

ACADEMIC EVENTS

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The Law of the Shared Norm

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On 23 May 2024 St. Petersburg Academy of Postgraduate Pedagogical Education named after K.D. Ushinsky organized and hosted the Conference “Thought as an Event: in Memory of Alexander Isakov.” The Conference was not only an academic event, but also a personal attempt made by each participant to say heartwarming farewell to Alexander Isakov, who had recently passed away. Friends, students and close colleagues of Professor Isakov took part in the Conference. The format of dialogical exchange of ideas contributed to the general idea of paying tribute to an outstanding philosopher and thinker of the modernity.

The Conference was opened by **Gulnara Khaidarova**’s report entitled “The Time of Reconstruction.” The event of thought in the philosophical tradition is self-valuable and autonomous. However, it is precisely its unconditionality that generates the need for a certain illuminated stage arranged in a special way: it must have friendliness (*philia*) as the ability to give place to thoughtful utterance and love as an illuminating force. Alexander N. Isakov thought and talked a lot about this. “Humanism and Christian Love” is the title of the report that he prepared, but he did not have time to perform. This “and” should

be understood as an addition to completeness, as a recognition of the insufficiency of “normal” humanism. Here it is necessary to keep in mind that functional literacy has become a general trend in school and higher education. Friendliness, Gulnara Khaidarova argues, is a necessary complement to humanism, and without friendliness it does not make sense at all.

Walter Benjamin, analyzing one of B. Brecht’s poems, noted that friendliness is both the source of the creative power of thought and the need to communicate thoughts to others. We find friendliness at the most critical moments of life — in birth, in the first steps in life, in saying goodbye to life, — and without it no event is possible. The key phrase in Benjamin’s text is “he comprehended the futility of cruelty.” Let me add here my own consideration: it is unexpected, but the relevance of this statement cannot be denied, it is already scary to admit it. The report provided an answer to this dilemma: whoever wants to overthrow rigidity should not miss any opportunity to show friendliness. And for Alexander Isakov it was characteristic of the ability to keep friendliness in an unclouded state, which created a sense of authenticity of a philosophical meeting and generated an event of thought.

Nikolai Ivanov structured his report in his usual manner, as an expanded metaphor. It is difficult, if at all possible, to retell such a report, since there is a great risk of losing not only the shades of meaning, but meaning itself, since the complexity of the metaphorical utterance cannot be reduced. But fortunately, every metaphor consists of individual replicas that in this case are significant in themselves, and we will undertake to reproduce them.

Ivanov’s entire report was built around Plotinus’ phrase “Every soul is and becomes what it looks at.” In his soul Alexander Isakov was a desperate hack, a secular lion and a cavalry guard, but the third “Critics” by Immanuel Kant is in his hands. There was nothing in his look from an exemplary fighting man: no bearing, no pride. A bookish man and a hermit; a peaceful intellectual, who treated the civil slaughter, the universal fooling and brutalization of people with Tolstoy’s inflexibility. Only in philosophy he appreciated what brings it closer to military discipline and makes it a science, namely: rigor.

Originality and brilliance of thought should always be preferred to its thoroughness, this is the only discipline of the mind.

Here, the tone of the paper becomes so elegiac that it is separated from tearfulness only by tragic irony, reminiscent of the stories by O. Henry. We will allow ourselves a detailed quote: “And yet, even as a joke, it was not for nothing that his friends nicknamed him ‘Sashka the War.’ He knew so much, and with such boyish enthusiasm he talked about wars, battles, generals, combat formations and branches of the armed forces, officer duels, carousing and love affairs, about weapons, standards, uniforms, ammunition, military orders and insignia, military customs and etiquette, military campaigns and exploits of heroes of all times and peoples. But especially, of course, Russian history.”

Alexander Isakov loved the excitement of battle, not forgetting about the war as “of beginning of everything,” according to Heraclitus, even at chess. Isakov’s thought is a battle where nothing falls out of the pure field of the master’s speculation. In this battle, not only self becomes a seer, but the world itself becomes sighted. Not every soul is ready to bear this world’s gaze. With the test of transcendental fortitude of the soul, its baptism of fire begins. The experience of philosophy as such begins with this test: as preparations for death, according to Plato. Philosophy is the back mind in the face of death, always someone else’s, and birth, always one’s own. Despite of Aristotle’s believe, philosophy does not begin with astonishment and it is not born free, for its own sake. Astonishment as such, *i. e.*, a surprised imagination, generates only unintentional fright and laughter. Only the admiration of the soul saves from speculative infertility. But it is impossible to conclude to admiration. Philosophy can become free if it wins its freedom. Therefore, the war is the beginning of everything, *i.e.*, of the archetypal congeniality of thought and being.

