply reduced to the level of a “that” truth ?

Shestov states that “reason and science give us judgments of universal validity” (JB XVII) because “science and knowledge were born of Necessity” (AJ 130). And yet, he admits that science is useful although it does not know truth — only universal laws (ATP 106). Also, “law of causality, the principle of the regularity of phenomena, and, indeed, the whole idea of self-sufficient order are assumptions highly useful, for practical purposes, but totally ungrounded and erroneous. The self-sufficient, eternal, ‘natural’ order is the purest fiction, and a fiction, at that, created in deference to our limitations” (JB 193). Although he mentions “fat, senseless books that demonstrate the advantages of scientific knowledge” (ATP 84), he cannot ignore the fact of usefulness of science. But if science relies on necessary generalizations and such generalizations are the essence of sin, is doing science sinful ? Such a conclusion is inescapable. It is not that science tries to be all-encompassing by invading the domain of philosophy and theology ; it is not only scientism that is sinful, but science itself is sinful. Science is useful, but apparently it is not welcome usefulness because it subdues people to sin : those who do science and those who reap its fruits.

Exact sciences use “unshakable deductions” (PC 322) and “firm and immutable laws” (SR 277) ; “the exact sciences also establish the necessary relationships of things and teach men obedience, but philosophy is not content with this. It is not enough for philosophy that men accept Necessity and accommodate themselves to it ; philosophy wishes to bring it about that men should love and venerate Necessity, as they once loved and venerated the gods” (AJ 168). This would mean that necessity, universality, deductions, and use of reason are not sinful. Liking them is. However, the difference between doing and doing in love is a hair-splitting distinction. Would Shestov agree with an acquittal of a defendant charged with killing her husband because, as she stated, she had to do it although she did not like it one bit ?

There is, thus, one knowledge, and the Fall must be understood, in Shestov’s interpretation, in an all-or-nothing way. In theory, empirical knowledge can be distinguished from theoretical knowledge, but in practice, no separation can be made between the two. Some knowledge is more saturated with theory, some knowledge is more imbued with factual content ; empirical knowledge does not exist in a pure state. It is like Aristotle’s potential infinity that cannot become actual infinity, or his substance that never exists in separation from form. Knowledge is more or less theoretical, but an element of generality, universality, and necessity is always present in it. Therefore, defending Shestov on the ground that not all of knowledge is meant

when he speaks about the Fall is unsustainable.⁷ All of knowledge, not just scientific knowledge, because knowledge of everyday life, *i.e.*, common sense, “rules autocratically in the positive sciences” (PC 39) since science “was born of common sense” (AJ 396). The principle that “rule and law govern everything” is a conception originated in common sense (JB 23-24) and “in the last analysis there is no essential difference between common sense and wisdom,” “the lofty wisdom of mankind,” that is (KEP 81). In sum, both “science and common sense are always searching for necessary and universally acknowledged judgments” (JB 24). All of knowledge is sinful ; all of knowledge is necessity-related ; all of knowledge is an enemy of faith. Athens engulfs all we know and does not leave any knowledge on the outskirts.

III. RATIONAL AND MORAL DIMENSION

As already indicated, as also admitted by Shestov, there must already have been rational apparatus present in man before the Fall. But if acquiring of knowledge was sinful, why should such apparatus have existed ? It may appear that its presence would be a redundant, not to say harmful, element in the divine creative economy.

Shestov considers the tree in the Biblical account as simply a tree of knowledge ; however, the tree is called the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It is not all knowledge, but only knowledge concerning what is good and evil. However, a prohibition to touch the tree does not mean that man should be an amoral being. Quite the contrary. Moral dimension should be central to a human person ; rational dimension should be secondary and in the service of the moral dimension. The domain of the moral dimension should not be beyond good and evil, as Shestov suggests, but beyond rationality ; *i.e.*, it should not be rationally established through the means of definitions, classifications, logical derivations, and clear and distinct verbalizations. Humans rely on this type of un verbalized knowledge most of the time. When we walk, there is hardly any rational reasoning involved in dictating how we should walk : at what angle a foot should be in respect to the ground at a particular moment, what is the ratio of the walking speed to the speed of wind which allows us to reach the goal, what should be the level of contracting and relaxing particular muscles in the hip, calf, ankle, and foot, not to mention other innumerable factors. And yet, apparently effortlessly we are able to walk. There is hardly any reasoning involved in recognizing faces of relatives and acquaintances and yet the job gets done. A child — and an adult, for that matter — would be hard pressed to explain why a particular construct is used in speech, why some words should be put in a particular order, why words are inflected in a particular way, etc. The speaker relies on linguistic compe-

7. The word knowledge should be used in the sense of “necessary knowledge, scientifically demonstrated or demonstrable, dialectically presented,” according to André BÉDARD, *La nuit libératrice. Liberté, raison et foi selon L. Chestov*, Tournai, Desclée, 1973, p. 16. Shestov “is essentially not at all opposed to scientific knowledge, to reason in everyday life,” according to Berdiaev (SR 3). “The position which Shestov took was that a *posteriori* knowledge was allowed by the Bible and that it was only a *priori* knowledge which is rejected and forbade,” claims James C.S. WERNHAM, *Two Russian Thinkers : an Essay in Berdiaev and Shestov*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1968, p. 74, but cf. p. 103-104.

tence, a built-in ability to command a language, any language, at an early age without a painful process of acquiring grammatical rules first, the way foreign language is learned by adults. It could just be that humans in a paradisiac state should have relied entirely on moral dimension or moral competence that allows humans to know what is good and evil without the need to verbalize and rationalize it. It was presumably a state in which humans were able to have such knowledge in an unadulterated way because they relied on God, and God infused them with this un verbalized knowledge either once and for all or constantly. Just as humans are born with an ability to learn a new language, they are born with the ability to know good and evil through a moral dimension without the need to make the concepts of good and evil explicit.

