

Jonas Vanbrabant (ed.)  
Philosophers on the Russian Aggression in Ukraine

Edited by  
Hans Rainer Sepp

## Editorial Board

Suzi Adams · Adelaide | Babette Babich · New York | Kimberly Baltzer-Jaray · Waterloo, Ontario | Damir Barbarić · Zagreb | Marcus Brainard · London | Martin Cajthaml · Olomouc | Mauro Carbone · Lyon | Chan Fai Cheung · Hong Kong | Cristian Ciocan · București | Ion Copoeru · Cluj-Napoca | Renato Cristin · Trieste | Eddo Evink · Groningen | Matthias Flatscher · Wien | Jean-Christophe Goddard · Toulouse | Andrzej Gniazdowski · Warszawa | Ludger Hagedorn · Wien | Seongha Hong · Jeollabukdo | René Kaufmann · Dresden | Vakhtang Kebuladze · Kyjiw | Dean Komel · Ljubljana | Pavlos Kontos · Patras | Kwok-ying Lau · Hong Kong | Mette Lebeck · Maynooth | Nam-In Lee · Seoul | Monika Małek · Wrocław | Balázs Mezei · Budapest | Viktor Molchanov · Moskwa | Liangkang Ni · Guangzhou | Cathrin Nielsen · Frankfurt am Main | Ashraf Noor · Jerusalem | Karel Novotný · Praha | Markus Ophälders · Verona | Luis Román Rabanaque · Buenos Aires | Rosemary Rizo-Patrón de Lerner · Lima | Kiyoshi Sakai · Tokyo | Javier San Martín · Madrid | Hilmar Schmiedl-Neuburg · Boston | Alexander Schnell · Paris | Marcia Schuback · Stockholm | Agustín Serrano de Haro · Madrid | Tatiana Shchytsova · Vilnius | Olga Shparaga · Minsk | Michael Staudigl · Wien | Georg Stenger · Wien | Silvia Stoller · Wien | Ananta Sukla · Cuttack | Toru Tani · Kyoto | Detlef Thiel · Wiesbaden | Lubica Ucnik · Perth | Pol Vandeveld · Milwaukee | Chung-chi Yu · Kaohsiung | Antonio Zirion · México City – Morelia.

The *libri nigri* series is edited at the Central-European Institute of Philosophy, Prague.  
[www.sif-praha.cz](http://www.sif-praha.cz)

# Philosophers on the Russian Aggression in Ukraine

Edited by  
Jonas Vanbrabant

Verlag Traugott Bautz GmbH

*Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek*

Die deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation  
in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie.  
Detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet abrufbar über  
<http://dnb.ddb.de>

Verlag Traugott Bautz GmbH

D-99734 Nordhausen 2023

Gedruckt auf säurefreiem, alterungsbeständigem Papier

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Printed in Germany

ISBN 978-3-95948-602-6

# Table of Contents

<b>FOREWORD</b>	7
Jonas Vanbrabant	
<b>PARRHESIASTIC ESSAYS</b>	
Living without Ground	13
Natalia Artemenko	
A Journalist's Gaze	35
Helena Cazaerck	
Ontology of Insecurity during War	43
Zura Gvenetadze	
Towards an Ontology of the Caesura	53
Mikhail Minakov	
War at the End of the End of History	67
Václav Němec	
The Ukrainian Crisis and Us	77
Martin Palouš	
Overcoming Censorship	89
Ekaterina Shashlova & Katerina Stecenko	
Aggression Regression	103
Georgios Tsagdis	
Ukraine's Scourge	111
Paul Willemarck	
<b>ABOUT THE AUTHORS</b>	121

Hey, you star! Have you reached Ukraine?  
Do dark eyes scour the blue sky for you?  
Or don't they care?  
May they sleep if they don't.  
May they know nothing of my fate.  
- *Taras Shevchenko* (translated by *Alexander Motyl*)

Doves are chatting over the city.  
About what, I don't know. About interesting things.  
About that cathedral. About humanity. About the war.  
About the world, about heaven faraway.  
Or perhaps one says to his beloved: "Well,  
On my far flight, did you miss me?"  
- *Lina Kostenko* (translated with various resources)

# Foreword

*Jonas Vanbrabant*

The Russian aggression in Ukraine, culminated in its invasion on 24 February 2022, has left friend nor foe untouched and continues to shock the international philosophical community. In order to offer a wide range of perspectives on this predicament that affects each and every one of us, the present volume brings together ten philosophers – from France to Georgia, from students to professionals and professors – who shed different lights on the war. They have been asked to express themselves parrhesiastically, in other words to speak boldly, putting themselves on the line, from their personal aim at the truth and for the common good, therefore in the form of essays rather than standard scientific articles.