Alexander Govorunov asked the question to clarify the phrase “drill training of the mind,” whether it is possible to get a couple of lessons. As an answer, it was stated that, in an essential sense, the philosophical school is a drill. You have to be able not to spoil the row of those who are behind you. So that it is even. And to lift the leg to the correct height. Not higher, but not lower than the rest. It includes training camps, combat training, and shooting. After all, there

are idols all around — markets, caves, etc. You need to have time to examine all this and shoot it. Nevertheless, Aleksander Isakov did not like all that, although he delved, often even too deeply, into historic-philosophical distinctions. There is a war, and there is a civil massacre. And in thought, we can only talk about the original war, about settling personal accounts with the world.

One more noteworthy statement of the Conference declares that nothing makes a thought an event. There is nothing outside thought, which forces a thought to come true. When we interpret the dynamic world in terms of entities, we destroy it as an event. Therefore, the only thing that becomes an event is a test of the spirit for its presence.

Evgeny Malyshkin spoke about the course given by Aleksander Isakov at the Open Philosophical Faculty (recordings of these meetings are available on popular video hosting sites). The course contains two terms that are repeated over and over again and that are impossible to perceive directly: shared evidence and investment. Regarding the latter, in the case of communication between theology and philosophy, there is no talk of a reliable transfer of investments. What is it then? It is about neighborhood, or, as Gulnara Khaidarova said, about friendliness, which Aristotle calls not just *philia*, but *philophilia*, such a friendly disposition that invites you to do what you are already doing, but in an established community. God, death, love — this is what we need to discuss in the company of philosophy and theology. Thus, we are talking about the hyphen, about the “between:” death-immortality, God-Being, reason-love. But this hyphen itself precedes the subject.

There are two different ways to discuss such precedence. The first is as follows: reflection on the “between” itself, avec-, cum- — everything that we find in Nancy’s book “Being singular plural.” This method also has a limitation, which Aleksander Isakov notes: there are things that cannot be divided. Such are not only corporeal, material things. With regard to the latter, the sharing impossibility is obvious: half an apple is not the same as a whole apple. Therefore, if I share an apple with someone, I will share a friendly disposition, but not the apple itself. But it is also impossible to share primacy, just as it is impossible to share paternity. Much of the course given by Aleksander Isakov is devoted to this contradiction, the need to share obvious things when it is impossible to share a lot of them.

Now the second method of discussing mentioned precedence is also visible: reasoning about sharing itself, on the boundaries of sharing. In these limits the quantitative question is no less important than the qualitative: not only what you share, or with whom. But also, with how many? The quantitative dynamics of separation tells us something important about the sharing itself: how many elements are capable of being involved in this obviousness? The thesis repeated by Isakov about the unconscious God, “God is existence,” can be grasped in quantitative terms: how does existence grow if the meanings are given to those who exists only in shared forms? There is a dynamic of sharing itself, therefore, questions can be asked not only within the limits of these three elements: I or you or between us.

Larionov inquired if we are talking about limits, then what cannot be invested in?

In Ivanov’s opinion, it is impossible to invest in the field of fools or idols. For example, “objective reality,” “cognized necessity,” the world of truth comprehensible from the outside, the intelligibility of the world based on the intelligibility of objects of experience for everyone — all that is often passed off as philosophy itself, whereas in this case philosophy turns out to be only a means, a banknote put into our idols, in order, primarily, to reduce our freedom.

Nina Savchenkova said that Alexander Isakov drew her attention to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book “Ethics.” But she had a chance to read it only recently, and it became clear that there was a strong connection between what the German theologian wrote about and what Alexander Isakov spoke and wrote about. The general plot is: teachers and teaching. And even greater coincidence of themes is visible through Bonhoeffer’s book “The Cost of Discipleship,” where the same plot is discussed, but in different aspects, the call of Christ to follow him and how this call can and should be followed.

Obedience turns out to be not just a practice or discipline, but a desire. This concept turns out to be both a critique of the authoritarian model of knowledge transmission and Lacanian models of desire. The concept of desire as obedience unfolds in a certain epistemological modesty: there is no Subject declared, who speaks or wins his place, believes in his desire or insists on it. Ultimately, this concept becomes

self-referential, so much that it is impossible to say that “following is this and that.” A similar revolution is taking place in film theory: the idea that big theories destroy the subject, i.e., cinema language, is accepted; ultimately, any interpretative model replaces the subject of interpretation itself. If the time of big theories has not passed in philosophy, and large and long-term projects still hold sway in many minds of our contemporaries, then Isakov can be called an adherent of a small theory.

