

PHENOMENOLOGY IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract

The article deals with phenomenology in Lithuania. The main thesis of the article is this: phenomenology is a living tradition in need of both development and interpretation. The minor thesis follows from the main one: the Western phenomenological tradition and Lithuanian philosophy interact and develop in tandem with one another. According to the authors, the contact between poetics and philosophy is the dominant form of phenomenology in Lithuania. The phenomenological tradition is treated as creative and living philosophical thought.

Key words: phenomenology, poetics, continental tradition.

Introduction

Although professional Lithuanian philosophy dates back more than 500 years¹, Lithuanian philosophy in the 20th century grew together with the reception of the phenomenological tradition. There are also seeds of analytic philosophy in Lithuania², although most of Lithuania's philosophers identify with the continental European tradition, which has been marked by phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism. Since postmodern philosophy branched out from phenomenology as its counter-balance, its influence has been felt in Lithuania as well. Not only does Lithuanian philosophy develop under the impetus of phenomenology but Lithuanian philosophy has also become more distinctive and interesting

¹ According to R. Plečkaitis, professional philosophy in Lithuania started 1507, with the establishment of the Dominican school (Plečkaitis 2008).

² The most prominent representatives are: Evaldas Nekrašas, Rolandas Pavilionis, Marius Povilas Šaulauskas, Nijolė Lomanienė.

the more it goes beyond the phenomenological tradition, while it in turn it could supply this tradition with significant undertones. Phenomenology – both in Western Europe and in Lithuania – is constantly developing, creatively continuing the Husserlian and Heideggerian currents as they assimilate new features in the conditions of a changing *Lebenswelt* and in national coexistence (*Mitsein*).

Phenomenology can be discussed in broad and narrow terms both in Lithuania and in the West. A majority of researchers agree about the roots of phenomenology (Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger), its connection to existential theology (Rudolf Bultmann, Gabriel Marcel, Eberhard Jüngel), hermeneutics (Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricœur), and philosophy of dialog (Martin Buber). A question arises: whether philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Slavoj Žižek – who came out of the phenomenological tradition – should be treated as phenomenologists?

Since we value all Lithuanian phenomenologists – who are not many – we will review the ways in which their research is connected to phenomenology. In addition, we shall also review the work of phenomenologists who are involved in the Lithuanian phenomenological movement, but hail from the neighboring countries. On the one hand, this corresponds to the goals³ of philosophical research in Lithuania; on the other hand the criteria of what makes Lithuanian philosophy Lithuanian are very obscure. Obviously, the most famous “Lithuanian” phenomenologist is Levinas although he did not publish a single philosophical work in Lithuanian⁴. Another case is that of Lev Karsavin who had always considered himself as Russian despite the fact that his most solid work had been written in Lithuanian⁵. Therefore we shall resort to the shorthand phrase “Phenomenology in Lithuania,” referring thereby to the creative co-existence of phenomenologists who philosophize in different languages in a single country and vice versa – those who are scattered throughout the world but have a common national origin.

We have stipulated that the maturity of philosophy can be evaluated according to its autonomy in regard to the dominating school. In this sense “pure” phenomenology, in our understanding, is unnecessary and useless. The power of phenomenology is displayed in its creativity, which has impacted not only philosophy but other human and social sciences. When phenomenology ceases to evolve, we will then have a fact of Western thought, to be explored from a historical perspective. In our opinion, this tradition is still alive, one to which Lithuanian thought, we hope, will likewise contribute. Therefore we shall treat phenomenology in Lithuania in its broad and living sense.

³ The beginnings of professional philosophy in Lithuania are associated with lecturers delegated by the chapter of the Polish Dominican province. Among them - the first were Peter from Sochaczew and Marian Grozgy - were no Lithuanians, and some were not Polish (for instance, Gregorius de Austria) (Plečkaitis 2008: 13).

⁴ There is only Levinas’ correspondence in Lithuanian.

⁵ *History of European Culture* (Karsavinas 1994).

Although phenomenologists typically congregate with the help of journals created for such purposes, the situation in Lithuania is different. The oldest and, until 1990, the only post-war philosophical semi-annual journal, *Problemos* (inaugurated in 1968, published by Vilnius University), was and still is considered a forum for authors from various trends in philosophy. Bearing the dominant philosophical trends in mind, the merits of this journal for spreading phenomenological ideas have to be admitted.

