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Aristocratism of the spirit in Henryk Elzenberg's philosophy

ABSTRACT

Elzenberg's philosophy is usually defined as perfectionism, culturalism, pessimism, conservatism, or asceticism. Despite the accuracy and validity of the above mentioned terms it seems, however, that none of them fully encompass the characteristics of the view, tending rather to focus on its given profile. One term that, in my opinion, can be regarded as a suitable candidate for the role is "aristocratism of the spirit", which embraces perfectionism, culturalism and asceticism as well as pessimism, conservatism and outsiderism. In debating on the elzenbergian variety of this idea I would like to put forward his relation to, or entanglement with the tendency to think in the categories of the aristocratism of the spirit, that has been present since the dawn of philosophy. I use the tentative term 'entanglement' here, as Elzenberg in his writings never declared, either openly or indirectly, any (formal) adherence to a movement, including the movement of the aristocratism of the spirit. My ascribing Elzenberg to this movement is a convention of interpretation, imposed upon his philosophy for heuristic reasons.

Keywords: aristocratism of the spirit, perfectionism, culturalism, individualism, asceticism, contemplation, spiritual community, monoseology (philosophy of loneliness), loneliness, alienation (stigmatization, rejection), the life of a mob, the life of a sage, moral progress.

Whoever believes in *moral progress* today?... - Ambition, the desire to *aggrandise* oneself... - how they always manage to nest at the very centre of the most glorious ethical pursuit!

- Without the battle for *ethical standards* life would be lifelessness, reduced to pure mechanics of desires and actions, aridity, nakedness, worse than "prosaic"¹;

... I reject the depreciation of ambitions and the attitude ... of "non ceremonialism"².

¹ H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu*, [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in time.] UMK Press, Toruń 2002, p. 187–188.

² Ibid, p. 460.

The virtue of a thinker is his exactness; the virtue of an artist - his expressivity. But, strangely, there is a third virtue we instinctively seek in philosophy and in art: *glory, sublimity*³.

The enemy of the spirit are not the senses and the body; the enemy of the spirit is "the world" and *society*⁴.
(emphasis P.D.)

ELZENBERGISM AS ARISTOCRATISM

To define the philosophical views of Henryk Elzenberg in their entirety, taking into account their scope and diversity, especially with reference to the body of ethical beliefs⁵, as aristocratism of the spirit is nothing new, insightful or particularly surprising. It is, however, uncommon to regard them as such, particularly in the light of the approach that I propose. Elzenberg's philosophy is usually defined as perfectionism⁶, culturalism⁷, pessimism⁸, conservatism⁹, or asceticism. Despite the accuracy and validity of the above mentioned terms it seems, however, that none of them fully encompass the characteristics of the view, tending rather to focus on its given profile. One term that, in my opinion, can be regarded as a suitable candidate for the role is "aristocratism of the spirit", which embraces perfectionism, culturalism and asceticism as well as pessimism, conservatism and outsiderism. This is evidenced by the long history of the philosophical movement, which I venture to call the movement (or, more tentatively, a tendency) of the aristocratism of the spirit. If to identify elzenbergism as aristocratism is, admittedly, not a novelty in itself, the perspective that I

³ Ibid, p. 43.

⁴ Ibid, p. 161.

⁵ T. Czeżowski, *Henryk Elzenberg jako teoretyk etyki*, [Henryk Elzenberg as a theoretical ethicist] „Etyka” 1969, vol. 4; K. Kaszyński, *Z historii etyki. Henryk Elzenberg*, [History of ethics. Henryk Elzenberg] Wrocław–Zielona Góra 1998; J. Breś, *Kilka uwag o etyce Henryka Elzenberga*, [Remarks on Henryk Elzenberg's ethics] „Kwartalnik Filozoficzny”, 2007, vol. XXXV, z. 3.

⁶ W. Tyburski, *Etyka perfekcjonizmu Henryka Elzenberga* [The perfectionis ethics of Henryk Elzenberg], „Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici”, Filozofia XII, 1991.

⁷ H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu* [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op.cit., p. 484; E. Aniszczenko, *Kulturalizm Henryka Elzenberga* [Henryk Elzenberg's culturalism], „Zeszyty Literackie” 1996: 4.

