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WITOLD PŁOTKA, PATRICK ELDRIDGE (EDS.)

EARLY PHENOMENOLOGY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE.  
MAIN FIGURES, IDEAS, AND PROBLEMS

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The collective volume *Early Phenomenology in Central and Eastern Europe: Main Figures, Ideas, and Problems*, edited by Witold Płotka and Patrick Eldridge, enriches the ongoing and highly topical research of the history of phenomenology with the thematization of a specific period and localization of phenomenology. The authors of eleven chapters explore the emergence of phenomenology in local traditions outside the Germanophone area, its appropriation and development, describing the unique forms it acquired in individual environments. The book clarifies the characteristics of the early wave of phenomenology and provides a list of Central and Eastern European phenomenologists who participated in it. On the one hand, the volume is a contribution to historiography, enriching the study of the history of phenomenology thematically and thus contributing to the development of phenomenology itself; on the other hand, it introduces its own set of philosophical problems. These concern methodology and the issue of the Central and Eastern European identity, which is examined through the prism of the development of local traditions of phenomenology. When exploring the latter it is useful to introduce the concept of the *marginocentric*. This concept, which originated in comparative literature, facilitates an understanding of the unique cultural configuration of a concrete tradition in its communication with internal and external environments.

*Keywords:* phenomenological movement, historiography of phenomenology, Central and Eastern Europe, early phenomenology, local tradition, marginocentric, Husserl, Husserl's students.

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РЕЦЕНЗИЯ НА КНИГУ ВИТОЛЬДА ПЛОТКИ,  
ПАТРИКА ЭЛДРИДЖА (РЕД.)

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Коллективный том «Ранняя феноменология в Центральной и Восточной Европе: основные фигуры, идеи и проблемы» под редакцией Витольда Плотки и Патрика Элдриджа существенно обогащает имеющиеся в настоящий момент исследования весьма актуальным анализом истории феноменологии — он тематизирует особенный временной период (раннюю феноменологию) и специфическую локализацию феноменологической философии (Центральная и Восточная Европа). Авторы одиннадцати глав исследуют историю возникновения феноменологии в локальных традициях за пределами немецкоязычного пространства, детально анализируют её освоение и развитие, описывают уникальные формы, которые она приобрела в том или ином индивидуальном исполнении. В книге уточняются характеристики ранней волны феноменологии и приводится список феноменологов Центральной и Восточной Европы, которые приняли участие в её возникновении и развитии. С одной стороны, книга представляет собой вклад в историографию, поскольку она тематически значительно обогащает изучение истории феноменологии, что в свою очередь способствует развитию феноменологии как таковой. С другой стороны, книга вводит свой собственный комплекс философских вопросов и проблем. Эти вопросы и проблемы касаются методологии и тематики центрально- и восточноевропейской идентичности, которые рассматриваются через призму развития локальных феноменологических традиций. При исследовании локальных феноменологических традиций нам представляется продуктивным ввести концепции *маржиноцентричности*. Эта концепция, зародившись в сравнительной литературе, облегчает понимание уникальной культурной конфигурации конкретной традиции в её связи с внутренней и внешней средой.

*Ключевые слова:* феноменологическое движение, историография феноменологии, Центральная и Восточная Европа, ранняя феноменология, локальная традиция, маржиноцентричность, Гуссерль, студенты Гуссерля.

The collective volume *Early Phenomenology in Central and Eastern Europe. Main Figures, Ideas, and Problems* (2020) enables us to go back to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which a vital philosophical discourse took place that determined the future direction of phenomenology. The examination of this discourse has a funda-

mental importance from the point of both historiography and phenomenology itself. The volume may be of particular interest to those readers, who are active in the context of Central and Eastern Europe and their teachers or philosophical predecessors were inspired by or directly participated in the mentioned discourse. By means of a genealogy of phenomenology the issue of the identity and of the concept of Central and Eastern Europe arises, which is related to the dynamic of center/periphery and to the plurality of traditions that developed in its framework.

