

Article

Logos, Culture, and the Constitution of Philosophy: The 1910 Ern–Frank Dispute in Russia

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Abstract

This article examines the 1910 philosophical dispute between Vladimir Ern and Semyon Frank in post-1905 Russia as a dispute over the criterion of philosophy itself. The controversy arose in a field where the meaning of “Russian philosophy,” the authority of neo-Kantian *nauchnost'* [scientificity], the religious-ontological program of *Put'*, and the problem of culture had become closely interconnected. The article argues that the central issue concerned what makes a claim philosophical: participation in an antecedent order of being, or conceptual articulation, proof, and universally valid justification. Ern's intervention is presented as an attempt to reconstitute philosophy through *Logos*. For Ern, modern rationalism separates the discursive-logical from the “fullness of reason,” producing *ratio* as an autonomous and ultimately meonic form of thought; *Logos*, by contrast, names the ontological principle through which thought remains inwardly bound to being. Frank's response locates the issue in the concept of philosophy itself. While acknowledging intuition, ontologism, and the insufficiency of one-sided rationalism, he insists that every appeal to being becomes philosophical only when it enters the medium of concepts, reasons, and proof. The article argues that the controversy turns on two irreducible conditions internal to philosophy itself: thought must remain faithful to being, yet it must do so in a form through which its claims become philosophically valid. Read in this way, the Ern–Frank exchange discloses a constitutive tension between ontology and conceptual justification, and between historical embodiment and universal validity.

Keywords: Russian philosophy; Vladimir Ern; Semyon Frank; Logos and ratio; philosophy of culture



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1. Introduction

In the contested intellectual landscape of post-1905 Russia—shaped by the constitutional opening of public life after 1905, the institutional consolidation of the Moscow and Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Societies, the polemical aftermath of *Vekhi*, the emergence of *Put'* as an explicit program of national religious philosophy, and the neo-Kantian challenge later articulated by the Russian *Logos* circle—the very status of philosophy had itself become a matter of acute intellectual contestation [1] (pp. 798–802, 805–810); [2–4]. What was being contested in these years was not only whether Russia possessed a philosophy of its own, but by what ground philosophy in Russia could claim legitimacy at all: whether its authority was to be sought in scientific method, in religious-ontological depth, in national-spiritual vocation, or in some universal form irreducible to all three [1]

(pp. 797–810); [2–4]. It was within this already charged field of philosophical, cultural, and historical antagonisms that the 1910 philosophical controversy between Vladimir Ern and Semyon Frank took shape. For that reason, the controversy did not merely reopen the question of “Russian philosophy” as a local or national problem; it condensed a broader crisis concerning the ground, task, and validity of philosophy under late-imperial Russian conditions and drove that crisis toward a more exact philosophical articulation [1–4]. Ern formulates the dispute through the opposition between two cognitive principles—*ratio* and *Logos*—and insists that what is at issue is this principial opposition rather than any crude contrast between “Russia” and “the West” [5] (p. 119). Frank accepts the principial character of the problem, yet relocates its center. For him, the decisive issue lies in the concept of philosophy itself: however diverse philosophers may be in temperament, confession, or metaphysical ambition, philosophy exists only where thought gives reasons, proves, and seeks universally valid justification; in that sense, *ratio* belongs to the very idea of philosophy [6] (p. 166). The controversy therefore turns on a problem more exact than the familiar formulae of “Russian philosophy” or “faith versus reason.” Its core question concerns the ground of philosophical validity: does philosophy derive its truth from discursive and logical justification, or from thought’s participation in a prior ontological order that grants discursivity whatever truth it possesses?

Recent scholarship has reconstructed the Ern–Frank controversy through several closely related but analytically distinct problematics, and the relation among those problematics defines the point of departure of the present article. Marchenko reconstructs the 1910 exchange as a debate over the distinguishing features of Russian philosophy, and the philosophical importance of his reading lies in the way he binds that theme to the inner architecture of the two positions themselves. In his reconstruction, Ern’s conception of an original Russian philosophy is inseparable from his broader doctrine of *ratio* and *Logos*; the debate thus appears as a conflict of “fundamental mindsets,” in which Frank insists that *ratio* belongs to the very concept of philosophy, whereas Ern treats Russian thought as the privileged site at which the opposition between the objective-divine *Logos* and subjective-human *ratio* may be historically and philosophically enacted. Marchenko then extends the line of inquiry beyond 1910 by tracing the later development through which Frank’s émigré reflections on Russian philosophy move strikingly close to positions earlier associated with Ern, while Frank’s overall philosophical development retains its evolutionary continuity [7] (pp. 289–301). Mjør shifts attention from the internal structure of the debate to the broader early-twentieth-century search for a Russian philosophy as a modern practice of philosophical self-definition. His central category of “foundational texts” designates the retrospective construction, through commentary, of those authors and works in which a culture articulates its collective philosophical self-consciousness, provides itself with origin and history, and reorders its past in light of present tasks. In this account, the quest for Russian philosophy belongs to the conjunction of professionalization, nationalization, and canon formation, and it unfolds less through university instruction than through learned societies, journals, and non-university intellectual venues [8] (pp. 623–626). Meerson reconstructs the dispute at a more sharply philosophical level. In his account of the polemical encounter between *Put’* and *Logos*, the central issue already concerns the nature of philosophy itself: the *Put’* thinkers develop a realist and religious-philosophical response to neo-Kantianism by contesting the reduction of philosophy to methodology and by insisting that knowledge has an ontological and metaphysical basis. He also shows that the two enterprises embodied different but intersecting tasks: *Put’* sought the philosophical rediscovery of Eastern Orthodoxy and its contemporary applicability, whereas *Logos* sought fuller integration into the philosophical life of contemporary Europe through neo-Kantian technique and method [9] (pp. 225–227).

Walicki brings these lines of inquiry into a wider historical-philosophical field and, in doing so, clarifies several conditions of possibility of the Ern–Frank controversy itself. His reconstruction of the post-1905 religious-philosophical renaissance begins from the constitutional opening of public life and the legalization of associations, journals, and organized public debate; within that altered setting, the Moscow and Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Societies emerge as institutional forms of philosophical life within civic society and as sites for a consciously pursued integration of philosophy and theology [1] (pp. 798–801). He then treats *Vekhi* as a decisive moment in the revaluation of the intelligentsia tradition, especially through Berdiaev’s defense of philosophical truth against the domination of utilitarian-moral and political criteria and through the broader post-revolutionary search for a constructive cultural program [1] (pp. 801–807). From there Walicki turns to *Put’*, whose declared task was “defining our national image” in the midst of a prolonged crisis of Russian self-knowledge; he identifies three self-defining decisions of the group: to speak as Christian philosophers, to create a consciously Russian philosophy universal in aspiration yet directed toward Russian spiritual identity, and to connect that philosophical program to a broader historical mission [1] (pp. 807–810). Only on that basis does the later division between ontological and transcendental-idealistic tendencies acquire its full determinate shape, culminating in Ern’s attack on the *Logos* editors for their use of the name “*Logos*” and in his claim that the divine *Logos* belongs to the Eastern-Christian tradition and stands opposed to Western rationalism and transcendental meonism [1] (pp. 819–821). Taken together, these studies establish with real precision the historical field, the institutional antagonism, the national-philosophical stakes, and the broader anti-neo-Kantian setting of the controversy. The present article takes up the controversy at the point where these reconstructions converge in a further philosophical question. Its claim is that the most exact philosophical stake of the Ern–Frank exchange lies in the divergent determination of the criterion by which philosophy is constituted as philosophy. What is at issue between Ern and Frank is whether philosophy receives its truth from participation in an antecedent ontological order, or whether every appeal to being acquires philosophical validity only in the medium of reasons, proof, and universally valid justification. From this standpoint, the question of “Russian philosophy” assumes its determinate form within the controversy itself: Ern understands it through the possibility that philosophy may be historically embodied where thought remains grounded in *Logos* and being, whereas Frank understands it through the requirement that every such claim becomes philosophically valid only through discursive and logical articulation and universally valid justification. The specific contribution of the present article lies in reconstructing the controversy at the point where the historical problem of Russian philosophy, the *Put’*–*Logos* antagonism, and the question of culture and historical embodiment are gathered within a prior disagreement over the constitutive norm of philosophy itself.

