

Sergey Smirnov

Novosibirsk State University
of Economics and Management

A human being after Auschwitz and Gulag¹ or How to Interrogate about a Human Being

Abstract. The paper focuses on possibility and problematicity of modern interrogation about a human being. Problematicity emerges as a man is put in a situation called “after Auschwitz”, which is described with the categories of irreducibility (irreducibility of experience, means of self-determination). It is shown that the cultural form of representing such ultimate experience is testimony, which itself problematizes after Auschwitz. Precedents of such testimonies are described with examples of the works by Primo Levi and Varlam Shalamov. The author reveals the principal difference in the answers given by witnesses and the answers offered by interpreters such as contemporary philosophers. An attempt is made to substantiate that the modern experience of philosophizing about a human being – the modern anthropology – has to reject traditional efforts to determine a human being as “thing existent” or find some determinant essence. It is due to the situation “after Auschwitz” that questions all previous methods of human thinking. Moreover, a modern person increasingly chooses the so-called withdrawal scenario for a human being, rejection of actual social life in favour of imitating life and generating simulacra, withdrawal to the virtual reality. The author takes a provocative example of Jean Baudrillard, who showed that the entire contemporary creative work of human beings is reduced to generating simulacra – empty, meaningless signs. The latter becomes a popular trend obtaining a mass character. In response to this withdrawal trend the author proposes a different scenario: an anthropological alternative in the form of anthropological practices of self-determination and testimonies about such anthropological practices.

Keywords: a human being, anthropology, situation “after Auschwitz and GULAG”, testimony, simulacrum, anthropological alternative, anthropological practice.

Interrogation on a Human Being as an Ontological Problem

A lot has been written and said about Auschwitz and GULAG in spite of the overall difficulty of the statement on transcendence of that experience. This is not the subject of this paper though. The issue is to attempt, using Auschwitz and GULAG as the final argument, to frame a judgment, according to which the XX c. did not give us any understanding of a human being, and we have to start interrogating about a human being in a radically different genuse, which presumes working out a new dictionary on a human being, coining some new words. Upon burnt offering of all senses and words, we shall once again need to learn to speak, learn to see and listen up in a new way. To be in a new way.

¹ The paper is part of the project on “Building up neoclassical anthropology. A new human ontology” supported by Russian Science Foundation (No.14-18-03087). The project is carried out at Novosibirsk State University of Economics and Management.

Auschwitz as Simulacrum

In 1991 a master of philosophic provocations Jean Baudrillard published three essays in "Libération" on the same issue: was there a Gulf war? The essays were the subject of much debate. Rather than the debates, however, we are interested here in the "killing" conclusion that J. Baudrillard had to make: the Gulf war seemingly did not exist. In fact we are discussing some kind of a simulacrum, a phantom, a virtual reality. For the European public the Gulf was presented on their TV screens. Supposedly it took place but it was a strange one, nearly an imitation. They were only pretending. J. Baudrillard called that war – "the war in condoms", the "dead war".

In this example Jean Baudrillard determined a diagnosis to the society of intellectuals and general public who prefer not to see or forget the terrible reality of the war. It happens because developed countries are increasingly dominated by a trend of withdrawing of humans in the virtual, refusing to be real, live creatures. With even increasing frequency the mankind tends to choose rejection of understanding over the understanding, generating simulacra rather than creating senses, escaping to the virtual rather than the real life (Baudrillard 2015).

Following this logic, it is possible to come up with the statement that the terrible Second World War also did not happen. Auschwitz, a horror symbol of that War also never happened. Is it possible to imagine that today for many young people Auschwitz is nothing more than a simulacrum – a symbol deprived of any meaning? But it is for a lot of them. A proof is an example when a young girl takes a selfie with Auschwitz in the background. Under the principle: I was there. And this selfie is no different (in terms of meaning or rather its absence) from any other selfie, which this young girl takes somewhere in Nice.

What is proposed by a philosopher in such a situation? Baudrillard made a diagnosis. What's next? Does he agree with this choice, presuming human withdrawal? What can a man rely on? Why a philosopher does not offer any means of curing from this disease and gloom? Or this withdrawal strategy is not considered a fatal disease? Where and what footholds a man should look for to remember? To know the truth. To become and remain human?

History does not have that many cultural forms that show what the vehicles for salvation can be. Testimony experience is one of such vehicles. Unfortunately here also not everything is trouble-free.

Testimony as an Open Issue

The first testimony experience in the Christian culture was the experience of communication with God. It was Jesus Christ who showed an example of such an experience and testified about it, saying: "Come and See" and called upon his disciples to follow him. We know the result. His disciples scattered. Judah betrayed him. Peter backtracked three times and then was repenting all his life.

The experience of live testimony on personal experience remained, however, and repeated time and time again. The testimony phenomenon has always been the final and the main argument for the word of truth. The truth of experience, live action and live knowledge. The difference between testimonies and texts is that the former are represented by live carriers who can show a vivid, inalienable example of one's experience. A man testifies to another because he personally saw, did, and lived through.