⁸ M. Tyl, *Pesymizm – konserwatyzm – wartości. O filozofii Henryka Elzenberga* [Pessimism, conservatism, values. On the philosophy of Henryk Elzenberg], Katowice 2001.

⁹ M. Tyl, *Pesymizm – konserwatyzm – wartości. O filozofii Henryka Elzenberga* [Pessimism, conservatism, values. On the philosophy of Henryk Elzenberg], op. cit.

propose incorporating the philosophy into a multi-century, broad (as it touches upon diverse schools of thought, directions and approaches) but, at the same time, unified and concise philosophical movement advocating the idea of the aristocratism of the spirit, can be regarded as such. In debating on the elzenbergian variety of this idea I would like to put forward his relation to, or entanglement with the tendency to think in the categories of the aristocratism of the spirit, that has been present since the dawn of philosophy. I use the tentative term 'entanglement' here, as Elzenberg in his writings never declared, either openly or indirectly, any (formal) adherence to a movement¹⁰, including the movement of the aristocratism of the spirit. My ascribing Elzenberg to this movement is a convention of interpretation, imposed upon his philosophy for heuristic reasons. Elzenberg himself not only did not declare any institutional association of his philosophy¹¹, admitting, nevertheless, his many inspirations, sympathies, relations, lesser and greater influences¹², but also did nothing to give it an official label¹³. Notwithstanding, it would be difficult for this Polish philosopher of European scale¹⁴ ever to admit to having any relation to the elite circle of theoreticians of the idea of the aristocratism of the spirit - for such a circle formally never existed. It is thus difficult to refer to an entity that is non-existent, to which I assign the status of a research hypothesis useful for exploring, describing and explaining the source, development, continuity and character of the

¹⁰ Or, at least, I have not encountered such a remark by Elzenberg.

¹¹ To use the word 'his' seems most appropriate in this context, especially if one regards the character of the philosophical views, and their opposition to the scholarisation or other attempts at the institutionalisation of philosophical reflection.

Cf. W. Tyburski, *Elzenberg. Podręcznik akademicki* [Elzenberg. An academic handbook.] Wydawnictwo Wiedza Powszechna, „Myśli i Ludzie” series, 1st edition, Warsaw 2006, p. 19–21.

¹² Elzenberg himself used a diminutive of the word 'influence' to describe the impact of egxistentialism on him.

Cf. H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu* [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op. cit., p. 494. Elzenberg openly admitted that his mentality was shaped by such doctrines and masters as platonism, stoicism, buddhism, christianity, the British analytic tradition, existentialism, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Spinoza, Descartes, Leibniz, Goethe, Renan, Ibsen, Bourget, Leconte de Lisle, Flaubert, Nietzsche, Moore, Bergson and Gandhi. For further explanation of this topic see W. Tyburski, *Elzenberg. Podręcznik akademicki* [Elzenberg. An academic handbook.], op.cit., p. 20–26. Elzenberg had also his philosophical antipathies, which he did not hesitate to express, most notably neo-positivism and the Lwow-Warsaw School of Logic, as well as Tadeusza Kotarbiński's practical realism. See also: W. Tyburski, *Elzenberg. Podręcznik akademicki* [Elzenberg. An academic handbook.], op.cit., p. 27. For reference on the latter subject see H. Elzenberg, *Realizm praktyczny w etyce naczelnie wartości życia ludzkiego* [Practical realism in ethics, principal values in human life], in a work by the same author *Wartość i człowiek. Rozprawy z humanistyki i filozofii* [Value and man. Deliberations in philosophy and humanities.] UMK Press, Toruń 2005, p. 200–210; originally printed in „Ruch Filozoficzny” 1963.

¹³ Elzenberg did sometimes refer to his approach using a distinct name. In a short fragment from his work, the author states: *I have spoken of my "culturalism" frequently before...* (emphasis P.D.) See H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu* [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op.cit., p 484.