Most of these texts have (partly) already been published elsewhere. In fact, this project flows from the Belgian journal of philosophy *De Uil van Minerva*, which – led by editor-in-chief Henk Vandaele and with the cooperation of myself and many others – undertook the same exercise right after the invasion. In the second issue of that year's volume 35, we find four authors featured here again: Natalia Artemenko, who now added a second part to her essay published there; Ekaterina Shashlova, with an entirely new text in collaboration with Katerina Stecenko; Georgios Tsagdis, who's essay could remain unchanged; and Paul Willemarck, now with a revised and expanded version of his text. As those excellent contributions have only appeared in Dutch, and these authors' relevance has only increased after one year of war, it is more

than logical that with this bundle, they are being offered a more international forum. In addition, five accompanying authors are welcomed here. First of all Mikhail Minakov, with a reprint of his contribution to *Kotivõ. The Almanac of Philosophical Essays* based on his keynote speech delivered on 25 August 2022 in Käsnu as part of the XVII Annual Estonian Philosophy Conference. Furthermore, thanks to Lenka Karfíková's recommendation, Václav Němec and Martin Palouš, with translated essays going back to April 2022, published in the independent Czech newspaper *Deník N* respectively the independent Czech internet magazine *Forum 24* (here with a newly added second part on Patočka). Finally, we welcome Helena Cazaerck and Zura Gvenetadze, who contribute with previously unpublished essays written in the first half of 2023.

In sum, this special volume of the *libri nigri* series – founded by Hans Rainer Sepp within the Central European Institute of Philosophy in Prague – unites all these invaluable insightful contributions under one free roof. The essays are arranged in alphabetical order by the authors' surnames, and can be read in the order of personal preference.

My point of view at the heart of this philosophizing is phenomenological. In the *first instance*, the horrible situation in Ukraine, painfully reminiscent of the Great War's senseless artillery and trench fights in Flanders and Northern France, is not about that nation across from Russia and NATO, nor of geopolitical strategies or defensive buffer zones, not even of different thinking or contested values, let alone of "denazification". However paramount all this may seem, as I put it in my biography of Rudolf Boehm, phenomenologically it does not come close to the felt drama called war: that now..., or now..., or now some bomb can strike that literally and figuratively overthrows your life, irrevocably. Regarding human affectivity, where a lethal shot comes from is secondary to its lethality: each victim is a victim. First and foremost, the unfolding Russian-Ukrainian emergency is about sensitive bodies being torn apart, about the continuous annihilation of everyday life-worlds, thus in Hans Rainer Sepp's oikological terms about the structural undermining of those essential places, our body and our world, wherein human life resides. And in its wake about the inner scars this leaves behind, for example that even decades

from now, witnesses will vividly remember the smell of charred corpses, the view of dead relatives and so many other sad experiences being imprinted into their shook-up minds today, possibly resulting in long, eventually irretraceable chains of intergenerational trauma in turn.