But what is important here is not so much the refusal as the special ability to work with subject matter: working with a film, a book, a philosophical situation. And this is precisely what unites the style of Bonhoeffer and Isakov: the ability to work with details. Reading a film, for example, occurs through unfolding a small episode: it is lived, thought through, unfolded into a certain openness. In psychoanalysis, this is called a clinical vignette. And in psychoanalysis this turn has also taken place: now, even in supervision, they work not with cases, not with a whole plot, but with vignettes, based on which you can take some walks to grasp how this fabric is woven. As if we do not reach the whole, but enter into a certain openness, we are dealing with the horizon, that is, with the possibility of expanding the horizon.

One more answer to the question “What makes a thought an event?” says that starting with details, it would seem, is a common hermeneutic practice. Understanding is one thing, turning a detail into experience is another. When a thought produces a shared experience, we are dealing with an event.

In turn, Evgeniy Malyshkin admitted that in big theories we are dealing with a whole, with a set of discursive practices in which this whole is given, etc. But in small theories we are also dealing with the same thing, details are not given in themselves, they are always already inscribed in a certain context and then it will become noticeable. What is the difference between the big and the small then?

In fact, the answer to this question was in the question itself. The whole is given in big theories, that is, the pragmatic attitude. For example, a text can be written in different ways. First, formulate a concept, we can demand from the student a structure of the work, a

research plan. Or you can move in the opposite direction: one can be offended by some detail, some intonation, and then one can try to figure it out. The second path is much more hopeless, it is associated with uncertainty, with risk.

Professor Ivanov stated that much of what was said was close and true. Alexander Isakov's emphasizing of what seems like a trifle is very characteristic of him. Accepting the conclusions, Professor Ivanov insisted that the order of the sequence raised some doubts. The synthesis of service and desire in this concept of "following the step" is an example of a Taoist teacher. But the Taoists taught is the exact opposite: do as I do, do not follow me. And Alexander Isakov himself followed this thesis. Therefore, there is some kind of crack in the source that simply changes the very essence of the matter.

However, if Isakov was well oriented in philosophy, and everything was known to him, then in the religious tradition there was something that was unknown, not entirely clear, and that he hoped for. And it is important to stay with it as with some mystery. As if between Christ and His apostles something similar to friendship occurred, which is continuous and cannot be broken. This continuity should probably be called obedience.

Andrey Musatov insisted that Isakov's well-known virtues were based on his acquired understanding of what philosophy is. He liked to repeat that to practice philosophy is an author's business. But there are authorship and authorship. Alexander Isakov was precisely foreign to philosophizing tragic tone, when someone, inflamed with a noble passion, invites the whole world to witness how he resolves insoluble metaphysical questions. When, realizing the insolubility of these very questions, he is only engaged in describing the subjective conditions of their solvability.

Alexander Isakov distanced himself from this kind of romanticism. It was important for him that philosophy could take its place in a multidimensional dialogue with cultures, sciences, and arts. And the philosopher himself discovers his relevance and necessity, the demand for professionally posing questions of the ultimate kind. The first thing that catches the eye in Isakov's manner is complexity. Not only in the

sense of Plato's "everything beautiful is difficult," but also in the sense of complexity in composition, multi-aspect. And if we turn to the topic of education, then the question naturally arises: why is this complexity needed, which Isakov demonstrated continually in his lectures and papers?

To set a certain level of complexity, a certain bar. Young people, having tasted this complexity, will no longer be able to get involved in any discussion of so-called geopolitics, or other "actual" topics. If you thought at full-height, you will not want to return to squatting. Isakov often repeated that the task of a philosopher is to predict the nature of a future war. But it is not the task of philosopher to predict something. In what sense should this thesis be understood? Perhaps the very interdisciplinarity and multi-facetedness that creates the need for intellectuals can serve as a hint. As catastrophe theory can be applied in predicting wars. But it is still not very clear what philosophy has to do with it.

Evgeniy Malyshkin clarified that he always perceived this as a beautiful metaphor. Thus, Leibniz named $3 + 1$ signs of reality: your judgment should have three different characteristics, but all the three can be replaced by a prediction. A philosopher has nothing to predict. But there is at least one thing that makes sense to point out: reality itself. And there is one thing in relation to which it always makes sense to think ahead: war. As in Heidegger, the future has an advantage over the present, because there will be a death.

Khaidarova in her statement said that Alexander Suvorov had a concept of anticipatory thinking. And the training of a military man comes down to the cultivation of this very anticipatory thinking. The quote itself is from Svechin, who was well acquainted with the works of Clausewitz and Kant. There is an interesting biographical fact: in February of 1922, Isakov began writing a work, and he wrote it, that was devoted to negotiations. How are negotiations possible at all and what is the conditions for the possibility of sitting at the same table.

