

# Capricious Metaphysics contra Polarization: Lev Shestov's Creative Anthropology

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## Abstract

Eric Gans's conception of the origin of metaphysics leads him to conclusions about metaphysics similar to those held by Lev Shestov, an early twentieth-century philosopher who exerted a great influence on the existentialist movement in the early to mid twentieth century. This paper illuminates the similarities between these conclusions in order to demonstrate how an individual's involvement in polarization, as formulated in the terms of Generative Anthropology's (GA) originary scene, may be avoided by taking up Shestov's method of capricious metaphysics, a practice which refuses the adoption of received metaphysical assumptions, or *a priori* assertions, especially the notion of necessity. Instead, Shestov suggests that individuals look askance at the central ideals of their societies—or, what GA terms "centres of attention"—and strike out on their own intellectual journeys, thereby, leaving their peers on the periphery of the scene in order to discover other, or create new, scenes. Following Gans's contention that declarative sentences evolved from an originary ostensive gesture, this paper further suggests that declarative statements—which compose the rationales for staying on a given scene—are arbitrary and, therefore, may be exchanged for other statements and syllogisms that arise from the individual's creative caprice. In making such statements and inventing such syllogisms, individuals have the potential to be liberated from the polarities, or—put in GA's terms—competing centres of attention that galvanize those affected by cultural ideals, religious rhetoric, and ideological stances into tribes.

**Keywords:** Generative Anthropology, Lev Shestov; Metaphysics, Necessity, Polarization

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According to Generative Anthropology (GA), "[m]etaphysics, the intellectual attitude of Western philosophy, is best defined by its unexamined presupposition that the declarative sentence or *proposition* is the fundamental form of language" ("A Brief Introduction to Generative Anthropology"). In *Originary Thinking*, Eric Gans asserts that conventional

metaphysics present “[c]ategories such as ‘being’ and ‘reality’ [that] attempt to substantiate human understanding of the universe in objective, nonhuman terms” (63). He goes on to claim that “[t]he epistemology behind such categories is ultimately theological and revelatory.” With this gesture, Gans indirectly aligns himself with the thought of the Russian émigré to France, Lev Shestov, who had a great influence on the intellectual foment of continental philosophy in the early to mid-twentieth century. In his master work *Athens and Jerusalem*, Shestov resists philosophy’s efforts to establish logical, necessary truths and, instead, valorizes the creative caprice of the biblical God. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus interprets Shestov’s position as an exemplum of absurdism. Of Shestov’s thought, he writes, “[o]ne thing only interests him, and that is the exception, whether in the domain of the heart or of the mind” (18). Camus’s observation highlights Shestov’s interest in the particularity and complexity of the human against dehumanized, abstract metaphysical systems. In his early work *All Things Are Possible*, Shestov points out the inherent emptiness of propositions about the nature of reality, writing: “We know nothing of the ultimate realities of our existence, nor shall we ever know anything. Let that be agreed” (1.9). He goes on to say humans are under no obligation to accept the dogmatism of metaphysical systems, stating: “It only follows that man is free to change his conception of the universe as often as he changes his boots or his gloves.” For Shestov, “constancy of principle belongs only to one’s relationships with other people, in order that they may know where and to what extent they may depend on us. Therefore, on principle man should respect order in the external world and complete chaos in the inner.” Thus, Shestov shows his respect for human sociability, while also celebrating the possibilities of unbounded, individual intellectual creativity. I propose to compare Shestov’s embrace of intellectual caprice and changeability to the creativity of hypothesizing the anthropological origins of metaphysics expounded by GA. Given the tendency for humans, especially in current cultural and political discourse, to hedge themselves into intellectual positions dogmatically defended with propositions drawn from pre-established metaphysics, such a comparison is timely. Focusing on this tendency and considering that metaphysical propositions are often competing centres, or polarities, around which language-users array themselves, this paper will argue that Lev Shestov’s critique of metaphysical certainties validates GA’s characterization of metaphysics, showing that GA’s experimental way of thinking, which—if emphasis is laid on its creatively hypothetical nature—is obliquely similar to Shestov’s critique of metaphysics and, thereby, has the capacity to evade the mimetically charged lure of propositions that generate polarization.