The XX century, however, demonstrated for the first time that a big question mark also can be put about this experience. And the one who testifies is the first under the fire. Do they exist - witnesses? Who is going to tell the truth?

The issue of human self-determination in the world becomes pressing every time "after": after wars, catastrophes, loss of personal meanings, faded horizons, points of reference, backbones in life. People lose their identity, they forget who they are. One can give numerous examples.

Nevertheless, there is a more crucial and essential question – what should a man do after it happened? What should a man do after a war, a catastrophe, after losing backbones and meanings? What should a man do in a situation that is long given a symbolic name: "after Auschwitz and GULAG"?

Each time we hope that the Auschwitz gas chambers cannot happen again and there will be no other Hiroshima. We feel hopeful and call on those who survived to witness. Yet...

What can survivors testify about? What and how can be testified when testifying is impossible? Can a father describe his death to a son? What and how will the son learn from him who went to "The undiscovered country from those bourn No traveler returns" as Hamlet inquired about it²? What and how can those who lost their lives in Auschwitz gas chambers tell their descendants? Those who perished and not returned from Nowhere shall tell us nothing.

Every time those who survived by miracle try to say something, they admit that their testimony does not work, or, to be more precise, cannot work, because those who survived cannot witness Nothing. Those who survived escaped Nothing. And those who went to the other side, did not return and cannot witness. Primo Levi, one of the survived witnesses, put it directly: "I must repeat- it's not us, the survivors, who are the true witnesses [...]. We, the survivors, are the minority, a negligible part. We are those who did not reach the bottom due to a privileged position, an ability to adjust or a stroke of luck. Since those who reached the bottom, who saw the Gorgon, had not come back to tell their stories or came back silent; but it's them, Muselmanner³, the worn-out, the vanished – are the true witnesses whose evidence should be the core. They are the rules; we are the exception [...]. Nobody told of absolute, brought-to-the-end annihilation because nobody comes back to give an account of one's death" (Levi 2010: 68-69).

The subject of the paper is not the concentration camp phenomenon or fascism. We discuss a different matter: what does it mean to interrogate about a human being after it happened? After Auschwitz? In fact, Primo Levi also discusses it asking the pivotal questions in his memoirs written immediate after the war: "Is it a human being?" (Levi 2011). Much later in "The Drowned and the Saved" he attempted to make sense of the situation of a man in a concentration camp and how one can understand human beings after the Auschwitz situation (Levi 2010)? Let's outline several marks, points that can play the role of sore spots in our memory which already cannot be passed by.

The first mark: what is a human being? Our memory has elaborated some patterns, comprehensions of what is a human being, what is human dignity, what are "us" and "them", friends or enemies. They are quite ancient and have an imprint of some Manichaeism. We are used to thinking that history is exactly the history of the fight between good and evil, so we put something close to us in those understandings of good and evil,

² W. Shakespeare, Hamlet. Act 3, Scene 1.

³ Muslims was a term used among captives of the concentration camp to refer to those suffering from extreme starvation and exhaustion; who are dehumanized. An image of a Muslim symbolizes the phenomenon of any human shape disappearing.

and assume that ultimately the good must win otherwise the world would simply collapse. Following this logic we have always had some understandings of the boundary between good and evil and that the good friends are inside and the bad “them” are on the outside the boundary. A concentration camp destroys all such understandings to such an extent that the entire habitual worldview model disappears completely. There is simply nothing to rely on. In a camp, a man was shaken not by experiencing pain and seeing a lot of deaths but all mainstays and foundations falling out and all boundaries fading, plus the boundaries were numerous and a man was alone. Not as a person but as nothing, some materials to be annihilated⁴.

The second mark: what is human saving? In that situation of transcendence, or, more exact, disappearing of any customary bounds, a human being was left face-to-face with oneself and no personal courage could save him. It could only be an escape by miracle. Our traditional understanding of heroic deeds that can save, courage thanks to which it is possible to survive, not allowing to drop guard and surrender to fear, these understandings also stopped working and the survived could only thank their fate that they stayed alive. And then their life was not their personal merit, a result of their courage and resistance. It simply happened. Perhaps only one factor could contribute to survival: strong personal health. Moreover, only the worst survived. The crafty, the slippery, the traitors, the accomplices that joined Sonderkommndos. The best all died (Levi 2010: 67). “The Saved” were neither the selected, not the messengers, not the best. Each became a “Cain to one’s brother” and “each brought his fellow-creature into bondage and now lives instead of him” (Levi 2010: 66).

The third mark: what is a survival testimony? In the legal sense it is impossible to expect objective evidence from survived witnesses. They can only utter moans, complaints and condemnations and some weak words of self-justification that they escaped by miracle. A testimony of those who came from there stops being such. A fact of witnessing gave some hope to those who the testifying would tell about that experience and show that he managed, he survived. It implies there is some meaning in this survival. But the camp cut the ground from under even this last argument – the testifying. Because the survived either are silent from horror, or become insane and die not being able to stand the burning memories, or attempt to selectively remember more comforting pieces and episodes.

