

THE FIRST LATVIAN PHILOSOPHER JĒKABS OSIS AND THE SEARCH FOR SUBSTANCE

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Abstract. Jēkabs Osis (1860–1920) is the first academically educated Latvian philosopher and one of the founders of the University of Latvia. However, Osis never worked there. His academic life was closely tied with the University of Tartu, where he studied theology, philosophy and eventually became a professor of philosophy. Inspired by his mentor, professor of philosophy, Gustav Teichmüller, Osis turned his attention to the works of Leibniz, most notably those about the nature of substance. Osis aspired to unify the understanding of the notion of substance with the necessity to substantiate the immortality of individual entities. Osis criticized the philosophy of Leibniz and verified a new understanding of substance that is found in the works of Teichmüller.

Keywords. Jēkabs Osis, Teichmüller, Leibniz, metaphysics, personalism, substance, individual, history of philosophy, epistemology, University of Tartu

DOI: 10.3176/tr.2015.2.01

1. Introduction

Jēkabs Osis is known in the Latvian history of philosophy as the first academically educated Latvian philosopher. His works and academic accomplishments influenced the development of Baltic intellectual thought during the first half of the 20th century. Even though Latvian philosophical thought only started developing at the beginning of the 19th century, Osis already had a solid foundation for his philosophy. Nevertheless, the comprehensive study of his legacy remains a work in progress.

Osis spent most of his life in Tartu. Initially, he studied theology at the University of Tartu and later taught religion at a local gymnasium. However, not long after Osis resigned and decided to study philosophy instead. His choice was influenced by Gustav Teichmüller (1832–1888), who was professor of philosophy

at the University of Tartu. After Teichmüller passed away, Osis became the professor of philosophy. From 1893 to 1905, Osis was the dean of history and philology, intermittently fulfilling responsibilities as head of the university. Osis taught logic, psychology, epistemology, history of philosophy and conducted seminars. His contemporaries described the professor as a true scholar, devoting his life to intellectual pursuits, adhering to a strict daily regimen (Jurevičs 1948:8). As evidenced by the published works of Osis, as well as the lecture notes of his students, the philosopher represented what he described as a branch of thought pioneered by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), Rudolph Hermann Lotze (1817–1881) and Teichmüller (Oze 1890:83).

In Tartu Osis found himself among other followers of Teichmüller, such as Evgenij Aleksandrovič Bobrov (1867–1933), the Polish philosopher, Vincet Lutosławski (1863–1954) and the Lithuanian philosopher, Wladimir Szyłkarski (1884–1960). The aforementioned thinkers by Latvian and Russian philosophy historians are often referred to as the ‘Tartu school of personalism’ (Priedīte 1991:9). Osis defined personalism as a worldview whereby the subject assumes a critical point of view and comes to a new understanding of cognition. He realizes that the external, seemingly existing world is merely a projection of himself (Oze 1896:14). Philosophers representing personalism were united in the search of new metaphysics that could serve as a theoretical foundation for the acknowledgement of personality as the highest value.

Personalists focused on the history of philosophy and acknowledged Leibniz as one of their predecessors. However, after analysing the teachings of Leibniz on the subject of substance, Osis rejected his insights. This paper focuses on Osis’ critique of Leibniz, revealing why Osis opposed the philosopher’s work, and how he thus demonstrated the necessity of Personalism philosophy.

2. The Tartu school of personalism

Russian and Latvian historians of philosophy tend to refer to Osis as a representative of the Tartu school of personalism. However, to place the contemplations of the philosopher in a broader context, it is important to ask – who were the personalists of Tartu?

The arrival of German philosopher Teichmüller in Tartu can be considered as the beginning of the Tartu school of personalism. Heiner Schwenke noted personal considerations as one of the main motives behind his arrival. Teichmüller was in need of a larger salary than one offered by the University of Basel, in order to provide for his family (Schwenke 2006:49). However, the question can also be framed from another angle by asking why Teichmüller was offered a position at the University of Tartu, which was part of Czarist Russia at the time.

During the 18th century there was no university network in Czarist Russia. However, the emperor Peter the Great, inspired by Leibniz and other thinkers, supported the proliferation of universities, academies and scientific societies. In

this process, one of the main issues was the lack of prospective students, as well as academic personnel. Students were invited mainly from Russian religious seminaries, but professors were sought from other countries, primarily Germany (Bezlepkin 1999:19). In the search for teachers, representatives from Russian universities developed ties with Göttingen, Jena and other German universities (Petuhov 1902:398).