The quarterly journal *Logos* is of similar diversity (the publisher – Dalia Marija Stančienė), although thematic issues dedicated to E. Levinas, J. Derrida, and Pranas Dovydaitis appeared in these latter years. In a quarterly journal called *Filosofija. Sociologija (Philosophy. Sociology)*, published by the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences) philosophical and sociological (both empirical and theoretical) texts shared the pages. Recently this journal has grown out of its eclecticism: two sociological and two philosophical issues are published every year. The latter are only thematic, mostly phenomenological. New philosophical journals chose the same direction of research: the annual *Athena* (published by the Culture, Philosophy and Arts Research Institute) and the quarterly *Santalka (Co-activity)* (sponsored by the Vilnius Gediminas Technical University), which dedicates two issues per year to philosophy. The quarterly *Žmogus ir žodis (Man and Word)* maintains a more or less phenomenological direction dedicating one issue per year to philosophy

No doubt, the most phenomenologically oriented journal is *Topos*, published since the European Humanities University moved to Vilnius. The articles that appear in thematic issues of this journal are in main European languages⁶. In effect, the most phenomenological journal in Lithuania is least Lithuanian. There is an annual inter-disciplinary (in the good sense) journal with a semiotic orientation entitled *Baltos lankos (White Meadows)* (published by Vaidotas Žukas). We will not mention other Lithuanian philosophical journals⁷, because they have little in common with phenomenology. Hence dual tendencies are becoming prominent in Lithuanian periodicals: philosophy is gaining in self-awareness (separation from other disciplines, for example sociology) and appreciates the importance of concentration (the generation of topics for thematic issues). The phenomenological theories of openness and directness help to harmonize these two tendencies.

The origin of phenomenology in Lithuania

In Lithuania the first to write about phenomenology, and in part phenomenologically, was *Vosylius Sezemanas* (1884–1963). He instantly noticed and responded to the newest works of Husserl, Max

⁶ Lithuanian is not among these languages.

⁷ There are over 10 philosophical journals in Lithuania.

Scheler, Heidegger, and others. Sezemanas produced entries for a Lithuanian encyclopedia entitled *Fenomenologija, Husser, and Heidegger*. He based his research in epistemology and logic on Husserl's *Ideen I* and *Logische Untersuchungen* as well as on works by Scheler and Alexander Pfänder (Sezemanas 1987)⁸. The phenomenological perspective is quite prominent in his largest work *Aesthetics* (Sezemanas 1970) and the themes formulated in *Time, Culture, and Body* (Sezemanas 1935) are still at the center of phenomenologists' considerations⁹.

Another professor of philosophy also at Vytautas Magnus University, *Izidorius Tamošaitis* (1889–1943), relied on Scheler, frequently quoting him while lecturing on introduction to philosophy, ethics, and social philosophy, and writing articles on various questions of philosophy and world-view¹⁰. However his reception of phenomenology was too superficial and eclectic. More consistent was his disciple *Kazys Dausa* (born 1906). Having been influenced by Scheler, he wrote his dissertation on Scheler's anthropology and a few other articles (Dausa 1935), but became inactive.

In Lithuania, existentialism, which *Algis Mickūnas* and Dawid Stewart (Mickūnas, Stewart 1994) associated with phenomenology - regarding it as a branch of the latter - spread more widely. *Juozas Girnius* (1915–1994) was the first to study M. Heidegger's philosophy systematically and academically: he wrote both a solid dissertation and licentiate thesis as well as a few articles about existentialism. He attended Heidegger's lectures and while preparing to write his doctoral dissertation on Jaspers consulted the latter. (By the way, at various times there were more Lithuanians as students of Heidegger and Jaspers). Existential philosophy is the basis and the central view of all of *Girnius* creation¹¹: his analysis of man without God in the age of technology; studies in aesthetics, literature, and world-views in society.

Antanas Maceina is also usually regarded as an existentialist, especially in regard to his post-war works, though his philosophical presuppositions vary lot¹². The generation that had known the war cared about existentialism: philosophy seminars in Vytautas Magnus University were incredibly popular; with poets reading and discussing Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

Phenomenology and existentialism have influenced the generation which studied in the West. *Vincentas Vyčinas* (born 1918) has published a few books in English in which he presents and

⁸ For a comprehensive bibliography of his unpublished works see (Tumelis 1984). The manuscript texts of Sezemanas are indicated and shortly described in (Mikelaitis 1991).

⁹ See (Sverdiolas 1986).

¹⁰ Cf the almost complete biographies of I. Tamošaitis and other pre-war Lithuanian writers who wrote on phenomenology in (Mikelaitis 1991).

