

Vladimir Bibikhin's Phenomenology and the Paradox of the Limits of Human Activity in Philosophy

Ilya Pavlov, NRU HSE (Moscow)

Dear colleagues, it is a great honor for me to have the opportunity to speak on this conference on the bounds of philosophical rationality. In my talk I shall try to reveal new approach to this classical problem. The approach can be based on the works of Russian phenomenologist Vladimir Bibikhin.

The majority of Bibikhin's works which are available for us now are published versions of his lectures, which Bibikhin delivered at Lomonosov Moscow State University as well as at other Moscow universities from nineteen eighty-nine right up to his death in the year two thousand and four. Before his philosophical career as a lecturer Bibikhin worked as a translator in Russian Academy of the Sciences and also as a personal secretary of the last philosopher of Russian "Silver age" Alexey Losev.

The intellectual heritage of Vladimir Bibikhin is still poorly studied. The main reason of this state of affairs is the prejudice that Bibikhin is only translator of Heidegger's texts or his imitator. Even if the researcher opens Bibikhin's own books, he or she may think that they are no more than strange poetical thoughts, which do not correspond to any serious problems of philosophy of science or analytic philosophy. I consider, that attentive research of Binikhin's philosophy can refute such opinion. In my report I shall demonstrate that Vladimir Bibikhin's phenomenological project is really fruitful for the question of the limits of philosophical rationality.

Today the philosophers equate philosophical rationality to some structures of human thinking and nobody considers philosophy to be, for example, some kind of the eternal ideas in the God's mind. So, the limits of philosophical rationality can be understood as the limits of human activity in philosophy. But precisely the theme of human activity in philosophy is the key one for the Bibikhin's phenomenology.

Vladimir Bibikhin presents his own view of phenomenological method — especially in the lectures on the concept of energy. Bibikhin emphasizes that this specific method is unavailability of any method, because phenomenology is the turn to the things themselves. Of course, this turn is understood by Bibikhin not in husserlian, but in heideggerian ontological sense of "phenomenon". In this case phenomenology (which is a synonym for philosophy, according Bibikhin) becomes the ongoing existential work of philosopher on detection of something which is not constructed by the human¹. So, human activity in philosophy is permanent searching of its own limits.

How philosopher can find these limits? According to Ludwig Wittgenstein's "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus", philosophical discovery of these limits is metaphysically forbidden, because for ascertaining of the limits of our thinking we should be able to think the area abroad this thinking

¹ Bibikhin, V. (2010) *Energiya* [The Energy]. Moscow, St. Thomas Institute of Philosophy, Theology and History. P. 17–23.

itself. Should we wait when something abroad the limits will speak with us and establish the limits of our rationality? In some fragments of Bibikhin's texts we can find answer "yes", and this answer belongs to "heideggerian" part of Bibikhin's thought. This part is connected with Bibikhin's hermeneutics of history and philosophy of the event worked out in heideggerian way.

But how should we "wait"? This question turns us to "wittgensteinian" element of Bibikhin's philosophy. Bibikhin's criticism of methodology does not make us to accept antimethodologism, which is mere one of bad methods². Understanding of our distance from the area transcendent to our thinking forces us to follow the strict rules of our rationality. In his phenomenology of time Bibikhin demonstrates that mechanical time of watches and calendars does not refer to the ontological aspect of time. But the rigor of our time practices guards time's transcendence to our thinking³.

So, in Bibikhin's phenomenology we find paradoxical philosophy of the limits of human rationality. According to Bibikhin's view, our rational practices do not refer to the things themselves, that's why philosophy is permanent existential effort of reduction of human activity for detecting of something which is not constructed by human. Our rationality cannot be interpreted as method of guaranteed access to the truth. Nevertheless, we should follow to our practices of rationality, because we can not to unite with some ontological absolute and we are forced to understand our distance from transcendence.

By doing this Bibikhin is not just copying Heidegger's solution, but is trying to synthetize heideggerian metaphysics with wittgensteinian one. Unlike Heidegger, Bibikhin does not appeal us to realize the truth of the Being, which has nothing in common with the science. Any political actions such as Hitler's rise as the Fuhrer cannot provide us the truth of the Being. Bibikhin stresses that we could not deal with anything behind the borders of human being. This solution avoids political implications of Heidegger's philosophy as well as his rejection of any scientific rationality.

To sum up, Vladimir Bibikhin's view on the problem of philosophical rationality and its limits can be understood as antinomic and at the same time intellectually fruitful. On the one hand, Bibikhin postulates that philosophy should reveal thing as they are beyond the human activity. So, the aim of human activity in philosophy is to overcome its own bounds. On the other hand, this overcome can be realized only through some kind of existential experience. This experience is achieved by following modestly the strict rules of the ordinary and scientific rationality.

² Op. cit. P. 17–18.

³ Bibikhin, V. (2015) Pora (Vremiya-Bytiye) [It's Time (Time-Being)]. Saint Petersburg, Vladimir Dal. P. 161.