



Time as image of eternity: A.F. Losev's criticism of subjectivist conceptions of time

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Accepted: 12 May 2021

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Abstract

The paper analyses Aleksei F. Losev's position in respect to the notion of time, which he considers in a dialectical perspective. The Russian philosopher proceeds from the Platonic interpretation of the relationship between the one and the many, according to which each plurality carries in itself a unifying principle, as its ontological grounding. This anti-modern perspective represents a rejection of the positivist "objectification" of the world, which introduced the "metaphysical" notions of absolute space and time. According to Losev, time as an indefinite continued progress of events that occur in an apparently irreversible succession (from the past, through the present, into the future) does not exist as such and cannot be considered other than within the framework of the overall unity of temporal fragments, so that they acquire a common background. By placing the interpretation of time on the ontological plan, in its dialectical connection with its opposite (eternity), Losev manages to overcome the problem of the *measurability* of time, raised in Aristotle's definition of time as a "measure of motion." Losev also rejects modern subjectivist ideas about time as an experience of the present (Husserl) or as pure duration (Bergson), both conceptions inevitably leading to the problem of identifying in the continuous flow of time a stable (extratemporal) ground that serves as the basis for any temporal change. Besides that, Losev's approach to the interpretation of time leads to criticism of the modern idea of progress, understood as an endless striving for the future, which always remains unattainable. The main task then is to find "mobile rest," a unifying principle that can give meaning to human existence through the combination of past, present and future.

Keywords Losev · Philosophy of time · Criticism of positivism · Russian philosophy · Dialectic

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Aleksei Losev's studies on the notion of time began when he worked at the Moscow Psychological Institute, created in 1914 by Georgii Chelpanov, the founder of the seminar on psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy of Moscow University (1907–1912), as a natural extension and institutionalization of the Psychological Society headed by Lev Lopatin.¹ Initially, Losev's interests were aimed at studying the perception and experience (*perezhivanie*) of an artistic object—in this case, of a *musical* object—from the psychological point of view (Takho-Godi, 2018, pp. 76–79). During these years, the Russian philosopher was engaged in research on the perception of rhythm and its connection with musical time.² While information about that period in Losev's life is scant, some of his works on experimental psychology in the field of aesthetic rhythm have survived.³ Losev's enthusiasm for new trends in psychological science is also shown by the fact that it was to Chelpanov that he would dedicate his *Issledovaniia po filosofii i psikhologii myshleniia* [Studies in the Philosophy and Psychology of Thinking, 1915–1919] (Losev, 1999).

However, already in the mid-1920s, Losev would move away from the original approach in favour of an objective analysis of the musical (temporal) object, in which the discovery of Husserl's philosophy will play a decisive role (Losev, 1993b, pp. 654–708). It is phenomenology, according to Losev, that allows us to avoid “psychological and naturalistic deviations” and guarantees the objectivity of its analysis.⁴ In his work *Muzyka kak predmet logiki* [Music as a Subject of Logic, 1927], arguing that nothing else but music (a “window” into eternity) reveals the true essence of time (Zenkin, 2004), Losev deliberately rejects any psychological premise in the interpretation of time: “[T]ime is actually possible for me only if I somehow experience it. However, when describing the very essence of time, I am not at all obliged to talk about my experiences of time, and there is just as little subjectivism in it as in any other thing, thinkable or experienced” (Losev, 1995, pp. 521–522). In addition to his early passion for phenomenology, a turning point in Losev's life was marked by his work at GAKhN (State Academy of Artistic Sciences) and GIMN (State Institute of Musical Science), where the lively intellectual atmosphere undoubtedly stimulated his further research.⁵

¹ The Moscow Psychological Society existed from 1885 to 1921. Losev took part in the Society's meetings, where he presented on *Eidos i ideia u Platona* [Eidos and Idea in Plato] and *Teoriia abstraksii u Platona* [The Theory of Abstraction in Plato] (Maslin, 1995, pp. 352–353).

² The psychological seminar at Moscow University had a philosophical orientation as well. One of the main tasks of the seminar consisted precisely in the integration of psychology with other disciplines (Razdikhovskii, 1982, pp. 49–50). The program of the course on experimental psychology included, in addition to the discussion of philosophical topics (phenomenological reduction, the concept of number, the role of memory, perception of time), an overview of the latest foreign theories, above all German psychological theories: Meinong, Brentano, Stumpf, Husserl, Lipps (see INOR RGB).