¹⁴ See B. Wolniewicz, *Myśl Elzenberga* [Elzenberg's thought], „Studia Filozoficzne” 1986:12, p. 55.

conceptual tendency that constitutes the movement I refer to as the aristocratism of the spirit. This tendency was common for thinkers from a variety of epochs and streams, for whom it was not uncommon to be unaware of, or hide, mutual influences and continuations. The task I am undertaking here is far from hopeless, and my postulate to define Elzenberg's thought as aristocratism of the spirit and incorporate it into the mainstream philosophy, despite lack of an explicit declaration from the author of Torun philosophy regarding such a connection, seems to be justified also with reference to Elzenberg's writing. What I have in mind here is particularly the fragment of *The trouble with being* cited as the motto in the beginning, which speaks volumes about the author's nostalgia for *perfectionist ethics*, constructed on the foundations and fuelled by the thought on *moral progress, ambition and the desire to aggrandise oneself*¹⁵, to soar above the planes, as the great Polish poet wrote once. That same fragment of *The trouble* also illustrates the high regard that Elzenberg had for ethics based on the aristocratism of the spirit, which he saw as the basis for the *most glorious ethical pursuit*¹⁶. The fact that the philosopher uses the adverb 'always' leads me to conclude that he was convinced about the long pedigree, historical continuity and the separateness of the ideological reflection on the idea of the aristocratism of the spirit, even though he was not a member of the movement. There are places in Elzenberg's works where he seems to admit to a communal feeling with those, who have accepted and lived the idea of the aristocratism of the spirit and who formed a type of *spiritual community*¹⁷. This can be illustrated by the following fragment of *The trouble with being*:

A deeper, more interesting, singularly justified and it may well be that the most important in my thought is the following motif. A man who writes on *subtler matters* usually feels a *sense of loneliness*; he senses in his reader not only indifference, but hostility; this has a depressing effect. To reminiscence about **people valued and famous** who dealt in similar matters makes the writer feel less lonesome and, faced with the hostility on the part of the reader, somehow supported. **He feels that he is a part of a certain spiritual community**, rather than a pariah and a cursed outcast. At the same time he reminds the reader of the **community's existence** and, thus, if the reader is ordinary he is intimidated and stimulated to reflect, if he is above ordinary, he is encouraged and, in a way, invited to join the group¹⁸. (emphasis P.D.)

¹⁵ H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu* [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op.cit., p. 187.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 188.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 136.

¹⁸ H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu* [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op.cit., p. 136.

ELZENBERG AS AN ARISTOCRAT

It is worth noting here, on a personal note, that Elzenberg was not only an experienced theoretician of the idea of the aristocratism of the spirit, but also a practitioner and executioner of the thought, consequent and indefatigable, despite the challenges he faced. It could be said without exaggeration that Elzenberg had the soul of an aristocrat. He was a scholar, a man of uncommon appearance and manners. He was reliable in his scholarly work. He was singularly demanding towards other people as well as himself. His inborn witty criticism made him unable to ignore many issues, or to accept easy solutions. He always had his own opinion, which he stated openly in text, with little regard for the controversy he caused or the consequences it had for him. Always faithful to himself and his beliefs, the ironical and heroic advocate of wisdom and virtue; a sworn enemy and slayer of human ignorance, mediocrity and lack of principle. He was known for his polemics, the master of witty repartees, he became famous for his theory that philosophy is a permanent *state of war*;

...the fight for world-view, and so for life. Who refuses to defend themselves in this fight by attacking, dies: they are denied their own face and wiped off the face of the Earth¹⁹.

And so, Elzenberg, never stopped fighting the views he opposed. He was famous as the uncompromising enemy of *the curse of impotent rationalism*²⁰, the *arrogant dumbness* of logicism²¹, scientism, which he openly hated²². He regularly contested the Lwow-Warsaw school of logic paradigm²³, whose representatives he disdainfully called the *Twardowszczyk's*²⁴, and also *bureaucrats of exactness*²⁵. He was a fierce opponent of Sartre, whose interpretation of freedom he saw as *grotesque*²⁶, and whose philosophy he thought little of. While demonstrating his disdain towards Sartre, Elzenberg never tried to hide his reverence for Jaspers²⁷, whom he, however, also criticised²⁸. Elzenberg's judgments were

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 390.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 300, 302, 339, 360–362.

²¹ Ibid, p. 302.

²² Ibid, p. 484, 409.

²³ Ibid, p. 360–362.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 390

²⁵ See above.

²⁶ H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu* [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op.cit., p. 458.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 481.