The philosophical controversy took shape directly in response to the appearance of *Logos: Mezhdunarodnyi ezhegodnik po filosofii kul’tury* [*Logos: International Yearbook on Philosophy of Culture*] in 1910, issued in Moscow and St. Petersburg by the Musaget publishing house and edited by Sergei Hessen, Fyodor Stepun, and Boris Yakovenko as the principal organ of the young Russian neo-Kantian intelligentsia [7] (pp. 289–291); [10]; [2]. Ern opened the dispute with his four-part polemical essay, *Nechto o Logose, russkoi filosofii i nauchnosti* [*Something about the Logos, Russian Philosophy, and Scientificity*], published in *Moskovskii ezhenedel’nik* in 1910, where he attacked the *Logos* circle’s identification of philosophy with rigorously “scientific” and transcendental method [11]; [7] (pp. 289–291); [12] (pp. 264–281). Frank, who was not a member of the *Logos* editorial circle, entered the debate, at the urging of Petr Struve—one of the central figures of the *Vekhi* milieu and an influential liberal publicist associated with *Russkaia mysl’*—with *O natsionalizme v filosofii* [On Nationalism in

Philosophy], published in *Russkaia mysl'*, no. 9 (1910), where he subjected Ern's argument to a sharp critique and reformulated the issue in terms of the concept of philosophy itself [1] (pp. 800–802); [7] (pp. 289–290); [6] (pp. 162–167). Ern replied in *Kul'turnoe neponimanie. Otvet S. L. Franku* [Cultural Misunderstanding: A Reply to S. L. Frank], published in *Russkaia mysl'*, no. 11 (1910), and Frank then closed the exchange in the same journal with *Eshche o natsionalizme v filosofii. Otvet na otvet V. F. Erna* [Again on Nationalism in Philosophy: A Reply to V. F. Ern's Reply] [5] (pp. 116–129); [12] (pp. 130–137). Taken in sequence, these four texts provide the textual unfolding of the problem just outlined: the controversy moves from the immediate polemic over the *Logos* program to the more exact question of whether philosophy is grounded in ontological participation or in discursive validity.

Across these texts, Ern's position acquires a determinate philosophical structure. In *Nechto o Logose*, modern philosophy, culminating in Kantian and neo-Kantian rationalism, is said to have severed the discursive-logical from the “fullness of reason” and elevated that abstraction into a sovereign principle [11] (pp. 7–8). His critique of *nauchnost'* [scientificity] belongs exactly here: the target is not science as such, but the attempt to install “scientificity” as the external norm of philosophy, as though philosophy could receive its ground from method alone [11] (pp. 30–31). In Ern's later clarification, *ratio* names the principled separation of the discursive-logical from its ontological ground, whereas *Logos* names the objectively divine principle in which thought and being remain internally joined, so that discursivity is preserved only as one moment within a fuller ontological whole [5] (pp. 120, 126–127); [11] (pp. 8–9). This is why the critique of modern rationalism culminates in the category of meonism: once the discursive-logical posits itself as self-sufficient, philosophy becomes schematic, ontologically weightless, and inwardly detached from reality [5] (p. 127); [11] (pp. 7–9). Ern's appeal to Russian philosophy follows from that claim. Russia matters to him because it names the historical possibility that philosophy may be re-grounded in *Logos* and being rather than in autonomous *ratio* [11] (pp. 15–16); [5] (p. 125).

Frank's response acquires its force by identifying the point at which Ern's ontological distinction becomes a principle of philosophical history. In *O natsionalizme v filosofii* and *Eshche o natsionalizme v filosofii*, Frank isolates the decisive step in Ern's argument: the conversion of the distinction between *ratio* and *Logos* into a hierarchy of historical-philosophical worlds, in which modern Western philosophy comes to be aligned with the former and Russian thought with the latter [6] (pp. 162–163, 166); [12] (pp. 130–131). His objection therefore concerns neither ontological seriousness nor the philosophical significance of intuition. He states explicitly that he too had defended ontologism against meonism and had criticized one-sided rationalism [6] (p. 165); [12] (p. 131). What he rejects is the determination of philosophy through a privileged ontological, confessional, or national ground. For that reason, philosophy remains for him inseparable from reasons, proof, and universally valid justification; every appeal to *Logos*, truth, or spiritual depth becomes philosophical only in that medium [6] (pp. 165–167); [12] (pp. 130–134). The disagreement between Ern and Frank therefore reaches its sharpest formulation at the point where the autonomy of philosophy comes into view: Ern resists the self-grounding claim of the discursive-logical, whereas Frank locates philosophy's constitutive form precisely in the order of conceptually articulated and universally valid justification [5] (pp. 126–127); [11] (pp. 7–8); [6] (pp. 165–167); [12] (pp. 130–134).

By examining the Ern–Frank controversy, this article asks by what criterion a claim grounded in *Logos*, being, and historical embodiment counts as philosophy: whether ontological participation itself confers philosophical truth, or whether philosophy comes into being only where such participation is rendered answerable in the medium of reasons, proof, and universally valid justification. In addressing this question, the argument

proceeds accordingly. It first reconstructs the post-1905 philosophical field in which the controversy became possible and shows why the dispute over *Logos*, *nauchnost* [scientificity], truth, being, and “Russian philosophy,” among other issues, was ultimately a dispute over the criterion of philosophy itself, as well as over the status of these categories as contested terms in modern history of Russian philosophy [1] (pp. 797–810); [13–15]; [16] (pp. 1–22). It then turns to Ern’s attempt to reconstitute philosophy through ontological participation in *Logos*, before analyzing Frank’s counter-claim that ontology becomes philosophical only in the medium of concepts, reasons, and universally valid justification. Finally, it follows the controversy into its last and most revealing level—culture and historical embodiment—in order to show that the debate culminates in a constitutive tension within philosophy itself: philosophy requires more than formal reason, yet whatever exceeds formal reason cannot simply bypass the form in which philosophy justifies itself.

2. The Post-1905 Philosophical Field and the Immediate Situation of the Controversy

The Ern–Frank controversy belongs to a post-1905 philosophical field in which older disputes over the meaning, task, and authority of philosophy in Russia had intensified and extended across a wider range of intellectual and philosophical circles. What entered into dispute in these years was not merely whether Russia possessed a philosophical tradition of its own, but by what principle philosophy in Russia could be constituted and justified at all. The constitutional opening of public life after 1905, together with the partial legalization of associations, journals, and publishing initiatives, transformed earlier intellectual tensions into explicit programmatic conflicts. Questions that had long circulated in dispersed form—concerning the relation of philosophy to religion, science, culture, nation, and universality—were now posed in organized venues and under self-conscious philosophical titles. In that setting, “Russian philosophy” ceased to function merely as a retrospective label and became itself an object of philosophical struggle: as a positive task, as a category to be delimited, and, for some, as a notion to be rejected in the name of philosophy’s supranational validity [1] (pp. 797–810); [7] (pp. 289–301); [8] (pp. 623–626); [2–4].

Within this reconfigured field, one powerful tendency emerged from the religious-philosophical renaissance and from the increasingly self-conscious effort to articulate philosophy as answerable to being rather than to gnoseological form alone. In Walicki’s reconstruction, the constitutional period coincides with the transition of Russian religious philosophy from a preparatory phase of searching to a more mature phase of organizational and programmatic consolidation; from that standpoint, it is also the period in which Russian religious philosophy appears in its own self-definition as a form of “mystical realism” [1] (pp. 798–801, 805–810). At stake here was not simply the defense of religion against secular modernity. The deeper issue was whether philosophy could remain philosophically answerable to truth once it had been reduced to critique of cognition, method, or the formal conditions of knowledge. In this current, philosophy was neither to be modeled on the sciences nor dissolved into confessional dogmatics; rather, it was to become the conceptual articulation of a truth disclosed in a more originary relation to being, personhood, and spiritual life. The institutional importance of the Moscow and Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Societies lay precisely here: they were not only forums for religious discussion, but sites in which the relation between philosophy and theology was deliberately recast as a philosophical problem in its own right. Their debates signaled a distinct ambition: to construe a philosophy capable of creative integration with modern theology and, at the same time, to render religious consciousness more philosophically exact. The issue, therefore, already concerned the nature of philosophy itself: whether phi-

osophy should begin from a self-sufficient critical method, or whether knowledge remains answerable to an ontological and metaphysical basis irreducible to pure epistemology [1] (pp. 798–801, 805–810); [9] (pp. 225–229); [17,18].