The influx of German professors to Russian universities significantly contributed to the development of science in general, and philosophy was no exception. For example, Johann Gottlieb Buhle (1763–1821) arrived in Moscow from the University of Göttingen. The philosophy professor promoted interest in antique philosophy, and was one of the first to introduce Russian students to the philosophy of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854).

In the 18th century, Pavel I issued a ban on sending the younger generation to study abroad, which conflicted with the interests of the Baltic nobility. In order to solve the issue, Pavel I offered to create a new university in the region. It was one of the reasons behind the foundation of a university in Tartu (Guļevskis 2011:24). There were some discussions about the location in those days. Although, the University of Tartu already then had a long history, being established in 1632 as *Academia Dorpatensis* (*Academia Gustaviana*), the university was founded in Jelgava where it existed for about 100 days, because after the death of Pavel I, the new tsar Alexander gave an order to relocate the university in Tartu, stipulating that it must promote development of science in Vidzeme, Kurzeme and the Estonian provinces.

The German-Baltic philosopher Gottlob Benjamin Jäsche (1762–1842), the first philosophy teacher at the renewed University of Tartu, stressed the local importance of the university in his opening speech. Tartu had to enlist the descendants of local landlords to prevent the younger generation from leaving the Baltic region (Jäsche 1802:8). At the same time, the university could establish the values of Western European scientific achievements in Czarist Russia.

When Teichmüller was offered the opportunity to become a professor at the University of Tartu, the philosopher had already achieved recognition for his research on the philosophy of Aristotle. Since his student years, Teichmüller worked with antique texts, visiting lectures of Adolf Trendelenburg (1802–1872) in Berlin. Trendelenburg became a professor at the University of Berlin one and half years after the passing of Hegel. This is a noteworthy fact, as many researchers consider the year when Hegel died as the beginning of the downfall of German idealism or, as some refer to it, the beginning of the “breakdown of German idealism”. Following the death of Hegel, philosophy as a field of study became fragmented, ties between the various schools of philosophy weakened and public interest in philosophical questions consequently diminished (Falckenberg 1905:518).

Frederick Beiser (1949), an American philosopher, in his monograph titled “Late German Idealism” (2012), states that the time of Trendelenburg can be considered as the start of an identity crisis for the whole philosophy, at the heart of which lies the rapid development of empirical science. At the time, representatives

of the natural sciences regarded the speculations of philosophers with suspicion, “Philosophy had given birth to all sciences; but now that her children have grown up, she seems to have no purpose anymore” (Beiser 2013:23). A notable critic of the idealism branch of philosophy was Wilhelm Ostwald (1853–1932). He was teaching at the University of Tartu at the same time as Teichmüller. Ostwald professed a resurgence of interest in philosophy during the 19th century. However, this interest no longer focused primarily on the philosophy of nature, which, by his account, had lapsed into baseless speculation and brought the study of natural sciences as a whole in Germany down to its lowest point (Ostwald 1902:3). Ostwald considers the development of “a philosophy for the natural sciences” a necessity, separate from the academic, “specialist” philosophy, with an intrinsic dependence on the scientific method, trust in the progress of science and a commitment to continuously develop new tools to improve living standards for the betterment of mankind (ibid: 8–13).

Philosophers had to search for a new purpose and a new way to justify their own existence. A period of search began and multiple new branches of philosophy started to develop (Bičevskis 2009:106). Despite the myth of the “breakdown of German idealism”, attempts to ‘rehabilitate’ idealism played an important role in this search, adjusting it to new conditions defined by scientific developments.

Trendelenburg, well aware of the unenviable state of philosophy at the time, during his first classes in Berlin, harshly criticised the way Hegel approached the history of philosophy, instead encouraged the return to studies of antique texts that could serve as an inspiration for new searches in philosophy, and emphasised the close connection between philosophy and philology (Bratuscheck 1873:77).

Teichmüller was also aware of this crisis in philosophy. In the introduction to his work titled “The Real and the Apparent World: New Foundation of Metaphysics” (*Die wirkliche und die scheinbare Welt*) he writes, that the well-educated “know of the sorry state philosophy is in nowadays, wherein all systems have gone bankrupt, and will gladly welcome any attempt to give philosophy a new foundation” (Teichmüller 1882:XXVI).