²⁸ See above.

equally fierce towards Tadeusz Kotarbiński, as he accused him and his followers of *the crime of closing paths before man*²⁹. In general, for Elzenberg Kotarbiński was a constant target³⁰. The aristocratic mind of this one of the greatest Polish philosophers of the twentieth century, which in itself is a confirmation of the greatness of this mind, was led by its high aspirations and disdain towards anything that is shallow, bland and mediocre³¹ to battle against the ignorance of the lumpenproletariat and the arrogance of the *aristocracy of louts*³², who usurped the right to wisdom and virtue. Thus, while Elzenberg cleared the way for the ascension of the *beautiful aristocratic idea*³³, for this very reason he fell into disgrace and rejection of those whom he rejected and despised. As a result Elzenberg joined the host of intellectuals, philosophers, writers, and artists who, like him, defended the same *aristocratic idea* and tried to introduce it into society. And thus finally Elzenberg, partially because he provoked it, partially because he wished for it and partially because he saw no other choice chose to spend the rest of his life in seclusion³⁴, accepting the role of Colin Wilson's outsider³⁵. In support of my view I will quote *The trouble with being*:

I share a common world with no spirit; I share with no spirit what brightens my path, my reason for thought and life. And to search for such spirits is futile: no **community** can be founded on the charms of life, on the interplay of fragile, ambiguous symbols. No kindred consciousness can reflect that which I love like mine, or have new life to replace the one it will lose with me. Not only **I am lonely**, but **my world is lonely** among the immeasurable number of worlds separated by the insurmountable abyss of individual difference. This is my great melancholia, an ocean of sadness over the ocean of beauty, that makes it impossible to die mirthfully. How should one die then? - with love, love for - let me reminiscence upon the well-known words of a poet³⁶ - "what can never be seen by two spirits"³⁷. (emphasis P.D.)

²⁹ Ibid, p. 310.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 359–360, 361.

³¹ Elzenberg disdained mediocrity of any sort, *paltriness* as he called it (see *The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time*, op.cit., p. 254–255) and degeneration, and, on a theoretical level, relativism (see *The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time*, op.cit., p. 398). One personal declaration of the philosopher's I chose as the motto of the present work (...I reject the depreciation of ambitions and the attitude ... of "non ceremonialism". see *The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time*, op.cit., p. 460)

³² H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu*, [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op.cit., p.166.

³³ Ibid, p. 166.

³⁴ For further reference on this topic see W. Tyburski, *Elzenberg. Podręcznik akademicki*, [Elzenberg. An academic handbook] op.cit., p. 28–29

³⁵ See. C. Wilson, *Outsider*, transl. M. Traczewska, REBIS Publishing House, Poznań 1992.

³⁶ Vigny's *Aimez ce que jamais on ne verra deux fois*. Footnote by Elzenberg. See, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu* [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op.cit., p. 325

³⁷ H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu*, [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op.cit., p. 325

THE IDEA OF ARISTOCRATISM OF THE SPIRIT IN ELZENBERG'S THOUGHT

It is known that the noble idea of the aristocratism of the spirit comes from the Pythagorean tradition. The source of the idea, however, is to be sought in the Orphic Mysteries, from which it was transferred to philosophy. The idea of aristocratism stems from the ultimately trivial realisation that a human mass generates pettiness, mediocrity, inferiority, anonymity and automatism and is swamped in the mixture, whereas individuals break free from the shackles of the omnipresent prosaism and, facing ostracism from the mob, they create and design standards that can be reached only by the best and are far from the reach of the mob.