A closely related development was the crystallization of a program of national religious philosophy around the *Put'* milieu and the wider post-*Vekhi* revaluation of Russian intellectual culture. Here the problem of “Russian philosophy” was formulated as the attempt to produce a philosophy at once consciously Russian and genuinely universal. The program that came to institutional focus in *Put'* began from the diagnosis that Russia’s self-knowledge was in crisis, that inherited forms of life and consciousness were disintegrating, and that philosophical reflection had to therefore become part of a broader spiritual and cultural reconstitution [1] (pp. 807–810). From that diagnosis followed three connected determinations: to speak as Christian philosophers, to create a consciously Russian philosophy universal in aspiration yet directed toward Russian spiritual identity, and to join that philosophical reflection to a larger historical mission [1] (pp. 809–810). The importance of *Put'* lay not only in the publication of books, but in the fact that it made this program visible as an organized philosophical undertaking. Its editorial line joined the recovery of Russian sources—Solovyov, Kireevsky, Khomiakov, Chaadaev, and Skovoroda—to the reception of broader metaphysical traditions, while also presenting contemporary original philosophy as part of the same task [1] (pp. 808–809). “Russian philosophy” thus became a constructive philosophical project: not the repetition of a national essence, but the attempt to articulate a form of universality historically embodied in Russian spiritual experience. The point was not nationality as such, but the possibility that philosophical universality might require a determinate historical and religious bearer [1] (pp. 807–810); [8] (pp. 623–626).

That common platform, however, did not eliminate substantial philosophical differences within the same milieu. The very attempt to think universality through a determinate religious-historical form opened disputes over the meaning of national mission, the legitimacy of messianic language, and the status of historical embodiment within philosophy itself. The discussion initiated by Berdiaev’s return to Khomiakov is decisive here. In that discussion, Slavophilism reappears not as an antiquarian object but as the first serious attempt to formulate Russian national consciousness philosophically and to oppose Western rationalism by appealing to “new philosophical principles” [1] (pp. 810–813); [19]. Yet even here the relevant issue was not simply nationalism. Berdiaev distinguished between ordinary national mission and a stronger universalist messianism, and precisely this distinction exposed a fault line within the field [19,20]. The philosophical problem was whether a specifically Russian philosophy could be universal because of its spiritual task, or whether the language of national mission inevitably threatened philosophy with a collapse into historical self-assertion. “Russian philosophy” therefore named not a settled doctrinal unity but a struggle over the relation between universality and embodiment, between philosophical task and historical vocation [1] (pp. 810–813); [8] (pp. 623–626); [16,17].

It is at this point that the philosophical content of new Slavophile ontologism becomes decisive. The anti-rationalist turn of the *Put'* milieu was not a generalized protest against the West, but a technically sharper diagnosis of modern philosophy as a history of de-ontologization. In the Khomiakovian line as reread by Berdiaev, rationalism culminates in a pan-logical reduction of being to thought and thereby deprives reality of substantial ontological standing. What had originally been a critique of Hegelianism was now extended across the entire line from Kant to neo-Kantian transcendentalism [19,20]. The contemporary philosophical opponent, therefore, was not positivism alone, but the whole rationalist and gnoseological configuration in which the conditions of cognition came to usurp the place of being itself. Once philosophy was governed by gnoseological form alone, it no longer preserved access to *istinno sushchee*—real being in both ontological and

existential senses [19,20]. It is in this setting that Berdiaev's anti-epistemologism acquires its exact force. The object of attack was not cognition as such, but the hegemony of gnoseology: the reduction of philosophy to the regulation of abstract thought and to a method that, in securing the limits of cognition, uprooted thought from life and being [19]. The positive alternative was a newly ontologized philosophy grounded in religion, integral experience, and concrete spiritual reality. The terminological shift from "mystical realism" to "ontologism," together with the use of "meonism" for the triumph of abstract thinking over living being, condensed this diagnosis into a philosophical vocabulary that prepared the terrain on which Ern's later opposition of *Logos* and *ratio* would become intelligible [19,20]. This same diagnosis also stood in direct continuity with the Solovyovian critique of Western philosophy as the reduction of reality either to concepts or to impressions and with the claim that philosophy could overcome that reduction only by recovering the relation between cognition and real being through religious contemplation and the Christian East [1] (pp. 815–817); [19].

This ontological tendency, moreover, was not philosophically uniform. In one version, it took the form of Berdiaev's "concrete spiritualism" or "concrete idealism," in which the integral personality of the subject is directly involved in the world and cannot be understood through the abstract subject of critical philosophy [19,20]. In another, it appeared in Bulgakov's defense of the ontological status of nature against the "two nightmares" of contemporary philosophy: mechanistic materialism and idealist subjectivism. Bulgakov's "religious materialism" sought to affirm the substantiality and metaphysical reality of nature while construing it within living divine all-unity rather than as a dead mechanism [21]. In yet another version, the same impulse appeared in Lossky's intuitionism. Here a further distinction becomes important. Lossky himself elaborated intuitionism as a form of "mystical empiricism," in which the skeptical consequences of "individualist empiricism" are overcome because, in intuitive cognition, the subject is not separated from the object and being is immanently present within the cognitive act; it was Berdiaev who described this position as an "ontological gnoseology" supporting the status of ontologism as a mystical realism [22]; [1] (pp. 819–820). Florensky's position stood close to this tendency without coinciding with it. His Platonic resistance to Kantian subjectivism linked the *Put'* milieu to a more explicitly ecclesial and patristic orientation and thus marked another variant of ontological opposition to transcendental idealism [1] (pp. 819–820); [17]. Before the Ern–Frank controversy ever took shape, the anti-Kantian and anti-transcendental impulse of the period had therefore already generated several philosophically distinct ways of re-grounding thought in being, spiritual intuition, revelation, or Eastern-Christian metaphysics [1] (pp. 813–821); [17].

The same years, however, also produced the most rigorous rival answer to this ontological orientation. The emergence of the Russian *Logos* circle around the journal *Logos: Mezhdunarodnyi ezhegodnik po filosofii kul'tury* [Logos: International Yearbook on Philosophy of Culture] brought into explicit formulation a competing criterion of philosophy. The *Logos* editors defined their standpoint in terms of "supra-nationalism": national inflection in philosophy could be admitted as an inevitable and even fruitful feature, but it could not be made a goal, a principle, or a pretext for isolating Russian thought from universal philosophy [10] (pp. 1–7). In the Russian case, this meant a consciously Westernizing orientation and a programmatic insistence that the development of philosophy required a serious appropriation of Western philosophical tradition, especially neo-Kantian transcendentalism [16,18]. The dispute over "Russian philosophy" therefore became more exact than a contrast between "native" and "foreign" thought. It became a dispute over whether historical embodiment belongs to philosophy's criterion or only to its contingent situation; whether philosophy may take its beginning from a religiously and nationally

inflected experience of being; or whether such experience becomes philosophical only when submitted to forms of critique and justification not derived from it.

The *Logos* side articulated this position with strategic moderation. Precisely in order to avoid the charge of hostility to religion and mysticism, Hessen argued that the delimitation of philosophical reason was compatible with apophatic theology and with the Eastern-Christian insistence on divine inexpressibility [23,24]. Yet this conciliatory gesture did not alter the underlying polarity. For the ontological current, a philosophy that begins from gnoseology or from the immanent analysis of cognitive processes has already lost the level at which the relation to the absolute, to revelation, and to being becomes thinkable. Trubetskoi's insistence that the religious relation to the absolute cannot be posed within gnoseology [25], Bulgakov's thesis that every truly original philosophical system rests upon a philosophical myth [21], and the Solovyovian demand to raise the faith of the fathers to rational consciousness [1] (pp. 818–819) all converge on the same point: philosophy cannot begin from method alone if it is to remain answerable to being [9] (pp. 225–227); [21]. The split that now came fully into view was therefore not between religion and philosophy, but between ontological and transcendental-idealistic determinations of philosophy itself. It is precisely this split that constitutes the immediate prehistory of the Ern–Frank controversy [1] (pp. 819–820); [26].