For Teichmüller the search for this new foundation initially manifested through studies of ancient Greek philosophy under the tutelage of Trendelenburg. Much like his mentor, who aimed to establish a foundation for philosophy as the “science of all sciences”, Teichmüller also followed a line of thought described by Herbert Schnädelbach (1936), a professor of philosophy from the University of Humboldt, as the “rebirth of metaphysics”, with the problem of being as its focal point. Metaphysics that “has been reborn as ontology, charging against the empirical sciences occupying reality” (Schnädelbach 1983:233).

The Latvian philosopher Aloizs Strods (1924–2008) stated that Teichmüller was needed by the Russian government in Tartu as a shield against lines of thought that could prove dangerous to the monarchy (Strods 1996:31). Upon arriving in Tartu, Teichmüller began to actively work on the development of metaphysics. Criticising the followers of Hegel and Kant, he professed that a new doctrine must be created, one that would unveil and justify the value of individual

personality as the only true source of existence. Teichmüller named this new philosophy 'personalism' (Teichmüller 1889:157).

Who were the students of Teichmüller in Tartu? During the middle of the 19th century an increasing number of Latvians started studying at the University of Tartu. The lectures of Teichmüller on philosophy were attended by the first generation of Latvian intellectuals, such as: the linguist and poet Jēkabs Lautenbahs-Jūsniņš (1848–1928), the mathematician Pēteris Kadiķis (1857–1923), the theologian Jānis Sanders (1858–1951) etc. Also Osis, who, during his studies of theology in Tartu, attended courses by the German philosopher and, inspired by Teichmüller, turned to philosophy.

Known as a forthcoming professor, open to discussion, Teichmüller became popular among students (Schwenke 40), the lectures were widely attended and gave rise to new followers of his philosophy. Riga-born Russian thinker Bobrov, Polish philosopher Lutosławski and Lithuanian thinker Szyłkarski became devoted followers of Teichmüller.

Following the death of Teichmüller, Osis inherited his place as a professor at the University of Tartu and even though, supposedly, Teichmüller had personally named Osis as his successor (Lautenbahs 1920:5), it turned out to be a long and arduous ordeal. Despite multiple attempts to enact the Russification of Tartu, the Baltic Germans remained a formidable influence at the university during the second part of the 19th century (Petuhov 1902:436). In 1883, the senator Nikolaj Aveksen'evič Mamaseii (1835–1895) noted in a government review that the University of Tartu deviated from Russian scientific interests. He stated that the university and the realm of German sciences had "total, mutual synergy" (Mamaseii 1949:411). Osis declared himself ready to read lectures in Russian, causing conflict at the university. Consequently, professor Georg Philipp von Oettingen (1824–1916) threatened with a strike (Lautenbahs 1920:5) and newspaper articles questioned the academic quality of Osis' master's thesis. An article published in the newspaper "Düna Zeitung" is particularly noteworthy. The author counts Osis among the ranks of Latvian teachers of religion, where "the seeds of Baltic national religious patriotism are often sown" (Rorff 1889:2).

The university hesitated to elect Osis, and, ultimately, instead of being elected, the philosopher was appointed by the minister of education. The Latvian philosopher not only inherited the position from his mentor, but also his philosophical doctrine, which he strived to systematize and develop. Moreover, Osis was surrounded by a group of likeminded individuals, both Szyłkarski and Bobrov became assistant professors at the university.

There is no evidence to suggest that the philosophers of Tartu considered themselves a united group, nor has any philosophical manifest been found. However, they clearly kept in touch and even quoted each other on numerous occasions. Osis and Bobrov both strived to further develop the philosophy of Teichmüller and Szyłkarski, even attended to the matter of publishing his manuscripts.

The philosophers took cognisance of their opposition to the spirit of their time. Osis hoped that the sceptical and positivism-inspired streams of philosophical

thought would eventually lose their influence and philosophical thought would return to a place of reliance upon and belief in the strength of the spirit (Ohse 1940:5). Furthermore, Bobrov thought that the time of materialism and positivism had already ended, and instead, metaphysics and spiritualism had become the new necessity in philosophy (Bobrov 1898:40).