The forth mark: education and culture do not save in the camp. Intelligence, art or poetry could not help make the meaning of what was happening, understand what kind of place it was ...” (Levi 2010: 118-119). Comprehension simply stops working at the camp. On the contrary, it began to be an obstacle. Because to understand means to find some foundation for what was happening, identify a particular meaning, get bearings. The camp requires brutal survivability instead of understanding. It was easier for poorly educated people. They were quicker to grasp the simple rule: do not attempt to understand anything. The survivors were mostly those who did nothing more than survived rather than tried to understand.

The fifth mark: it is impossible to understand and internalize the Auschwitz experience. Any accounts of it, demonstrations of those who were there and survived cannot make us comprehend what happened there. We just put into the survivors’ stories our modern interpretations taken from books and films, while we sit in warmth and coziness. We lack an

⁴ What kind of understandings of a human being can we talk about when every day, every hour the camp machine demonstrated such annihilation of all and everything: “Ash, tons of which were supplied from crematoriums every day was easily recognizable due to teeth and spinal bones. Nevertheless, it was widely used – to fill up marsh spots, as insulation for board buildings or as phosphate fertilizers. It was especially popular in the SS village near the camp for beating paths instead of gravel” (Levi 2010: 104).

organ of understanding to accurately and fully comprehend what happened there. In this context we get a terrible and insurmountable lesson: to remember it is necessary to comprehend properly what happened. And then we write books, shoot films and compose songs about it. Yet Levi already pointed out that only true witnesses who got whence they could not return are able to deliver the entire truth. And those who came back already cannot give the complete truth. But those who have never been there cannot understand even them. It means that for us, the contemporaries, it is impossible to understand what was behind the line: "The experience carried out by us who survived in the Nazi camps is hardly understandable for the new generations in the West, and with years passing by it becomes increasingly less understandable" (Levi 2010: 166).

Yet Levi wrote his books in spite of such marks and wounds. Like other witnesses (J. Ameri, B. Bettelheim and many others), P. Levi testifies assuming readiness to be a witness, readiness to testify in a situation when nobody and nothing can already testify: one is forced to be a prisoner, but testifies only on one's own free will, being at liberty. Nobody forced Levi to write. The act of testifying is the act of the second birth, returning to oneself. In spite of all difficulty, a testimony is pronounced, even though the witness understands that its testimony guarantees nothing and saves nobody. This fact, however, turns out to be the single tiny and weak argument for a chance for a new act of human. Rather than to the past, this testimony is directed to the unknown future. The phenomenon of testifying about Auschwitz is different because it is not about the past. The past was burnt out since everything on what anthropology had been based previously was burnt out. Testimonies of those who returned from there are directed to the future that has not arrived yet. Thus, a witness does not refer to archives and documents. A witness presents oneself as a living document, not forcing to and calling for anything, showing that further on, after everything, after Auschwitz, one is expected to live and think dramatically different. How? Nobody knows⁵.

It laces with cynicism – calmly reviewing the situation of Auschwitz or GULAG. But what shall we do after Auschwitz? And what is left for us after Auschwitz or GULAG? Ashes of the burnt cannot testify. The perished are silent. Yet, historic memory remains.

G. Agamben analyzed the phenomenon of the "after Auschwitz" situation. According to him, a witness typically testifies in the name of truth and justice, which makes his words strong and complete. In this case, however, testifying equals to what is absent in it; the core of it contains non-testimony, which deprives the survived of their authority (Agamben 2012: 35).

What authority does he mean? What is he about? Surely the survived must not apologize for staying alive? And why must a survivor now keep silent only because he escaped the gas chamber and the poor one is not a real witness because he is not dead? Why doesn't Agamben take at least this as an argument?

I can't help feeling that despite his education and intellectuality Agamben comes across helpless against the experience of the witnesses. Many times Levi and other witnesses specified as if they were ashamed that they finally dared to say something. And it would be better to simply keep silent, hold a pause. We found ourselves in a pause. A philosopher V. Podoroga calls it a "totalitarian pause" that lasted 70 years of the Soviet period (Podoroga 2010: 18-19). V. Podoroga characterizes this pause as the time when nothing could be done. The pause is not a time out. Not a break, not an interval. It's the time when acting is impossible and nothing can happen.

⁵ Although P. Levi felt up to remember and testify, he finally found it beyond his strength and committed a suicide in 1987. Another witness, J. Ameri also took his life in 1978.

Following Levi, Agamben repeats the actual marks and testimonies. It is impossible to testify about something that cannot be understood and described, what cannot be put in words. Agamben inserts this experience of impossibility in a historic frame: religionists have long experienced impossibility because testifying about God is also impossible. In 386 A.D. John Chrysostom also described this incomprehensibility of God, who is inexpressible, ineffable and inarticulate in his treatise “On Incomprehensibility of the Divine Nature” (Agamben 2012: 32-33).