It is against this background that the immediate significance of the Ern–Frank controversy becomes clear. What the post-1905 field had already brought into view was not simply a cultural contrast between Russia and the West, nor merely a conflict between religious philosophy and neo-Kantianism, but a sharper philosophical division between rival criteria of philosophy. The *Put'* camp had concentrated its effort on overcoming rationalism, gnoseology, and de-ontologized thought by returning to Khomiakov, Solovyov, religious experience, intuition, and Eastern-Christian sources. The *Logos* camp had answered by insisting on supra-national method, critique, and scientific philosophy. The Ern–Frank exchange emerges from this already constituted field as the point at which these broader tensions are forced into a direct and conceptually concentrated dispute over the criterion of philosophy itself. What comes to the surface in that controversy is the more exact question that structures the present article: whether a claim grounded in *Logos*, being, and historical embodiment counts as philosophy by virtue of that ontological participation itself, or only insofar as it assumes the form of reasons, proof, and universally valid justification [7] (pp. 289–301); [9] (pp. 225–227); [1] (pp. 817–821); [18,26].

3. Ern: Ratio, Meonism, and the Reconstitution of Philosophy Through Logos

Ern's intervention is best understood as a strictly philosophical diagnosis of what has happened to philosophy under modern conditions. The decisive event, for him, is not the emergence of reason as such, nor the use of concepts, proof, or logical articulation, but the abstraction of the discursive-logical from what he calls the "fullness of reason" and the subsequent absolutization of that abstraction into a sovereign principle. In *Nechto o Logose, russkoi filosofii i nauchnosti* [*Something about the Logos, Russian Philosophy, and Scientificity*], this abstraction appears as the inner principle of modern rationalism and reaches its consummate form, for Ern, in Kantian and neo-Kantian transcendentalism [11] (pp. 6–8). What is therefore at issue is not discursivity as such, but a more determinate philosophical transformation: the point at which the discursive-logical ceases to function as one moment within a fuller order of reason and instead posits itself as self-sufficient. *Ratio*, in this sense, is not simply *logos* in its discursive form; it is the discursive-logical torn away from its ontological ground and elevated into an autonomous norm of thought [5]

(pp. 126–127). Ern's critique is thus directed not against thought's formal articulation, but against a conception of philosophy in which form claims authority independently of being.

This is the point at which meonism becomes indispensable for Ern's philosophical vocabulary. Meonism names neither a contingent doctrinal error nor one metaphysical position among others. It names the ontological consequence of autonomous *ratio*. Once the discursive-logical is severed from the fullness of reason, thought no longer encounters reality as *sušće* [that-which-is] in its own ontological givenness; what it confronts instead is a field increasingly governed by schema, construction, and conceptual surrogate. Ern formulates this with particular force when he speaks of the "luxuriant flourishing of universal meonism" and when he insists that the modern myths of Nature and the human "I" are "meonic" not because they are mythical in the older ontological sense, but because they arise where being has already been displaced [11] (pp. 7–8, 29); [5] (pp. 119, 121–122, 127). Meonism is therefore the ontological name for a world in which intelligibility is preserved only at the cost of being's reduction. The more self-sufficient formal thought becomes, the more radically philosophy is cut off from reality as that-which-is. Ern's claim is not that modern thought lacks rigor, but that its rigor is purchased through ontological depletion.

From this standpoint, Ern's polemic against the *Logos* circle acquires its exact contour. His objection is not, in the first instance, that the Russian neo-Kantians are "Westernizers," nor merely that they borrow from German philosophy. What provokes his intervention is that a journal bearing the name *Logos* should, in his view, represent almost the opposite of what *Logos* signifies in the Eastern-Christian and patristic tradition. Under the Greek name he finds not the divine and ontological *Logos*, but the latest form of autonomous *ratio*: a philosophy that accepts *nauchnost'* [scientificity] as its external norm and thereby renounces philosophy's own proper ground [11] (pp. 2–3, 6–8). This explains the sharpness of his attack on "scientific philosophy." The phrase is, he argues, philosophically illegitimate because "science in general" is itself a fictive abstraction: only particular sciences exist, each with its own domain, matter, and procedure [11] (pp. 30–31). Once "scientificity" is detached from the concrete sciences and transformed into a universal criterion for philosophy, it becomes an empty and coercive norm. Ern's point is not anti-scientific. It is that philosophy loses its own matter when it binds itself to a form whose legitimacy is external to philosophy's relation to being. Under such conditions, philosophy no longer asks how thought is internally related to reality; it asks only whether thought satisfies a borrowed standard of formal rigor.

The argument deepens further when Ern distinguishes between the empirical content of the sciences and what he calls the *tonos* of scientificity. Since philosophy concerns what is given supra-empirically, no empirical component of science can simply be transferred into it. Yet neither can the "pure form" of scientificity serve as philosophy's norm, because pure form without ontological content remains merely possible and not actual; invoking the Aristotelian distinction between *dynamis* and *energeia*, Ern argues that a purely formal scientificity lacks full reality precisely because it has abstracted from the order in which thought receives its truth [11] (p. 32). The decisive step follows from here: what appears, from the modern standpoint, as scientificity must be reinterpreted, from the standpoint of *Logos*, as a more originary *logichnost'* [logicality], that is, as the inner articulation of thought participating in *Logos* rather than legislating from itself. Hence his striking thesis that, "from the standpoint of the philosophy of the *Logos*," the concept of scientificity coincides with the concept of logicality [11] (pp. 31–32). This is crucial for the coherence of Ern's position. He does not abandon logic; he re-situates it. The discursive-logical remains indispensable, but only as a moment within a fuller ontological whole. Once detached

from that whole, it degenerates into *ratio*; once grounded in *Logos*, it becomes a legitimate moment of philosophy.

At this point the internal architecture of Ern's concept of *Logos* becomes decisive. *Logos* is not for him an abstract principle of order, nor a general name for discursivity, nor an "average cross-section" of consciousness. It is "the summit of consciousness" and, more radically still, an "objectively divine" principle [11] (pp. 8–9). But the philosophical force of this claim becomes fully explicit only in *Kul'turnoe neponimanie* [Cultural Misunderstanding], where Ern articulates a threefold distinction within *Logos* itself: the cosmic *Logos*, the discursive-logical *Logos*, and the divine *Logos* [5] (pp. 120, 126–127). This distinction is the conceptual device by which Ern secures both the specificity of philosophy and its non-autonomy.

The cosmic *Logos* designates the intelligible structure of created reality and is disclosed in the wider life of the world, in natural religion, and in artistic creation. The divine *Logos* names the absolute and personal ground of truth, disclosed in Christianity and in the highest illumination of will. Between these stands the discursive-logical *Logos*, which is the proper sphere of philosophy: formally bound to the norms of logical evidence and materially ordered toward the whole of experience [5] (p. 126). This means that philosophy has its own irreducible domain and cannot be collapsed into religion or art. Yet it also means that philosophy is not self-grounding, because the discursive-logical *Logos* belongs within a wider whole and remains inwardly linked to both the cosmic and divine dimensions of *Logos*. Ern can therefore preserve the distinctiveness of philosophical activity while denying that its truth is constituted by autonomous form alone. Philosophy remains philosophical precisely because it is discursive, but discursivity is true only insofar as it remains ordered to the fuller ontological whole of *Logos*.

This triadic articulation clarifies the exact relation between *ratio* and *Logos*. *Ratio* is not the discursive-logical as such. Ern explicitly insists that *ratio* is "not the discursive-logical in thought as such," but the principled tearing-away of the discursive-logical from the whole of reason [5] (p. 127). The discursive-logical belongs properly within *Logos*; *ratio* arises only when that moment secedes from the whole and claims sovereignty for itself. That is why the problem lies neither in logic, nor in proof, nor in dialectic as such. Ern can even attribute to dialectic a positive and indispensable role within thought. The philosophical catastrophe begins only when the discursive-logical is absolutized and transformed from one moment of *Logos* into the governing norm of reality. The triadic differentiation of *Logos* is therefore essential to Ern's argument, because without it his position would collapse either into an anti-rational mysticism or into an undifferentiated ontologism. With it, he can argue that philosophy belongs irreducibly to the discursive-logical sphere while also insisting that this sphere derives its truth only from its place within a wider ontological and divine order [5].