Most certainly, however, the roots and contexts of this misery must be questioned, too. Let us recall Henk Vandaele's political-philosophical preface in the aforementioned volume of *De Uil van Minerva*. As he put it, Putin – whose Russia combines the worst of both the tsarist and the Soviet eras – is caught in the old zero-sum game in which a country is believed to either be sovereign or colonised, reinforcing Russia's sovereignty and repelling feared EU or NATO colonisation by colonising neighbouring countries in advance, today Ukraine. Yet, at least as far as the European Union is concerned, this dichotomy of colony-sovereignty doesn't correspond to reality. Drawing on Luuk van Middelaar's *The Passage to Europe. How a Continent Became a Union* (2013) as well as Etienne Balibar's *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (2004), Vandaele argues that the Union is characterized by intermediarity, by in-betweenness. According to Middelaar, although the initial European dream was to eventually do away with nation states through the creation of independent supranational institutions such as the European Commission, in the end, between this inner and outer sphere the plan resulted in mediating institutions such as the European Council, where national government leaders meet to seek supranational solutions in democratic consultation: its participants, key to the Union itself, wear many hats at once, exemplary of the continuum of interests at the stake, at least illustrating that this network transcends the form of sovereign empire or colonised nations. In Balibar's terms, this intermediarity is transnational: a fluid democratic politics that cooperatively seeks to bridge differences between classes, peoples, communities, contrary to nation states and empires neither erasing them, nor looking for assumed origins (which Putin, for the grand myth of Russia, believes to have found in Kyiv). In any case, Vandaele rightly adds that the European Union still struggles with democracy, in the face of the uprising of new-fangled nationalists but also in view of the transparency of its supranational institutions, to name just that. Regarding the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization – in which the Union is interwoven mainly with the United Kingdom and the dominant United States, meanwhile in line with this triad openly flirting with Ukraine – it must be criticised that the tactical agenda and the terms and conditions for Ukraine behind the Organization’s astronomical military support and delivery of arms remain unclear and thus questionable, yet justified in itself to *counter* the intolerable Russian aggression towards the Ukrainian peoples.

Whatever the outcome may be, and which meaning the different actors will attribute to it philosophically, politically, economically and culturally, as always the losers and losses will overshadow what is won. This, of course, has already become clear. For one, with its propaganda machine the Russian state exhibits a blatant lack of sincerity, coming up with silly stories about the reason for the “special military operation” being the – mind, nazi-like – “denazification” of a state that would – and, I agree, should – promote queer marriages whose president is of Jewish decent: funny combination. Apropos “special”: the carried out “military operation” and the highly flammable, semi-indirect and in part hypocrite war between eastern and western countries the Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered, is indeed “special” in that – albeit phenomenologically being a war with subsequent crimes no doubt – it is most uncertain whether Putin and his gang, ignoring the international rules of warfare (*jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* declared in the Geneva Conventions), could even, both legally and practically, be put to justice at the International Criminal Court in The Hague at all, if only because the Russian Federation, the United States as well as Ukraine aren’t State Parties to its founding Rome Statute treaty. Another regrettable and absurd dimension of the Russian-Ukrainian predicament, alas common to such tragedies (in the proper sense of the word), is the polarisation and mutual hate the war stirs up. Accordingly, formerly fluid demarcations between the Russian and Ukrainian cultures, ironically symbolised in president Zelenskyy having Russian and indeed not Ukrainian as his mother tongue, are artificially being tightened and fixed, and partly invented whatsoever. Both countries and their cultural organisations are taking far-reaching measures in order to avoid contact between the supposed Self and the envisaged Other, as if natural cross-fertilisation were inherently negative. Instead

## Foreword

of shutting out all that is Russian, to the point of refusing to take part in international events – such as this project, as a matter of fact – where Russians are also present, wouldn't it rather benefit Ukraine (*and* Russian culture, of course exceeding the Russian Federation) to welcome those neighbours – a desirable and I believe significant part of the population, despite all the state-induced lies and fear – who unambiguously support the Ukrainian cause and feel groundless in what used to be home? In doing so, the Russian brain drain could turn into a brain gain for Ukraine, for example. As the history of the phenomenological tradition has shown, the welcoming of German philosophers in the wake of the world wars – as with Husserl himself indeed not limited to original German nationals per se – couldn't have been more beneficial for 'Eurasian' culture and far beyond.

In that sense, this book's coming together is one step to a human future.

1 May 2023, Prague



# Living without Ground

*Natalia Artemenko*

Part one (written spring 2022)

We live without feeling the country beneath our feet  
- *Osip Mandelshtam*

“We live without feeling the country beneath our feet” is a poem Mandelshtam wrote in November 1933. I took it as an epigraph for this essay, since it truly reflects my state in the here and now. As Mamardashvili pointed out, historical time does not coincide with chronological time in reality, and although something which lingered on for a few decades in chronological time might currently seem long gone to us, it is actually happening at this very moment. So I feel that, in a way, I am present at the same historical point, at the very same point of historical time in which Mandelshtam created these lines of what became the most famous poem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in.