3. The critique of Leibniz

When describing the personalists of Tartu, historians of philosophy often mention the influence of Leibniz. The historian Vasilij Zen'kovskij (1881–1962) in his work “The history of Russian philosophy” devotes a chapter to representatives of the Neo-Leibniz branch of philosophy, including Teichmüller, Osis and Bobrov in it (Zen'kovskij 1948/2001:599). The Russian historian of philosophy Nikolaj Petrovič Il'in (1947) notes that Zen'kovskij divides Russian philosophers into groups – followers of Leibniz, Kant and Hegel and even though such an approach clearly reveals the connection between Russian and West-European philosophers, at the same time it can make it difficult to appreciate the originality of individual philosophers (Il'in 2008:43). Regarding the philosophers of Tartu as followers of Leibniz can be misleading in the sense that the criticism of his doctrine became obscured.

One of the first papers in philosophy by Osis was “Research on the concept of substance of Leibniz” (*Untersuchungen über den Substanzbegriff bei Leibniz*). The reviewer of the paper, professor from the University of Yen, Richard Falckenberg, indicated that Osis looks at the philosophy of Leibniz from a particular point of view (Falckenberg 1888:1). In the introduction, Osis explains that the paper is part of a larger research work, one which strives to investigate the concept of substance in contemporary philosophy (Ohse 1888:2)

The approach that Osis chose to analyse works of Leibniz was based on his understanding of the history of philosophy, which was strongly influenced by Teichmüller. As noted by Lutz Geldsetzer (1937), during the 19th century there was a growing discussion surrounding the understanding of history. Philosophers were asking: what is the history of philosophy? What is the nature of the relationship between philosophy and the history of philosophy? How should the history of philosophy be written (Geldsetzer 1968)? The most notable representatives of German academic philosophy during the 19th century, such as Eduard Zeller (1814–1908), Trendelenburg and Kuno Fischer (1824–1907) stimulated interest in the history of philosophy. The philosopher Ulrich Johannes Schneider notes that the growing dedication to the study of the history of philosophy was not limited to Germany, as France and England also exhibited the same trend. Extensive volumes were written on the history of philosophy, primarily by university professors. The growing prominence of the field can be seen in terms of statistics. At the start of the 19th century approximately 10% of all German philosophy studies were dedicated to the history of philosophy, by the end of the century half

of all academic inquiry was devoted to the history of the discipline, moreover, there was a rise in the practice of organizing seminars, discussing specific works of philosophy (Schneider 2004:283). Osis led seminars on the works of Aristotle, Plato and Kant at the University of Tartu. One of his students, Pauls Jurēvičs (1891–1981), wrote the following in memory of Osis: “His seminars were especially valuable. This is how I remember a particular seminar of his, dealing with the metaphysics of Aristotle, during which much could be gained due to the small number of participants” (Jurēvičs 1948:6).

As noted by Schneider, the majority of philosophy professors thought of delving into the history of philosophy as a necessity on the path to truly understanding the discipline (Schneider 2004:289). Osis warned his students at Tartu against being excessively captivated by Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, urging them to study the Greek language and history lest they become ‘plebs’ (Sanders 1964:26).

Even though the growing importance of the history of philosophy during the 19th century can leave an impression of diminishing original thought, such a conclusion can turn out to be premature. During his lectures Osis declares that:

“Not faith in dogma, but rather active thinking leads one to understanding and makes him a philosopher. It must be understood that the thoughts of a philosopher are a living, breathing thing; they cannot be caged within some text. Therefore, all philosophical writings ought to be viewed as motives, reference points for independent thought” (Oze 1890:9).

Osis considered that the history of philosophy, first of all, must include descriptive overviews. Secondly, historians must carry out comparative studies of concept definitions. In order to achieve the aforementioned, philosophical constructs must be broken down into their respective components, that is, concepts. In this way, the history of philosophy becomes a history of concepts, allowing us to “trace the lineage of modern constructs to their historical precursors” (Oze 1896:5). The next methodological step is rooted in the realization that in the history of philosophy one comes across questions that “spring naturally from the human spirit” (ibid: 6). Behind concepts and their constructs, Osis notes, the motivations of the thinker can be gleaned. This is why it becomes necessary to perform a psychological interpretation, revealing the motive driving the mind behind the psychological construct. This step, according to Osis, makes it possible to determine the value of the philosophical doctrine in question. It is necessary to explore the repercussions of concepts and their definitions, and then to correlate the results with the aims and motives of the particular philosopher to determine “coherence or contradiction” (ibid).