The positive dimension of Ern's project becomes evident at this point. Philosophy is not abolished in favor of mystical immediacy, nor is discursivity nullified by appeal to revelation. Rather, philosophy is reconstituted as discursive thought restored to its proper place within an ontological order that precedes and grounds it. To think philosophically is still to distinguish, argue, and articulate; but these operations are true only insofar as they are measured by being rather than by a self-legislating formal reason. Ern's quarrel with modern philosophy is therefore not that it thinks too conceptually, but that it mistakes the autonomy of conceptual form for truth. What modern rationalism takes as the maturity of philosophy is, for Ern, the sign of its internal contraction.

It is in this context that Ern's claims about "Russian philosophy" must be read. He repeatedly insists, especially in reply to Frank, that he is opposing "two cognitive principles, *ratio* and *Logos*, and not two cultures, Russia and the West" [5] (p. 119). Yet this

gnoseological claim unfolds immediately into a philosophical-historical one. In *Nechto o Logose*, modern Western philosophy is read as the historical development of self-sovereign *ratio*, culminating in transcendentalism, whereas Russian thought is described as “concretely essential” and “penetrated by ontologism,” because its deepest source lies in the Eastern-Christian “religion of the Word” [11] (pp. 7, 15–16). The crucial point is not simply that Russian philosophy differs from Western philosophy, but that it becomes, for Ern, the historical site at which the antagonism between *ratio* and *Logos* is rendered explicit and can be philosophically worked through. This is why he can define the “task” of Russian philosophical thought as the realization of that decisive encounter within itself [5] (p. 125). “Russian philosophy,” in this sense, is neither a neutral historiographical label nor a merely cultural designation. It names the historically situated bearer of a conflict whose meaning is philosophical before it is national.

Seen in this light, Ern’s intervention can be described most exactly as an attempt to reconstitute philosophy through *Logos*. The center of his argument is not a generalized opposition between religion and rationalism, but the more determinate thesis that philosophy ceases to be philosophy when the discursive-logical severs itself from being and claims self-sufficiency. Meonism is the ontological result of that severance; scientifcity, when absolutized, is one of its principal symptoms; and the journal *Logos* becomes, for Ern, the exemplary sign of a pseudo-*Logos* that has retained the name while evacuating its ontological content. Against this, Ern proposes neither anti-intellectual immediacy nor the abolition of argument, but a stronger concept of reason in which discursivity is preserved precisely by being subordinated to *Logos*. The wager of his position is therefore clear: philosophy remains philosophy only where thought is not merely formally valid, but inwardly bound to being. On that basis, his critique of modern rationalism and his elevation of *Logos* are not ancillary themes in the controversy. They are his answer to the governing problem of the article itself: by what criterion does philosophy count as philosophy? For Ern, the answer is that philosophy becomes itself only where the discursive-logical is reintegrated into the ontological whole of *Logos* and thus ceases to speak from the abstraction of *ratio* alone.

4. Frank: Ratio, Discursive Validity, and the Philosophical Status of Logos

Frank’s intervention shifts the controversy onto the plane at which it becomes a dispute over philosophy as such. In *O natsionalizme v filosofii* [On Nationalism in Philosophy], he explicitly states that Ern’s first article possesses a significance “far beyond” that of a critical notice on a newly founded journal, because, under the pretext of evaluating *Logos*, Ern in fact undertakes a principal assessment of Western European and Russian philosophical creativity [6] (pp. 162–163). The decisive issue, therefore, is not whether the editors of *Logos* have represented neo-Kantianism adequately, nor whether the dominant tendencies of contemporary German philosophy are themselves philosophically compelling. Frank concedes, indeed, that much contemporary neo-Kantian philosophy is poor, formalistic, and at times scholastic; he even accepts several of Ern’s caustic remarks about the sterile importation of the latest German philosophical fashions. This concession is crucial for locating Frank’s relation to *Logos* with precision. He does not enter the controversy as an apologist for the journal’s dominant neo-Kantian orientation. On the contrary, he explicitly distances himself from the philosophical poverty and formalism of much contemporary neo-Kantianism and, in his later reply, states just as clearly that he too had defended ontologism against meonism, acknowledged the significance of intuition, and criticized one-sided rationalism [6] (pp. 162–164); [12] (p. 131). But for precisely that reason the real point of dispute lies deeper. What must be clarified is not the merit of

a journal, but the criterion by which philosophy is to be judged as philosophy. Frank's basic claim is that Ern's construction exceeds the level of criticism of a school and hardens into a total historical-philosophical opposition in which modern Western philosophy appears as the historical domain of *ratio*, while Russian thought appears as the privileged bearer of *Logos*. For Frank, this displacement is where the properly philosophical problem begins [6] (pp. 162–164).

This is why Frank's defense of *ratio* has to be formulated more precisely than the usual contrast between "rationalism" and "living thought" would suggest. His decisive thesis is not that philosophy is reducible to formal reasoning, but that *ratio* belongs to the constitutive concept of philosophy itself. Philosophers, he writes, may be mystics or rationalists, empiricists or skeptics; they may differ in temperament, metaphysical orientation, and spiritual experience. Yet insofar as they philosophize, they reason and prove, they work with abstract concepts, and they rely on logical norms. In that strict sense, there is no decisive difference between ancient and modern, Western and Eastern philosophy [6] (p. 166). Frank's point is not banal formalism. It is that philosophy acquires criticizability, communicability, and universal validity only in a conceptual and justificatory form. Without that form, one may still have religious witness, mystical vision, or existential disclosure, but one no longer has philosophy in the precise sense. *Ratio*, therefore, is not for Frank a contingent stylistic feature of some philosophies and not others. It names the conceptual, argumentative, and universally valid form internal to the very concept of philosophy [6] (pp. 166–167).

At the same time, Frank's argument cannot be assimilated to a flat defense of neo-Kantian formalism. In the same essay he explicitly acknowledges a fundamental difference between purely rational cognition and mystically intuitive cognition, the latter knowing its source as a real divine power and itself as living communion with the deity [6] (p. 165). In the later reply he further insists that he too had defended ontologism against meonism and had criticized one-sided rationalism [12] (p. 131). The disagreement with Ern therefore does not concern whether thought must remain open to being, nor whether philosophy may acknowledge an intuitive or ontological dimension irreducible to formal deduction. Frank grants both points. What he denies is that such a relation to being can count as philosophical prior to conceptual articulation and justification. No ontological depth, no immediacy of spiritual experience, and no privileged access to truth becomes philosophical by virtue of its intensity alone. What makes it philosophical is its entry into the medium of concepts, reasons, distinctions, and proofs. Ontology is not excluded from philosophy; rather, it becomes philosophical only under the condition of *ratio*. This is the exact nerve of Frank's response: philosophy does not abandon being, but neither can its relation to being bypass the conceptual and justificatory form in which philosophical validity is constituted [6] (pp. 165–167); [12] (p. 131).

From this follows the precise sense of Frank's accusation of "nationalism in philosophy." The phrase does not merely refer to patriotic inflation or to a rhetorical overvaluation of Russian thought. It names a structural confusion between a historically determinate bearer of truth and the universal form of philosophy. Ern's distribution of principles is, for Frank, objectionable not simply because it is exaggerated, but because it identifies the opposition between *ratio* and *Logos* with a historical opposition between the modern West and Russia. Frank insists that such a distribution is both historically false and philosophically illegitimate. One cannot subsume the whole of modern Western philosophy under *ratio*; one cannot purge ancient philosophy of the same principle; and one cannot assess Russian philosophy as though it were quantitatively and qualitatively independent of Western philosophical creativity [12] (pp. 131–134). In this respect, Frank's accusation of nationalism names the point at which a principal distinction is illicitly transformed

into a hierarchy of traditions. Once that step is taken, philosophy ceases to be a universal discursive practice and becomes the privilege of a particular spiritual-historical world [6] (pp. 163–166); [12] (pp. 131–134).