³ See Losev's works dating 1913–1914 on the experimental analysis of aesthetic rhythm (2005a; 2005b; 2005c). In his diary, he recalls the opening of the Institute on 23 March 1914 (2002b, pp. 416–417).

⁴ In his introductory essay to the first English translation of Losev's work *Dialektika mifa* [The Dialectics of Myth], Vladimir Marchenkov characterizes Losev as an “enthusiastic follower of Edmund Husserl” (Marchenkov, 2003, p. 16).

⁵ Musical rhythm was studied at GAKhN in 1924–1927 both in the musical section and in the psychophysiological department, which also included a commission for the experimental study of rhythm. The work plan of the physical-psychological department of the psychophysical laboratory for the year

Subjective time. Losev's criticism of Bergson's views

To the Russian philosophy of the early twentieth century, that was characterized, on the one hand, by the recovery of Platonic and Neoplatonic heritage (as for Semyon L. Frank, Aleksei F. Losev), and on the other, by an attempt to overcome Kantianism, Bergson's philosophy, alongside Husserl and William James, appeared to offer a new approach to the study of human consciousness, laying the foundations for a new theory of knowledge based on authentic human experience. At the same time, no less relevant for the spread of Bergson's ideas to Russia were the French philosopher's reflections on philosophy's relation to science and religion, a question that interested Lopatin, Nikolai Berdyaev, Semyon Frank and others. Therefore, it is not surprising that Bergson's "revolution," which consisted of elevating the reality of subjective time, i.e. mental time, over, as he argued, the unreality of the objective time of science, was enthusiastically welcomed, above all, by the intuitionist Russian philosophers (see Wünsche, 2017). Bergson's ideas spread in Russia primarily thanks to Nikolai Lossky, who translated *L'intuition philosophique* [The Philosophical Intuition, 1912] and dedicated to Bergson his own work *Intuitivnaia filosofia Bergsona* [Bergson's Intuitive Philosophy, 1914]. In the same years Semyon Frank, as editor of the journal *Russkaia Mysl* [The Russian Thought], published several reviews of Bergson's works. In the 1920s, the notion of the "vital impulse" (*élan vital*) was also discussed within a broader debate between mechanists and neo-positivists (Neterkott, 2008, p. 251).

Like many of his contemporaries, Losev was no stranger to Bergson's ideas. The Marxist theoretical journal *Pod znamenem marxizma* [Under the Banner of Marxism, 1929] even ranked him among the "ideological enemies of Marxism-Leninism," living by the "spiritual food of capitalism." It turns out that "Shpet reads Husserl, Ermakov, let's say, Freud, while Losev reads Bergson" (Takho-Godi, 1997, p. 134). This citation provides an example of the danger of choosing the "idealistic path" by leading representatives of modern theories. Although Losev cannot be called a follower of Bergson, he certainly admired French philosopher's ideas in *Creative Evolution*, in which he especially valued the author's vitalistic views and saw an attempt to resume the discourse on life as opposed to positivist and materialist tendencies.⁶

Nevertheless, Losev clearly distances himself from Bergson's ideas regarding the notion of duration (*durée*). Bergson's understanding of time as duration, a creative flow within the limited framework of biological and psychological dimensions, did capture, for Losev, the essence of temporality, but at the same time it occluded its meaning from a purely philosophical point of view. Undoubtedly, through the opposition of "time of science" and "time of man," Bergson was able to emphasize the

Footnote 5 (continued)

1925/1926 included the study and discussion of the theories of rhythm of E. Dalcrose, R. Laban and R. Bode (see RGALI).

⁶ This refers to Losev's view regarding what he considered the tragic contradiction between life and inanimate matter: "[L]ife has always remained a dramatically tragic problem for me" (Losev, 1990a, p. 16).

changing and flowing nature of psychic life that was no longer seen as a line on which every phenomenon is placed in a sequential order, but was rather considered in its inner unity. The alternative would mean to deny the essence of life and to reduce it to a simple mechanical alternation of phenomena, in accordance with the naturalistic premises of traditional psychology.

The consequence of this assumption, however, is the denial of the possibility of measuring time, i.e. of applying any quantitative determinations to it. Losev's criticism of Bergson concerns precisely the character ascribed to space. The French philosopher interpreted space and time as opposing categories. If time in the Bergsonian sense of the word is life, activity and becoming, then space is immobility and homogeneity. In such a notion of space, Losev sees a remnant of Newtonian mechanics, whereas in fact space should be viewed as something living, "creatively intense" (*tvorcheski napriazhennoe*). From a dialectical point of view, space is structured in accordance with the same categories as time, although in a different modification of the dialectical triad "eidos—topos—number" (see Kosykhin, 2013, p. 339).