In Professor Ivanov's opinion, the answer, in general, lies on the surface. This kind of formula, of course, is worth of reflection. It has metaphysical interest by virtue of its beauty. However, a character (i. e.,

of a war) is a form of a *priori*. This is beyond any forecast. There is nothing to anticipate in the war, its character is obviously unhuman. But theoretically this should be connected with a situation in which the being brings itself to the extreme. Not when the metaphysician goes to the edge of the earth (as every metaphysician should do), but when this edge belongs to the earth itself.

Ksenia Kapelchuk in her report reminded that on 23 May, when the Conference was held, another outstanding professor, Timofey Antonov celebrated his birthday, and perhaps it makes sense to try to compare his style of teaching with that of Alexander Isakov. If we were to produce a taxonomy of great lecturers, we would get two groups: producers of ideas and concepts and their keepers. Isakov and Antonov, for all their differences, were both keepers: if you noticed any gaps in knowledge or understanding of some sophisticated texts, you knew that they were the ones who could provide you with the answers. However, Isakov's discourse was quite sophisticated itself. It seems that talking about philosophical systems and concepts in the language of these very systems is rather a tautological matter: how can we understand Kant by means of another Kant? Isakov often performed a certain interpretative trick, referring to the classic literary works and films. But the remarkable feature of these interpretations was that he did not explain the incomprehensible through the understandable. On the contrary, the unknown encountered in the texts suddenly transformed what had long seemed familiar into something unexpected, and both semantic series finally got corresponded to each other and surprisingly they got clear.

In his article devoted to Dostoevsky and discussing the novel "Crime and Punishment," Alexander Isakov mentions Lacan's distinction between empty speech and full speech as one in which some kind of desire is invested. Can we regard one of the Isakov's latest texts Dostoevsky's Dialectic: The Name of the Father and the saving power of children's life itself as a full speech? Something caught Ksenia Kapelchuk's eye. When Alexander Isakov writes about "The Brothers Karamazov," he regularly calls it "Dostoevsky's final novel." How to understand this finality? In articles from different years, although they are very similar

thematically, the theme of children and childhood is only growing. In the earlier texts he turns to the Japanese researcher Nakamura, who points out that Dostoevsky has a Buddhist motive in his “Crime and Punishment,” since it shows rebirth without redemption. But then this motif unfolds in the Isakov’s course “The Thought as an Event,” and the middle term here is precisely the concept of childhood, a return to a childlike state. Eventually in his text on “The Brothers Karamazov” Isakov refers to Walter Benjamin’s account on Dostoevsky’s “Idiot,” that gives to this theme a new attitude perfectly matching with the figure of Alexander Isakov himself. A quote from W. Benjamin helps Ksenia Kapelchuk show that immortal life is not something infinite; it is eternal renewal, and Isakov’s thoughts were characterized by this renewal, seemingly referring to the well-known idea of the immortality of the soul.

Oleg Nogovitsyn stated that just as in the discussion of several Kant’s problems, the central concept for us is the experience of consciousness — this experience is the very “condition of possibility” of a priori synthetic propositions. Thus, in ancient commentaries on Aristotle’s syllogistic it is not the forms of correct syllogisms that are discussed, but the ability to find a middle term: this is precisely the business of a philosopher, to find it. But how can we still speak of the unity of both the event of thought and those objects to which our experience is directed? In Christianity, this search is understood as a personal event that opposes the Neoplatonic teachings in which the God creates as a natural being; this Neoplatonic God cannot therefore be given his due, he cannot be revered. It is precisely this difficulty that Alexander Isakov draws attention to when he points out that Christianity begins not with the apostleship, but with the community, since it is impossible to speak on unique individual experience: faith is inherent in every act of consciousness, that is why Christianity becomes the intellectual tradition. To discuss the clash of two orders of universality in Christianity, Greek and Jewish, it is necessary to conclude: only that thought is true which helps to win the war. But the concept of war and contemplative life are poorly compatible. I do not think that Alexander N. Isakov has found a solution, but this is the horizon open to us.

The final utterance of Alexander V. Govorunov can be formulated as follows. Philosophy has no other language than the language of the history of philosophy. Therefore, philosophy is a special kind of temporality that is possible even outside of historicity. And every thought is an event if it is a responsibility. The responsibility should be understood rather as the ability and desire to be in the center of attention. Aleksander Isakov never condescended to the unpreparedness of the audience. To dare to be in the center, to dare to be among the best interlocutors, to dare to speak with the best thinkers in any audience — this is what it means to be a philosopher.

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