Frank strengthens this objection by showing that Ern's philosophical history is untenable even on its own terms. His counterexamples are not ornamental. When he asks whether Spinoza—the greatest and most classical rationalist in the strict sense—is really “meonic,” given that his system begins from the concept of *causa sui*, he is not merely correcting a historical oversight [6] (p. 164). He is showing that the connection Ern posits between rationality and non-being is philosophically too crude to bear the historical burden placed upon it. The same holds for Leibniz and Lotze, and more generally for the rationalist and idealist traditions in which reason precisely seeks access to being rather than withdrawal from it. Frank's point is that Ern's schema becomes self-defeating once it encounters the actual history of philosophy. If rationalism in figures such as Spinoza can aim at ontology, then *ratio* cannot be equated straightforwardly with meonism. If, moreover, Russian thinkers themselves are said by Ern to have defended ontologism “by striking *ratio* with its own weapon,” then Ern's own construction implicitly concedes the indispensability of rational-discursive proof for the defense of ontological philosophy. Here Frank's objection becomes immanent: Ern's attempt to denounce *ratio* philosophically already presupposes the legitimacy of the discursive element he seeks to subordinate. If *Logos* in Ern's sense had simply renounced *ratio* as such, it could not philosophically argue against it [6] (pp. 164–165).

This immanent criticism clarifies why Frank repeatedly separates the proper ontological and gnoseological questions from the historical distribution of principles. He does not deny that the distinction between *Logos* and *ratio* may carry metaphysical meaning. What he insists upon is that Ern's historical-national deployment of that distinction is “one-sided and, in part, simply incorrect” [12] (pp. 131–132). The point is decisive. Frank sees that the deeper philosophical danger does not lie in ontologism as such, but in the step by which one privileged historical configuration of ontologized thought comes to function as the bearer of philosophy itself. His resistance is therefore directed not against ontology, but against the monopolization of ontology by a national-confessional formation. Philosophy may well arise in determinate linguistic, cultural, and religious worlds, but no such world may coincide with the criterion of philosophy as such. Once such coincidence is asserted, philosophy loses the universality proper to its discursive form and passes over into worldview, confession, or cultural self-assertion [6] (pp. 163–166); [12] (pp. 130–134).

This is why Frank's intervention does not simply oppose Ern from the standpoint of an alien formalism. On the contrary, both thinkers are responding to the same crisis: the insufficiency of a merely schematic rationality severed from reality. Both reject a flattened conception of reason. Both are concerned with the possibility of a thought adequate to being. Their divergence concerns the criterion under which such adequacy becomes philosophical. Ern argues that the discursive-logical element receives legitimacy only as a moment within the fuller ontological whole of *Logos*; once isolated, it becomes *ratio* and tends toward meonism. Frank argues, by contrast, that every relation to being becomes philosophical only insofar as it enters the universal and criticizable medium of *ratio*. Ern subordinates philosophical form to *Logos*; Frank insists that every appeal to *Logos* must still assume philosophical form. The difference between them is therefore not between ontology and anti-ontology, nor between spirituality and rationalism in any loose sense. It concerns two rival determinations of philosophical validity itself [6] (pp. 165–167); [12] (pp. 131–134).

Frank's position thus defines the contrary pole internal to the same problem that animates Ern. Ern had argued that philosophy loses itself when the discursive-logical secedes from the fullness of reason and claims self-sufficiency. Frank argues that philosophy loses

itself when its relation to being is allowed to bypass the form through which philosophy alone becomes philosophy. The force of his intervention lies precisely here: he compels the controversy to state in rigorous form what is at stake in the appeal to *Logos*. If philosophy is to remain more than formalism, it must remain open to being; but if that openness is to remain philosophical, it must assume the discursive form of universal justification. Frank's response therefore does not dissolve the controversy. It sharpens its central antinomy and prepares the terrain on which the later exchange—especially the dispute over historical embodiment and culture—becomes intelligible. For the question that now emerges with full clarity is no longer whether reason requires an ontological ground, but whether such grounding can be thought without compromising the universality internal to philosophical form itself [6] (pp. 166–167); [12] (pp. 130–134); [15–27].

5. Ern's Rejoinder and the Hardening of the Dispute

Ern's reply to Frank's essay does not simply repeat the original opposition between *Logos* and *ratio*. Its philosophical importance lies in the fact that it reformulates the controversy at a higher level of explicitness. In *Kul'turnoe neponimanie. Otvet S. L. Franku* [Cultural Misunderstanding: A Reply to S. L. Frank], Ern insists that Frank has misconstrued the issue from the outset by translating a principal distinction into a merely cultural or national one. His decisive claim is familiar but now strategically sharpened: what is at stake is "two cognitive principles, *ratio* and *Logos*, and not two cultures, Russia and the West" [5] (p. 119). The force of this reformulation marks Ern's attempt to retrieve the controversy from the register of "nationalism in philosophy" and to return it to the level of a first-order dispute about the structure of reason itself [5] (pp. 118–119). In that sense, the rejoinder is the moment at which Ern explicitly tries to show that his earlier appeal to "Russian philosophy" was never meant as an ethnographic or patriotic predicate, but as the historically situated site of a more fundamental conflict internal to thought [5] (pp. 118–119, 125).

What changes in the rejoinder is therefore not the basic architecture of Ern's position, but its degree of conceptual articulation. In the earlier polemic, *ratio* had already been presented as a self-sovereign abstraction and as the inner principle of modern meonism [9] (pp. 7–8). In the reply to Frank, however, Ern defines it with greater precision as "the principled separation of the discursive-logical from the fullness of reason," that is, the extraction of one moment of reason from the whole to which it belongs and its elevation into an autonomous principle [5] (p. 127). This clarification matters because it directly answers Frank's central move. Frank had argued that *ratio* belongs to the constitutive concept of philosophy, since philosophers, whatever else they may be, reason and prove [6] (pp. 166–167). Ern's reply is not to deny this discursive element, but to contest its philosophical absolutization. The decisive issue is no longer whether philosophy uses concepts and proofs, but whether the discursive-logical is self-grounding or whether it remains internally ordered to a fuller ontological whole [5] (pp. 126–127). Ern's rejoinder therefore does not reject philosophy's discursive form; it radicalizes the question of its ground. What he now presses more sharply is that the discursive-logical, when torn from the fullness of reason, becomes *ratio* in the pejorative and properly meonic sense [5] (p. 127).

This point is crucial for the internal progression of the argument. Ern's original position already turned on the distinction between the discursive-logical as a moment within *Logos* and *ratio* as the abstraction of that moment into sovereignty [11] (pp. 8–9); [5] (pp. 120, 126–127). The rejoinder confirms that this distinction remains the center of his philosophical self-understanding [5] (pp. 120, 126–127). Ern is not answering Frank by retreating into irrational immediacy or by surrendering the terrain of philosophy. On the contrary, he is attempting to show that Frank's concept of philosophy remains bound to the very abstraction whose insufficiency it fails to grasp [5] (pp. 126–127); cf. [6]

(pp. 166–167). The rejoinder thus renders fully explicit an antinomy that Frank’s critique had already brought to the surface: if conceptual reason is made constitutive without remainder, philosophy loses its relation to being; but if that relation to being is asserted without clarifying the status of the discursive-logical within it, philosophy risks losing the criterion by which it remains philosophy [5] (pp. 120, 126–127); [6] (pp. 165–167). Ern’s reply is his attempt to resolve this antinomy by subordinating the discursive-logical to the fuller order of *Logos* without abolishing it [5] (pp. 120, 126–127).