Eleven chapters and a comprehensive introduction by the editors Witold Płotka and Patrick Eldridge explore on the one hand the specific regional phenomenological initiatives that took place outside the dominant German stream, i.e. in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Yugoslavia. On the other hand, they examine a thematically diverse spectrum of early phenomenological research which they arrange chronologically. Such a view provides an interesting opportunity to examine not only the content tendencies in phenomenology but also the methodological framework for studying the history of the phenomenological movement. The recent discourse in the Central and Eastern European studies of phenomenology has been characterized by lively and varied debates which have created space for further specialized research.

At the beginning of the volume the editors ask two legitimate questions: “How should we understand ‘early phenomenology’ here? And: Why is the heritage of the phenomenological movement in Central and Eastern Europe worth special attention?” (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 2). The relevant time framework starts with Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*. As for the end of the period of early phenomenology—on which opinions differ—the authors subscribe to Moran’s and Parker’s determination, which they broaden due to the context of the localisation of their research. In concrete terms, the end of the early period is connected with Theodor Lipps’ students around the Munich Circle, Husserl’s students in Göttingen and Freiburg until 1933, and some of Carl Stumpf’s students in Berlin. Eldridge and Płotka amend this list with another group: “scholars who interpreted and reacted to Husserl’s philosophy outside Germany before World War II” (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 2). They are interested in the work of Husserl’s Central and Eastern European students, who later promoted phenomenology in their home countries. A list of their names is provided (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 3–4).

The authors of individual chapters present the atmosphere in which phenomenology developed, they describe specific regional situations including their political, social, cultural, and religious aspects. Each of the historical protagonists entered the ground of phenomenological research from a specific background, which had formed

his or her identity. The volume presents “a mosaic” of countries and traditions which captures the interesting relations and interactions between Husserl and the phenomenologists from Central and Eastern Europe. These interactions include debates on the issue of psychologism and the efforts to liberate phenomenology from its effects (Prague, Lvov-Warsaw School), as well as debates on the relations to different philosophical traditions, such as for example Russian irrationalism. Phenomenology in Central and Eastern Europe is shown to be a varied “pluralistic movement, without a clear centre, unlike in Germany where Göttingen and Freiburg im Breisgau were obvious hubs. This lack of a centre, it seems, resulted in pluralistic interpretations and reinterpretations of Husserl which were not dominated by any ‘standard’ reading; in Germany, by contrast, the reception of Husserl was to some extent centralized, or dominated by such a reading” (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 6). This phenomenon could be further developed by a reflection on the relation between the centre (centres) and the local traditions, to which we will return at the end of our review.

Chronologically, we first find ourselves in Prague. Hynek Janoušek and Robin Rollinger describe the situation of the environment that was closely linked to Husserl, and they focus on the activities of both the orthodox and the heterodox branch of Brentanism. These two branches are represented by Antony Marty and Christian von Ehrenfels respectively. An intriguing moment explored by the authors is the debate between Marty and Husserl. Against the background of this debate the authors demonstrate the mutual influences concerning themes and problems that arose around *Logical Investigations*. Dariusz Łukasiewicz in the following chapter presents the situation in Poland focusing on the Lvov-Warsaw School and the question of truth, as well as on the relation between Edmund Husserl and Kazimierz Twardowski. The interaction with Twardowski may have had a fruitful impact on Husserl’s doctrine of anti-psychologism and on the application of his arguments within the LWS, which was inspired by Twardowski.