Indeed, in Bergson's conception, naturalistic tendencies are still preserved, for, as Losev observes, "reason appears to him exclusively in the form of rational schemes and dead copies of reality" (Losev, 1993a, p. 435). In other words, Bergson was unable to fully develop the notion of duration as a real "integral experience" and a process through which eternity is revealed (as Losev puts it, he was unable to develop the notion of "the alogical becoming of noetic eternity," *alogicheskoe stanovlenie umnoi vechnosti*). Here it is interesting to emphasize the following. The assertion that duration is a continuous and indefinite series of internal mental states, not tied to any stable basis dialectically opposed to it, leads to its natural devaluation. For this reason, despite the recognition of the importance of Bergson's concept of duration, Losev rather prefers the interpretation proposed by Frank, who corrected the concept of *durée*, understanding pure becoming as a stream in which eternity is already present (*sverkhvremennost'*, supratemporality) (Losev, 1995, p. 595; Frank, 1915, pp. 326–362).⁷ Losev turns to the analysis of number and time in Frank's work *Predmet znaniia* [The Object of Knowledge, 1915], namely to the chapter "Time and Number," where Frank comes to the conclusion that duration cannot be given except in relation to a timeless unity. Only by recognizing that any temporal sequence (becoming) always follows from unity, can it be assured that the "new" is inseparable from the "old." Duration itself cannot be understood apart from its connection with eternity; therefore, what the concept of *durée* actually refers to consists not in time as *experienced*, but in time as it is given in the intuitive unity of the two temporal planes. "The truth of Bergson's doctrine," Frank states, "is not that 'pure duration' is the absolute, but only that the absolute is not pure immobility, that the original moment of dynamism or creativity is inherent in it" (Frank, 1915, pp.

⁷ Berdiaev, too, noted that the understanding of duration as a pure stream of the present, an "elusive point" (*neulovimaia tochka*), presupposes a denial of the essence of time, which is given only by consolidating the process of becoming in the timeless plane. In doing so, he refers to St. Augustine's interpretation of memory as the unifying basis of three temporal dimensions, "the greatest manifestation of the spirit of eternity in our temporal reality" (Berdiaev, 1990, p. 58).

356–357). Starting from the widespread notion of the absolute (“supratemporality,” eternity) as “empty” duration, Losev offers a different interpretation based on the philological analysis of this term, similar to that of Émile Benveniste, who noted, in Losev’s paraphrase, that eternity “indicates not the duration of movement, but the power of life, the inexhaustible source of life and even youth.” “And when E. Benveniste proves,” Losev continues, “that this Greek term in the classical language corresponds to the root *aion* with endings in ‘n’ or ‘s’ and with the meaning ‘life force’, and that it has such parallels as in Latin *iuvenis* (‘young man’), in German *jung* (‘young’) or in the Slavic languages *iunost’* (‘youth’), then no strong objections to such an observation can be raised” (Losev, 1988b, p. 92). In fact, the essence of temporality is determined by two opposing moments: on the one hand, time is the “living stream of becoming,” “the birth of the new” in relation to the “given,” and, on the other hand, it is an indivisible whole. However, as Losev notes, “Bergson’s theory one-sidedly emphasizes the moment of dynamism or creativity in the absolute. This is his right, for there really is such a moment in it, and it should have been remarked. But this moment is neither ‘pure time’ nor the absolute itself, and the fact that Bergson equates these three different concepts represents his misinterpretation” (Frank, 1915, p. 357).

The assertion of absolute duration inevitably leads to the problem of justifying it, determining a stable basis in the continuous flow of time. In other words, it becomes necessary to highlight the moment of timeless immobility in which duration develops. For Losev, this means finding that “mobile rest” (*podvizhnyj pokoj*) which makes temporary flow possible. It is evident that this issue is related to the need to distinguish the identical from the different, the one from the many. Consequently, Losev’s solution is to approach the problem from a dialectical point of view, applying a series of fundamental antinomies to his discourse about time: image (*obraz*) versus prototype (*pervoobraz*), finitude versus infinity, the one versus the other. The Platonic pattern of the relation “the one and the many” arises as a starting point for the philosophical enquiry, so that each multiplicity carries a single principle that constitutes its grounding. Thus, time as a sequence of the past, present and future does not exist as such and cannot be considered other than with a view to the unity of these moments, so that they acquire a common background. Losev moves the whole discourse to the plane of the relation between eternity and time, which, in turn, develops on the model of the fundamental dialectic of “image and prototype,” for eternity arises as a necessary condition of time.⁸ In the next paragraph, we will dwell on this in more detail.