Rational dimension requires us to know assumptions from which reasoning can begin to derive theoretical and practical consequences. Where do these assumptions come from? Even the model of science, mathematics, is not unanimous in this matter. When it comes to establishing the essence of concepts such as good and beauty, centuries long discussions in ethics and aesthetics clearly indicate that rational reasoning is not bringing us nearer to a definitive solution. The paradisiac man, therefore, should not resort to reasoning to establish their essence because an attempt to do it destroys them and guarantees that their essence will not be captured in rational terms. God is the foundation of all things, God is the foundation of good, He is good, and thus goodness, an infinite attribute of infinite God, cannot be captured in all clarity and sharpness in finite terms of a finite human being. Some — most — aspects of the good will always remain outside rationally established categories, and thus a rational approach to the problem of the good guarantees that rational knowledge of the good will be incomplete, imperfect, fractured, faulty, not good. Just as singularities are beyond the reach of the apparatus of physics, so the concept of the good is beyond the reach of rational categories. Rational approach allows only for a partial, finite success which amounts to an infinite failure. The essence of the good is a foundation, an axiom, a first proposition accepted as true. If it is reasoned about, it ceases to be the first assumption; it is reduced to other categories for which it itself is foundational. Thus, is knowledge of good and evil impossible? On a human scale, yes. On a divine scale, no. God possesses such knowledge because of His transfinite and trans-finitely perfect, cognitive apparatus. Human cognitive apparatus is wanting and therefore should resign itself to leaving the good where it is, in the moral dimension. It is the divine prerogative to know good and evil; only a perfect being can possess moral knowledge.

God prohibits Adam and Eve to eat from the tree because that spells their death (Gen. 3:3). However, the serpent says to Eve that they will not die and that they will know good and evil, like God (3:4-5). After the Fall, God says, “now man became like us, he knows good and evil” (3:22). Does God confirm the serpent’s statement? Yes, because full and perfect knowledge of good and evil is possible only to God. No, because man by trying rationally to approach good and evil imperfectly imitates God but can never succeed. That is, although for a finite being, rational approach to the problem of the good is possible, it is never desirable because it can never be perfect. By its rationality, this knowledge can — and does — create a false impression

that it may be possible to tackle this problem as an isolated research problem detached from its source, God. And so, man not only analyzes good and evil but also determines it. The power of reason therefore is seductive, and the more successful reason is in science and technology, the stronger becomes the seduction of self-sufficiency in moral matters. Left to himself, man heads to self-destruction, to death. The serpent was not altogether lying. Most seductive lies are half-truths. Man would not die if he could have God's knowledge. This, however, is impossible. Man tries to become like God through his knowledge in all matters, including matters of morality, but he becomes like God to a limited extent only, to the extent possible in a finite, created, imperfect being. Therefore, God's "now man becomes like us" includes a tinge of irony : man becomes like God by knowing good and evil, but he does not know it like God does ; man acquires a characteristic reserved, so far, to God alone, namely moral knowledge, but it does not make him more divine, quite the contrary. As phrased by Augustine, "is it not an example of a sentence inducing fear that man not only did not become what he wanted to be, but he even did not retain the state in which he was created ?"⁸

Interestingly, Shestov quotes God's "now man became like us" statement but makes nothing of it. He quotes it, in fact, inside a quote from Hegel who states that the serpent did not deceive man (AJ 164). Shestov cannot accept God's statement because he values Nietzsche's pronouncement about God being beyond good and evil. Shestov cannot accept God's statement because in his theology, "God does not know good and evil" (AJ 255).⁹ Although God explicitly states that He possesses moral *knowledge*, Shestov states otherwise, notwithstanding his constant acknowledgment of Biblical authority.

Moral actions should be instinctive, unpremeditated, and unreasoned, relying on the impulses streaming from the moral sense, from the moral dimension. Rational dimension is only a subsidiary faculty that allows moral dimension to accomplish its goals. Moral dimension is responsible for "what," rational dimension for "how." Moral dimension determines goals, rational dimension determines means to accomplish them that does not thwart the voice of moral dimension. But this is a situation of the paradisiac man.¹⁰ After the Fall, the situation changes, and total reliance on moral sense is not quite possible. Ethics, for better and worse, becomes just like any other

8. *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 11.39(53). God's statement "contains a mournful irony — man by the Fall has really reached what he was to reach, but in a wrong way, and to his hurt. In one sense, the serpent [...] told the truth, for man has reached independence over against God. But still he was deceived and deluded, for it is only independence in evil" (Gustave F. OEHLER, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1883, p. 160). Chaadaev in his second *Philosophical letter* considered this statement to be God's terrible mockery.