In *Originary Thinking*, Gans’s chapter on the taxonomy of speech-acts seeks to reframe philosophers’ and linguists’ heretofore metaphysical assumption that declarative statements are the basis for all language by offering an anthropological account of how the declarative evolved from the ostensive gesture in the originary scene. Gans hypothesizes that this scene is a historical event, wherein the ostensive consisted of people’s gestures towards an object. Gans further suggests that philosophers of language and linguists are in error when they insist that the declarative sentence is the most fundamental linguistic form, existing as a

metaphysical *a priori*. Thus, the declarative has been stripped by philosophers and linguists of its historical basis in the revelatory realization that accompanied an originary ostensive gesture and then speech-act, which evolved into the imperative, and, ultimately, into the declarative statement, out of which metaphysics is constructed. Following on GA's definition of the term, I will broadly define discourse of metaphysics as arrangements of declarative statements that characterize existence or being, including representations of empirically experienced natural phenomena, given that such representations attempt (as the common definition of metaphysics asserts) to relate the true nature of reality.

As stated above, with its hypothetical historical understanding of the emergence of the human, GA posits that the philosophical development of metaphysics is derived from ritual and the theological conceptions that emerged on the originary scene and eventually evolved into full-blown theologies—themselves metaphysical systems—that use declarative sentences to explain the existence of the universe. In *Originary Thinking*, Gans writes: “The epistemology behind such [metaphysical] categories [as ‘being’ and ‘reality’] is ultimately theological and revelatory” (63). Indeed, theology “is evacuated by disembodiment of its vocabulary, leaving only these vaporous notions [‘being’ and ‘reality’] in its place” (63). Speaking against those who practice philosophical metaphysics among the ruins of theology, Gans advocates a return to anthropology, wherein the human—with our desires and attendant sociability—hold pride of place. The declarative sentences that instantiate various theologies frequently represent anthropomorphized beings who are subject to many of the same desires and passions that humans are. The Greek gods are well-known exemplars of this; however, the God of the Bible is just as prone as Zeus to passionate outbursts and interactions with human beings. This focus on the human and humans’ theological representation of anthropomorphic beings, as opposed to metaphysicians’ abstraction and disembodiment, is an important point of contact between GA and Shestov’s thought.

The majority of Shestov’s master work *Athens and Jerusalem* is an exposition of the medieval scholastics’ and then Enlightenment philosophers’ attempts to transform the capricious human-like God of the Bible into a rationalized, logically coherent abstraction rather than the Bible’s creative, passionate deity. In doing this, they attempt to constrain, not only God, but all beings through the force of rational systems. Holding to the Greek—specifically Aristotle’s and the Stoics’—insistence on the rational acceptance of necessity, the scholastics sought to subject God to universal principles and the law of non-contradiction. Proceeding from the idea that rational thought (or logically coherent syllogisms) cannot be at odds with God’s nature, their efforts, Shestov argues, ultimately force medieval theologians to aggrandize knowledge of necessary principles over faith in an omnipotent (or all creating) God and embrace axioms such as Augustine’s: I “understand in order to believe” (3.4). Drawing on the scholarship of the medievalist Étienne Gilson, Shestov repeatedly demonstrates the obsession medieval thinkers “had with finding a proof for the existence of God which rests only on the principle of [non-] contradiction” within a

metaphysics of substance constructed using declarative sentences. Enlightenment philosophers took up the cause of their forbearers, refining their efforts, until—in the thought of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz—the notion that God is subject and bound by necessity and reason was firmly entrenched in the Western tradition. Shestov cites both Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura* (God or Nature) and Leibniz's conviction that "eternal truths ... are in the mind of God independently of His will" to further underscore his point (3.4). In order to demonstrate how these ideas persisted in the metaphysical systems of idealism, Shestov quotes Hegel's axiom: "everything that is real is rational" (3.7). Thus, God, humanity, and all of creation seemed to be firmly under the control of the rule of non-contradiction, which forces all to accept there is no aspect of existence—including no creative act—that is not subject to incontrovertible universal laws that may be described with logical syllogisms.

