



Open Existence: On the Poetic Ontology of R.M. Rilke

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Abstract

The authors of the article reflect on the possibility of a non-classical ontology, in which the distinction between the immanent and the transcendental, and related to it familiar to the human mind categories of the boundary, the local and the Other, life and death, the otherworldly, etc., would be rethought. The subject of reflection is the poetic ontology embodied in the eighth “Duin Elegy” R.M. Rilke, whose images the authors consider as an independent philosophical text. The methodology of the work is the ontological hermeneutics of the event, presented in numerous works by V.V. Bibikhin and the poetic philosophy of the late M. Heidegger. The article formulates the general provisions of existential ontology, in which existence is understood not as transcendental or immanent (local or other, otherworldly or worldly), but as a transition from one to another. Reality is the border just crossed between two worlds, and the worlds themselves are abstractions that come to life only in the event of crossing the border, in an existence that goes beyond itself.

Keywords: Poetic Ontology; Poetic Philosophy; Phenomenology; Heidegger; Rilke.

1. Introduction

The subject of our thoughts is a special poetic ontology embodied in the eighth “Duin Elegy” R.M. Rilke (Jacobs, 1989; Leishman & Spender, 1939; Marchenkova, 2013). His work we consider, in this case, is precisely a philosophy expressed in a poetic word, and not as poetry with some abstract content. This is not “philosophical poetry”, namely, “poetic philosophy” as one of the forms of philosophizing (Burns, 2020; Eldridge, 2020; Saikia, 2018). Its peculiarity lies in the fact that it sees the world in the aspect of displacement - as elusive, departing, not falling within limits. Eluding definitions, escaping attempts to make it an object, not falling within the limits of understanding, certainty and connection. The poetic word describes that which disappears before our eyes, dissolves, in any attempt to describe and define. These are plots and images that express the inexpressible, disappearing, fleeting, random. They express what cannot be expressed otherwise than in words of uncertainty and optionality. A poetic ontology sees and describes a reality to which any form of categorical, abstract ontology remains blind (Hollender, 1995; Thomas, n.d.). It builds the attitude to the elusive and shifting world precisely as to the elusive and shifting, always not equal to itself – through nostalgia, longing, passion, through various forms of metaphysical craving. An abstract ontology deals with a static world, which always remains the same, equal to itself, itself identical, drawn by certain, restrictive lines. Poetic ontology, on the contrary, is interested in the world as a kind of shift, as something displaced – to part with itself, reaching for another, going off its axis and divergent at the seams (Mazis, 2019; Steinhart, 2020). This displacement can be expressed in various forms. The most common images of Rilke – die *Klage* and die *Ruhmung* – complaint, plaintive complaint, complaining voice and fame, glorification, hymn. These are the most common ontological forms of the non-identity of reality itself – lack (lack, absence, deprivation), embodied in the complaint, and excess (excess, overcrowding, going beyond), which is glorified. These are the very first (ontologically first) cases of the displacement of the world from the point of equilibrium. In the indefinite space between *Klage* and *Ruhmung*, a poetic ontology moves by touch, because only then can it move there.



1.1. Research Objective

The writers of the paper address the possibility of a non-classical ontology in which the distinction between the immanent and the transcendental and applied to the boundary categories of the human mind, the local and the other, life and death, the other-worldly, etc., will be rethought.

2. Material and Methods

Ontological intuition underlying the philosophy of R.M. Rilke is a metaphysical sense of the border passed, transcendence transcended. Exit to the vastness of limitedness, narrowness, certainty. The immanent in itself (local, earthly, object-specific) and the transcendental in itself (other, absolute, infinite) is abstract. Reality is a transition from one to another, the moment of becoming, overcoming, transforming the local into another. Only this moment, transition, transformation, overcoming. The moment of coexistence of “just” the former here and “now” the approaching other. Otherwise, that which was confirmed in the local, has become “it's own”, “sustainable”, sure, but not flickering and fading – it is again local (just abstract theoretical, not body-practical). The Other, by its very nature, trembles, slips away, is not stable (stability, in principle, is a characteristic of the “local”). Other – this is – the transition from here to another. But the true Other (in addition to the transition, as a kind of objective certainty) is hypostasis, abstraction. The genuine Other is the “other, which has become local”, or even more precisely, the “becoming here”. The reality that Rilke describes lies beyond all abstract categorical contrasts (transcendental/immanent, ideal/material, eternal/temporary), and therefore, can only be described as an event (transcendental, bursting into the immanent; ideal, embodied in the material; an instant of eternity cutting time). The method of expression and comprehension of this event is the hermeneutics of the event presented in the works of V.V. Bibikhin and late M. Heidegger (Bibikhin, 2002; Heidegger, 1991, 1993).