Osis indicates that the interest and care for the individual is central to the speculations of Leibniz. In attempts to prove the immortality of the soul and its connection to God, the question of substance becomes central in the doctrine of Leibniz, due to “the understanding of both, God and the soul, resting upon the understanding of substance” (Ohse 1888:13).

The aims underlying the philosophy of Leibniz, as described by Osis, are apparent in one of his first works – “The Confession of Nature against Atheists”

(1669), wherein Leibniz expresses suspicion that all attempts to explain the processes of nature, without accepting the existence of God, lead to “unconcealed atheism” (Leibniz 1669/1989:110). Leibniz admits that in order to explain corporal phenomena it is necessary to operate with the characteristics of matter – size, form and movement. However, corporeal entities, according to Leibniz, are not self-sufficient. First of all, from their characteristics alone, it is impossible to explain why the body has any particular form, and not another. Secondly, movement does not inherently derive from the body. Therefore, in order to explain the phenomena of the body, it is necessary to accept an immaterial entity ruling the world, that is, God.

The aforementioned arguments represent some of the early contemplations of Leibniz. In his search, the philosopher developed multiple approaches to the understanding of substance prior to reaching immaterial considerations. Osis criticised the Heidelberg professor Otto Caspari (1841–1917) for his interpretation whereby Leibniz rejects the notion of inherently inert and passive matter as early as 1670 (Caspari 1869:76). Currently, a professor at the University of Columbia, Christia Mercer is a proponent of this particular reading of Leibniz (Mercer 2001:167). However, Osis, as well as Professor Daniel Garber of Princeton University, a critic of Mercer, are sceptical about attempts to ‘imbue’ the early works of Leibniz with some of his later realizations (Garber 2000:150).

It was not until the paper titled “Discourse on Metaphysics” (1686), which was “permeated by refreshing new streams of thought” (Ohse 1888:17), in the opinion of Osis, that Leibniz reached an understanding of substance that remained unchanged in his later work. In the mentioned paper, the German philosopher states that “it is of course true that when a number of predicates are attributed to a single subject while this subject is not attributed to any other, is called an individual substance” (DM 8).

One of the conclusions arising from the given understanding of substance is the realization that each subject in itself already encompasses all that will happen to it. Therefore, one who possesses full knowledge of a subject would also know all its predicates. Leibniz makes use of Julius Caesar as an example. Every single action undertaken by Julius Caesar was encompassed in his substance.

However, even if one would have absolute knowledge of Julius Caesar or any other subject, he would be unable to unveil the necessary links between the subject and its predicates. Only God, as the absolute, can possess such knowledge, and only God can know how the concepts “I” and “being” relation, that is, why should the “I” exist in the first place (NE IV, VII. 411–412).

Through the characterisation of substance, Leibniz also comes to reject the interaction between substances. Since substance from the onset already encompasses all that will happen to it, as an independent unit, and nothing in it is caused by other substances, “nothing enters naturally into our minds from without, and it is a bad habit we have of thinking as if our soul received certain ‘species’ as messengers and as if it had doors or windows” (DM 26).

The reason behind a subject being unable to foresee, with necessity, all future events, and at the same time perceive the whole of the universe, lies in the limited

nature of separate substances. If individual substance has no limitations, it would exist on the same level as God, but, due to its limited nature, a separate substance can be described as a “small divinity in its own sphere” (Mon. 83).

Substances contain in themselves notions which vary in accordance with the clarity of said notions. A rational substance, a monad, is capable of apperception. Leibniz writes:

“Thus it is well to make distinction between perception, which is the inner state of the Monad representing outer things, and apperception, which is consciousness or the reflective knowledge of this inner state, and which is not given to all souls nor to the same soul at all times” (Leibniz 1714/1898:411).

In apperception, a monad is capable of producing clearer notions which, in accordance with the teleology of Leibniz, is the aim of the development of all substances.