⁸ The patristic tradition (Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor) had already emphasized the connection between time and eternity, introducing a third moment, “created eternity,” just as Boethius put, between *tempus* and *aeternitas*, *sempiternitas* (“relative” eternity), that is, the existence of the world as infinite duration (see Gaidenko, 2006, pp. 73–75).

Time as the image of eternity

In his analysis of the relation between time and eternity, Losev proceeds from Plotinus's critique of Aristotle's view as it was elaborated in the fourth book of *Physics*. Aristotle defined time as "the number of motion in respect of 'before' and 'after'" (*Physics*, 219b1). Indeed, this definition does not say anything about the nature of time, but only emphasizes the connection between time and movement, which consists in a sequence of movements. In other words, in Aristotle we observe a division of time into its separate "time points," as Thomas Aquinas pointed out (1956: 107).⁹ The main point of Plotinus's criticism lies precisely in the rejection of the notion of time as directly dependent on its spatial representation (according to the Platonic paradigm), or as number, i.e. *measured* time, applied to a separate segment of time, and not to time itself. On the contrary, time can be understood in its essence only in its relation to eternity. Here Plotinus, obviously, is basing his argument on the assumption that only knowing the model (παράδειγμα) can one reach the essence of the image (εἰκονος); therefore, the paradigm of the image and prototype is introduced in relation to time.

As Losev notes, the understanding of eternity as infinity represents a significant turn in comparison with the traditional Greek concept of infinity as a negative principle (formlessness) in contrast to form. An example is Aristotle's concept of the continuum as an infinite potential, or Plato's opposition between unity and matter as continuous becoming. In Plotinus's *Enneads* (3,7,11)—which Losev cites in full in his own translation from Greek in *Muzyka kak predmet logiki* [Music as a Subject of Logic], as if to emphasize its relevance—time was defined as "the life of the soul" which passes from one state to another. According to Plotinus's (and later Augustine's) interpretation, time is generated in the soul, more precisely, in the world soul, which is the origin of individual souls. Therefore, time was no longer interpreted as the creation of the Demiurge, but was thought of as the "duration of the soul" resulting from sin: taking the eternity of the ideal world as its model, the world soul creates the phenomenal world as a "mobile image of eternity."¹⁰

Losev is clearly starting from the modern (Husserlian) concept of time as an experience of the present. Indeed, Husserl's conception remains tied to a linear concept of time with its division of time into segments, where the past and the future are aspects of the present, its components (which corresponds to the unity of the phases "retention—nowness—pretension"). Losev's task is exactly the opposite and consists in finding an objective justification for time, interpreted as a *finite* continuum. If unity is opposed not only to multiplicity, but also to infinity (duration as a continuous overcoming of the present), then the presence of unity as the source and foundation of time dialectically entails that the latter is finite. Therefore, in this dialectical perspective, what lasts cannot be temporary in all respects:

⁹ For the Medieval interpretation of time see Savel'eva and Poletaev (1997, pp. 75–78).

¹⁰ According to the Christian conception, "it was not the Fall that took place in time, but time was the result of the Fall [...] Time is a sort of falling out of eternity, and at the same time, time is inside eternity" (Berdiayev, 2007, p. 315).

Everything is eternal, and nothing is temporal in itself; time is only a subjective illusion. Eternity exists. To exist, the one must differ from what is not eternity. Eternity, therefore, presupposes, if it really exists, something non-eternal, from which it, in order to be, differs. But the non-eternal is temporal. Therefore, eternity implies time. However, eternity embraces everything that was, is and will be; and, besides it, there is nothing. Then what, besides eternity, can be temporary? Obviously, only eternity itself can be temporary. Therefore, time is eternal, and eternity is temporal. (Losev, 2014, p. 143).