Illustrating the possibility of countering this tendency, Shestov's critical readings of Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, and Kierkegaard reveal other ways of thinking—ways that do not accept the constraints established by the Greeks and promulgated by theologians and metaphysicians. "Nietzsche's 'will to power,'" Shestov writes, "his 'beyond good and evil,' his 'morality of masters' which he opposes to the 'morality of slaves'" refuses the constraints of declaratives, which attempt to establish the authority of necessity over the individual's creative caprice (3.10). In the ranting of Dostoyevsky's *Underground Man* against the stone wall of rational philosophy's "two plus two equals four," Shestov identifies Dostoyevsky's equation of positivist progressivism with death. In Kierkegaard, Shestov sees Dostoyevsky's "spiritual double." Kierkegaard witnesses "[s]peculative philosophy [bowing] down before ... self evidences" and—instead of joining in—he "proclaims ... [the ascendancy of] existential philosophy, the source of which is faith ... which overcomes ... self-evidences." Shestov further extols Kierkegaard for his valorization of the omnipotent—that is all-creating—God, whom speculative philosophy ignores.

Ultimately, for Shestov, the capricious, anthropomorphic God of the Judeo-Christian tradition exemplifies—and models for humans—the refusal of capitulation to the constraining imperatives supported by syllogistically organized declaratives, which propound universal laws that ostensibly follow from necessity. Echoing the biblical assertion that humans are made in God's image, Shestov extends the deity's capacity to act capriciously to humans. With Kierkegaard, he claims the very possibility of believing in an improbable biblical God is itself evidence of the individual's capacity—like that of the deity—to construct her own metaphysical system that has no part in prescribed, commonly-held universal laws (3.10). Given that there are no logical or empirical grounds to believe in the existence of a divine being (who, out of caprice, created the universe), to hold such faith is the essence of groundlessness itself. It elevates the absurdity of belief and opens up an infinite multiplicity of possible metaphysical constructions that do not depend on reason. This is a departure from a system of thought—a mythical, religious, or ideological system—that functions by creating a centre of attention around which believers gather to

create a mimetically desiring periphery, which becomes an aspect of individual and community identity. Such a mythical, religious, or ideological centre of attention, when set against another scene, is a polarity that draws onlookers to gather around, believe, and identify with the others who stand on the periphery.

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I have stated above that Shestov's thought, like GA's way of thinking, tends to lead those who think like him away from becoming polarized, a term which is usually defined as the division of "something, especially something that contains different people or opinions, into two completely opposing groups" ("Polarization"). In response, one might object that the title of Shestov's master work, *Athens and Jerusalem*, itself sets up a polarity. This is, however, not the case. Shestov is no dogmatist. His examination of the metaphysics of ancient and modern philosophy reveals that, behind even the most rigorous metaphysician's elaboration of his or her system, lies the unrealizable desire to achieve an all-encompassing knowledge that expounds an all-powerful necessity, to which everyone must ultimately submit. Shestov does not want to submit to necessity, nor does he wish his readers to take his thought as expounding the imperatives of necessity. Accordingly, Shestov does not dogmatically insist on Judeo-Christian faith, nor is he a Jewish or a Christian apologist. Rather, he attempts to point out how willingly humans tend to accept the constraints of reason and prefer to submit to necessity rather than conceiving of the existence of an infinite plentitude of potentialities or, as yet uncreated, realities. This is evident in the full title to his early work, *All Things Are Possible* (sometimes translated as *The Apotheosis of Groundlessness*). The paradoxical elevation of groundlessness in the title illustrates how the work sets out to release the reader from the bondage of formal systems. Characterizing Shestov's way of thinking in the forward to *All Things Are Possible*, D.H. Lawrence states that Shestov "is preaching nothing.... He absolutely refutes any imputation of a central idea" (10). Instead, he attempts to expose the laziness and resulting banality of allowing oneself to be chained to any given system of thought. Thus, the dichotomy between the cities of Athens and Jerusalem in the title of Shestov's major work does not set up a polarized antagonism between two systems of metaphysical thought: one rationalist and one religious. Rather—in the work's final section, titled "On the Second Dimension of Thought: Struggle and Reflection"—Shestov asserts the possibility that refusing the constraints imposed by rationalist, positivist, mythical, or religious systems inheres in the individual's capacity to capriciously create multiple ways of understanding and knowing.