¹¹ We do not have a comprehensive bibliography of Juozas Girnius. A helpful to his writings is the *Autobiography* with interesting notes by the Girnius (Girnius 1991).

¹² There is no bibliography of Antanas Maceina. Volume 3 of *Raštai (Works)* includes the trilogy *Cor inquietum* (Maceina 1990). Books by Maceina concern to existential philosophy from a hermeneutic perspective. (Maceina 1976; Maceina 1979; Maceina 1981; Maceina 1985) and other texts.

independently develops Heidegger's ideas (Vycinas 1961, 1966, 1972, 1973). The ragged and annotated copy of his first book, *Earth and Gods. Introduction to M. Heidegger philosophy* in Moscow's Lenin's library shows that many have sought to know more about Heidegger's philosophy in this systematic outline. Vyčinas has also published some works in Lithuanian¹³. Mickūnas (born 1933), also writes a little in Lithuanian, though his main works have appeared in other languages¹⁴. *Alphonso Lingis*¹⁵ has to be mentioned, despite the fact that he does not write in Lithuanian, though he willingly admits his Lithuanian roots and frequently visits Lithuania, contributing to the development of phenomenological thought. His thinking swings from phenomenology to cultural anthropology and he devotes much of his attention to the problem of identity. Existentialism has informed the thinking of most post-war emigrant writers and scholars in the human sciences. Without phenomenology it would be hard to understand the world-view of the intellectuals who gather round the Lithuanian movement in the West (*Santara-Šviesa*).

Contemporary phenomenology in Lithuania

Some speakers at the conference, "500 years of philosophy in Lithuania,"¹⁶ have suggested fixing 1968¹⁷ as the year marking the beginning of contemporary Lithuanian philosophy. In that year the journal *Problemos (Problems)* was first published. We shall proceed in a similar way in reviewing contemporary phenomenology in Lithuania, where during the Soviet period existentialism, in particular existentialism as a branch of the literary movement, wielded considerable influence, although it did not acquire a concrete form. The first to start writing about existential philosophy was *Jonas Repšys* (1930–1976) (Repšys 1966, 1972a, 1972b, 1974, 1976, 1980). Leaving aside those who, without being familiar with the sources, criticized phenomenology and existentialism for ideological reasons, attention should focus instead on a group of philosophers who emerged later and analyzed one or another aspect of phenomenology.

Dissertations on phenomenology have been written by *Arvydas Šliogeris* (born 1944), *Tomas Sodeika* (born 1949), *Zenonas Norkus* (born 1958), *Audronė Žukauskaitė* (born 1968), *Arūnas Mickevičius* (born 1965), *Nerijus Milerius* (born 1971), *Vytautas Rubavičius* (born 1952), *Mintautas Gutauskas* (born 1971), *Tomas Kačerauskas* (born 1968), *Saulenė Pučiliauskaitė* (born 1973), *Danutė Bacevičiūtė* (born 1969),

¹³ Articles related to phenomenology: (Vycinas 1970, 1977, 1974, 1975, 1979, 1984, 1990a, 1990b, 1991).

¹⁴ Mickūnas together with Joseph J. Pilotta wrote: (Mickunas; Pilotta 1990). He edited and translated into English several books on phenomenology. We will mention only the most important articles: (Mickūnas 1975, 1980, 1987a, 1987b, Мицкунас 1986, 1987c, 1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c; 1993). Also see: (Sverdiolas 1992).

¹⁵ The most important books of Lingis: (Lingis 1984, 1985, 1988, 1989, 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1998, 2000).

¹⁶ Held 27-28.09.2008 in Vilnius University.

¹⁷ Incidentally, one of the co-authors of the present article, the obedient servant of Lithuanian phenomenologists, was also born in the same year.

Arūnas Gelūnas (born 1968). Apart from these authors, phenomenological and hermeneutic themes are developed in books and articles by *Arūnas Sverdiolas* (born 1949), *Marius Povilas Šaulauskas* (born 1961), *Dalius Jonkus* (born 1965), *Gintautas Mažeikis* (born 1964), *Jūratė Baranova* (born 1955), *Rita Šerpytė* (born 1954), *Kęstutis Dubnikas* (born 1959).