Only eternity, being indivisible, represents real duration; therefore, it *ontologically* precedes time. On the contrary, time as the present, “the ‘now’,” consists of a sequence of moments from which duration as such is excluded. More precisely, time is finite and infinite at the same time: on the one hand, it represents a limited duration; on the other, its connection with eternity reveals the plane of infinity in the time continuum. Thus, by including the question of time on the ontological plane, of its connection with eternity, Losev removes the question of the measurability of time, the source of which he considers to be the well-known Aristotelian definition of time as a “measure of motion” (*Physics*, 220b33).

The myth of time as substance. Criticism of the Newtonian conception

In Losev's reflections on the relation between time, space–time (the time of nature), and historical time, the main target is Kant's philosophy, where the emphasis is shifted from the metaphysical plane (rationalistic concepts of time in the seventeenth century, starting with Descartes) to the concept of time as an a priori form of perception. Kant failed to solve the problem of the gap between phenomenon and noumenon, according to Losev, since he approached it in a merely formal manner. Indeed, Kant's definition of time as a mediator between a priori categories and the data of sensory experience is, in its essence, purely functional: time as a form of systematization of sensory experience is necessary for a person to contemplate the world and himself, and at the same time the very condition of the possibility of this experience.

The other widespread conception of time criticized by Losev is Newtonian mechanics, where time is understood from a “metaphysical” perspective.¹¹ Following the Cartesian concept of time (duration) as an attribute of substance, Newton interpreted time substantively, that is, as the source of motion in absolute space, independent of the phenomenal world. When the relationship between matter, space and time is denied, only pure space and pure time remain, regardless of the material processes taking place within them. This conception, which G.W.F. Hegel had already criticized in his *Philosophy of Nature*, is categorically rejected by Losev

¹¹ Here, for “metaphysical” and “metaphysics,” Losev understands everything concerned with the “reification of abstract concepts” (Losev, 1997, p. 796).

because, in addition to denying the true nature of space and time, it presupposes a worldview in which the universe turns out to be empty space, without outline and volume, and in which there is no connection between things and the space–time dimension in which they exist. The homogeneity of the space of mechanical physics is expressed through the Hegelian image of the universe as “bad infinity”:

Just imagine: your space is infinite, it has no spatial peculiarity anywhere, that is, it is homogeneous everywhere, not shaped anywhere. [...] In this terrible infinity, even countless galaxies and clusters of unknown heavenly bodies seem to be thrown into loneliness and emptiness. When all celestial bodies are merely mechanically connected, this infinity smells like a corpse. [...] This is not a structure, but some kind of prison, if not directly a cemetery. (Losev, 1988a, p. 18).

Therefore, it is not surprising that Losev enthusiastically welcomes Einstein’s new theory,¹² which supplements the previous concepts of space and time as “empty vessels” with the understanding of space as “a degree of the thing itself” (*stepen’ samoi veshchi*), “an integral form of things themselves” (see Losev, 1996b, p. 127).¹³ Indeed, Einstein’s space is very close to Losev’s concept of “the intensity of being” (*napriazhennost’ bytiia*), understood as a different degree of corporeality and immanence (Losev, 1993a, pp. 296, 297, 302). Losev himself noted how the principle of intensity (τόνος) which underlies the ancient Greek cosmological conception, finds a modern reformulation in Einstein.¹⁴ From a dialectical point of view, the intensity depends on the degree of transition of *eidos* into its other, that is, on the degree of the “self-alienation of essence” (*samootchuzhdenie sushchnosti*).

The dialectic of light (the energy of the essence) and darkness (*meon*) unfolds against this background, in which light, “meonized by darkness,” gives rise to different levels of illumination (*osveshchennost’*) that give shape to the phenomenal world.¹⁵ The lifeless world of Newtonian space is contrasted with the living world created by the dialectic of meonal darkness and eidetic light, in which varying concentrations of being, like the Greek notion of intensity, express varying degrees of the thing’s participation in the idea, of *meon* in *eidos*. Such a position presupposes, at the same time, the homogeneity of the world emanating from a

¹² In *Antichnyi kosmos i sovremennaiia nauka* [The Ancient Cosmos and Contemporary Science, 1927], Losev cites the main existing literature on Einstein’s theory. In addition to E. Cassirer’s *Zur Einsteinischen Relativitätstheorie. Erkenntnistheoretische Betrachtungen* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1921), translated into Russian as *Teoriia otositel’nosti Einshteina* (Einstein’s Theory of Relativity), trans. by E. S. Berlovich, I. Ia. Kolubovskii (Petrograd, 1922), two books by Bergson were published in Russian translation in 1923: *Osnovy teorii otositel’nosti* (The Foundations of the Theory of Relativity), translated from German by N. N. Andreev (Petrograd) and *Durée et simultanéité, a propos de la théorie d’Einstein* (1922), as *Dlitel’nost’ i odnovremennost’. Po povodu teorii Einshteina* (Duration and Simultaneity. Concerning Einstein’s Theory), trans. A. Frankovsky, (Petrograd), (see Losev, 1993a, p. 481).