Like the most original speculations made in GA's way of thinking, Shestov proposes a poetics that resists established assumptions by turning towards the individual, as she exists in relation to others. Nevertheless, GA does draw on some principles that could be described as accepting of necessity, specifically the Girardian principle of mimetic desire. Though many who deploy the idea of mimetic desire in their theorization would like to establish mimeticism as a law as necessary as gravity, Girard's original exposition of the

concept asserts the possibility of the mimetically-influenced individual turning away from one model and choosing another. Embedded in the original formulation of mimetic theory in Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* is a pause—manifest as a hesitation—in the novels' characters' mimetic behaviour that allows the characters the choice of reorienting to another model. For Girard this is the moment of the novel's central character's and the novelist's conversion. GA's rendition of the change of imitative orientation includes a similar hesitation in its theorization of the behaviour of subjects on the originary scene. This is the gesture of aborted appropriation. Though this initial hesitation is explicable by the natural law of self-preservation, or fear, in the face of potentially fatal violence, the repetition of the gesture on a subsequent scene—the gesture which is the originary ostensive sign—would be neither a natural animal reaction nor a reasoned gesture. The first person to make the originary ostensive sign elects to act without any clearly defined rationale. Thus, the originary ostensive sign could also be the first instance of creative caprice. Just as the protagonist in a novel unaccountably reorients his mimetic attention, the first emitter of the ostensive sign unaccountably chooses to act. We may propose reasons for these choices, but these reasons will remain unverifiable, more-or-less convincing declarative propositions.

The ostensive sign emitter's creative break away from apparently necessary constraints, when compared with Shestov's capricious resistance to non-contradictory rationalist systems, shows an oblique affinity between the two ways of thinking, an affinity which imagines the possibility of escaping apparently necessary scenes, or polarities. GA's hypothesis posits a scenicity (or organization of scenic configurations) that easily lends itself to visualizing the social and cultural configuration of competing polarities—that is, a set of desired centres surrounded by rings of mimetically desiring subjects. Given that desire is an affect, or emotional disposition, that motivates individuals to fasten their attention on a given object via the mediation of models for desire, the emotions that accompany desire form a spectrum, which Gans has characterized as spanning a divide between love and resentment (see his *Chronicles of Love and Resentment*). To stand on a given scene is to occupy a place between the two extremes of love and resentment. Thus, in GA's understanding of the scene, to turn one's back on the object of desire is interpretable as an expression of resentment. However, there are other characterizations of emotion that may be used to interpret the affects that accompany such a gesture. For instance the terms "love and resentment" might be replaced with "enthusiasm and anger,"<sup>[1]</sup> given that a beloved person or concept inspires enthusiastic adoration in a mimetically desiring periphery, while another idea or person may inspire angry revulsion in a mimetically driven mob. For the individual, however, there is a third possibility, which is indifference—a disposition that lends itself to capricious reorientations of desire—wherein the individual remains affectively unmoved by the mimetically driven interests of the community (that is, the desiring periphery).