3. Results and Discussion

To this inconspicuous reality, Rilke gives the name “the Open” – *das Offene*. In its clearest form, this is expressed in the eighth Duin Elegy. In it, the Open is described as a special form of existence, which remains inaccessible to man, hidden from him. Rilke symbolically describes its otherness in relation to man (to our way of perceiving, to our order of conscious life) through the image of the beast (and even the “small creature”, the insect) and the image of the baby (Bergholz, 1948; Gates, 1996; Ziegfeld, 1981). Their view, their world (as they see it) is something that is completely inaccessible to us, completely different in relation to a person, to the average human form, to the consciousness of a person, to his normal, natural system.

“Outside the creature looks in all eyes,

And in front of it, the distance is wide open.

You only have eyes like traps

Blocking free exit

...Only death

We are able to see, and the beast is free” (Leishman & Spender, 1939).

The beast gazes into the Open, as if on top of death, and sees God. The gaze of a man rests on death. The open is immortality. This is God, but not as a personal, subjective certainty, but as a directing view. “The open is the direction in which the formation takes place ... for Rilke, religion and even God himself is the direction of the heart” (Scott, 1958; Simon, 1965).

The direction of the gaze is unlimited; it is the gaze into the infinite. The experience of openness in this sense is the experience of full commitment. The beast gives itself without a trace because it gives itself to the Open - it requires the whole being at once, all life at once. Conversion, the orientation of a person is fundamentally limited, and therefore a person is not capable of full bestowal – he gives only a part of himself – measures, divides, distinguishes. Human existence is separateness. Everything that a person does, he does with objects that are isolated from the general body of the world (that is, the human consciousness first isolates and separates them from the body of the world). And a person separates himself, limits to the framework of a certain consciousness, personality (“himself”), outlook, worldview,



etc., and, in the end, closes in himself, suffocates in isolation of himself. This is what Rilke describes as a gaze “resting on death”.

In this case, death is a symbol of the boundary of individuality (that is, the limitations of individual existence in general). The man’s gaze is turned, turned inside out, unnaturally turned so that he looks within the limits of “himself”.

“Brings us the news outside

Bestial only face. Baby we

Flip to the back

He saw appearance, not depth,

So frank in the bestial face

Free from death... ” (Leishman & Spender, 1939).

The limitations of separate, individual existence (“oneself”, one’s will, one’s mind, one’s memory, etc.) Rilke describes as “reverseness”, the reverse order (“*rückwärts Gestaltung*”) is unnatural, violent, disturbed. What seems to us natural, consistent with our nature, our essence, is, in fact, forcibly, unnatural, against nature and essence. Reality is not given to man as it is, we perceive it as if turned inside out – in false statics and objective certainty, as an object of possession, appropriation. In the world (in the way we perceive it) a person is not in place, in discord, in restlessness, unlike “small creatures”, which remain in unity with the world.

"O quiet bliss of a small creature,

Not leaving the native bosom.

A happy mosquito jumps inside

His meeting wedding. The bosom is everything” (Leishman & Spender, 1939).