9. "God does not know good and evil. God does not know anything, God creates everything" (AJ 255). This amounts to the statement that God does not know what He is doing. The principle of God lacking knowledge comes not from the Bible, but from Plotinus who says that the One transcends *Nous*, transcends knowing : above all need, it is above all the need of knowing (*Enneads* 5.3.12), the One is beyond reason and thought (AJ 290).

10. "Paradise is the unconscious wholeness of nature, the realm of instincts," says Nikolai BERDIAEV, *The Destiny of Man*, New York, Harper & Row, 1960 [1931], p. 38.

area of human knowledge with its categories, assumptions, derivation rules (as in, e.g., deontic logic). Even a regenerated man cannot rely on moral sense : apostle Paul castigates Christians for unacceptable behavior (1 Cor. 3:3, 5:1-2).

IV. ST. PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS

Reason is not and cannot be a friend of faith, says Shestov. It is its mortal enemy that “has ruined faith in our eyes,” and thus it should be pushed aside. Therefore, “religious philosophy is a turning away from knowledge” and exclusive reliance on faith (AJ 70). No compromise. “Science, in fact, is science only so long as it does not admit faith” (AJ 396). “Faith cannot be changed and does not even wish to be changed into knowledge. The faith of which the Bible speaks to us delivers man, in an incomprehensible way, from the chains of knowledge, and it is only through faith that it is possible to overcome the knowledge that is bound to the fall of man. So that when we transform a truth given by faith into a self-evident truth or understand it as such, it is a sign that we have lost this truth of faith” (AJ 317). But what is faith ?

Faith “concerns itself neither with understanding nor with proofs” (AJ 318) and “does not feel any need of proofs” (AJ 400). Shestov emphasizes the fact that there is only one kind of faith, faith of the Bible, that has nothing to do with the faith of common parlance nor with the understanding of the Greeks. “The faith of the Bible is not the trust that we put in a teacher, in parents, in superiors, in a doctor, etc., which is really only a substitute for knowledge, a knowledge on credit, a knowledge not guaranteed by proofs. When one says to a man, ‘according to your faith be it unto you’ or ‘if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, nothing will be impossible for you,’ it is clear that this faith is a mysterious, creative power, an incomparable gift, the greatest of all gifts” (AJ 323, 400). “The truths of faith are to be recognized by this sign : that, contrary to the truths of knowledge, they are neither universal nor necessary and, consequently, do not have the power of constraining human beings. These truths are given freely, they are accepted freely. No one officially certifies them, they do not justify themselves to anyone, they do not make anyone afraid, and they themselves fear no one” (AJ 425).

The existence of only one kind of faith, as categorically stated by Shestov, cannot be maintained. As an example, we can use the verse that for Shestov epitomized Biblical faith, “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Paul’s statement captures in Shestov’s eyes the essence of Biblical faith, and it is so important to him that in *Athens and Jerusalem* alone Shestov quotes it nine times (AJ 45, 59, 64, 65, 70, 254, 255, 259, 320). Yet Shestov completely disregards the fact that Paul makes his statement in the culinary context concerning what food should be eaten : anything can be eaten since all food is clean, but if someone is in doubt about that, then abstaining from food is in order because what does not originate from faith is sin (Rom. 14:20,23).¹¹ It

11. Such out-of-context quotations are replete in Shestov. “Sometimes, when Shestov speaks about great philosophers, his attention shows an astounding selectivity. He concentrates himself on his favorite episodes, on quotations, sometimes on isolated words, and he does not seem to give any importance to context, to the

is, incidentally, puzzling how Shestov arrived at the conclusion that Paul's statement is an interpretation of "biblical legend of the Fall" (AJ 65). The division of food into clean and unclean does not contradict rational truths. Reason may not be entirely satisfied with criteria used in this division (clean animals chew the cud and have cloven hoofs, for instance), but there is nothing inherently contradictory in this division with what reason may be willing to accept. This truth may be even confirmed by science when it turns out that meat of unclean animals spoils easier than meat of clean animals, but if it does not confirm it, this culinary truth of faith is neutral in respect to the pronouncements of reason, far from being "contrary to the truths of knowledge" as required by Shestov's characterization of biblical faith.¹²

Also, Shestov castigates Duns Scotus for saying "I believe, Lord, what your great prophet has said, but if it be possible, make me understand it" because he allegedly diverges from Paul's statement. However, it is a false interpretation to see that Paul advocates an either/or approach to the reason-faith relationship. Paul says that $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\nu \delta\ \sigma\tilde{\upsilon}\kappa\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \pi\tilde{\iota}\sigma\tau\epsilon\omega\varsigma$ (Rom. 14:23), anything which is not from faith, which does not stem from it, anything that is not based on faith. If reason, therefore, relies on faith, if reason makes its first assumptions based on faith, then it is not sinful, and this is exactly what Duns Scotus is saying: I believe, but if from this belief can be constructed understanding, so much the better.