Initially it causes a slight shock: such a comparison of the experience of communion with God and impossibility of sayings about God, and the Auschwitz experience. Then one begins to understand that perhaps only this comparison is possible and it gives at least some chance to escape the “anthropological dead-end” that emphasizes our incapability in the means of the language of understanding human beings as things in existence, futility of our entire strategy to comprehend and “catch” a human being to fit particular patterns and concepts (Avanesov 2015).

Thus, we already place on a par two irreducibility strategies: irreducibility of annihilating all things existent (Auschwitz) and irreducibility of communion with ontological Other that gives a chance for resurrection and transfiguration. But only a chance. Is it so?

Agamben does not further develop the comparison of the two irreducibilities. Being accurate in his analysis and assertion, what does Agamben propose? Effectively he finds a consolation in a weak hope that it (Auschwitz – S.S.) would not repeat in the future (Agamben 2012: 32). He does not, however suggest and build up a conceptually careful anthropological alternative.

Overall Agamben lists a number of dead-ends, the consciousness of a narrator and interpreter bumps up against. Whether you make a film, write and publish diaries or attempt to describe your experience in legal categories, all cultural forms fail to work.

The cultural forms of understanding the camp experience also cannot be an adequate form (the norm) because when writing a novel or shooting a film, the narration about the camp comes from outside, through a TV camera. Agamben believes that to explain the testimony paradox through singing means to aestheticise testifying: neither poems nor songs can help save testimonies from impossibility; on the contrary, the possibility of a poem is based on a testimony (Agamben 2012: 37). Still poems cannot express any testimony. Obviously there is no logical and cultural way out from the paradox. Having done such subtle, surgical review of witnesses’ materials, Agamben comes to an intellectual dead-end. After reading Agamben we may as well say no more. And he acknowledges it, stating that to testify language must give way to non-language, show impossibility to testify (Agamben 2012: 40).

Agamben is precise and fair in his analysis: neither legal and moral-and-ethical evaluation of Auschwitz and testimonies about it, nor the esthetic form are adequate for testifying. A testimony from Muselmann who survived after the camp cannot be described in any categories – legal or moral because the bounds of what philosophers traditionally call a human being disappears. Auschwitz transcendence kills any bounds of understandings and definitions of a human norm. The camp is a place where all human, customary and understandable to a human being disappear, vanish in the gas chambers: if we set the boundary, crossing which a human is no longer a human and people [...] are put on the other side of this boundary, it proves a dissatisfactory and abstract nature of the suggested boundary rather than inhumanity of people (Agamben 2012: 67).

The only thing that Agamben can allow himself after such subtle analysis is to give another very controversial definition of a human being following M. Blanshot who once stated that a human being is an indestructible that can be infinitely destructible (Agamben

2012: 143). Referring to Blanshot, Agamben attempts to play with a series of similar metaphors, for instance, that a “human being is the one who can survive a human being”, understanding the entire controversy of such definitions. Ultimately he states that a “human being can survive a human being [...] not because somewhere there is a human essence that can be destructed or saved but because the whereabouts of the human is split up, because the place of a human being is in split between a live creature and the speaking, between a human being and non-human being. In other words, the place of a man is in a non-place of a man, in the missing connection between the living being and logos. A human being is a self-absent being that consists exclusively in this absence and instability opening through it” (Agamben 2012: 144).

Yet, after weeping for the deceased, after songs and poems over the ashes of the vanished, wiping tears, a man sits down at a table and attempts to understand from square one what happened. Weeping eases the pain, but does not give the means for understanding. Even if you call upon the Earth, the Sky, the Stars, the Air as witnesses because you have long been out of words.

Let this air be my eyewitness,
 Its long-range heart,
 In the dug-outs, omnivorous, active,
 Substance – a windowless ocean strives ...

O. Mandelstam (Verses on the Unknown Soldier. 1937-1938)

Thus, there are other examples of testifying that demonstrate the overall conventionality of earlier adopted cultural and artistic boundaries, rules and genres. For instance, a testimony of a GULAG survivor V. Shalamov in the “Kolyma Stories” (Shalamov 1992; 2009). He himself became a live testimony, becoming such and presenting this testimony to the world in the form of his stories (for more details see also Smirnov 2011).

Shalamov’s experience is especially informative exactly because he is not an observer and a writer. He is a witness of that experience, the experience of life behind the line, life in death, in the Nothing. It is impossible to describe such transcendental experience. Still he presented his testimony. Because he was not writing, he was shouting. The testimony was clear and thunderous. One cannot write about it the way of the classic Russian literature. Therefore Shalamov found “Doctor Zhivago” by Pasternak a failed experience. Pasternak could not be a witness there. It was a collapse of the genre. Tolstoyan novel is dead (Shalamov 2009: 840).

Shalamov’s testimony strongly resonates with Levi’s experience although by all accounts they did not know each other. What did Shalamov understand at the camp?