Separation, isolation, the certainty of oneself (appropriation, action, cognition) are unnatural, the opposite of reality. From this "Self", from this certainty and limitation, our entire human world is built. Rilke just calls it “*Die Welt*”, referring to the Spatio-temporal world, tailored by our restrictive standards, subordinate to our limited view. This is a world in which there is a separate "I", acting, cognizing, transforming the surrounding reality. Every step, every movement in this world is determined by death, that is, by a certain limit, a boundary. This means, in fact, that it has a goal, a meaning, is a step-in development or a step along some path, is embedded in a chain of causal relationships, relationships and dependencies, belongs to someone, is associated with something, attached, is a predicate of the subject, etc. And all these certainties, which have weight and significance, are wound on “self” as a substance, on self-identity identical to itself in a variety of acts and manifestations.

Rilke contrasts this “*Die Welt*” with that in which open existence lives – “*Nirgends Ohne Nicht*” – in the translation of Mikushevich “immeasurable Nowhere”, literally “Nowhere without Nothing” that is, a non-spatial existence. That which is, but is not in any particular place.

“The world is in front of us everywhere and always

And never – immeasurable Nowhere” (Leishman & Spender, 1939).

“*Nirgends Ohne Nicht*” is a timeless and non-spatial existence. The life with which human measurements are taken is defining, limiting, discriminating and separating. The Open – that which is, is realized and gives itself completely and immediately. «*Die Welt*» – is the world, lined with the metered human eye. It cannot be accommodated; the Open will not fit into it. “*Nirgends Ohne Nicht*” is that which corresponds to the scope of the Open, and it’s the extremely wide gesture. This is the place (non-place) and time (non-time) in which the Open can only take place. In which it can be, without location and duration, without occupying any specific space and time. In which existence is possible, which does not become either an object or a subject. Pure, uncontrollable, belonging to nobody and nothing, not attached to anything, not connected with lust, affection, property, etc.

“... an immense Nowhere,

Which you breathe inadvertently

And you always know, and you will not crave” (Leishman & Spender, 1939).

Knowing about it is unlimited knowledge of something that is more or less, to which there is a path, method, etc. – this is the knowledge of the Whole, which is given all at once, unfolding at one point in space and in one instant of time.

4. Summary

In open existence, the experience is not based on memory, but on instant recognition, always new. Any experience is a new meeting, not related to the former. In the eighth elegy, the idea is concluded that an individual, separate (“closed”) consciousness twists around the phenomenon of memory (that is, in our case, memory, the experience of memory, since we are talking about the phenomenology of consciousness).

“But even in a sensitive, warm beast hidden

Great, hard care.

And with him, memory is inseparable

Overcoming often us.

Who knows if the goal was once

Much closer, more affectionate, or rather.

Here is the distance, and there is breathing... (Leishman & Spender, 1939)”.

Fullness is unattainable for a mortal, limited consciousness. It is given all at once, without separation and without distinction. It is impossible to measure, earn and deserve. It is impossible to seize, get and hold it. The capturing and holding grip on are limiting. We can receive, hold, possess and appropriate for ourselves only certain objects. Completeness cannot be an object, since it has no certainty, borders (nothing is limited), outlines. Unlimited, unsupervised Completeness responds in a limited and overseeing consciousness as “*Schwermut*” (melancholy), longing for unity, overwhelming (“*uberwaltigen*”) memory of some beginningless, timeless moment of tightness and closeness. This is a memory of an instant of fullness and unity, which cannot be held and which in the next instant becomes a memory. Or vice versa – a premonition of impending fullness, but not yet become. The one that comes in the next instant. One instant is fullness (closeness), and the other is already yearning for fullness, a memory of it or a vague presentiment. Only this instant of unity, dissolution in general, the instant of the present, the moment of recklessness, unconsciousness possesses genuine reality. The other following him only follow him. Along with this non-cooling trace, a series, sequence, connection, distance, distinction, isolation, individuality arise. The instant following the present already falls away from the whole and begins to weave the fabric of an illusory (individual, separate) existence. Based on the phenomenon of memory, it establishes a false connection of one moment with another, weaving from them an imaginary sequence of experience, held together by self-consciousness. From this (phenomenologically, not empirically), a separate personality arises, with its imaginary magnitude, meaning, actions, knowledge, etc. All this at the base is only the severity of longing and foreboding. By remembering, with its viscous, dominating and enslaving force, everything that happens is wound up, sticks (sticks, becomes attached) and a lump of limited, closed existence – mortal “I” forms. This limited life consists in the accumulation of “oneself” – knowledge, meaning, experience, etc., appropriation and possession of the finite things of the world (Rilke’s *die Welt*). Remembering is the energy of appropriation and cognition (through remembering, leaving everything in oneself as “one’s own”).