Therefore, as in the case of knowledge, there are two shades of faith, where the division between the two may sometimes be difficult to determine: faith contradictory to reason and faith neutral to reason. This is in agreement with the biblical definition of faith that Shestov overlooks: "[...] faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). There is nothing in this definition that pits faith against reason. What is hoped for may be, but does not have to be, contradictory to reason, what is not seen may be, but does not need to be incompatible with rationality. It may, to be sure, be much more difficult to believe in miracles and resurrection than in the validity of the division of foods into clean and unclean, but in

thought hidden behind the words and through which it exists" (Anatole AKHOUTINE, "À propos d'une seconde dimension de la pensée: Chestov et la philosophie", in N. STRUVE, A. LAURENT, ed., *Léon Chestov: un philosophe pas comme les autres?*, Paris, Institut d'études slaves, 1996, p. 30). The problem of misinterpretation and even misrepresentation of views of different philosophers was so notorious that Berdiaev coined for it the word "to shestovize" (Vie 1.74). Examples of shestovizing Pascal and Kierkegaard are given by José R. Maia NETO, *The Christianization of Pyrrhonism: Scepticism and Faith in Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Shestov*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1995, p. 103-119. Cf. Н.В. МОТРОШИЛОВА, "Парабола жизненной судьбы Льва Шестова," *Вопросы Философии*, 1989, no. 1, p. 137, 142; Рената А. ГАЛЫЦЕВА, *Очерки русской утопической мысли XX века*, Москва, Наука, 1992, p. 111-112. As Shestov himself states, "to speak truly about Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, it wouldn't be even needed to speak about them, but only about oneself" (Vie 2.153); and speak about himself he does when interpreting the Bible as well. It was only in his first book that he was indignant that because of Shakespeare's greatness, each critic makes every effort "to bring to agreement his worldview with Shakespeare's. Therefore, very often those who 'know how to read' Shakespeare read in him what he never wrote but what in their books or hearts wrote their own, often quiet, simple, limited life which perfectly excludes the possibility of the Shakespearean ideal" (SKB 34).

12. Faith "is not necessarily the antithesis of scientific knowledge. The opposition of the truth born of reason to the truth born of tears or of strange will or even contrary to reason does not necessarily represent the way to liberty nor the face or the heart of Jerusalem," says BÉDARD, *La nuit libératrice*, p. 65.

both cases it is faith. After all, Paul mentions those whose faith is weak (Rom. 14:1) and whose faith is strong (Rom. 15:1).

Contrasting faith and reason as strongly as Shestov does leads only to a schizophrenic concept of man : man has two faculties that are irreconcilable and even hostile toward one another. Genuine faith excludes reason, it bars reason from any encroachment beyond reason's boundaries. Reason wants to stay away from faith, consigning the domain of faith to the yet unconquered territory or a territory worth no attention if it does not lend itself to reasonable treatment. Reason and faith remain and will remain sworn enemies, Jerusalem and Athens, like real cities, will occupy different territories separated by a sea. However, such a solution is hardly acceptable.

Science is based on many assumptions, and the nature of an assumption is that there is no proof for its general validity, for its necessary truthfulness. Such assumptions may be inductively confirmed, but this does not imbue them with an unquestionable authority. A common sense assumption is that tomorrow will be yet another day since it was that way so far ; therefore, the night-and-day sequence can be assumed as universally valid. But it may happen otherwise for some cosmic reasons. Hume already knew that and denied the validity of necessary truths, which presumably awakened Kant from his metaphysical slumber. After Kant and his critical efforts, the situation is not any different. Kant himself assumes the existence of some *a priori* truths and although he does not state it anywhere, the truths are accepted by faith, trusting that they are sufficiently self-evident to be held as universally valid.¹³ Long before him Aristotle stated that "it is impossible that there should be demonstration of absolutely everything" (*Met.* 1006a8) because "the starting point of a demonstration is not demonstration" (1011a12). Science does the same. Scientific research would hardly have been possible if had not been assumed that the laws of nature are the same tomorrow as they were yesterday. This assumption can be to a large extent confirmed, but trust, or belief, in it is the ultimate justification of its acceptance. And so it is with other assumptions of science : that our reason is powerful enough to unravel regularities of nature and fix them as natural laws ; that this reason can overcome limitations of sensory cognition to establish its truths ; that we are not doing it in sleep but in the waking state ; that, for the most part, the testimony of the senses can be accepted, etc. Faith is thus at the foundation of science ; faith, which is reinforced by science's accomplishments ; faith, which is confirmed by the results, but still, it is faith. Science conceals this fact by passing it with silence, and rational purity of science is sometimes even philosophically defended by positivists and scientists, but such philosophical efforts are hardly successful.

Is the situation in religious matters much different ? Hardly. Faith in God is seldom if ever an unvarnished belief without other elements. Shestov says that it is necessary to seek God (PC 1, 278). How would we know that we are going in the right direction in our search, and how would we know that we are reaching the goal or at least getting closer to it ? Some reasoning is indispensable, some confirmation is