In an article titled "A Cross-Cutting Calm: How Social Sorting Drives Affective Polarization," political scientist Lilliana Mason suggests that—given the current cultural and political

climate—calm individuals, those who feel neither enthusiasm nor anger, are becoming increasingly uncommon, a claim which, when transposed into the language of GA, indicates that centres of attention are generating increasingly passionate expressions of desire that fall on the spectrum of love and resentment, or anger and enthusiasm. She argues that anger and enthusiasm for a given governmental policy is not as powerful a motivation for opinion and action as anger and enthusiasm for identification with a given group and further claims that people who have cross-cutting identities—that is, the ability to identify with a number of groups—are less enthusiastic and angry. Thus, as “social sorting” into differing identity groups increases, less emotionally charged peoples’ numbers will decline (1). Mason begins her argument by pointing out that “[i]n recent decades, a particular type of partisan sorting has been occurring in the American electorate. American partisan identities have grown increasingly linked with a number of other specific social identities. These include religious ... racial ... and other political group identities” (2). Mason goes on to explore how an

increasingly socially homogeneous set of parties has generated an increasingly emotionally reactive—and therefore ‘affectively’ polarized—electorate. The specific emotions ... [she examines] are enthusiasm and anger, chosen because these particular emotions have been repeatedly shown to drive action, political engagement, and partisan thinking.... (2)

The social sorting that Mason describes is analogous to the tendency for mimetic desire to create a scene, whereupon desire generates affective responses of love or resentment inflected with enthusiasm or anger. Mason demonstrates that action, political engagement, and partisanship are linked to the experience of these emotions, and that social sorting creates “identity scales,” which “are coded with positive values while unaligned identities are coded negatively” (11). Thus, driven by mimetic desire, individuals are increasingly galvanizing their identities to align with sets of racialized, religious, or political rhetoric—that is, syllogistically established metaphysics. From the perspective of GA, as it draws on mimetic theory, this polarization into specific identity groups is the attraction of a given centre of attention, which those who are already on the scene have designated—through the ostensive gestures that underlie their declarative, syllogistic rhetoric—desirable and, in many cases, sacred. As noted above, desire is a fundamental affect, which is the basis of love, resentment, enthusiasm, and anger, which are not subject to reason. Accordingly, polarization occurs due to emotions dependent on desire, desire which is driven by syllogistic systems composed of declaratives.

In a polarized society there are typically two dominant scenes, or polarities, that draw the mimetic desire of each member of the society, pulling them in one or the other direction. In order for the centre of a given polarity, or scene, to be desirable, a subject must be convinced of its desirability through the interest of the others on the scene. This interest is most usually expressed through discourse, which uses declarative sentences to create a

metaphysics that extols the centre's desirability. If, like Shestov, a given subject listens to the rationale for desiring a given centre, but—resisting the mimetic impulse to adopt the system of declarative sentences—holds the theory of the centre's desirability at arm's length, that subject will feel free to distance herself from the scene, moving away until she is drawn into another. However, on her way, she may become a centre of attention herself by deploying declaratives to create a new metaphysics that, for a time, attracts a desiring periphery. This is a moment of caprice, wherein an individual—breaking away from the scene through a choice akin to Girard's converted protagonist or GA's first sign emitter—fashions a space for original creative expression.

This capricious creative construction of a new system of declarative sentences, or metaphysics, is the essence of proposing new hypotheses, and therefore resembles the project undertaken by those who practice originary thinking. *Anthropoetics's* "Brief Introduction to Generative Anthropology" makes this explicit in its characterization of the future of GA, which states: "The rethinking of the totality of human institutions on the basis of the originary hypothesis will be carried out by those willing to overcome their discomfort with a new way of thinking for the sake of the intellectual excitement it provides." This statement affirms GA's capacity to entertain hypotheticals, which is to say: think creatively, even capriciously, about the nature of the human. This capacity to amend and reformulate in order to develop new avenues of thought liberates the thinker—the creator of declarative sentences and syllogisms—to embrace paradoxes as constituent of humans' existence and experience. This capacity is a form of Shestov's refusal to cling to a central idea. If untethered from the notion that declarative sentences, and similarly structured notations, ostensibly establish unquestionable realities, individual humans might float freely between scenes, as well as create and dissolve their own.