“An extreme fragility of human culture and civilization. A human being turns into a beast in three weeks through hard work, cold, hunger and beatings [...]. I understood that friendship, camaraderie never emerges in difficult, truly difficult conditions when life is at stake. Friendship is born in difficult but possible conditions (in a hospital but not in the depth of a mine) [...]. I understood that a sense of animosity is the final one preserved by men. A hungry man does not extend beyond animosity – he is indifferent to the rest [...]. I learned that one can live by animosity [...]. I understood why a man does not live by hopes – there are no hopes at all; or by will power – what willpower you are talking about, just by the instinct, a sense of self-preservation – the same beginning as a tree, a stone or an animal [...]. I have no doubts that the camp in its entirety is a bad school, where one cannot spend even an hour because it’s a corruptive hour. The camp could give nothing positive – never, to nobody. The camp corrupts everybody – prisoners and hired employees” (Shalamov 2009: 263-266).

Shalamov understood that the camp teaches nothing, it is a negative experience, the camp experience disintegrates and annihilates, and it does not strengthen the spirit.

Therefore, it is impossible to write about this negative experience. Shalamov's own realization of the survival experience and searching for something that can be said after that experience is a striking and radical testimony: "My objective was to create a documentary testimony of the period" (Shalamov 2009: 840). "Any word, any twist of the soul from the witnessing author gives the final formulae, passes the sentence" (Shalamov 2009: 838).

It seems that V. Shalamov responds to J. Agamben: nothing can be said Auschwitz and GULAG in the genres of Tolstoy and Turgenev novels. None would believe and understand. Wrong words, wrong intonation and wrong voice. The word, a responsible word of the author, a phrase must be powerful and hard-resounding like a slap. The story text must be a document. It's a prose that lives through as a document, as "fixing exceptional in the state of exceptional" (Shalamov 2009: 845). The author himself becomes a live document. In this case the difference between life and art fades. An integral act is born. Therefore, the word of testifying is not created by writing or composing. It is scribbled with blood on the barrack wall and squealed out: "Each story, each phrase was first yelled in an empty room: I always talk to myself when writing. I shout, threaten, and cry. And I can't stop tears. I wipe them only afterwards, finishing a story or a part of a story." (Shalamov 2009: 847). In fact, Shalamov repeated the experience of surviving GULAG, burning himself for the second time: "I had to burn myself to attract attention". He himself became a live fire burning in the memory chamber.

J. Agamben in his turn also tries to honestly understand and hear the witnesses and comprehend the situation after Auschwitz. Does anything remain for us or just the gas chambers? There were true witnesses. They perished in the gas chambers. The archives remain. They, however, perish in the fire of forgetfulness stronger than the gas chambers.

V. Shalamov got the answer for himself long time ago. He does not have any illusions: "I do not believe in the literature. I do not trust its possibility to correct a man. The experience of humanistic literature led to the bloody executions of the XX century in front of my eyes. I do not believe it is possible to prevent, to stop things repeating. History repeats. Any execution of 1937 can happen again" (Shalamov 2004: 3). Still he writes stories because those who will read them will have to do something in their experience. A man must do something. But do what? What should we do to make sure that 1937 does not repeat? That Auschwitz does not happen again?

J. Agamben does not give any answers; he cherishes hope that Auschwitz is not going to repeat. Jean Baudrillard, however, showed that exactly the opposite takes place. Nothing remains in our memory: no meanings, no words, just simulacra. There is nobody to be a witness and nothing to testify about. Overall nothing happened. A former concentration camp can, for instance, become a shelter for poor migrants. Why not?

The above examples of understanding the issue underline the most important: we, the philosophers, pretending to work out an anthropological discourse about and for a human being to address the modern challenges still are in the state of numbness. We have not learned how to talk about a human being adequately. We immerse in overgeneralizations, or become emotional, or continue searching for some ready, great essence of a human being, or turn into oracles. Or we refuse to understand anything and shut down. Silence is our answer to the challenges. Or, better described as grunting. In this case silence means irresponsible withdrawal. A philosopher is a philosopher to aspire to perform an act, to pronounce a responsible word. The word on a human being, for which a philosopher must be held accountable for, as M. Bakhtin desired (Bakhtin 2003).

Thus, a philosopher himself must testify about his experience of understanding. Not only the situation "after Auschwitz and GULAG" but also what a human being should do after this situation?

The Situation after Auschwitz as a Concept

What does this metaphor – the situation "after Auschwitz and GULAG" – mean for me? It means describing a situation of a man who is put in a place that requires ultimate interrogation and self-determination. A human being is out-of-the-way in that place. A human being is in the state of "beyond found", according to M. Bakhtin. In this state of inappropriateness and "beyond found" a man must perform an act of rooting to establish oneself as being, build up one's unique place that does not exist in the world as a ready *topos*.

The human action on building up one's *topos* is ultimate and radical. Irreducibility means the following:

1. Irreducibility of experience, marginality of everything that one does and approaching the ontological bound where the ontological Other begins, and all antecedent is verified approaching the experience of communion with it. Such irreducibility is described in the ontology of M. Heidegger – as an experience of interrogating and answering to ontological Calling of Being. Only through this experience of interrogating a man becomes a carrier of the experience of caring about Being and a witness of such an experience. In fact this is one's ontological eventfulness, as a result of which a man becomes an event of Being, not an accidental singular thing in existence, but a necessary, ontologically rooted thing existent (Heidegger 2009).