¹³ The new concept of space is also discussed in Losev’s article of 20 October 1932 “O forme i razmerakh mira” [On the shape and size of the world] (Losev, 1996a, p. 130).

¹⁴ The main assumptions of the ancient Greek notion of space, based on the categories of time, magnitude, space and mass, can be traced in the modern notion of relativity (Losev, 1993a, pp. 226–227).

¹⁵ On Orthodox energetism in Losev’s thought, see Postovalova (2017, pp. 147–148).

single basis, and its heterogeneity. The contradiction is explained by Losev as the “antinomy of meaning and fact,” which simultaneously affirms two opposite thoughts: according to its fact (*po faktu*), reality is a homogeneous space, but, according to its meaning (*po smyslu*), it reflects a different degree of intensity (heterogeneity).

Newton's error was that he pushed the concept of absolute space and time to the extreme, raising them to a single plane of reality and neglecting moments of difference and diversity. The same problem in ancient theories of space was solved by integrating the concept of absolute space and time in a relativistic perspective, which made it possible to avoid simultaneously two extremes: absolutization and relativism (dependence of space and time on the observer). The absolute was understood rather as a substrate of reality, present in each individual body, or as *eidos*, which could manifest itself in different ways.

Space is relative here because it is intense in different ways everywhere. But it is absolute because these different grades of intensity are determined by the eternal *eidos* of the intelligent world and are unchangeable in themselves. That is why, in spite of “relativity,” absolute rest in one or another point of the ancient universe has exactly the absolute meaning and absolutely predetermines the state of the body (and soul), hence, is not conditional. (Losev, 1993a, p. 498).

For ancient Greek thought, the objective reality of the physical world arose from the interaction of space and time, which did not have an independent existence, but were categories embodied in the material world:

Space is only the limit of the dispersion of the one, of meaning, and time is only the limit of the dispersion of the existent, of being. This means that, rather than the terms “space” and “time,” it is the adjectives “spatial” and “temporal” that have ontological meaning. There are only spatial and temporal things, but not space and time themselves. But if we agree with this, we will immediately have to admit that the so-called “pure space” and “pure time” are nothing more than material things of than a certain kind. (Losev, 1993a, p. 280).

Thus, every physical thing existing in space and time carries in itself its own *eidos*, understood as a sort of internal structure that determines its finitude. This corresponds to the category of “magnitude” as spatio-temporal *eidos*, embodied in the other:

Space and time are thus completely definite and limited quantities. Therefore, world space is certainly finite, and world time is certainly finite. The world, being in general, as we have proved, a countable quantity, is a quantity calculable in time and space. This is a necessary requirement of dialectical thought. [...] However, the actual, physical finiteness of the world in space and in time is possible only because the *eidos* of the world is eternal, that is, it is free from time, and is not a divisible fact, that is, it is free from space. (Losev, 1993a, p. 280).

The relativity of space and time is fundamental for Losev since he traces in it the scientific expression and concretization of dialectical antinomies. To some extent, dialectics also “requires” the theory of relativity. Losev expresses the horror generated by the Newtonian paradigm: “Newton’s mechanics is built on relativism and nihilism, in which there is nothing absolute in anything, and everything spreads and crumbles into an infinite number of miserable monads, hostile to each other and going into the abyss of nihilism” (Losev, 1993a, p. 498). On the contrary, according to the new theories, it turned out that there are different types of space, and there is no absolute space. The void left by Newtonian mechanics can be filled with a new conception of space and time, whose essence Losev summarizes as follows: “1. Space–time also is a thing, an integral form of things themselves (like redness or triangularity). This form is different depending on the things themselves. 2. Things are not dead mechanisms with a random body, they are [...] different types of corporeality and different degrees of corporeality” (Losev, 1996a, p. 129). It is known that the general theory of relativity (1915–1916) demonstrated the dependence of space and time on the speed of movement and on the relationship of the material systems present in them. In philosophical terms, if the speed of movement is infinite, then it becomes possible to assert that the body is found everywhere, so it stops moving (it “rests”).¹⁶ Consequently, the transition from one temporal plane to another turned out to be conceivable “not only dialectically, but also physically.”¹⁷ Here, Losev is engaged in adjusting physical–mathematical theory to the needs of his philosophical conception. This is quite evident, since the main thing here for the Russian philosopher is that this theory is thinkable theoretically, mathematically, while its concrete realization is purely accidental: “The dialectics of the principle of relativity that I have derived does not depend in any way on the actual state of science at the present moment” (Losev, 1993a, p. 482).