Šliogeris is one of the most productive Lithuanian philosophers; he has published more than 10 books, the last of which contains more than 1200 pages (*Niekis ir Esmas (Nothing and Essence)*) (Šliogeris 2005). Šliogeris in his books and numerous articles relies on the solid basis of existentialist philosophy and starting with his second dissertation, *Žmogaus pasaulis ir egzistencinis mąstymas (The Human world and existential thinking)* (Šliogeris 1985), he endeavors to think through and overcome this philosophy.¹⁸ His book *Post scriptum* (Šliogeris 1992) has been published in German (Šliogeris 2001). If we consider creativity as the main criterion for the development of a philosophical tradition, Šliogeris would receive the title of the most prominent phenomenologist in Lithuania. In addition, in his works he emphasizes the importance of creative thinking and the relation of philosophy to poetry. While thinking over the constantly changing human world, surrounding objects and the closeness of language and existence, Šliogeris keeps his attention fixed on the basic metaphysical questions. Also, in addition to Heidegger (Šliogeris is the most renowned translator and commentator of his works in Lithuania), he sympathizes with Aristotle. The horizon of Šliogeris' thought is remarkably wide.

Sverdiolas is one of the few Lithuanian philosophers who not only analyzes but also creates philosophy. In his texts, he develops the hermeneutical and phenomenological traditions, which he supplements with new features. If a Lithuanian school of hermeneutics is ever formed, it will be firstly associated with the name of Sverdiolas. This current is supplemented with Lithuanian features, not only interpretable phenomena – past or future – of Lithuanian culture, but also by a distinctive view proper to our cultural surroundings. On the other hand, Sverdiolas maintains a thinker's distance regarding the phenomena he analyzes, offering original insights and in this way widening the reader's perception and self-awareness. In my opinion (T. K.), all Lithuanian philosophical research should be conducted in this productive way and not by digging through the works of phenomenological classics. The latter are determined by our modes of perception and cultural surroundings. The question to ask is: are we honest and insightful enough 1) to admit this, and 2) to use the ideas of the classics productively. In this sense Sverdiolas is honest, conscious and, moreover, creative. Lithuanian philosophical research should be

¹⁸ He published the following books: (Šliogeris 1985, 1988, 1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1996, 2005) and a lot of articles. Also Šliogeris has compiled a book of several authors: (Šliogeris 1981).

developed by following his example; it is the original interpretation, not the “objective” restoration that is interesting¹⁹.

Sodeika investigated Ingarden in his youth (dissertation *Romano Ingardeno fenomenologinė ontologija (Phenomenological Ontology of R. Ingarden)* (1983)²⁰). He gained notoriety for his phenomenological improvisations in cultural magazines (less scholarly than those cited above) and for his phenomenological-pedagogical method, which he together with Baranova presented in a manual for teaching philosophy (Baranova, Sodeika 2002) in gymnasias. For Sodeika to philosophize is to move within a triangle “text interpretation-discussion or dialogue-meditation.” It should be added that not only Husserl, Scheler or Buber, but also Meister Eckhart fall within his horizon of interpretations.

The most significant achievements of Norkus, who started his career from phenomenological studies, were associated with the analysis of social theories (Norkus 2000). Previously he was concerned with the philosophy of history (Norkus 1996). Doubtless the phenomenological experience helped to shape his open attitude towards various disciplines. Jonkus, on the contrary, began his scientific activity with the analysis of scholastic logic and later turned to research on Husserl and Eugen Fink. He is also sympathetic to phenomenology in Spain (José Ortega y Gasset).

Šaulauskas does not restrict himself to one – i.e., the hermeneutical – tradition; he confronts the latter with analytic philosophy. He also directs his attention to the information society, in this way benefiting not only analytic philosophy and sociology, but hermeneutics well. Pučiliauskaitė in her dissertation analyzed aspects of L. Wittgenstein works following the example of Šaulauskas.

Žukauskaitė steps beyond the phenomenological tradition in the other direction. After analyzing Heidegger from the post-phenomenological standpoint in her dissertation and first book (Žukauskaitė 2001), in her second book (Žukauskaitė 2005) and later publications she turns to the interpretation of contemporary cultural phenomena (in a broad sense). Similarly, Mickevičius, in his dissertation and book (Mickevičius 2004), analyzes Nietzsche from post-phenomenological perspectives (J. Deleuze, J. Derrida). Bacevičiūtė, in her dissertation about Husserl’s conception of time, also deals with post-phenomenologists.

Rubavičius tries to do what Gadamer and Derrida failed to achieve, that is, to find a common denominator for hermeneutics and deconstruction. It is most interesting that he draws his insights from poetry. By working on two fronts – poetry²¹ and philosophy (Rubavičius 2003) – he develops a philosophical essayistic, in this way continuing the work of Heidegger and Šliogeris. Likewise,

¹⁹ Books by Arūnas Sverdiolas: (Sverdiolas 1996, 2002, 2003, 2006a, 2006b).