13. Kant is like Husserl who "*believes* that reason needs no justification" (PC 402).

necessary. We need to have some concept of the divine to seek God. The concept of God and the divine attributes may be modified during our pursuit, but without them it is hard to imagine what any quest for God would look like. Pascal, Shestov's hero of faith, devotes many pages of his *Thoughts* to miracles and prophecies as the means of acquiring and strengthening faith. It is not beneath him to use reasoning as a means of spurring faith, to mention Pascal's wager. Sensory and rational reasoning reinforce faith, faith enables cognition that puts trust in our cognitive apparatus. Faith thus forms a circle : faith leads to faith,¹⁴ but cognitive elements belong also to this circle. Faith builds knowledge, knowledge builds faith in a spiral of perpetual reinforcement. Therefore, instead of the Athens-Jerusalem contrast, a better analogy is the pair St. Paul-Minneapolis : different cities that are very close together, not in hostile relationship, but cooperating in a friendly arrangement. They are different, but they have a common borderline ; they are close, but in clearly separate areas. However, to push the analogy a bit further, if St. Paul symbolizes the faith that Shestov meant, Minneapolis symbolizes the reason that accepts only necessary laws ; the suburbs of St. Paul symbolize faith neutral to reason and the suburbs of Minneapolis symbolize the knowledge of predominantly factual nature. It may happen, however, that some re-districting is done in the suburbs in both directions : some suburbs of St. Paul may be included in greater Minneapolis, and some suburbs of Minneapolis may be counted as part of greater St. Paul. What was accepted by faith, may become rationalized, what was rationalized falls out of rational favor because of the change in the scientific paradigm.

In this light, Shestov's reference to Tertullian may not be so helpful for his case. Tertullian states, as Shestov repeatedly quotes it : "The son of God was crucified : it does not shame because it is shameful ; and the son of God died : it is absolutely credible because it is absurd ; and having been buried, he rose from the dead ; it is certain because it is impossible" (*De carne Christi* 5.4). The statement has been summarized erroneously in *credo quia absurdum est* which would indicate that, according to Tertullian, what is absurd is automatically believable. The statement is understood by Shestov in this distorted spirit (ATP 85). According to him, "Tertullian wants to know and that is why he does not wish to understand, feeling [...] that understanding is hostile to knowledge" (PC 157). However, the emphasis of Tertullian's statement is, as befits a Christian theologian, the person of Christ : His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Christ, God in person, a transfinite, immortal, and perfect being, meets the fate on earth which is simply incongruous with the divine being. How can an transfinite being become finite and become a speck of a human being on a speck of a planet in the immense vastness of the universe He created ? How can an immortal being be crushed by death ? "On the one hand [Christ] is born, on the other — not born, on the one hand corporal, on the other spiritual, on the one hand weak, on the other omnipotent, on the one hand dying, on the other living," says Tertullian (*De carne Christi* 5.7). That is absurd, impossible — if judged rationally. The truth of incarnation and resurrection is a revealed truth that cannot be derived rationally (al-

14. JANOSKA, *Kant und Shestow*, p. 28.

though, admittedly, that also has been tried, *e.g.*, by Anselm). This truth not only could not be established rationally, but it defies rationality and thus it becomes a province of faith. This truth can be accepted by faith and faith only. But this does not mean that any impossibility should be accepted by faith just because it is an impossibility. What is absurd and impossible can only be accepted by faith, but not all that is absurd and impossible becomes so accepted. And this is the thrust of Tertullian's statement : the truth of Christ's death and resurrection can be accepted by faith, not reason, because it is impossible by rational standards. The central truth of Christianity can be accepted by faith only. However, this does not mean that faith accepts anything that reason refuses to accept. There must be a good reason for it and a revelation is such a reason.¹⁵

V. LIVING

If faith, as Shestov understands it, is all important in the life of individuals, what is its presence in social life? "No social life is possible in chaos ; this, I trust, does not require demonstration" (PC 342). It does not, indeed. The fact is that in order to avoid chaos, some social rules are needed according to which social cohesion can be maintained. The rules can be imposed entirely by force, but even in a totalitarian society there is a need for those who enforce totalitarianism, and they are most effective if they do that themselves, not being obligated by force but by argument, by bait, by benefits. And so, "in practical life, whether one wishes it or not, one must obviously obey the commandments of reason" (PC 57-58),¹⁶ and these commandments are embodied in moral rules. In the moral world, "principles occupy the position of gods ; destroy principles and all will be confusion, there will be neither good nor evil" ; that is, morality "has no support except in law : all men must act in such a way that their behaviour shows their perfect submission to rule. Only on this condition is social life possible" (JB 25). To introduce order in the world, "reason has invented morality," whereby "the ultimate fate of mankind is to prostrate itself before the claims of reason and morality and to submit itself to their autonomous principles" (JB 303).

However, commandments of reason, and thus moral rules, are by nature, as rules, sinful and thus guaranteed to mislead every person. Therefore, morality turns into its opposite : abiding by moral rules creates with certainty unacceptable results. The more consistent people are in their application of moral rules, the more sinful they are.

15. "Tertullian does not universalize the paradox. He finds a credible ineptitude in the incarnation and not elsewhere" (Eric OSBORN, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 50).

16. In this one sentence, Shestov violates two important aspects of his philosophy : he says "obviously" although the effort of every man should lie in defeating self-evident truths ; "one must" — that is, there is some necessity which Shestov finds here unobjectionable. Similarly, in this statement : Man can be sometimes inspired by an unproven truth that is contrary to our experience and thereby know that universally transmitted and taught knowledge is not true. However, such knowledge "is necessary, of course," although not quite so important (JB 215).