Yet it is precisely here that the reply also hardens the dispute. For Ern’s clarification of principle does not remain at the level of principle. It unfolds once more into a philosophical-historical distribution. The most important formulation in this regard is his claim that “the task of Russian philosophical thought” is the realization of the decisive encounter between *ratio* and *Logos* and that this task is “historically grounded” [5] (p. 125). This sentence is not a rhetorical appendix to his gnoseology. It is the point at which the entire controversy turns. For if the opposition between *ratio* and *Logos* is indeed principal, then in principle it should be thinkable wherever thought confronts the question of its own ontological ground. But Ern now insists that this confrontation has acquired a specific historical locus [5] (p. 125). Russia appears not merely as one contingent site among others in which the conflict may be observed, but as the historical place in which it becomes inwardly decisive for philosophy itself [5] (p. 125). The rejoinder therefore preserves the distinction between cognitive principles and cultures at the level of declaration, while narrowing it again at the level of philosophical consequence [5] (pp. 119, 125).

His second essay now advances from a dispute over the criterion of philosophy into a dispute over the relation between principle and embodiment. Frank had already argued that Ern’s distinction between *ratio* and *Logos* covertly hardened into a philosophy of history in which Russia became the bearer of *Logos* and the West the bearer of *ratio* [6] (pp. 162–163, 166); [12] (pp. 130–131). The rejoinder does not dissolve that objection; it deepens its stakes. Ern now makes more explicit that Russian philosophy matters because it bears a determinate historical vocation internal to the destiny of philosophy itself [5] (p. 125). What he is defending, then, is not “national philosophy” in the banal sense, but the stronger thesis that a universal philosophical problem may be historically concentrated in one spiritual-intellectual formation [5] (p. 125). The universal and the historical are no longer merely juxtaposed; they begin to converge. That convergence is what gives the controversy its full philosophical pressure [5] (pp. 119, 125).

At this point the structure of Frank’s final response also becomes more intelligible. Frank sees that Ern’s rejoinder has not merely restated the earlier position; it has shown the precise point at which Ern wants to hold universality and historical singularity together [12] (pp. 130–131). That is why Frank’s final intervention no longer needs to contest every ontological component of Ern’s argument. He explicitly notes that the larger gnoseological and metaphysical issues would require separate treatment and instead isolates what he takes to be the decisive mistake: the historical ranking of philosophical traditions by means of a principal distinction [12] (pp. 130–131). This move is philosophically significant. It means that Frank recognizes the real issue to be neither the existence of *Logos* nor the philosophical significance of ontologism, but the passage from a principal account of reason to a privileged historical bearer of that principle [12] (pp. 130–131). His counter-claim remains that philosophy may indeed be historically embodied, but no historically singular embodiment may function as the criterion of philosophy as such [6] (pp. 166–167); [12] (pp. 130–131). The rejoinder therefore sharpens the debate by forcing both positions into their clearest form: Ern insists that philosophy remains true only where the discursive-logical is restored to the fullness of reason, whereas Frank insists that no such restoration

counts as philosophy unless it assumes the universal form of conceptual and justificatory validity [5] (pp. 126–127); [6] (pp. 166–167).

What becomes visible here is a genuine reversal in the logic of philosophical legitimization. Ern's reply argues that autonomous discursivity cannot serve as the criterion of philosophy because it is itself the sign of philosophy's ontological contraction [5] (p. 127). Frank's final response argues, conversely, that an antecedent ontological privilege cannot serve as the criterion of philosophy because it exempts philosophy from the very form through which its claims become criticizable and universally valid [6] (pp. 166–167); [12] (pp. 130–131). Each therefore identifies as philosophy's condition what the other identifies as its point of collapse. This is the deeper reason the later exchange should not be narrated as a simple "hardening" of positions in a merely rhetorical sense. What hardens is the structure of the problem itself. The controversy can no longer be reduced either to the question of "Russian philosophy" or to the opposition of "faith" and "reason." It has become a dispute over whether philosophy's claim to truth is grounded first in ontological participation or first in discursive form [5] (pp. 125–127); [6] (pp. 166–167); [12] (pp. 130–131).

6. Culture, Historical Embodiment, and the Fate of Philosophy

At the final stage of the exchange, the Ern–Frank controversy gathers itself around a more exact question than the earlier opposition between *ratio* and *Logos*, taken simply as a gnoseological or methodological dispute. As the argument moves from the criterion of philosophy to the question of its historical bearer, the decisive issue becomes: in what mode does philosophy live as philosophy? The problem of culture enters here as the point at which the earlier dispute over philosophical validity encounters historical existence. Ern had already argued that the discursive-logical does not sustain itself in abstraction from the fuller order of *Logos*; Frank had insisted with equal force that every relation to being becomes philosophical only in conceptual and justificatory form. Once the problem of historical embodiment comes to the fore, this antinomy becomes sharper: Ern increasingly treats the realization of the decisive encounter between *ratio* and *Logos* as a historically grounded task of Russian thought, whereas Frank resists every move by which a historically singular formation might assume the place of philosophy as such. The final stage of the exchange draws out the full consequence of that development: culture becomes the medium in which the tension between ontological participation and universal validity comes fully into view [5] (pp. 118–119, 125–127); [6] (pp. 165–167); [12] (pp. 130–131); [15].

This is why Ern's reflections on culture in *Kul'turnoe neponimanie* belong to the inner development of the controversy itself. What first appeared as a dispute over the structure of reason is now unfolded into a dispute over the being of culture. Ern's decisive move is to extend the opposition between *Logos* and into the sphere of cultural existence. The conception of culture he attributes to Kantianism and to Frank's position is, in his words, "the most radical negation of culture possible," because it preserves only culture's outer body while destroying its living soul; the "museum understanding" of culture turns it into an abstract principle, preserved as residue rather than lived as an ontological process [5] (p. 129). The image of "museum-graves" thus carries a precise philosophical meaning. Once culture is approached as a system of ideal values detached from the being in which they arise and live, it persists as archive, catalog, and preservation, that is, as an object already severed from the living order that made it possible [5] (p. 129). In Ern's construction, the reduction of culture to value stands in a strict structural parallel to the reduction of philosophy to scientificity: in each case form survives through the evacuation of ontological life [11] (pp. 30–32); [5] (p. 129).

Ern's own account is correspondingly more ambitious than an appeal to "organic culture." The metaphysical "where" and "in what" of culture, he writes, are answered only ontologically: culture remains alive in the *anima mundi*, in the "cosmic womb of *natura creata creans*" [5] (p. 129). This formulation gives the decisive clue to the place of culture within his entire position. Culture does not appear as an external sphere to which philosophy is later applied, nor as a neutral container within which ideas happen to circulate. It belongs to the same ontological reality in which thought itself participates through *Logos*. The earlier analysis of Ern's triadic articulation of *Logos* makes the point clear: if the discursive-logical belongs within a wider ontological and divine whole, then culture too belongs within that same living order. A philosophy grounded in autonomous therefore generates, at the level of historical existence, the same result it generates at the level of thought: schematization, abstraction, and the replacement of living participation by formal remainder. The crisis of philosophy and the crisis of culture thus express one and the same ontological severance [5] (pp. 120, 126–129).

Ern's philosophy of culture extends the same argument from the structure of thought to the structure of historical form. His initial central thesis held that philosophy remains philosophical where the discursive-logical is reintegrated into the fuller ontological whole of *Logos*. In the philosophy of culture, the same structure reappears as the thesis that culture remains culture where form remains inwardly rooted in being. The issue is therefore more exact than the question whether culture has religious origins or whether philosophical ideas arise in a social world. The issue concerns whether historical forms live as participations in *Logos* or persist as idealized and preserved forms whose ontological substance has thinned out. This is the exact force of Ern's "museum" critique. His target is not historical scholarship as such, nor classification, nor reflective mediation taken in themselves. He is attacking a mode of cultural relation in which reflection stands over against life and value stands over against being. In this sense, the critique of culture becomes the historical analog of his earlier critique of *ratio*. *Ratio* is the discursive-logical when it posits itself as self-sufficient; "museum culture" is culture when its forms are detached from the ontological life that sustains them [11] (pp. 30–32); [5] (pp. 126–129).