²⁰ The main articles on phenomenology of T. Sodeika: (Sodeika 1979, 1980a, 1980b, 1981a, 1981b, 1981c).

²¹ V. Rubavičius has published six books of poetry.

Kačerauskas, in his dissertation and monograph (Kačerauskas 2006b), develops philosophical poetics as a creative and open view, which originated in ancient philosophy (Aristotle), existential phenomenology, and hermeneutics. In addition to his published novel (Kačerauskas 2006a), he pursues philosophical research in the field of cultural phenomenology (Kačerauskas 2006, Kačerauskas 2007, Kačerauskas 2008). According to him, culture is an existential project, where fiction and reality participate in a human creation. Thus, while developing the phenomenological tradition, Kačerauskas remains a disciple of the Lithuanian (Šliogeris') school of phenomenology. Another follower of Šliogeris, Gutauskas, in his articles and dissertation examines the philosophy of dialogue and its relation to hermeneutics.

Milerius, who dedicated his dissertation to the development of Husserl's slogan "Zu den Sachen selbst," has recently turned his attention to the phenomenology of city and art, especially cinema. This direction of research is also close to Gelūnas, who is a painter as well as a practicing phenomenologist. After having spent two years in Japan he is open to innovations not only in art and thought, but in the intersection of Western and Eastern civilizations.

Mažeikis, who dedicated his second monograph (Mažeikis 2004) to philosophical anthropology, is interested in contemporary culture (especially religion). Just as Heidegger did not feel isolated in Freiburg, Mažeikis does not feel isolated from the pulse of phenomenology at large and in Lithuania by having chosen a provincial (Šiauliai) university: he is an initiator of and participant in many philosophical events. Religious phenomenology is investigated by Šerpytytė and Dubnikas. The second dissertation and the most recent monograph (Šerpytytė 2007) by Šerpytytė are studies of nihilism, to which Heidegger devoted much of his attention. By concentrating her attention on existential problems, Šerpytytė develops the ties between philosophy and literature. Dubnikas investigates existential and hermeneutical theology. He is active in supporting phenomenology in the University of Vilnius²². Dubnikas' disciple, Mindaugas Briedis (born 1977), in his dissertation and articles, investigates the phenomenology of religion from the perspective of Tillich's thinking (Briedis 2007a; Briedis 2007b).

The professor of literature, Viktorija Daujotytė-Pakerienė (born 1945), has written two books in the spirit of phenomenology: *Philosophy of Literature* (2001) and *Phenomenology of Literature* (2003). These books not only correspond to the dominant direction of Lithuanian phenomenology, they also extend the latter by virtue of introducing motives from Lithuanian literature and by their poetic style of philosophizing.

Baranova is also close to poetic philosophy, as inaugurated by Heidegger. Similar to Šliogeris, Daujotytė-Pakerienė, Šerpytytė, Rubavičius, and Kačerauskas, the first female professor of philosophy in

²² K. Dubnikas is the dean of Faculty of Philosophy at Vilnius University.

Lithuania has been trying to express existential concerns by searching for the ties between poetry and philosophy (Baranova 2006).

Finally we should mention a couple of other phenomenologists who were born outside Lithuania but despite this have joined the company of Lithuanian philosophers, as witnessed by their presence at Lithuanian conferences and symposiums and their contributions to Lithuanian journals. These thinkers are an important source of new creative impulses for Lithuanian philosophy, both in regard to its age-old tradition and in its present increasingly dynamic state. *Tatjana Ščicova* (born 1970) focuses on the fundamental components of human co-existence (birth, death, the differences of gender and age) in her work on the phenomenology of inter-subjectivity (Щитцова 2006). *Andrei Laurukhin* (born 1971) reflects on phenomenology as a practical philosophy (Laurukhin 2005).

Conclusion

The dominant concern of phenomenologists in Lithuania is the contact between poetry and philosophy, a concern that requires a broader perspective on the conception of philosophical creation. It also attests to the creativity of phenomenology, and thereby the maturity and the dynamism of Lithuanian philosophy. By focusing on “Phenomenology in Lithuania” we are able to review the work of philosophers in emigration as well as that of philosophers who have come to Lithuania in order to be involved in phenomenology here. This is quite in keeping with our 500 year-old tradition of openness and internationality. Only in such an environment can the Other (who has departed or arrived) become a factor of philosophical creativity.

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