In Natalia Artemenko’s chapter we move thematically and geographically to one of the most significant figures of the Russian phenomenological movement: Gustav Špet. The central motive here is the research of the intersections between phenomenology and hermeneutics and the uncovering of new connections between them. “Špet was sensitive to the transformation of hermeneutics into a new philosophical direction with its own logic and its own research methods, and it was this sensitivity that enabled him to make a significant contribution to elaboration of hermeneutics” (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 61). In what sense was this so? The advantage of the phenomenological attitude in the description of the phenomena of consciousness complements the contribution of the hermeneutic approach in the description of social

and cultural phenomena or historical issues which Špet treated in an original way (for example, the heuristic meaning of historical-phenomenological studies, the application of hermeneutics to phenomenological purposes, etc.).

Alexander Kozin introduces the personality of Semyon Frank, whose work contributed to the development of phenomenological psychology. Through Frank's activities Kozin presents the situation of the Russian philosophy at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He situates Frank within the framework of phenomenological discourse, which is a rather complex matter. Inner life, the life of the soul, the grasping of the I—the specific sphere of human experience is in Frank connected with intuitivism. Frank sees in philosophical psychology and the research of intentionality a new way of linking normality and abnormality, turning the attention to the areas related to man, such as history, sociology or ethnography. This generates new impulses for psychology and gnoseology. Here an interesting connection with Husserl emerges: “Frank's approach to abnormality is similar as it also defines abnormality in terms of limits or ‘borders’ rather than deviation” (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 83). New inspiring topics come to the fore, such as emotions in children's play and art, which can inspire a debate in the framework of philosophy of emotions. Kozin concludes: “Without using the phenomenological method or procedures directly, Frank alludes to them when he examines different facets which are tied to different kinds of consciousness, and which are built with great precision on psychological and philosophical ground” (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 90).

Dalius Jonkus' chapter discusses the philosophy of Vasily Sesemann while focusing on gnoseological issues, which are in the case of man-in-the-world characterised by relational aspects. This approach has the potential of grasping different nuances of man's situatedness which cannot be captured exhaustively by mere theoretical and objectifying approaches. Anthropological questions arise and it is intuitivism (“intuition which has a center and a periphery” (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 97)) that forms Sesemann's thinking. The individual changes his or her attitudes, adopts different starting points and standpoints, and these enable him or her to focus on things from different angles. On the one hand, the focus limits his or her view, but on the other hand, it brings the possibility of new knowledge and perception.

In further exploration of the personalities of early phenomenology we move back to Poland and then to Romania, Latvia, Czechia and the former Yugoslavia. In such regional configuration the mosaic of phenomenological thinking gains an increasingly multicolored image. We can identify two tendencies: theoretical assessment of key philosophical concepts, their demarcations—which is important for early phenomenological thinking—as well as a tendency to move the debate into new areas.

Let us look at three significant personalities starting with Roman Ingarden. Marek Piwowarczyk presents the origin and the formulation of Ingarden's theory of object. We are able to follow the beginnings and the points of departure of this theory, we learn about the first definition of essence and the uncovering of the material-formal structure of the object. The chapter by Viorel Cernica introduces Nae Inocescu, who was among the first philosophers who developed their own interpretation of the phenomenological method in Romanian philosophy. On the one hand, this method makes it possible to uncover such concepts as being, reality, image, object, and identity. On the other hand, it facilitates the exploration of topics that concern the being of man (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 131). Uldis Vēgners directs our attention to yet another figure, the Latvian philosopher Theodor Celms, and explores the realism-idealism controversy. He points out that the relevance of this controversy transcended the topic of the ontological status of reality and concerned "the meaning of phenomenology, its aims and scope" (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 147). Furthermore, Celms played a crucial role in this context: he was "the precursor" who identified the problem and "a moderator who, while having an extensive knowledge of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, is capable of reflective distance and unbiased critical assessment" (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 150).