The question I have been asking myself since 24 February 2022 is: “At what point have we lost our natural birth right dignity so that now we need such tragic attempts to regain it?”

It is well-understood that there are no *external* conflicts, since all external conflicts affect the fate of every human being. Whenever we want to prove our self-style, some sort of our certain specialness, it’s always a matter of a human value of specialness – not for Europe, not for Ukraine, not for Russia, not for America, but for every person. What does it take to remain human in

an inhuman era, and where are the standpoints in this inhuman era when you are being treated as a human body and not as a personality of a unique value? This is a question I never stop asking myself.

In the morning of February 24, I was faced with the fact that not only my country had unleashed a shameful war with another country. And since that very day, too, I was no longer allowed to call things by their proper names, as from then I was obliged to substitute the word 'war' with the expression 'special operation'. A couple of weeks passed, and by this time anyone could get a prison sentence for just mentioning the war. Calling a war 'war' came to be considered 'spreading fake information' by the official authorities. Such linguistic substitution caused me to feel some unprecedented resistance within myself. At the beginning March, I took part in two rallies in St. Petersburg and chanted 'No to war!' along with many others. But gradually, Putin's regime 'tightened the screws' to such an extent that any one-man protest, any public speech, rallies in particular, condemning governmental actions started to be considered a criminal offence. They filled our throats with hot resin...

Let us imagine the following scenario. A Soviet man living, say, in 1976 invents a time machine which transports him to 7 March 2022. The very first thing he sees out there in the street is a girl holding up a sign declaring 'Peace to the world!' with Picasso's white dove painted on it. At that moment a policeman pounces on her, twists her arms and tramples the sign. The Soviet man hurries back to his 1976. There in complete numbness he watches a banner declaring 'Peace to the world!' with Picasso's white dove painted on it, unfurled in the very heart of Moscow, directly opposite the Kremlin. He recalls drawing this dove many times in art classes in nursery and primary school, taking part in May Day parades showing how determined Soviet working people were to devote themselves entirely to the struggle for peace. Could this Soviet man of 1976 ever imagine that in 2022 he would face a prison sentence for carrying the sign declaring 'Peace to the world?'...

Thus, what kind of historical events are unfolding before our eyes? Russian philosopher Bibikhin indicates two polar aspects of time: mechanical time and

time-event. Such antithesis, by all means, is not a novelty. According to Bibikhin it goes back to Aristotelian attempts to resolve the aporia of time perceived as a measure of movement, set by the Eleatics. The conceptual innovation brought up by Bibikhin lies in introducing *an aprioristic perfect*, i.e. grasping the event as ‘sudden and already-present’. Namely as something that, on the one hand, is anticipatory, and on the other hand, happens suddenly, unexpectedly, turning out to be already-given and at the same time on-going.

New times bring new chimerical ideas.  
I feel ashamed for future: a new creed,  
a holy one, may once again bereave us  
of all that’s sacred to our hearts indeed!  
- *Michelangelo*

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the era that has come to be called ‘modernity’, the radical critique of all self-evidences, metaphysics, religion, tradition, all conventions, reached its limit, focusing on the very subject it is carried out by. Thus, its irrational origins came to the surface. However, since Kantian critical philosophy was already built as a critique of reason, i.e. of the very tool it is carried out with, it allows us to say that modernism, with its rebellious impulse, became the very culmination of the development of the new-European type of rationality. Yet, being its high point, it marks not only its climax, but its crisis as well. The pathos of modernism stands for the pathos of creativity, originality, fear of repeating. Herein, rationalistic subjectivism turns into irrational individualism, the assertion of the subject’s natural rights turns into the existential experiencing of his ‘here and now’. Modernism is accompanied by liberalization, democratization, emancipation, elimination of any ritual and traditional inequalities, as well as by restoration of the rights of human nature, desires that are always individual and unique. Yet constituting the individual simultaneously leads to his erasing. Freudian psychoanalysis is a perfect example of such duality: proclaiming that there can be no criterion for ‘normality’, it asserts the triumph of the unique personality, albeit, at the same time, essentially perceiving it as a set of symptoms.