2. Irreducibility means exhausting the means of interrogating about the ontological bound experienced by the one who interrogates. At a bound all customary means, words, concepts, images, metaphors problematize. A man is alone with the Other, with clean hands. Only himself, his arms, legs, the head remain in his disposal. He, the Only, with his clean body. Because he gave away everything as arguments and is left bare. He acts as he was told:

But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek,
turn to him the other also,
And if anyone would sue you
and take your tunic,
let him have your cloak as well,
And if anyone forces you to go one mile,
go with him two miles. (Matthew 5, 39-41)

According to this commandment, the answer by the one who interrogates to a challenge must be so radical that the challenging Evil must blanche. The answer is radical not in the language tool, since only oneself, one's arms and legs are at disposal, It is radical by irreducibility of the answer, one's readiness to a radical answer.

3. Irreducibility means that further on a human being still have to move along the road, which is the way to the unknown. Ontologically unknown. Here a bound is understood in its ontological rather than a narrow gnoceological meaning of expanding the boundaries of learning for a particular object. A human being does not know under the principle: where to go. There is nobody to show the way. There are no guides. When a Sherpa accompanies you in the Himalayas, he knows a path to take. You don't know the path but he knows. In

this case there is no Sherpa. And there is no path. Yet it will be necessary to step to there, untouched by humans.

4. It will be necessary because (it's another sign of irreducibility) a man of the Way undertakes extreme responsibility to say a word of truth about the bound. He accepts this ontological woe, understanding the consequences. He may be killed, betrayed, sent to an exile, fired, accused of something he is not guilty of, etc. There may be various options for annihilation. But all of them are vitally risky. A man risks his life when claims to be a witness of irreducible experience.

It becomes clear from the above that that the situation "after Auschwitz" seemingly cannot be a mass one. Such ontological self-determination cannot be mandatory. It is a personal and personalized decision by the actor. The experience of Socrates and Christ. The experience of Hamlet and Don Quixote.

Yet the XX century sprung a mine again. Auschwitz shows that millions find themselves in this situation. And the situation starts putting these millions through a "nitty test".

That is why such extreme, irreducible situation is called the situation "after Auschwitz". It exposed irreducibility of a human being, his means of understanding and irreducibility of the Way.

The situation "after Auschwitz" revealed principal emptiness, Nothing, after which there is nowhere to go, nobody to go and there is no point in going. It is a situation of burn offering. Holocaust does not start with fire, with burning villages. It starts with burning human in a human being. "Enough of the living dead". If the dead get hold of weapons, they leave Nothing behind.

Therefore, the situation "after Auschwitz" means the formedness of ontologic and anthropologic discontinuity:

1. First discontinuity: nothing to convey, because symbols and patterns are annihilated. Nothing to testify about.

2. Second discontinuity: nobody to convey to since the younger generation is increasingly less accepting the patterns of the fathers and lives by simulacra and in the virtual.

3. Third discontinuity: nobody to convey because the fathers stop being the carriers of such patterns. They either perish or stop being such carriers, the cultural authorities. There are no witnesses.

Thus, we come to the desertisation zone, absence of ontological meanings, not even in Nothing but in the zone of senselessness and not-being. We get in a situation of ontological transition, the need to newly obtain a new cultural norm, the need for restoring and building up a symbolic horizon and basic sense bearings.

We go back again to the issue of human norm, building up a new dictionary of a human being, adequate to the challenges and are forced to talk about human beings in such categories as boundary, eventfulness, testimony, and transition.

Transitivity becomes our permanent event, a way of existence. Yet, eventfulness and transitivity tend to result in a catastrophe – changing the basic norms. Being on the border line is always catastrophic. The transitivity and boundedness have no recipe and do not give guarantees of saving and succeeding. Every time a metaphysical situation of Hamlet is restored who lived up to the permanent readiness principle: "I am ready". It is necessary to be always ready, ready for everything, including radical challenges.

Thus, fitting, furnishing a man with equipment in a situation of "always-readiness" becomes a pressing task. And, therefore, working out, elaborating special anthropological practices that help a human being construct personal navigation in an open problem life space becomes urgent.

In a principally open and problem field the situation of sense bearing and ontological self-determination and self-navigation of a human being escalates.

Being as a Temptation

It is astonishing to be aware that bringing M. Heidegger in our arguments as an ally we must consider that at some point this ally wore an NSDAP [Nationalist Socialist German Workers' Party] badge on the lapel of his jacket⁶. A modern writer M. Gabriel called him a "Nazi in ambush". In the recently published "Black Notebooks" Heidegger, explicitly taking an anti-Semite position, is carried away by a temptation of the leader cult, confusing the homebrew "soil-bound" tradition and paganism of fascists, the Blut-und-Boden ("soil and blood") ideology with a real rooted call of Being (Motroshilova 2015; Nansi 2015; Gabriel 2015).