We move on to the last three parts of the volume. Witold Płotka makes us acquainted with the thought of Leopold Blaustein, which is characterized by a unique approach to the phenomenological method (that leads to descriptive psychology focused on lived experience) as well as a unique approach to the problem of content. At the end of his chapter Płotka enriches the dynamism of his analyses with the formulation of a potential answer to Blaustein's critique from a Husserlian perspective. Płotka finds Blaustein's conception of imaginative attitude particularly inspirational. Karel Novotný in the following chapter leads us back to Prague explaining Jan Patočka's early conception of natural world and its importance from the very beginning of Patočka's explorations. We can track Patočka's discussion of the issue of life and the relation of the subject to the living world back to his habilitation and even doctoral thesis. Novotný focuses on how "Patočka presents the fundamental layers of the relationship between human and world, and how these layers may be exhibited from the standpoint of a transcendental-genetic reduction" (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 194).

Finally, Dragan Prole introduces the context of phenomenology in the region of former Yugoslavia through Husserl's student Zagorka Mičić. Prole explains how phenomenology developed in this region and what kind of reactions it provoked (ambivalent to dismissive to enthusiastic). Mičić authored one of the earliest introductions to Husserl's phenomenology which was published in Belgrade. Just like in the previous

instances, the key question of the appropriation of phenomenology was its method and its possibilities, in other words, the plurality of its possibilities.

When reading the volume we encounter original and fresh interpretations by authors who have been professionally involved in the study of the history of phenomenology in Central and Eastern Europe for quite some time. They have also been able to elaborate a variety of philosophical topics on the basis of their research. Some connections discussed in the volume appear natural and “are to be expected”. Other connections are quite surprising and innovative (for example, the connection between Husserl’s borderline phenomena and Frank’s approach to abnormality).

The authors of the chapters do not deal with artificial connections but they do not limit themselves to a purely historical observation of phenomenological ideas either. Inspirations and inner connections reflect the vitality of this period of the phenomenological movement, some of whose lines have not come to an end yet and reach into the present. What captures the attention of the reader—even after a century of historical distance—is the authentic genealogy of the problems that the individual representatives of the early wave of phenomenology dealt with and the unique backgrounds of their research.

To understand “local traditions”—the possibility to stay aside, on the borders—can shed light on the thinking of the “centre.” Also, “local” traditions cannot be interpreted merely as dependent on the centre. In other words, staying aside, not in the centre of the philosophical discourse and interpretation, can create a place of freedom of thinking (even in relation to complicated conditions concerning the political or philosophical background). In this connection, after reading this volume, we can return to the introduction of the editors, who pointed out that “[g]iven the plurality of mutual connections and national diversities, one could argue that pre-World War II Central and Eastern Europe provided phenomenology with unique intellectual contexts that redefined the conceptual frameworks introduced in Germany by, i.a., Husserl or Heidegger” (Płotka & Eldridge, 2020, 5). This encourages pluralistic interpretations and developments, as the authors of this volume demonstrate. When reading the individual chapters, we are reminded of a specific concept used in comparative literature which might prove fruitful in our context: the concept of the “marginocentric.” This concept is used to thematize an analogous issue in literature—to address the topic of “cities,” their special histories and situatedness (on borders, periphery but creating a significant realm of creativity). A unique configuration arises, which creates the identity of an environment, and a cultural paradigm is rewritten “from the margin, ascribing to it a dialogic dimension, both internally (in dialogue with other ethnic traditions) and externally (in dialogue with larger geocultural paradigms)” (Sabatos,

2020, 7–8)<sup>1</sup>. Something similar happened when phenomenology was created, appropriated and developed in the works of the presented philosophers and disseminated in the ensuing phenomenological traditions. A glimpse into the history of phenomenology thus becomes an exciting exploration of the debates which were at the heart of phenomenology and in which original Central and Eastern European philosophical thinking was born.

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<sup>1</sup> I use a quotation from Domínguez, César, Haun Saussy, and Darío Villanueva, 2015. *Introducing Comparative Literature: New Trends and Applications*. London and New York, NY: Routledge, (pp. 100–101), to which Charles Sabatos (Sabatos, 2020, 7–8) refers in his analyses of a city connected to the river Danube.