It should be noted that the dialogue between notions belonging to different spheres, such as that of philosophy and mathematics, was particularly stimulating and productive for philosophical thought, as it made it possible to develop different themes in completely original ways. Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there was a growing tendency in philosophy to appropriate the discourse of science, and vice versa; in Russia, a positivist orientation had arisen called “scientific philosophy” (*nauchnaja filosofija*), represented by Vladimir Lesevich,¹⁸ who interpreted philosophy as a necessary continuation and completion of scientific knowledge. In a similar way, in his *Vvedenie v filosofiju* [Introduction to philosophy, 1922] Frank stressed the importance of philosophy’s preliminary conceptual fine-tuning for science (Frank, 1993). In the 1920s, Losev was planning to write a work—that was never realized—on the philosophical foundations of scientific theories, as stated in

¹⁶ This assertion is reminiscent of Florensky’s ideas in *Mnimosti geometrii* [Imaginarities in Geometry, 1922], see Chase (2015).

¹⁷ See the discussion following A.S. Akhmanov’s speech at G.A.Kh.N. “Vremja v iskusstve” [Time in Art] of 26 April 1928 (Chubarov, 2005, pp. 464–465).

¹⁸ On these philosophers, see Nemeth (1993, pp. 294–303) and the special issue of *Studies in East European Thought* 47, nos. 3–4 (1995) devoted to “Neo-Kantianism in Russian Thought.”

his various books, such as *Antichnyi kosmos I sovremennaia nauka, Filosofii imeni*, and *Muzyka kak predmet logiki* (Troitskii, 1994, p. 895). On the other hand, one needs to bear in mind that, at the end of the 1920s, Soviet scholars were engaged in an effort to set up a historical and philosophical study of mathematics on the basis of Marxist dialectics (Vuchinich, 1999, p. 108). During these years, the theory of relativity in the Soviet Union was largely banned, and the mystical tendencies in Losev's interpretation were bound to evoke sharp criticism from the Marxist ideologues of the time. In the article "Protiv voinstvuiushchego mistitsizma A.F. Loseva" [Against A.F. Losev's Militant Mysticism, 1930] published in the *Herald of the Communist Academy*, a journal devoted to Marxist theory, Kh. I. Garber wrote, for example: "It is not surprising that he [Losev] gives a clearly mystical interpretation of the theory of relativity and at the same time refers to Florensky's work *Mnimosti geometrii* [Imaginarities in Geometry]. [...] Losev is a philosopher of Orthodoxy, an apologist for serfdom and a defender of the police regime" (Garber, 2007).¹⁹ This is hardly surprising, for in the 1930s Marxist theorists declared a war on the epistemological principles of recent science, such as "mathematical idealism" allegedly built into Einstein's scientific work, that were regarded as contrary to dialectical materialism (Vuchinich, 1980).

Indeed, Losev seeks to draw philosophical and religious inferences from the latest scientific discoveries. The implications of the "new science" became the object of close study by the philosophers who tried to resist the dominant rational-empiricist thinking. Losev regarded the theory of relativity as an important step towards creating a new worldview: "The theory of relativity is not one of the ordinary hypotheses, but a new worldview" (Losev, 1996b, p. 126). A full acceptance of the idea of heterogeneity and relativity entails a different understanding not only of matter, but also of the very structure of the universe.²⁰ The development of a new conception of the world is discussed by Losev in the context of a broader anthropological discourse focused on humanity's place in the universe. Modern science in this sense is "humanistic" in its essence; it does not ignore the fate of the human being.

In this, he follows Florensky (Losev, 1990b, p. 11), for whom the notion of time is closely related to the notion of discontinuity (*nepreryvnost'*).²¹ Particularly sensitive to new paradigms (in his works, he cites Einstein, Freud, Husserl and Bergson and Spencer's vitalistic philosophy of life), Florensky interprets reality as a hierarchical

¹⁹ On other polemical articles directed against Losev in the 1930s, see Polovinkin (2012, p. 123).