The dissociation that can be empirically observed between the thoughtless, indolent human mass - the mob - and the idealist, creative, ambitious individuals - the chosen ones who, in the Pythagorean tradition dating back to the Orphic-Pythagorean thought, in a symbolic sense are frozen in the opposition between *the life of a mob* and *the life of a sage*. In this tradition *the mob* embodies the worst vices, whereas *the sage* - the unattainable ideal - embodies the greatest virtues. This is reflected in the axiology of the two types of life, one of which (*the life of a mob*) was always judged pejoratively, as worthless aberration; the other (*the life of a sage*) was judged as the highest value, the highest form of human perfection; sometimes even a value in itself. Despite the fact that *the life of a mob* and *the life of a sage* are separated by an insurmountable abyss, they are entangled as one affects the other. The dialectic of *the life of a mob* and *the life of a sage* is a battle between the forces of apathy, denial, destruction and degeneration and the forces of activity, creation, persuasion and perfectionism. The sage abhors the mob, and yet feels driven to force it out of its apathetic state and direct towards perfection. These remedying actions of the sage, his lofty ideals, his drive to universalise superiority and sublimity³⁸, the constant pressure of self improvement - all this meets with, often violent, resistance from the mob, that may stem from incommodation (maladjustment), misunderstanding or indifference. The mob would use all means available to stigmatise any sign of superiority, sublimity and genius. Most often used, and at the same time the most severe of those means are stigmatisation, isolation and alienation. The final outcome is most often that the philosopher is alienated and marked as an

³⁸ From the third formula of the motto of the present work. See H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu*, [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op.cit., p. 43

outsider. The sage finds himself thus in a paradoxical situation. He who has the right to stigmatise is himself stigmatised, and by those who ought to be stigmatised themselves, as stigma, understood in its classical definition that dates back to antiquity, is a sign of shame, moral defects, disorders or lack of moral competence. To be stigmatised is severely degrading, putting oneself at a risk of moral discrimination. Stigmatisation means,

...that the *moral status* ... of the bearer [of the stigma - P.D.] is associated with something extraordinary and *evil*³⁹. (emphasis P.D.)

It is astonishing that in the mutual relationship between the sage and the mob the proportion between normality and deviation are disrupted and reversed. The mob takes over the role of the *normals*⁴⁰ from the sage, the sage becomes the bearer of the stigma. If stigma is understood as moral infamy, the result of this reversal in roles is that the sage, who represents and whose goal is *the moral progress*⁴¹ of himself and others is judged as apostate by those who are themselves morally indifferent, degraded or degenerated.

As a consequence of his stigmatisation, the sage is eliminated from society⁴² that does not accept him, and that he, against his ideals and himself, is not able to accept. There is, again, the dialectical battle between the sides. The society is ready to admit the sage if he agrees to lower his standards and adjust to fit the level of society. The sage, in contrast, is ready to integrate into the society if it agrees to raise itself to his level according to his directions.

³⁹ E. Goffman, *Piętno. Rozważania o zranionej tożsamości* [Stigma. Deliberations on hurt identity], transl. A. Dzierżyński, J. Tokarska-Bakir, GWP, Gdańsk 2005, p. 31.

⁴⁰ *Normals* is a neologism, coined by Erving Goffman and denoting a person who fits into an acceptable framework, which is established, regulated and enforced by the society (the so called majority); the person is under constant threat of being exposed as not belonging to the *normals*' and stigmatized. Goffman opposed the use of the word 'normal' knowing what 'normal people' are capable of. He claimed that the term 'normality' is used to hide perversions, deviations and disorders and paradoxically leads to their stereotypization and demonization. For further reference on this topic see J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Wstęp do wydania polskiego. Et(n)ologia piętna* [Introduction to the Polish edition. Et(n)ology of beauty] in E. Goffman, *Piętno. Rozważania o zranionej tożsamości* [Stigma. Deliberations on hurt identity], op.cit., p. 20–21. Reference to Goffman is perhaps awkward here, as he would not have seen the change of roles between the sage and the mob as "surprising". For him the canonical 'normality' as something ascribed to the sage never existed. What is more, the author proposes that a *superior person* the sage *does not undergo stigmatisation* cf. J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Wstęp do wydania polskiego. Et(n)ologia piętna* [Introduction to the Polish edition. Et(n)ology of beauty] in E. Goffman, *Piętno. Rozważania o zranionej tożsamości* [Stigma. Deliberations on hurt identity], op.cit., p. 21.

⁴¹ As used by Elzenberg and quoted in the first formula of the motto of the present work. See *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu* [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op.cit., p. 187.

⁴² For the purpose of the present work I treat the terms 'human mass', 'the mob', the common', 'lumpenproletariat', 'society' and 'surroundings' as synonymous.