As already noted, GA asserts that such scenes are sites of self-referential desire, desire which manifests in both love and resentment. The language used to persuade others to love a certain centre will likely offer reasons couched in declarative sentences, declaratives that are themselves an epiphenomenon of desire. With its model of the centre and periphery, GA celebrates the paradoxical nature of the human experience of desire, which—in its self-referentiality—is infinitely creative. Gans's 9<sup>th</sup> *Chronicle of Love and Resentment* asserts the primacy of desire in its reflection on the paradox: "Paradox depends on self-reference. Structures are paradoxical when they refer, directly or indirectly, to themselves. But everything human is self-referential. Our consciousness necessarily includes itself in what it is conscious of" (para. 3). Gans goes on to posit the existence of an "imaginary scene," wherein "I see myself through the eyes of the community that gives value to my choice." Though he does not delve into the nature of this choice, as I have done above, Gans notes that "to desire and to see oneself desire are contradictory operations," which occur as we imagine ourselves on the periphery of a scene with an inaccessible centre. Thus, the paradox of desire itself gives rise to the possibility of reason, which, in its pursuit of truths, refuses contradictions.



The paradox of desire gives rise to the possibility of scepticism, which—in turn—allows for the possibility of capricious metaphysical contemplation. Individuals desiring on a given periphery may feel resentment at the inaccessibility of the centre, which may cause one to stand at the outer edge of the periphery. Alternatively, one might lovingly and longingly continue to contemplate the centre—resisting the impulse to reorient oneself to another scene. Thus, the individual is always in a paradoxical position unless she is in a state of capriciously transitioning from one scene to another. To realize the paradox of one's desire and begin to question the necessity of remaining riveted to the contemplation of a given centre is to begin to question one's own desire for the centre and—while remaining aware of how one's desire appears in the eyes of the community—look askance or sceptically at the desire of the others. Creating sceptical questions that query the logic of others' desire may appear to be a form of reasoning in itself, which would therefore be subject to the same laws of non-contradiction that rationalist discourse declares inviolable. However, given that it is the paradox of desire that allows for the possibility of rationalist discourse and that desire is driven by the irrationality of mimeticism and associated resentment, this is not the case. Scepticism has no truck with reason.

Shestov discusses scepticism as a non-rationalist way of thinking, and his discussion illustrates the way scepticism—combined with creative, capricious thinking—may be an antidote to polarization. Challenging the axiom that “logical scepticism refutes itself, since the denial of positive knowledge is already an affirmation” (*All Things are Possible* 1.44), Shestov makes two points to characterize the non-rationalist nature of scepticism: firstly, “scepticism ... has no desire whatever to gratify that dogma which raises logic to the position of law,” and, secondly, “there is no philosophic theory, which if carried to its extreme, would not destroy itself.” Thus, scepticism “honestly avows that it cannot give that which all other theories claim to give.” In this characterization of scepticism, it becomes—not a belligerently antagonistic and destructive mode of thought—but a way of thinking that is comfortable with uncertainty, unembarrassed in not providing definitive answers, and able to resist the urge to readily adopt, or outright reject, others' opinions. In this time of radical polarization in international relations, in domestic politics, in cultural conversations, such a way of thinking would be ameliorative to the emotionally charged—and, indeed, often violent—interactions that are destructive to individuals, relationships, and communities. The capacity to pacifically inhabit the paradox of desire, while being conscious of the self-referentiality of one's desire, allows an individual to stand at the back of the crowd of those others on the desiring periphery of a given scene. From this position, one might even turn one's back on the centre and look out into the void, wherein constellations of other scenes beckon to the individual. Some in the crowd may be nonplussed by such strange behaviour, ignore it, or elect to follow suit, potentially following others towards as yet undiscovered scenes of desire—scenes which, to the majority of the periphery, it would be absurd to seriously consider contemplating.