²⁰ By "matter" Losev understands not a concrete substance, but an unlimited principle, the opposite of meaning, in some respects analogous to meon. In his *Dialectics of Myth*, he calls the interpretation of matter as an autonomous substance "a metaphysical and abstract notion" (Losev, 2014, pp. 120–122). To designate matter, Losev prefers to use the terms "body" (*telo*) or "corporeality" (*telesnost'*), understood as "fact," that is, a form which is dialectically derived from the triadic meaning.

²¹ In particular, Florensky's popular article in Russian about the new mathematical ideas titled "*O simvolach beskonechnosti*" [On the symbols of infinity] was published in 1904 in the journal "Novyi put'." The Russian philosophers' interest in the new scientific theories is also shown by a letter from Losev to Florensky of 24 May 1924, that refers to a collection of philosophical articles on mathematical, astronomical and mechanical topics being prepared in Moscow. The project was never realized owing to the onset of Soviet repression (Losev, 1990b, p. 14). On the translation of Einstein's theories into a broad philosophical view, including Florensky's work, see Vuchinich (2001, p. 14).

structure, as a sort of a “ladder.” From his point of view, the Renaissance ideas of the historical process, evolution and continuous progress represent a dangerous determinism for human freedom. By contrast, Florensky places the human person (*lichnost'*) before a choice, whereby the transition to a new level of being is not the consequence of a process, but the result of a “qualitative leap” (*kachestvennyi skachok*). This qualitative leap, detached from the line of continuity, allows the human being to reach a new level of understanding.

This opens the possibility of a turning point in the strictly determined historical process, and it is Einstein's theory, according to Losev, that confirms this possibility from a theoretical point of view. On epistemological plane, this means that an impulse of intuition, breaking rational “linearity” and reaching beyond pre-established knowledge, grasps a deeper and more authentic reality. In such an irruption, the infinite is revealed, and this happens only through a free act of the human person, by which she rediscovers in herself a connection to an original dimension. Since such an intuition is directed towards a reality that remains hidden in its ultimate essence, this knowledge will be expressible only through an antinomic formula. However, it is not a question here of a turn to irrationality, but rather of rational thought's impetus beyond its ordinary boundaries, which is one of the distinctive features of Russian thought. For Losev, the same intuition lies at the basis of the notion of infinity as expression of unity in multiplicity, of discontinuity in continuity. “The principle of relativity, speaking of heterogenous spaces and providing formulas for the transition from one space to another, makes shapeshifting and miracle possible again” (Losev, 2014, p. 21). It should be noted that here by “miracle” Losev does not mean an exception or deviation from natural laws, but their “ground and justification,” a final and historically realized correspondence of phenomena to a certain state (*tselesoobraznost'*). This definition is largely due to a similar notion of “magic” in Pavel Florensky, which consists in “living, vital (spiritualized) communication of man with living nature” (Losev, 1990b, p. 23), while science is communication with reality through concepts. In a similar way, in *Dialektika mifa* [Dialectics of Myth, 1930], Losev substantiates his critique of the modern understanding of the laws of nature by pointing out scientific thought's inability to explain them. Thus, “knowledge of the laws of nature is not a vital knowledge” (Losev, 2002a, p. 527), for it says nothing about the essence of the world; moreover, genuine knowledge of such laws is simply impossible; it is a sequence of “relative myths” for which one single hypothesis is sufficient.

At this point, our discussion of the miraculous brings us back to the question of the relationship between time and eternity. The possibility of a miracle heralds the entrance of eternity into human temporality, and opens access to the symbolic dimension where the coincidence of the historical human and the eternal divine is given as “expression,” “myth” (Marchenkov, 2004). “The myth is a real wonderful personal story given in words”: historicity is the essence of mythical experience (Losev, 2014, p. 265).²²

²² By “word” Losev means the name (*imia*) as a magic-mythical symbol, a synthesis of personality and expression. This emphasizes the “directionality” of the semantic content of the word in relation to reality. Losev's concept of magic consists in understanding the word as a multi-layered semantic core, which,

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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Footnote 22 (continued)

unlike a symbol, has a peculiar expressive direction, the ability to implement a certain *event*. In this sense, the word is not only a symbol, but also a “magic-mythical” symbol.

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