Contradictoriness of the considered era might also lie in the fact that although we witness extreme liberalization, establishing the principle of tolerance as well as a frantic revolutionary impulse, we also see that what came to be called totalitarianism develops along with it and it as a reaction to it. And if a thesis about the death of God posed by Nietzsche, evidence of total critique and total rebellion, is considered the motto and origin of modernism, then totalitarianism should be seen as a certain attempt of ‘god-building’, of constructing a new divinity, transferred to the human context, to the immanent context. In this respect, the craving for constructing a totalitarian utopia, inherent of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is no less a result and a sign of modernism than a craving for a total revolution.

What has come to be called ‘postmodernism’ cannot be considered the exact opposite of modernism. Rather, its very name indicates that we are talking about a successor to modernism, its outcome, which repels from it and depends on it. It seems no coincidence that the word ‘postmodernism’, which is as well being used in a number of other senses, eventually became the designation of the cultural situation of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: not only it historically designates, but also reflects, one might say, the very essence of the ongoing processes. Formally chronological, as it seems, the name of the era coming ‘after the era of modernism’ reveals its essential *post-historicity*. Or, perhaps, not so much post-historicity as its postponement to the future in relation to the present: another strange temporal paradox of being *after that what is now*.

The arrival of postmodernism is associated with the famous motto of ‘cross the border, close the gap’. Yet, border crossing has actually already been carried out by modernism. The sad essence of the new era lies precisely in the fact that there is *nothing more to cross*. Or, perhaps, it represents the *realization* of the fact that there is nothing more to cross, and that what seemed to be a border, definite and distinct, does no longer exist.

Let us recall the regularity with which modernity varied on the theme of ‘the final’; perseverance decadent moods were provoked and the era of ‘the declines’ was proclaimed in various ways: of religion (Nietzsche), metaphysics

## Living without Ground

(Heidegger), culture (Spengler), civilization (Toynbee), of history (Guardini, Rorty). It seems that all the declines have taken place ...

Each question was answered.  
When you see everything, you don't see a thing.  
Turned into a matrix of newspapers  
Your meek brains.  
- Vladimir Lifshitz

At this stage, the world entered a new phase: the phase of *post-truth*, or the phase of the tactics of *privatization of meanings*, generated by the deepest ignorance, common to today's man in the area of his own tradition and by obliterated perception caused by automatism and habit. A man of the present day – as it was foreseen by Nietzsche – is under the oppressive influence of an initially-ruined semantic context, which self-confidently defines itself as a world of facts and common sense. Truth gets oppressed within the context of modern universities, the press, politics, business, if it is present there at all. Thus a man must get out of this context, at least for a while, in order to reveal himself to himself. As a result, we are now witnessing complete irresponsibility as well as a new phenomenon of privatization of meaning: any desired meaning is attributed to any concept, and if you dare to doubt such truth, you will become a target for pinpoint missile strikes.

In our case of post-historicity, *post-truth* can be perceived as a phenomenon of defocusing of attention, which makes it hard for any information consumer to tell the truth from lies in our inordinately accelerated information flows. Post-truth is a kind of 'truth' which devalues factuality and endows emotional resonance with supreme importance. The purpose of such 'ideological truth' is to constitute the very specific optics that, in imaginary openness of information, allow for perceiving the state of things in the world. In 2016, compilers of the *Oxford English Dictionary* named "post-truth" the word of the year and defined it as follows: "An adjective relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." In other words, the reliability of the message doesn't matter as much as its effectiveness. Modern techno-