In open existence, binding energy, viscosity (*Die Erinnerung and anhaftig*) does not work. Nothing is isolated in separate objectivity and is not associated with one another. But everything dissolves in everything, losing its outlines and independence. This is not an indirect connection, but direct mutual affiliation, mutual dissolution, merging. Moments do not bind to each other in a sequential chain but dissolve one into the other. After one instant, another arises, not because one follows the other, but because the first disappears in the second, dissolves in it, becomes identified with it. This moment of mutual dissolution and disappearance is an event of the present. Everything is experienced in him and does not remain, does not accumulate in the static, substantial definiteness of the “I”. Coming – at the same moment,

leaves. Surviving – without attachment, possession and appropriation. In a single movement is accepted and surrendered. In every moment there is a complete return of everything – to everything. Every moment is a dissolution as a whole, becoming and disappearing in itself in its entirety. Death and resurrection in one moment.

Then every moment will begin a new existence, and not continue the previous one. A look into the open is a look that does not look back. He always “*hinausstarren*” - gazes outwardly (beyond himself – the past), perceives what is coming, belongs to the future. The “closeness” of this view does not mean focus on any particular subject. By contrast, this view involved in the fullness of an uncertain future. Only such a future – absolutely unpredictable, inconspicuous, unpredictable – is in the full sense of the Future. The unnatural, inside-out human gaze presents the future as something definite, as the next item on the timeline. The real future (completely different) remains closed to him. He does not break out, remains within himself. For the looking back, there is only him, and there is no other, and therefore there is only the past, but there is no future (the future, which is laid on the timeline and has become “ours”, is also the past). The past, which this look looks back at, revolves around "oneself", one's own self.

"But being for the beast is infinite

And clean as the space in front of him.

He lives without looking at himself.

Where we only see the future

He sees everything and himself,

Forever healed in everything” (Leishman & Spender, 1939).

What Mikushevich says is “without looking at himself”, literally – “*ohne Blick auf seinen Zustand*” – without looking at “its condition”. “*Seine Zustand*” - its (human) state in the most general sense, the totality of all individual psychological states that make up the empirical "I", are woven into the "Me" and belonging to the "Self" (as a kind of stable, high-quality state of affairs). A look into the open is always a departure from "oneself", from one's state, from "*seine Zustand*". The word “future” does not matter for someone who looks into the open. For him, everything is the future; there are no other times. He does not look back at the past, but the present – this is the future, the future has already come.

The movement in the open is performed as if each time anew, each step is a turn, a new movement, without repeating or continuing the previous ones, without establishing a connection with it, in every movement - a breakdown to infinity. Open existence knows no paths or roads. Coming out of nowhere, it goes nowhere, without creating a sequence of steps and decisions.

5. Conclusions

Thus, we can conclude that the possibility of poetic phenomenological ontology lies in the image of open existence described by Rilke in the eighth elegy. Its peculiarity will be that it describes a reality that is beyond the boundaries of the oppositions customary for our mind – local and other, temporary and eternal, individual and universal, illusory and genuine, etc. And most importantly, beyond the categories of transcendental and immanent. The Open does not know the difference between life and death, and if death is the boundary between one and the other, then in open existence, this boundary has always been overcome.

5.1. Contribution

Such an ontology, according to the authors, requires a different, unsubstantial understanding of experience. Experience as contact with reality is an experience of an instantly overcoming the boundary; it does not accumulate and does not remain with those who experience it. The past does not matter, does not bind to the present and does not define it. Each instant of existence is a way out of one infinity to another, from the uncertainty of the present to the unknownness of the future. Following Rilke, the authors call such an existence “the Open”.

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