This is not a place to review the "Heidegger case" once again. Numerous works are written about it (Bibikhin 1991; Motroshilova 1991). It's not for us to judge a philosophic genius. Let's just emphasize this phenomenon of a temptation experienced by the philosopher, who encountered a truly radical challenge and after "Being and Time" came up with the "Black Notebooks" showing that in the 1930s he was tested by a temptation of accepting Hitlerism and fascism as both a radical answer and acceptance of this calling.

Many scholars point out (each in one's own way) that philosophy developed by Heidegger encouraged this temptation. It is not about his political views. The issue is that during all his life, throughout his philosophical biography Heidegger was aspiring to reach the ultimate bounds of philosophizing and attempting to make the Being talk. It determined the specifics of his philosophic discourse and the love to the ancient Greeks, the desire to overcome centuries-long layers and later developments of culture and get to the roots; the aspiration to talk on a non-human language directly to the things forced Heidegger to experiment with language, build up complex constructs with cultural etyma, work with ancient languages. This is not to justify Heidegger⁷ but to attempt to understand and show that the intent to overcome any scientific rigour, artificiality, theoretical constructs and concepts, the urge to reach the roots had dramatic consequences and threw the philosopher in a temptation to stand on the God position (the Last God"). Thus, he did not see a point in arguing with the mortals, even friends and disciples, broke off with them (like with E. Husserl, K. Jaspers, K. Lowith and many others) considering them fellow-travellers and interlocutors, on whom he verified his philosophical experiments.

The major testing and temptation happened in 1933. Heidegger's imagination was excited by Hitler speeches. And even a camp could not stop him. It is the camp, however, that became the pinnacle of European progress. It was possible exactly because through the entire scientific-and-technical development of the European civilization a man was increasingly giving himself to serve this Moloch, a logical consequence of which was transforming the world into some terrible Laboratory, where human beings are tested and experiments are made on them. In terms of the so-called pure science the experiments carried out by the "butchers" - German doctors in the camp were truly scientific. They were pristine experiments. And the doctors were reputable scientists. G. Agamben also writes about it, referring to H. Arendt: "The concentration camps are laboratories where experiments on total rule

⁶ M. Heidegger paid the membership fees until 1945.

⁷ By the way, Heidegger never said a word in self-defence and never ever in his life repented as was so long expected of him by everybody.

are carried out, because taking into account human nature, this goal can be achieved only under the ultimate conditions of hell created by men" (Agamben 2011: 153). It became possible also because Nazism as the "first evil" implicitly existed in the western philosophy, particular, in the ontology developed by Heidegger in the form of enabling Dasein. Nazism is rooted in the "facticity experience", on which Heidegger based his thought (Agamben 2011: 193).

Therefore, behind his philosophical constructs M. Heidegger concealed his urge for a spiritual cult of the leader. Instead of an author-transforming practice, philosophy that he attempted to overcome with his own philosophical ideas turned out into ideology and a form of prophecy. K. Jaspers recalled: "Heidegger thinks polemically but not in the form of a discussion, he invokes rather than substantiates, utters rather than performs an operation of mind" (quoting: Motroshilova 1991: 50).

Referring to the example of Heidegger, we do not at all intend to nail and shame the philosopher, humiliate him and sooth one's vanity ("this great one is so petty and impotent!"). For us this key episode becomes an essential example that philosophy on its own, even such refined and rooted as the philosophy developed by Heidegger, failed to produce an antidote for its author, did not guarantee saving from messianship, and, on the contrary, threw him in temptation, where the reference points were lost and the boundary between two bounds faded.

An Anthropological Alternative

It is difficult to show examples – testimonies without establishing them as footprints, marks to remember. A hunter who follows animal traces can track it down. Because the animal left footprints. If no traces of a testimony are left, it is washed out like an imprint on sand. Testimony should be established. There is only one method to do it: mapping, compiling a diary of a person. It is, however, a subject for a separate work (see Smirnov 2015).

In the meantime let's establish our position as an answer to the above-described challenge meaning human refusal from Being, withdrawal. We call our position an anthropological alternative, under the frame of which we attempt to answer the question put in the title: how to interrogate about a human being in the situation "after Auschwitz and GULAG"? (see also Smirnov 2010; 2015).

1. A human being does not possess any essence. A human being is not some ready essence and does not bear any ready qualities of a subject. A human being is possible thing existent, fraught with consequences, and provocative.

2. In this possibility a human being manifests oneself as a step, as advancement from the shade of possibility. A human being is not "this" or "that". A human being manifests oneself in a step, in a live action; and stays in the phenomenon of such live, sense bearing action.

3. In this case a human being, tentatively speaking, appears as a scintillating, pulsing action; therefore, it is always deceptive, covert, and unstable. Upon accomplishing a step of advancement in the light a human being fades away – until the next step. Such acts are his mode of existence.