logies are capable of giving out pseudo-facts, that which is beyond the truth, thereby constructing reality. In times of post-truth, it is nearly impossible to identify the truth.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the manifestation of three main paradigms possessing great power in shaping public consciousness, namely communism, fascism, and the so-called ‘free society’. The point of communism and fascism being ‘eaten up’ by their third companion marks the beginning of a completely new situation: the beginning of the era of *pluralistic totalitarianism*. The era of ‘ideas’, the struggle for ideas, was over. Ideologemes of the new so-called ‘free society’ are chameleon ideas aimed at establishing a new world order. Therefore, a man of tradition cannot help but react negatively. For example, an idea of ‘democracy’ (which, by the way, they’ve declared the main Russian state ‘compass’ during the entire 22-year period of Putin’s rule) is simply an oxymoron, since it is clear that the ‘demos’ does not rule, but is only capable of alienating its will in favor of the ruling minorities, so that actual ruling turns into a political business for the few. As Hannah Arendt noted in her *On Revolution* (1963): “What we today call democracy is a form of government where the few rule, at least supposedly, in the interest of the many. [...] public happiness and public freedom have again become the privilege of the few.” In the situation of post-truth, these unrealistic ideas get stirred up, dispersed all over the world, and the more unrealistic they are, the more effective and the more terrible, too, they get.

The rationality that we are focused on nowadays is the so-called *gig economy*, the driving force behind neoliberalism, which should be taken to mean a new stage of capitalism, characterized by the unrestrained spread of economic logic to all cultural strata, return of emphasized utilitarian principles of choice, efficiency and profit maximization. But what is essential: neoliberalism should be perceived as an individualistic social philosophy focused primarily on a single person. Modern society is extremely atomized. And assuming that we sometimes are still capable of consolidating around old values (liberalism, humanity, freedom, the right to choose, compassion for the Other), then we rather do it out of inertia, every day more and more since such is our habitus,

the habitus of a man of the outgoing age. We also see that it aren't the ideas of humanity and philanthropy that are decisive on the big stage of the political game, but the logic of money, the logic of capitalism, which has taken the form of a gig economy. We witness that the type of capitalism has changed: the old productive capitalism has been replaced by gig capitalism. And if the first one was rooted in the idea of a long-term contract, then the second one is based on the idea of successive projects. Instead of progress, there is sporadic and extremely unstable success. This is the very alarm warning us that we are entering the area of the most complex anthropological crisis.

According to contemporary philosopher René Girard “our society's obligatory compassion authorizes new forms of cruelty.” We are shouting out our feelings, yet we turn into a society of traumatized isolated from each other. We treat vulnerability by building autonomy, not by learning to empathize. Surely everyone has a right to express their pain and to have a place to do it, but today we often don't hear each other. We are moving further and further away from the universalist perception of man and his rights (a product of the Enlightenment) and we are focusing more and more on individual groups and their needs. According to Rousseau, for example, empathy, vulnerability is exactly what makes a man a man. It is the very idea of universal vulnerability on which the economic theory of Adam Smith is based: the ability to empathize makes a man a moral being. Today we are moving further and further away from the ideas of the Enlightenment. We are still appealing to the language of these ideas, but are less and less ready to practice them...

It seems that one of the main mutations of modernity is the disappearing of the ‘complex man’. It fostered the monstrous polarization that currently exists in a society choked with hatred. Today we lack the idea of self-cultivation, and at the same time in this regard there are numerous institutions of simulation and imitation. Culture is rooted in the ‘cultivation’ of the soul, and it is known that the soul requires care and attention although it grows in and of itself, and it is very dependent on climate and weather. As noted by Pavel Florensky, culture is the environment cultivating a personality. According to Dostoevsky, the main necessity is to ‘be distinct’ by personality. Yet, culture

is also a matter of the past. It is a matter of history of mankind, and thus my own personal history too. When a man perceives his personal history amidst human history, then he gets a chance to grasp the personal meaning of his own life.

The entire 20<sup>th</sup> century passed before our very eyes under banners of quagmire and an anthropological catastrophe. Now there is a growing number of people who can no longer say to themselves “I think, therefore I am.” There is a growing number of artificial beings living their artificial, fictitious lives, iconic lives. Man is a noble illness, but not a being looking for a way for better living, speaking with Nietzsche.