The sage is faced with an internal struggle. On the one hand, he is drawn to society so as to push it towards moral progress; on the other, he is visibly reluctant to do so, afraid to betray his ideals, foreseeing the failure of his mission and even feeling disgust to descend to the level of the common. What then is left for the sage to do? Seclusion and the search for his like. But even in a community of the distinguished and superior one cannot settle for the competition in moral progress. It is evidently a long, tedious and complicated process, full of difficulties, failure and dejection. One cannot forget that moral perfection, the greatest priority of the sage and the goal of his actions, is also the most difficult goal to achieve for man in general; in fact, it is an unattainable ideal. The sage, however, is not built to be discouraged by the obstacles to his development and, as Elzenberg points out, is content with his *pursuit* of perfection and aware that nevertheless he can never reach it. Indispensable here is a quote from *The trouble*, in which the author cogently expresses this idea in just a few words:

To choose a goal higher than one hopes to attain is sensible only for someone for whom the goal is not the greatest good, but for whom the *pursuit*⁴³ holds a higher value than the goal (emphasis P.D.)

Or else:

Homo ethicus... is a man whose own morality is his particular concern and who pursues it consciously, precisely because he does not feel completely at ease. He is a stoic *prokopton*, with focus, however, not on the actual progress but on the pursuit; he is, so to say, an 'apprentice' to morality⁴⁴.

Regardless of the circumstances, the fate of the sage is inevitably *solitude*, which can take a variety of shapes and sizes. The components of the solitude that the sage is facing are usually: seclusion, lack of understanding from his surroundings, low self-esteem, indifference, derision, disdain, rejection, marginalization or elimination (exclusion from the local community), internal emigration, oversensitive focusing on oneself, a sense of loneliness and enmity of the world – or lack of kindred spirits. At the same time, solitude is the sage's weapon in the battle for virtue. Conscious that only solitude, used for soliloquies, can help him deepen his understanding of himself; *comprehend the notion of humanity, what it means*

⁴³ H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu* [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op.cit., p. 60.

⁴⁴ H. Elzenberg, *Ideal zbawienia na gruncie etyki czystej*, [The redemption ideal grounded in pure ethics] in: H. Elzenberg *Wartość i człowiek. Rozprawy z humanistyki i filozofii*, [Value and man. Deliberations in philosophy and humanities.] UMK Press, Toruń 2005, p. 215.

to belong to the human race and empathize with it; discover the universal human character of the moral imperatives and values that he discovered 'in himself'; find a direct and personal relation to God and to nature as the universal order⁴⁵; drawing a multitude of spiritual benefits from his solitude the sage makes it his lifestyle and the foundation of his existence. Even though for the sage his solitude is at times a heavy burden, as is his role of an outsider, he is aware that, for him, there is no alternative; that in fact he is held hostage by his outsiderism.

The figure of the sage – the aristocrat of the spirit (gr. *aristoi*)⁴⁶ – evokes to the notions of individualism, contemplation and asceticism, therefore the movement of aristocratic thought ought to be classified as a contemplative variation of the grand individualist narrative, in the framework of the philosophy of solitude. Consequently Elzenberg himself, as a representative of aristocratic thought, simultaneously belongs to the broad movement of contemplative individualism. He can thus be classified as the philosopher of solitude⁴⁷. It is no accident that Elzenberg is placed in the framework of solitude philosophy. In many of his works the *monoseological*⁴⁸ perspective occupies a privileged position in the context of perfectionist ethics analyses. I quote here a fragment of his work which, I hope, will convince the reader of the credibility of my speculation.

One cannot *achieve personal improvement* without *becoming detached* to a certain extent. And one cannot attain *a level* that is even slightly *higher*, without it driving more people away than are ready to accept us.

- *Whoever is devoted to shaping oneself*, will be alone; this is a constant rule. For he is devoted to something that nobody holds in regard, and in normal conditions he can expect no help with it: for only *in*

⁴⁵ This is a modification of the thought by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as presented by Bronisław Baczko in his book *Rousseau: samotność i wspólnota* [Rousseau: solitude and community], PWN, Warsaw 1964, p. 286. Cf. J.J. Rousseau, *Listy moralne. List szósty* [Morality letters. Letter Six.], in: J.J. Rousseau, *Umowa społeczna*, [The social contract] transl. M. Pawłowska, PWN, Warsaw 1966, p. 587.