After characterizing substance as understood by Leibniz, Osis returns to the initially posed question – how does Leibniz ensure the individuality of the immortal soul? Without taking into account the references by Leibniz to each substance having its own, individual experience and place in the order of the universe, leading to an individual perception of the world, Osis considered the basis of individualism in the doctrine of Leibniz as being based on unclear notions. “At the moment apperception develops to the level of clear ideas, it becomes part of the common mind. However, as ideas of the common mind do not possess individual features, they abolish individuality” (Ohse 1888:57). Given these contemplations, Osis recognizes that the foundation of individual substance, as understood by Leibniz, cannot safeguard separate entities.

In the conclusion of his research, Osis reproached the German philosopher for intellectualism. A broader explanation of the label "intellectualism" can be found in his monograph on Lotze. The paper indicates that representatives of the intellectualism branch of philosophy “acknowledge thought as the foremost element of the spirit” (Oze 1896:62). Osis mentions Hegel and Shelling as representatives of intellectualism, with their respective philosophical constructs, in the opinion of Osis, rejecting the value of individual personality as a consequence of defining the aim of historical development as the return to an impersonal Absolute. The views of Osis himself regarding the aim of development will be explained in the following chapter.

4. The new understanding of substance

In his research on the understanding of substance by Leibniz, Osis concludes that the German philosopher was unable to establish the immortality of individual personality. According to Osis, upon determining a teleological course, Leibniz arrives at monism which excludes the possibility of differing substances. However, Osis considered that the immortality of individual personality was established by Teichmüller’s doctrine of Personalism.

In his work titled “The Monadology” (1714) Leibniz wrote:

“It is by the knowledge of necessary truths and by their abstract expression [leurs abstractions] that we are raised to acts of reflexion which make us think of what is called “I,” and observe that this or that is within us: and thus, in thinking of ourselves, we think of being, of substance, of the simple and the compound, of the immaterial and of God Himself, conceiving that what is limited in us is in Him without limits” (Mon. 30).

But according to Teichmüller, direct self-consciousness is present before all relations, ““I” is not a concept or the product of thinking, a judgement or a form of cognition, but simple consciousness” (Teichmüller 1889:160). And this simple consciousness is the only true prototype of substance.

The soul, Osis writes, acts in a “suicidal manner towards itself” (ibid:126), as it determines its own existence by way of ontological abstractions, which are secondary to the simple fact that the “I” exist.

How does Osis understand the aforementioned division between the existence of the “I” and secondary abstractions? Part of the answer is already sketched out in his critique of Leibniz as a representative of “intellectualism”. Thought is just one of the functions of the “I”. The existence of the “I” is a presupposed condition at the core of every act of thinking. The acknowledgement of the “I” as the existence of substance is possible through thought, as well as feeling and emotion. However, the subject itself cannot be explored to determine its function, nor can it be adequately described.

In his paper titled “Epistemology” (1890), Osis turns to the relationship between cognition and external objects, exploring some of their differing qualities (colour, odour, taste), indicating that they cannot be derived from outside the perceiving subject. The philosopher concludes that “Directly we can only know the contents of our consciousness: our feelings, preconceptions and emotions. On the other hand, things outside ourselves, which influence our state of consciousness, we can only contemplate through the prism of our own consciousness” (Oze 1890:22).

Osis does not agree that a subject can perceive such characteristics as form and movement in a direct way. He states that, in the process of perceiving an object, the subject perceives separate sensations delivered by the sense organs and subsequently combines them to form an impression of the object and its qualities. Thus, it follows that “objects are impressions and not direct awareness; they are a secondary, not a primary form of phenomena” (ibid: 23).

There is a tendency deriving from human nature, which leads to misleading notions, and, as Osis believes, erroneous conclusions in philosophy. This tendency was named by Teichmüller ‘projectivism’ (Teichmüller 1874:67). In the work on Lotze, Osis defines projectivism as the “uncritical point of view, in which the states and entities of consciousness, that is, feelings, notions and concepts, are projected outward, creating a world of objects and entities seemingly independent from the subject” (Oze 1896:14).

While questioning the ontological status of objects located outside the subject in his work “Epistemology”, Osis states that by searching the cause of its feelings,

the subject projects them outward, creating illusions about objects independent from it, which, as vessels of perceived characteristics, are then elevated to the status of substance.