4. Only a human being himself can say about his appearing and manifestation. He testifies about it. The latter is possible strictly through the means commensurate with a person. He can testify only by personal, responsible authorial word. He puts his signature, personal autograph under such testimony. Put it as a body tattoo –for the rest of one's life. These tattoos, marks and scratches of testimonies on the body of a witness are established in the

person's diary. Nobody can give guarantees how long and for how many pages the diary of personal testimonies will be extended. Each person has one's own diary.

5. One can try to read such a diary. During all these years we have been reading testimonies from Primo Levi, Varlam Shalamov and the like. Any text of a different testimony, however, requires efforts and counteraction: if you yourselves did not undergo through an experience of ultimate interrogation, you are not able to understand a diary of experience alien for you. You do not have a clue for understanding. You will not be able to elaborate the adequate mood, frame of mind and rhythm to set your heart on it and became integrated in the breathing rhythm of a live testimony of another person. That is why such testimonies - diaries do not become testimonies for those who did not experience ultimate interrogation. Moreover, such a person is afraid of them because they show to him his own ontological incapacity and effectively his absence, since he did not make a step of manifesting himself to the world. Yet there is always a chance to make such a step and in doing so appear in the world.

References

- Agamben Giorgio (2012), *Homo sacer. Chto ostaetsya posle Osventsima: arkhiv i svidetel'* [Homo Sacer. What remains after Auschwitz: archives and witnesses], Moscow: Europe [in Russian].
- Agamben Giorgio (2011), *Homo sacer. Suverennaya vlast' i golaya zhizn'* [Sovereign power and bare life], Moscow: Europe [in Russian].
- Bakhtin Mikhail (2003), *K filosofii postupka* [By the philosophy of the act]. In: Collected Works. V. 1. Moscow: Publisher Russian dictionaries [in Russian].
- Bibikhin Vladimir (1991), *Delo Khaideggera* [Case of Heidegger]. // *Filosofiya Martina Khaideggera i sovremennost'*. Moscow: Nauka [in Russian].
- Bodriyyar Zhan (2015), *Simulyakry i simulyatsii* [Simulacra et simulation]. Moscow: Postum [in Rusian].
- Gabriel' Markus (2015), *Natsist iz zasady* [Nazi ambush]. «Voprosy filosofii». № 4. S. 166-169 [in Russian].
- Levi Primo (2010), *Kanuvshie i spasennye* [Sunk and rescued], Moscow: The New Publisher [in Russian].
- Levi Primo (2011), *Chelovek li eto?* [Is this a Man?], Moscow: Text [in Russian].
- Motroshilova Nelli (2015), *Chernye tetradi M. Khaydeggera: po sledam publikatsii* [Black notebooks by M. Heidegger: on the trail of publication]. «Voprosy filosofii». № 4. S. 131-162 [in Russian].
- Motroshilova Nelli (1991), *Drama zhizni, idei i grekhopadeniya Martina Khaideggera* [The drama of life, ideas, and the fall of Martin Heidegger. The philosophy of Martin Heidegger and Modernity]. // *Filosofiya Martina Khaideggera i sovremennost'*. Moscow: Nauka [in Russian].
- Nansi Zh.-L. (2015), *Khaydegger i my* [Heidegger and we]. «Voprosy filosofii». № 4. S. 163-165 [in Russian].
- Podoroga Valeriy (2010), *Apologiya politicheskogo* [Apology of Political], Moscow: Publishing House of National University "Higher School of Economics" [in Russian].
- Smirnov Sergey (2010), *Chertov most. Vvedenie v antropologiyu perekhoda* [Devil's Bridge. Introduction to Anthropology of transition], Novosibirsk: Ofset [in Russian].
- Smirnov Sergey (2011), *Avtopoēzis cheloveka. Filosofskie ocherki po antropologii stikha* [Autopoiesis of human being. Philosophical essays on poetry anthropology], Novosibirsk: Ofset [in Russian].
- Smirnov Sergey (2015), *Forsayt cheloveka. Opyty po neklassicheskoy filosofii cheloveka* [Foresight of Human Being. Experiences on non-classical philosophy of Human Being], Novosibirsk: Ofset [in Russian].
- Shalamov Varlam (1992), *Kolymskie rasskazy* [Kolyma Tales], books 1, 2. Moscow: Russian Book [in Russian].
- Shalamov Varlam (2009), *Neskol'ko moikh zhizney. Vospominaniya. Zapisnye knizhki*.

- Perepiska. Sledstvennye dela [Several of my lives. Memories. Notebooks. Correspondence. The investigations of the case], Moscow: Exmo [in Russian].
- Khaydegger Martin (2009), Vklady v filosofiyu. Ot Sobtiya [Contributions to philosophy. From the Event], "Ερμηνεία. Journal of philosophical translations", 1 (1), p.p. 56-94 [in Russian].

Bibliographical note: Sergey A. Smirnov, Russia, Novosibirsk. Professor at Novosibirsk State University of Economics and Management. The editor-in-chief of the "Chelovek.RU" humanities anthology. Area of interests: philosophic pedagogical, poetic anthropology, philosophy of culture, philosophy of education, foresight research.