⁴⁶ For further reference on this topic see J. Legowicz, *Historia filozofii starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu* [The history of antique philosophy in Greece and Rome] PWN, Warsaw 1973, p. 32–34, 39–40.

⁴⁷ The only work I am familiar with that gives a detailed, reliable and inspiring account of Elzenberg's philosophy as voiced in *The trouble with being* is written by Tadeusz Kobierzycki. See T. Kobierzycki, *Filozoficzne problemy samotności (H. Elzenberg, Kłopot z istnieniem 1907–1963)*, [Philosophical problems with solitude (H. Elzenberg, The trouble with being 1907-1963)] in P. Domeracki, W. Tyburski (eds.), *Zrozumieć samotność. Studium interdyscyplinarne*, [Understanding solitude. An interdisciplinary study.] UMK Press, Toruń 2006, p. 115–127.

⁴⁸ This is an expression of my own design, based on the Greek words: 'monosé' – 'solitude' and 'logos' – 'science', and denoting the study of solitude. This term can be used in its strong and weak version. In the latter, as simply meaning philosophy of solitude; in its strong version it denotes the general study of solitude in an interdisciplinary framework, consisting of such domains and perspectives as: philosophy of solitude, psychology of solitude, sociology of solitude, pedagogy of solitude, anthropology of solitude, theology of solitude and biographical studies on solitude.

the rarest of circumstances does it happen to *meet a man* for whom *human progress* is a matter of *concern*. And it is thus: in every minute of our lives we can find a hundred allies in our common, mediocre enterprises; a hundred people ready to justify our every failure: but to find *allies* in our *superior spiritual goals* is difficult⁴⁹ (emphasis. P.D.).

In its essence every concept that develops the notion of the aristocratism of the spirit is founded on the interplay between the ideas of individuality, seclusion, alienation, outsiderism, asceticism, silence, contemplation, internal dialogue, self-exploration, being true to oneself, wisdom, striving for moral perfection, and freedom. Elzenberg's aristocratism undoubtedly contains the notions mentioned above. To describe these notions and concepts in detail would shed light on Elzenberg's approach toward aristocratism as a whole. I will not, however, proceed to deliberate on the topic, as it is a matter broad enough for a separate paper.

CONCLUSIONS

It appears that in order to summarize the issues discussed in the present paper, taking full responsibility for their brief, perfunctory nature, it is necessary to present Elzenberg's opinion on the validity of the notion of the aristocratism of the spirit and the possibility of introducing this idea into public debate. Despite what one might have thought, in reality Elzenberg's position in the overall balance is rather weak. Naturally, this does not indicate the philosopher's dejection toward the implementation of the notion of the aristocratism of the spirit, but is rather an illustration of his healthy distance and lack of naïveté, something that was not common in the advocates of ethical intellectualism, who maintained that virtue can be taught to anybody. Elzenberg's approach views ethical perfectionism as a domain of chosen individuals, rather than a material to be spread among the masses. As for the possibility of introducing the aristocratic ideal into contemporary society, into the Polish nation, Elzenberg is in no doubt with regard to the fact that this is pure fiction.

From the moment of the significant breakthrough, that is the war and, importantly, the revolution, *many of my ideas have been rendered obsolete*, they have acquired properties so 'academic' and hopelessly remote from reality that I cannot dream to be able to influence this life through them. Among these I

⁴⁹ H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu, czasu* [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op.cit., p. 255–256.

would classify my certain philosophy of nationalism, *aristocratism* ...⁵⁰. ...The *aristocratic ideal* (the beautiful one) could be implemented perhaps on Aldebaran. Now is, the time of democracy, and will continue to be. And even if some *aristocracy* was to eventually emerge from these years of chaos and fighting it will be *aristocracy* of such louts, that prime minister Barcioch and minister Fafała would be head and shoulders above it⁵¹. (emphasis P.D.)

What is it, then, that remains? Elzenberg's answer is straightforward and rather striking - ...I need to constantly raise myself [and do it by myself – add. P.D.]⁵².

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⁵⁰ H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu, czasu* [The trouble with being. Aphorisms in the structure of time.], op. cit., p. 165.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 166.

⁵² Ibid, p. 104.

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