Osis acknowledges the individual “I” as the only substance, moreover it is the “I” of self-consciousness. Referring to Teichmüller, Osis makes a strict distinction between self-knowledge and self-consciousness. This distinction, according to Osis, is not made by those representing intellectualism, who equate the thinker with his thoughts. However, those who think, as stated above, also feel, sense and move, “therefore ‘I’ as a concept is not the real ‘I’, but only ‘I’ as a reference, the ‘I’ as an image” (Oze 1896:200).

If for Leibniz, a development of a reasoned monad suggests the creation of clear preconceived notions, then how did Osis describe the teleological order of the world, considering his rejection of the primacy attributed to the function of thinking? The philosopher Larisa Čuhina (Čuhina 1991:240) indicates that the optimism seen in the thought of Leibniz does not apply to Osis. Leibniz’s treatise titled “On Wisdom” (1700) states that “Nothing serves our happiness better than the illumination of our understanding and the exercise of our will to act always according to our understanding, and that this illumination is to be sought especially in the knowledge of such things as can bring our understanding ever further into a higher light” (Leibniz 1690/1989:426), in those words, as indicated by Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), Leibniz encompasses the whole theoretical programming characteristic of the German enlightenment (Cassirer 1951:128).

In contrast, Osis describes the idea of progress, which ruled the age of Enlightenment, as an empty illusion that had already been lost:

“Optimism was accompanied by the belief that scientific progress will bring happiness to the people, but reality clearly showed that, with the advancement of science, evil and suffering progressively grows and expands, instead of the opposite. Then, there was disappointment in relation to the benefits of science” (Oze 1890:3).

In the view of Osis, the very idea of mankind achieving progress is grounded in the illusions stemming from projectivism, specifically in the projection of the concept of ‘mankind’. The philosopher urges us to keep in mind that mankind consists of individuals, and if progress is at all possible, then surely it must be the progress of separate individuals, “all historical events happen through the thoughts, feelings, passions, and efforts of personality” (Oze 1896:155).

In this way, Osis believes it is possible to return to the respect for the values of each particular individual, promoted by Christianity. Clearly, for him, the Christian doctrine also serves as the basis for recognizing the ultimate purpose of human life. As a consequence of rejecting the purposeful development of mankind, Osis must derive the answer to the question – what is the meaning and purpose driving the existence of separate individuals? The philosopher gives but a brief indication – “By acknowledging the individual as a substantiated existence and the true subject of historical development, there is no barrier to expanding history beyond the borders of this world” (Oze 1896:160).

5. Conclusions

The context of philosophical contemplations of Osis is the German “breakdown of idealism”, following the death of Hegel. Even though the term “breakdown of idealism” is conventionally applied to the philosophical environment of Germany, it should be noted that despite being located within Czarist Russia, the University of Tartu maintained close ties with the German academic environment.

Philosophy in Germany during the 19th century is dominated by the critique of past thinkers and attempts to create new metaphysics that would give philosophy a new foundation in a period of relentless development of empirical science. The “rebirth of metaphysics” school of thought was represented by Trendelenburg and his student, Teichmüller, who arrived in Tartu and found other supporters of his philosophy.

Even though the Personalists of Tartu are considered followers of Leibniz, Osis, in his work, expressed criticism against the German philosopher. Moreover, Osis opposed the interpretation of substance in the doctrine of Leibniz. Osis thought that Leibniz was unable to reconcile the desire to enable the immortality of individual personality, and the repercussions deriving from the definition of substance and teleology. Leibniz considered individual substance as inherently limited in comparison to the absolute substance of God. Limitations of substance arise from its abilities of perception. The internal progress of a monad means the transition from ambiguous to clear notions. However, if a monad could develop completely, as Osis concluded, it would lose its individuality.

Osis considered intellectualism as the flaw in the approach developed by Leibniz, that is, the absolutisation of thought. The philosopher indicated that humans are not only thinking entities, but also entities of movement, desire and sensation. However, all of those are only functions of substance, while substance itself, which Osis, following Teichmüller, describes as a simple “I” of self-consciousness, presented before all relations, remains separate from its functions.

Based on Teichmüller’s understanding of substance, Osis rejected the idea of progress derived from the works of Leibniz characterising the century of Enlightenment. The only purposeful development possible is confined to particular personalities, not abstract concepts such as ‘mankind’, and its development, Osis believed, continues into the afterlife.

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