Moral people are the most revengeful of mankind, they employ their morality as the best and most subtle weapon of vengeance. They are not satisfied with simply despising and condemning their neighbour *themselves*, they want the condemnation to be universal and supreme : that is, that all men should rise as one against the condemned, *and that even the offender's own conscience shall be against him*. Then only are they fully satisfied and reassured. Nothing on earth but morality could lead to such wonderful results (ATP 26).

What is Shestov's solution ?

Our logic, the logic of beings who eat their bread in the sweat of their brows, has fundamentally perverted our capacity to know by accustoming us to think in accordance with the exigencies of our earthly existence. Only he can know and think, who has nothing to do, who, thanks to a combination of circumstances essentially fortuitous, has been cast out from the world common to all, and, left alone, abandoned to his own devices, has suddenly discovered the truth which by its very nature cannot be necessary, obligatory, or universal (JB 116).

Solitude is a way out, solitude and the abandonment of reason.

Within the "limits of reason" one can create a science, a sublime ethic, and even a religion ; but to find God one must tear oneself away from the seductions of reason with all its physical and moral constraints, and go to another source of truth. In Scripture this source bears the enigmatic name "faith," which is that dimension of thought where truth abandons itself fearlessly and joyously to the entire disposition of the Creator : "Thy will be done !" (AJ 67-68).

Only "there," in the blending with God, is freedom, there is truth, there is the holiest aim of all our endeavour. And this blending is rapture, is "delight" — in contrast to knowledge, it is that which is most direct, most sudden in life, that which least fits into the usual categories of understanding (JB 227).

Faith is audacity, an audacity of rejecting truths accepted by man and his criteria of good and evil because "the essence of knowing lies in limitation" ; faith is rejection of all limits, all necessary and eternal truths, and stating that all is possible. It is a way of abandoning the ground of solid laws and truths and raising oneself to the level of all possibilities. Faith is rapture, faith is groundlessness (JB 239). "It is obvious that biblical 'faith' has nothing in common with obedience" (AJ 253-254). By faith, "the believer goes forward, without looking to the right or to the left, without asking where he is going, without calculating" (AJ 397, PC 83).

In this light, all promoters of morality are, in essence, immoral, and whoever says anything that is good, defies faith. In his first book, Shestov was sure that "a great poet distinguishes himself from us first of all in that he values good and beauty" and for such a poet "good and beauty constitute the essence of life," and for Shakespeare, one such great poet, the ideals were "an expression of true human aspirations" (SKB 116-117). It appears that these views are not so commendable, after all, because the serpent can easily take the form of a poet (PC 274).

Only in solitude can one have visions of truths which "appear more like dreams than truths. We forget them easily, as we forget dreams. And if it happens that we do retain a vague memory of them, we do not know what to do with it. And, to tell the truth, one cannot do anything with these truths. At the very most, one can try to translate them by means of a certain verbal music" (AJ 430). The words of this music

must not be semantically analyzed because such analysis would imbue them with the element of necessity and thus would kill the truth. In solitude, words lose their meaning. No meaning is even needed since language is used to establish communication between humans. But truth is not communicable, so language is reduced to sounds because even syntax establishes rules of correctness. Thus reason and language, which are most commonly considered the distinctive characteristics of human beings, are really hindrances in reaching the truth rather than useful tools. "Truth is not for common possession" (JB 115). Truth is something subjective that cannot be generalized or even communicated. Mystery, by definition, cannot be unveiled and "truth can only be glimpsed when we do not try to take possession of it," even if this is done by trying to put this mystery into words. As soon as a mystery is revealed and the truth communicated, "we shall immediately forget all that we saw when we were 'beside ourselves' with ecstasy" (JB 67).

Man cannot obtain faith by himself (AJ 129). It is a gift of God. On the other hand, man is torn by two centrifugal forces. Centripetal force is the "attraction to the earth, to the steady and stable" (JB 171). Through this force, most people act as though they would not die. Centrifugal force is seldom felt, unconsciously obeyed, feared, mysterious : man goes toward death.¹⁷ The former force is an engine of reason, the latter empowers faith. An ability for faith is in the human soul, but it needs to be awakened and when woken up, it needs to be nourished. Faith is gained through an act of a "spiritual exertion" of a particular type only with difficulty and is gained by only a chosen few (JB 228, 239). What is the way to such a faith ? "God is not, man must himself become God, create all things out of nothing ; all things ; matter together with forms, and even the eternal laws. That is the experience of the men of antiquity, of the Saints" (JB 230). And Shestov quotes Loyola and Luther with statements that show that the way to faith through "himself becoming God" was completely alien to them. A way to God through becoming oneself God as advocated by Shestov resembles more of a New Age approach than Judeo-Christian religion, which Shestov repeatedly claims to adequately render and is only a distorted reflection of the doctrine of deification found in the Orthodox faith.

A day may come, Shestov hopes, when we will walk entirely by faith freed from knowledge. "We will no longer be obliged to adapt ourselves to things, but they, rather, will be ready to modify not only their form but also their substance at the word or demand of man. At present we can give a piece of wax the form of a chessman or of a seal ; but then we shall be able to transform the wax into a piece of marble or into an ingot of gold by the power of our thought alone" (AJ 412). There is no need to look to the philosopher's stone in the outside world. It can be found inside, in one's soul, in faith.