Ern's account of culture also makes the relation between principle and historical embodiment more difficult to maintain. He continues to insist that his real concern lies with "two cognitive principles, *ratio* and *Logos*, and not two cultures." He also states that Russian thought has for him only a derivative value in comparison with the absolute priority of Eastern-Christian logism [5] (pp. 118–119). Yet this formal disclaimer no longer stabilizes the distinction between principle and embodiment. The same reply that denies the primacy of culture over principle simultaneously attributes to Russian philosophical thought a historically grounded task: the realization within itself of the decisive encounter between *ratio* and *Logos* [5] (p. 125). The earlier sections have already shown that, for Ern, Russian thought is "concretely essential," "penetrated by ontologism," and situated at the historical intersection of Western rationalism and Eastern-Christian *Logos* [11] (pp. 15–16). Within the philosophy of culture, this structure becomes more determinate. Once culture is conceived as the living body of *Logos*, and once Russian thought is treated as the historically privileged site in which the conflict of *ratio* and *Logos* is inwardly concentrated, the bearer of a living culture begins to appear as the bearer of philosophy's truth. The distance between universal principle and historically privileged embodiment thus narrows through the inner movement of Ern's own argument [11] (pp. 15–16); [5] (pp. 118–119, 125, 129).

For that reason, Ern's position leads beyond a simple contrast between nationalism and anti-nationalism. He is not merely claiming that Russian culture is superior because it is Russian. His argument is more exact: philosophy lives through ontological participation; such participation is historically embodied in culture; and the decisive embodiment of this

conflict appears in a specific historical-spiritual formation shaped by Eastern-Christian logism under maximal exposure to Western *ratio*. Taken together, these claims give Ern's position its full philosophical force. The issue is therefore the status of universality itself once philosophy is said to live only in determinate historical forms. A universal philosophical principle now appears inseparable from a historically singular medium in which it remains alive and efficacious [5] (pp. 118–119, 125, 129).

Frank's resistance acquires its full meaning precisely at this juncture. His objection extends beyond the claim that philosophy must remain discursive, and beyond the accusation of "national self-conceit." The deeper structure of his response lies in the conviction that no historically singular world may coincide with the criterion of philosophy as such. If philosophy is constituted by *ratio* in the sense of universally communicable, criticizable, and conceptually justifiable thought, then its historical embodiments, however indispensable, never assume sovereign status. That is why he reads Ern's article as a "continuous panegyric" to Russian philosophical thought and insists that the issue be treated "on the subject matter" rather than through cultural exaltation or wounded sensibility [6] (p. 163); [12] (p. 130). The decisive point is that the move from *Logos* as principle to Russia as privileged bearer transforms philosophy from a universal form into a historically monopolized truth. Frank's defense of universality is therefore inseparable from a philosophy of embodiment: he fully grants that philosophy appears only in determinate traditions, languages, and forms of life, but he refuses every identification of one such formation with philosophy's own validity [6] (pp. 163–167); [12] (pp. 130–134).

The problem of culture clarifies this tension at the level of historical existence. Philosophy stands not only between ontology and argumentative form, or between *Logos* and *ratio*; it also stands between historical life and universal validity. Ern argues that philosophy cannot live in the vacuum of pure form: once detached from the ontological life of culture, it yields preserved meanings, museum values, and conceptual residues severed from the being that gives them force. Frank's objection is that historical life cannot itself become self-authorizing. When a singular spiritual-cultural formation assumes the place of philosophy's bearer in an exclusive sense, universality is displaced by authority. The question of philosophy's criterion is therefore tested here against its worldly actuality [5] (p. 129); [6] (pp. 163–167); [12] (pp. 130–134).

This is the precise sense in which the "fate of philosophy" comes into view in the final turn of the controversy. Philosophy exists only in languages, traditions, institutions, and forms of life. Embodiment thus belongs to its very mode of existence. Yet embodiment carries a permanent philosophical risk. It can be the medium in which philosophy remains alive, and it can also become the point at which philosophy's claim to universality is displaced by the authority of a privileged historical bearer. Ern's philosophy of culture brings out the first truth with unusual force: thought cut off from the living order of being generates dead culture just as it generates meonic thought. Frank brings out the second truth with equal force: culture, religion, and historical world do not furnish philosophy's criterion in any immediate way, because philosophy's validity appears only in the universality of discursive form. The lasting significance of the Ern–Frank exchange lies precisely here. Philosophy does not stand before a choice between universal form and historical life; it lives through their tension [11] (pp. 7–8, 30–32); [5] (pp. 126–129); [6] (pp. 165–167); [12] (pp. 130–134).

What emerges from this controversy is therefore a constitutive tension internal to philosophy itself. Philosophy requires a concrete medium in order to live at all, and it requires a universal form in order to remain philosophy. Ern and Frank expose this tension from opposite sides. Their exchange shows that the question of what philosophy is remains inseparable from the question of how and where it lives. The problem of culture is therefore

where the relation between ontology and conceptual justification appears most sharply as a relation between living embodiment and universal validity. Once philosophy is understood as requiring both participation in being and publicly valid form, its possibility remains bound to the unresolved tension between these two conditions [5] (pp. 125–129); [6] (pp. 165–167); [12] (pp. 130–134); [27].

7. Conclusions

The Ern–Frank controversy shows that the decisive issue at stake in 1910 was neither the cultural prestige of “Russian philosophy” nor a generalized opposition between faith and reason, but the criterion by which philosophy constitutes and authorizes itself as philosophy. Read across the full arc of the exchange, Ern’s intervention does not amount to a rejection of the discursive-logical as such, but to a rejection of its absolutization. His claim is that once the discursive-logical is severed from the “fullness of reason,” philosophy loses its inner bond to being and survives only in schematic, meonic form; the crisis of modern rationalism therefore lies not in thought’s use of concepts, but in its elevation of formal articulation into a self-sufficient principle of truth [11] (pp. 7–8, 30–32); [5] (pp. 126–127). Frank’s response is philosophically decisive because it relocates the issue from ontology alone to the concept of philosophy itself. While acknowledging intuition, ontologism, and the inadequacy of one-sided rationalism, he insists that no relation to being becomes philosophical unless it assumes the medium of reasons, proofs, and universally valid justification [6] (pp. 165–167); [12] (p. 131). What the controversy thereby discloses is a constitutive difficulty internal to philosophy itself: thought must remain faithful to being, yet it must do so in a form through which its claims become publicly criticizable and philosophically valid.

What gives the exchange its full depth, however, is that this difficulty does not remain confined to gnoseology or method. As the controversy develops, the question of philosophy’s criterion unfolds into the question of philosophy’s historical existence. Ern’s triadic articulation of *Logos*, his critique of *nauchnost’*, and his diagnosis of meonism already imply that philosophy does not live through discursive form in abstraction from the ontological order that sustains it [11] (pp. 31–32); [5] (pp. 120, 126–127). In the later stages of the exchange, this implication becomes historically concentrated: the question is no longer only what philosophy is, but where and how it remains alive. That is why the final turn to culture is not ancillary to the controversy but its necessary consummation. Ern’s critique of “museum culture” radicalizes his earlier philosophical claim by showing that, when form is detached from being, culture no less than philosophy persists only as preserved remainder [5] (p. 129). Frank, by contrast, shows with equal force that historical embodiment, though indispensable, cannot become self-authorizing without transforming philosophy into the privilege of a singular spiritual-historical formation [6] (pp. 163–166); [12] (pp. 130–134). At this point, the controversy reaches its sharpest formulation: philosophy requires historical embodiment in order to live at all, yet no embodiment may coincide without remainder with philosophy’s own universal validity.

The enduring force of the Ern–Frank debate lies precisely in the fact that it does not resolve this tension but makes it fully visible. Ern sees with unusual clarity that a philosophy detached from the ontological life of culture yields abstraction, classification, and meonic self-enclosure. Frank sees with equal clarity that a philosophy grounded in an antecedently privileged bearer of truth forfeits the conceptual universality through which alone it remains philosophy. Their disagreement is therefore not external to philosophy, but internal to its very possibility. Philosophy does not simply choose between *Logos* and *ratio*, ontology and form, or historical life and universality. It exists only in the unstable relation between them [15,21]. Read in this way, the 1910 controversy illuminates more than one

episode in Russian intellectual history. It exposes, in an unusually concentrated form, one of philosophy's constitutive difficulties: philosophy must live in determinate worlds of language, culture, and history, yet it cannot surrender its claim to validity to any one of them without ceasing to be philosophy [27,28].

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