The Quran, for example, says that a man was created by God for ordeals. When we want to reason about the good and the evil, discerning right from wrong, we must not forget that we are beings created for ordeals, existing only by risk and absolutely without any guarantees. The awareness of undergoing our ordeals, of our finiteness in many ways helps us to live. In this sense, Nietzsche’s inquiry about the “overhuman” became the ultimate question of the modern age. He has discerned the times when man is ready to extend his dominion over the world, and he asked himself whether a man is worthy of such mission and whether his very essence should undergo transformation. As Hölderlin pointed out, where there is danger, there grows salvation. Now, I consider the current state of affairs a situation of increased responsibility of a person for himself as a *person*, not merely some humanoid being. He who is lost in profound thought is heading for profound mistakes. Right now, we cannot afford to make profound mistakes.

Things don't get more straightforward,  
Our age puts us on trial –  
There's the square – will you go out,  
There's the square – dare you go out,  
There's the square – will you go out,  
There's the square – dare you go out  
When the right time arrives?  
- *Alexander Galich*

The war between Russia and Ukraine is criminal. The isolation of the state of Russia from the rest of the world means its collapse, its suicide.

Over the past few months, I was giving more and more thought to German-Jewish émigrés, such as for instance Marcuse and Löwith, who, in midst of the darkest times of World War II, devoted themselves to their desperate work on volumes that ‘cleared’ Hegel and Nietzsche of responsibility for Nazism. These works were by no means reduced to apologies and casuistry, they represented a massive reconstruction of great ideas that had suffered a tragic defeat in opposition to modern barbarism. After the work was over it took decades for Marcuse and Löwith’s books to gain their rightful recognition, they became the appeal to the future, devoid of any optimism. Culture and philosophy cannot deliver us from crime, war and violence (which Nietzsche warned us about, by the way), but they are capable of pointing out why their inevitability is determined by our present, embedded in our ‘normality’.

For Russian culture such merciless exposure of inhumanity and criminality of past and present Russia always remains its central mission. There was no more radical critic of the Russian state than Herzen. There was no greater ‘decolonizer’ of the Russian imperious mindset than Tolstoy. And, at the same time, the most disgusting elements of chauvinism, without which this war would not have been possible, also originated in this culture. It is obvious that the ideological dump in the mind of Brodsky, who wrote poems about Ukraine, and in the minds of those now planning the ‘denazification’ campaign, are directly interlinked: this fact is impossible to deny. Right now, the time is coming for Russian culture, as it came for German culture 80 years ago, to revise this baggage, which we can no longer accept or ‘cancel’ as an indivisible whole.

So how, then, should we perceive our sad modernity? Let’s turn to German phenomenologist Fink, who in his course of lectures “Grundphänomene des menschlichen Dasein” (1955) disclosed the following reflection: “History of philosophy itself represents the history of the continuous self-interpretation of human being-here.” Such self-interpretation, or our perception of our-

selves, arises on the ground that we are not the things that someone else is capable of cognizing. Yes, we can learn from others; their statements about existence are extremely important and instructive to us, they belong to the reality of what we ourselves experience. Yet, being-here is always and necessarily *my own* being-here.

In other words, only through perceiving *my own life* I become capable of perceiving *human life in general*. Now, such perceiving of one's own life requires perceiving 'modernity' in which we experience ourselves and which we ourselves experience: "Such modernity is not located in any particular place different from other places, but in the experienced Here, which relates to all places at the same time and has its opposite only in the absence of a place; the modernity that exists not in a specific era distinct from other eras, but in the experienced Now, which relates to all times and is opposite to timelessness. Our modernity is a life being experienced, with death as its only opposite: a life that creates its substance precisely from a dark relation to death."

How can we interpret such definition of *modernity*? From this definition it follows that Fink links modernity with the Here and Now that each of us experiences. In other words, according to Fink, in order to be modern, it is necessary to be in the experienced *Here* and *Now*. Moreover, the Here and Now are impossible without us, and they do not just exist along with other places and eras.

*Experiencing the Here and Now* – or, what is the same: *meeting with oneself and with one's contemporaries* – means to feel the absoluteness of one's *presence Here and Now*, which beyond its boundaries doesn't have other 'countries' and eras, but only has *nothingness, not-being*. Philosophically speaking, Fink gives existential perceiving to modernity, making modernity a condition for our self-understanding and understanding the absoluteness of our being in the world.

Just like Fink, Foucault – in his "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?" (1984) – warns us for perceiving modernity as a modern era coinciding with calendar dates. But how, then, should we perceive *modernity*?