Abandoning any social constraint, leaving behind any social connections is a way to a divinized monad in the splendid solitude.¹⁸ Maintaining social ties inevitably leads to contact with morality and thus to sinfulness. Sinful orderliness of social con-

17. Лев ШЕСТОВ, *Sola fide - только верю*, Paris, YMCA-Press, 1966, p. 62 ; PC 343.

18. "In Shestov's work there is no historiosophic perspective, no ties of man with man ; there rules here the atmosphere of hopeless individualism" (Гальцева, *Очерки русской утопической мысли XX века*, p. 108).

tract has to be substituted by glorious incertitude of faith that leads no one knows wither. Truth and liberty are in the middle of the night ; the criterion of light is the criterion of enslavement since it hinders participation in mystery and wants to replace liberating faith by reason.¹⁹ One has to go ahead until a hope is lost that one can save oneself. One should go ahead, like Abraham, not knowing the destination. But what does it all practically mean ? If Shestov's philosophy should have any meaning, how should his precepts be applied ?

Abraham, the father of faith, went without knowing his destination, trusting in the guidance of God, in His unshakeable promise, in the perpetuity of His word. Abraham did not know his destination but he knew Who led him. He went by faith but he did not abandon all social ties. In fact, because of these ties, he wandered, because of progeny promised to him which should be as numerous as the stars. These ties caused him to go to Lot's rescue after Sodom was raided ; because of these ties, he bargained with God on behalf of Sodom. Shestov, however, irresponsibly proposes to abandon all morality, good or bad, having one's eyes fixed on the prospect of turning wax into gold.²⁰ Shestov wants the wanderer to trust in that which exceeds reason, and thus necessity and universality, to trust in unpredictability and uncertainty, suspension of guarantees, and darkness which is a domain of ineffable God, to trust in God of freedom and freedom alone, God of beyond-reason, God of insecurity ; "God is 'caprice' incarnate, who rejects all guarantees" (JB 82, 306). Would Abraham recognize his God in Shestov's God the caprice ? Shestov's God is always ready to change in response to man's tears. However, to rely more on the changeability of God than His immutability is not more biblical ; it is less so since trust in God relies on assurance in His promises that are eternal.²¹

Also, although he criticizes all morality, Shestov adamantly promotes his own : freedom of man. All morality is thus not inadmissible to him.²² It is a morality that pertains to each man individually, one by one, in isolation to other men. It is a morality that is blind to a simple fact that men are never isolated (maybe with the exception of the likes of Robinson Crusoe). What can he do when this freedom conflicts with someone else's ? What if men, like Raskolnikov take literally the idea that all is permitted ? Is this not putting in other words Shestov's idea that all is possible and this is the most desirable condition for man ? Shestov would not accept Raskolnikov's murders but his philosophy is powerless in indicating why this should be unacceptable. Because the lives of two women were cut short ? But that would hasten their transi-

19. BÉDARD, *La nuit libératrice*, p. 119.

20. Cf. Siemion FRANK's statement that in Shestov's is *philosophie irresponsable*, О Льве Шестове [1908], in his *Русское мировоззрение*, Санкт-Петербург, Наука, 1996, p. 578. He also says in a 1936 review of recent trends in Russian philosophy that Shestov is "an extreme religious anarchist whose goal is so distant from all categorial conditions of human collective life that his work practically constitutes fruitless reverie" (p. 641).

21. Cf. BÉDARD, *La nuit libératrice*, p. 193.

22. Zofia MAJEWSKA, "The Dispute Between Shestov and Husserl as a Reflection of Approaches to Axiology", in A.T. TYMIENIECKA, ed., *Life. Energies, Forces and the Shaping of Life : Vital, Existential*, Book 1, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 2002, p. 174.

tion to the state where freedom expresses itself in its fullest and, in the act itself, freedom of Raskolnikov found also its expression. Moral condemnation of Raskolnikov should not be made because one should not wield a weapon of vengeance.

In promoting unrestrained freedom, Shestov allows for most irrational expression of freedom. In fact, freedom must be irrational since rationality can only restrain it. How does one reconcile pretences of free agents acting among other free agents ? Shestov does not really address the problem. Maybe because of the perceived contradiction that in “terrestrial city, irrationality is a synonym of evil, whereas knowledge and rationality are the original sin of human mind [...] Shestov was fundamentally disinterested in history and politics.”²³ True, he said : “In so far as our common social existence demands it — let us try to come to an understanding, to agree : but not one jot more. Any agreement which does not arise out of common necessity will be a crime against the Holy Spirit” (ATP 53) ; but an isolated statement, like this, hardly solves the problem of social existence. Is it possible to come to an understanding without reference to morality ? If not, whose weapon of vengeance would Shestov be ready to accept as a tool of social contract ? He castigates Russian *intelligentsia* for being more interested in the celestial city than in earthly problems,²⁴ but he himself is a primary example of such interest.

Social life is a necessary evil and an obstacle in bringing individual freedom. Reaching this freedom is the only goal worth pursuing, and social ties should be limited to the minimum lest a crime against the Holy Spirit be committed. Is this what Shestov found in his Bible ? The problem of social cohesion and strength is a pronounced element in the Old and New Testament. And yet, Shestov pronounces that laws, all laws, including moral laws, “are necessary only to those who want rest and security” and “the first and essential condition of life is lawlessness. Laws are a refreshing sleep — lawlessness is creative activity” (ATP 61). Is it undignifying to strive for rest and security ? What happened to “God gives you rest” (Is. 14:3), “you shall find rest” (Jer. 6:16), and come to me and I give you rest (Mat. 11:28) ? And is creativity possible only in the state of lawlessness ?

