PHENOMENOLOGY AS A FACT OF CULTURAL HISTORY

The subject of my presentation is, first of all, an attempt to consider phenomenology as a historical phenomenon, in contrast to its widespread representations as a purely theoretical construction which developed exclusively according to immanent logic – just as the theorems of Euclidean geometry can be deduced from the several postulates and axioms firmly fixed in its foundation. I thus proceed to the precondition, which can also be considered a postulate – namely, the thesis that historical development differs from natural evolution, on the one hand, and logical reasoning (deduction), on the other. I stress that what we usually treat as “historical accident” plays a very important role in the history of ideas. I refer here to the creative intuition of the thinker which makes history to be “the space of freedom” as well as the historical context (specific social, cultural, biographic and other circumstances – including personal propensities of the thinker, his living conditions and friendship). If this thesis proves true, we have to acknowledge that every event in the history of philosophy (in the present case – phenomenology) has, even partially, individual character, in contrast to what is made “by strict necessity.” It is clear, that this attitude is much closer to Dilthey’s and the neo–Kantian’s interpretation of history, rather than to that made by Hegel.

According to such an assumption, neither philosophical achievements nor its deadlocks can be considered as rigidly predetermined by the pre-given structure of knowledge (or paradigm). What I mean can be formulated as follows: the philosopher (as well as his philosophical school, i.e. the group of his adherents involved in the work to tackle the same problem) is always a person, rather than a notorious self-developed idea or program in the sense of the so-called Popperian “Third world of objective knowledge,” which leads to predestined results under any circumstances, sooner or later. If not Husserl or Heidegger, than somebody else! If not in Germany, than in England or in Russia! Anyway, such a position tacitly presupposes that a phenomenological idea inevitably arises in the structure of philosophical culture. It inevitably develops and reveals its “internal” content, passing all those basic stages with which we get acquainted in dealing with “the empirical history” of this idea, with the biography of the philosophers and the chronological sequence of their publications and presentations.

Certainly, thus, there should be if not people gifted with consciousness, competent and philosophically educated, then at least, dynamic information
systems. In other words, the structure of philosophical knowledge as well as scholarship as a whole form the basic preconditions of the phenomenological turn in philosophy. I am far from an intention to reject the Popperian conception of objective knowledge as a whole: on the contrary, I agree with many outstanding physicians – theorists of our century who expressed their admiration of and surprise by the heuristic power of the mathematical formalism of modern science in such expressions: “It looks as if the equations are cleverer than we theorists are, and the only thing we have to do is to follow the mathematical formalism of the theory.” This aspect of scientific development has been clearly elaborated by I. Lacatos in his “methodology of research programs.” However there is also another aspect to which many scientists of the last century, as well as the present epoch of radical scientific changes, paid their attention. A. Einstein, N. Bohr and L. de Broglie are among them. According to them, the most outstanding discoveries of modern, rationally arranged science have been achieved by means of unexpected flares of intuition, or, following the expression of N. Bohr, due to “mad ideas.” Moreover, in the framework of mathematics, which is commonly viewed to be the pure embodiment of strict logic, at the verge of the 20th century there came into being two main schools (“intuitivists” and “formalists”) competing with each other, and the “constructivists” (basically consisting of Russian mathematicians), who tried to reconcile the aforementioned two. In other words, those who treat the development of scientific knowledge as a purely logical process have no monopoly in the field of theoretical reflection upon science, though it is difficult to overestimate the influence of their ideas, which is more often implicit – almost subconscious – especially with reference to the history of philosophical ideas.

Let me now turn to the main subject of the paper. The fact that the phenomenological program has undergone a number of transformations during history could hardly be contested. All the biographers of Husserl and Heidegger noted “the turn” (Umkehr) in Heidegger’s philosophical thinking and the unexpected change of Husserl’s subject matter when he dealt with “the life-world” (Lebenswelt). Closer analysis reveals even more radical changes. For example, Husserl’s transition from the view of the realm of numbers (and, accordingly, logic) as a certain ideal sphere of life, similar to Plato’s “ideal world,” towards a “psychological view” of them was followed by radical criticism of the latter. This does not mean that he came back to the to the former idealism, now treated as “naive.” Finally, there was the transition to the transcendental position, similar to the Kantian position. At this time he considered his transcendental phenomenology, first and foremost