Those who appreciate Shestov's thought or GA's originary thinking stand on a given scene

or set of scenes, wherein the paradox of desire that simultaneously attracts and repels the individual may be the force that propels one to choose capriciously and thereby launch oneself away from the seemingly inescapable structure of centre and periphery and discover as yet unconsidered possibilities. In the conclusion of “The Second Dimension of Thought” in *Athens and Jerusalem*, Shestov begins by referencing a letter from Kant to a friend, wherein he writes:

in the determination of the origin and validity of our knowledge the *deus ex machina* is the most absurd supposition and, over and above the vicious circle in the conclusions of our knowledge, it presents the disadvantage that it gives aid to every caprice and every devout or brooding fantasy. (qtd. in 4.66)

Kant realized—as Shestov points out—that the belief in a capricious and utterly free deity, would ensure that humans likewise would understand themselves as unbound by the laws of non-contradiction, rationality, and necessity. Kant goes on to state that: “to say that a Supreme Being (*höheres Wesen*) has wisely introduced into us concepts and principles of this kind (that is, what Kant called synthetic a priori judgments. – [Note by Shestov]) amounts to destroying at its root the possibility of all philosophy” (qtd. in 4.66). In his analysis of these statements, Shestov queries Kant’s ability to assert, as he does in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, that the central business of metaphysics is to take up the problems of God, the immortality of the soul, and free will, This Being, according to Genesis, is the model on whom all humans are based. However, Kant saw this notion as an absurdity that must be dispensed with. Shestov’s conclusion is that Kant—whom he says stands for all thinkers who feel bound by logical intuitions—believed that philosophy was the act of looking backwards: “The answer [to why Kant feels free to contradict himself] can only be this: Kant (quite like ‘all of us’) understood philosophy as a looking backward, as *Besinnung*.” Shestov states that Kant’s desire to “look behind oneself presupposes that what one seeks to see possesses a certain structure that is forever determined.” This search for a unified philosophy is particular in that “neither ... man nor ... any ‘supreme being’ [may] ... escape the power of the ‘order of being’ which was not created either by them or for them.” Kant, Shestov states, has accepted the suggestion that adopting a given system, submitting to an ostensibly necessary order, is the best thing one can do, while “[c]aprice, arbitrariness, [and] fantasy” are the worst. This belief—which is inherited from Aristotle’s claim that “[n]ecessity does not allow itself to be persuaded” (qtd. in *Athens and Jerusalem* 4.66)—is, Shestov insists, something to be resisted. Instead, Shestov embraces Plato’s statement, “[i]t is necessary to dare everything;” Plotinus’s assertion “[a] great struggle awaits the soul;” and Nietzsche’s “will to power” (qtd. in 4.66). Following on these thinkers’ claims, Shestov couches the true work of philosophy as an act of violence—a violence that tears the thinker away from the intuitive assumption of necessity’s ascendance. However, this violence, rather than being destructive, is creative.

Shestov’s embrace of caprice and absurdity aligns with GA’s embrace of an unverifiable

originary scene of language origin. The God, who GA posits ultimately appeared through the choice of a person on an originary scene, is as likely—or as unlikely—as the God that repented of his choice to destroy Nineveh in the Book of Jonah. Some people may not admit this proposition. However, people’s inability to give over their argument in the face of another individual’s or faction’s vehemence regarding their own, or received, concatenations of truth or meaning is at the root of any escalation in antagonism between competing centres of attention, or polarities. Thus, creative capricious thinking about what the human might be is a practice worth modeling, if not propounding, as propounding would be planting a hedge stake, around which others might rally to form a tribe. Polarized tribalism is often at the root of the most uninteresting rehearsals of inter-group antagonisms, wherein groups and individuals cease to listen or even hear each other, while many times becoming outright bloody-minded towards those who question their foundational *a priori* propositions. To avoid the ongoing repetition of this well-known phenomenon, one might do well to take Shestov’s suggestion to look askance at one’s own currently favoured, creatively constructed proposition.

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