Faith is defined by Shestov as audacity ; however, audacity is insufficient because Husserl has “a noble audacity” and yet he is wrong (PC 345). If finding such faith is all-important in life, how is reaching such faith possible ? His pupil, Benjamin Fondane, says, “to require all of you and give nothing in exchange, if it is not what you find all by yourself on your way — this is not of the character of a master who makes himself to be followed. Shestov abandons us along the way ; he thinks about his salvation more than about ours.”²⁵ If he thinks about his salvation more than about anyone else’s, how does it manifest itself in his life ? There are 650 pages of two volumes of his biography prepared by his daughter. The volumes include primarily letters, mainly Shestov’s. And yet, this is a very disappointing source of Shestov’s

23. Nikita STRUVE, “Chestov et la politique”, in STRUVE, LAURENT, ed., *Léon Chestov : un philosophe pas comme les autres ?*, p. 75.

24. Лев ШЕСТОВ, *Что такое большевизм*, Berlin, 1920, p. 21.

25. Benjamin FONDANE, “Léon Chestov, témoin à charge”, in his *Conscience malheureuse*, p. 288.

views on his seeking faith. The letters look to be written by an academic whose primary concern is, where some of his papers and books could be published, who read them, who reviewed them, who liked them, and who did not ; in what conferences he participates and whom he met ; how much he can expect for a paper or book and how much he actually obtained ; what is weather, food, and city, what are people and conversations ; and so on and on in unbearably monotonous succession. Truly, in practical life he obeys commandments of reason, and it looks like very little else. He is a commendably moral, likable, and admired man.²⁶ Some sixty pages of his biography are about philosophical and theological matters and very little new can be gleaned from them since they pertain to what has already been published or what is about to be published. It would be hard to suspect when reading these pages and his works that he is not a believer in God. He writes in his notes that “it is essential to turn oneself anew to God whom we forgot. This means that one needs to think solely about God and the rest will follow” (Vie 1.194), and to his daughters he writes that we have to remember that we are all sinners before God (Vie 1.223). And yet, his friend says : “Shestov looked for God all of his life, he told me himself, he did not have faith, but he wanted to have it. At least, he had hope.”²⁷ What Shestov may have meant in this moment of candor is that he did not have faith like the prophets, like Luther, Pascal, or Kierkegaard, all of whom he admired because he did not experience the moment of rapture, of being beyond himself with ecstasy (Vie 2.183), a moment, as de Schloezer phrased it, of “participation in divine omnipotence” (Vie 2.255), as they did. So he lectured his readers about something of which he did not have any knowledge — because, by definition, no knowledge is possible about matters of faith, which he did not experience himself. Whence his certainty ?

He constantly refers to the Bible and the source of truth. However, it is not his ultimate authority because he does not accept all of the Bible unconditionally.²⁸ Parts of the Bible that are in contradiction with his views are at least put in doubt. He says that Christianity allowed itself to be led into temptation and included logos in John’s gospel (PC 252 ; SR 59). “‘In the beginning was the word’ — that meant : first Athens was, and only later Jerusalem” (JB XXIII). The words were inserted into the Gospel (JB 261). They were expression of the fact that the opening of the Old Testament, “in the beginning God created heaven and earth,” “was absolutely unacceptable to the Graeco-Roman world” (JB 358). A remarkable fact is that the most important attribute of God — the only attribute, in fact — that Shestov recognized was omnipotence to the point that God created the so-called eternal truths, in particular, the law of non-contradiction. If so, would it be impossible for God to be logos in addition to other divine attributes Shestov may recognize ?

26. Vie 1.32. Would Shestov, in the light of his views, be pleased with Max Eitington’s description that Shestov represented “an infinite goodness and sweet beauty of the incarnation of human values” (Vie 2.239) ?

27. Boris DE SCHLOEZER, “Discussion”, in A. BESANÇON, V. WEIDLÉ, ed., *Entretiens sur le grand siècle russe et ses prolongements*, Paris, Plon, 1971, p. 89.

28. “Shestov rejects any authority, also the authority of the Bible” (Gustav A. CONRADI, “Leo Schestow oder das paradiesische Leben. Gedanken eines Schestow-Lesers”, *Antaios*, 4 [1968], p. 360).

Maybe Shestov did not consider himself as having faith because he was not ready to live by faith like the prophets, the saints, Luther, and Pascal. He confesses that “it is impossible to change conditions of life” and one has to submit himself to them (Vie 1.355), that it is impossible to better manage his time (Vie 1.368), and that he yearns for a life in tranquility (Vie 2.50, 62, but cf. Vie 1.105) notwithstanding the fact that he criticizes the dogmatists for their notion of tranquility (PC 44, AJ 382) and being influenced by reason that tranquilizes man (AJ 421) and Tolstoy for the want of *ataraxia* (JB 145). He did not have faith, and yet he incessantly wrote about this paramount matter in the life of each human being. What is the lesson for us here ? The blind leading the blind ?