

PERSON AND COMMUNION: THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF NIKOLAI BERDYAEV

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In memory of Veselin Vassilev (Vesko), artist-sculptor
1973-2018

ABSTRACT

This study, in contrast to mainstream scholarship, interprets Nikolai Berdyaev's religious philosophy specifically as political theology. I argue that this twentieth-century Russian thinker created a political theology based on four elements: freedom, creativity, person, and communion. None of these four elements, I contend, could stand alone without reference to the others and represent Berdyaev's general philosophical outlook. In my research, I argue that freedom, creativity, personhood, and communion are interrelated, mutually supporting and mutually confirming. I propose that to be understood properly, these four basic elements of Berdyaev's thought have to be discussed in their unity and proper order. The proper order, I suggest, is the following: in Berdyaev everything, whether divine or human, begins with a consideration, first, of freedom; then, everything has value and meaning if it is capable, second, of creativity. Freedom and creativity, however, are just abstract and empty ideas if not, third, accomplished concretely in the person. On the other hand, the person is a person not simply because of its capacity for freedom and creativity but, fourth, because of its actually free and creative communion with God, neighbour, and creation (nature).

By marshaling Berdyaev's criticism of modern political ideologies—socialism, communism, monarchism, anarchism, liberalism, democratism, nationalism, and conservatism—and exploring the "quadrilateral" structure of his underlying religious and political philosophy, I attempt to demonstrate that the culmination of his thought lies neither in the often-discussed concept of freedom nor in his idea of creativity, but rather in his concepts of personhood and communion. I also attempt to show that the social and practical element in these two presiding concepts requires us to understand him as a political theologian. Finally, my study challenges the common perception of Berdyaev as a radical philosopher, describing him instead as a conservative thinker, albeit one with innovative ways of developing and sustaining his conservatism. Viewed as what we might call a "communitarian personalist," however, his established image as a defender of liberty and human dignity is not only affirmed but strengthened.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude, contrairement à la recherche traditionnelle, interprète la philosophie religieuse de Nikolai Berdyaev spécifiquement comme une théologie politique. Je soutiens que ce penseur russe du XXe siècle a créé une théologie politique basée sur quatre éléments: la liberté, la créativité, la personne et la communion. Aucun de ces quatre éléments, selon moi, ne pourrait être indépendant sans référence à l'autre et représenter la vision philosophique générale de Berdyaev. Dans mes recherches, je soutiens que la liberté, la créativité, la personnalité et la communion sont interdépendantes, se soutiennent et se confirment mutuellement. Je propose que pour être bien compris, ces quatre éléments fondamentaux de la pensée de Berdyaev doivent être discutés dans leur unité et leur ordre. Le bon ordre, je pense, est le suivant: chez Berdyaev, tout, qu'il soit divin ou humain, commence par une considération, d'abord, de liberté; alors, tout a de la valeur et du sens s'il est capable, en second lieu, de créativité. La liberté et la créativité ne sont cependant que des idées abstraites et vides sinon, troisièmement, accomplies concrètement chez la personne. D'un autre côté, la personne est une personne non seulement en raison de sa capacité de liberté et de créativité, mais, en quatrième lieu, en raison de sa communion réellement libre et créative avec Dieu, le prochain et la création (la nature).

En rassemblant les critiques de Berdyaev sur les idéologies politiques modernes - socialisme, communisme, monarchisme, anarchisme, libéralisme, démocratisme, nationalisme et conservatisme - et en explorant la structure «quadrilatérale» de sa philosophie religieuse et politique sous-jacente, j'essaie de démontrer que l'aboutissement de son la pensée ne réside ni dans le concept de liberté souvent discuté ni dans son idée de la créativité, mais plutôt dans ses concepts de personnalité et de communion. Je tente également de montrer que l'élément social et pratique de ces deux concepts présidents exige que nous le comprenions comme un théologien politique. Enfin, mon étude remet en question la perception commune de Berdyaev en tant que philosophe radical, le décrivant plutôt comme un penseur conservateur, quoique doté de moyens innovants de développer et de maintenir son conservatisme. Considéré comme ce que nous pourrions appeler un «personnaliste communautaire», son image établie de défenseur de la liberté et de la dignité humaine est non seulement affirmée, mais renforcée.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	I
PART ONE: INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND AND MILIEU	1
INTRODUCTION. WHY PERSON AND WHY COMMUNION?.....	2
CHAPTER ONE. A RUSSIAN THINKER IN THE CHRISTIAN EAST—WEST DIVIDE	6
CHAPTER TWO. SIX CURRENTS IN RUSSIAN POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT	12
1. CONSERVATIVES.....	12
2. SLAVOPHILES.....	26
3. LIBERALS	32
4. WESTERNIZERS.....	35
5. RADICALS.....	38
6. RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHERS.....	41
CHAPTER THREE. INFLUENCES, PHILOSOPHY, AND CHARACTER	52
PART TWO: PERSON	67
CHAPTER ONE. FREEDOM	68
1. THE ARISTOCRACY OF SPIRIT.....	68
2. THE UNITY OF SPIRIT AND THE ABYSS OF FREEDOM	72
3. THE SYMBOL AND DYNAMIC OF SPIRIT	82
4. REVELATION AND FREEDOM IN SPIRIT	85
5. BEING, PERSON, FREEDOM, AND GOD	87
CHAPTER TWO. CREATIVITY	94
1. THE ETHICS OF LAW.....	94
2. THE ETHICS OF REDEMPTION	98
3. THE ETHICS OF CREATIVITY	101
4. CREATIVITY AS GOD-LIKE FREEDOM AND SOVEREIGNTY.....	108
CHAPTER THREE. PERSONHOOD.....	113
1. MICROCOSM AND MACROCOSM: HUMAN PERSON AS A CENTER OF BEING.....	113
2. SECULAR VS CHRISTIAN HUMANISM: THE ILLUSION OF AUTARKY AND AUTOCRACY	119
3. GOD, MAN, AND THE GOD-MAN	122
4. HUMAN PERSON	126
5. I, THOU, WE, AND IT.....	130
PART THREE: COMMUNION.....	134
CHAPTER ONE. REVOLUTION AND COMMUNISM	135
1. BERDYAEV'S "ENEMIES"	135
2. RELIGIOUS ATHEISM.....	137
3. MATERIALISM	143
4. REVOLUTION	148
5. THE ORIGINS OF RUSSIAN COMMUNISM AND REVOLUTION.....	154
CHAPTER TWO. SOCIALISM AND ANARCHISM	170
1. SOCIALISM: DIONYSUS VERSUS THE CRUCIFIED	170

2. <i>THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH</i>	174
3. <i>THE ANARCHIC UTOPIA</i>	177
CHAPTER THREE. LIBERALISM AND DEMOCRACY	187
1. <i>LIBERAL CONTRADICTIONS</i>	187
2. <i>THE POVERTY OF DEMOCRACY</i>	194
CHAPTER FOUR. ARISTOCRATISM AND CONSERVATISM	199
1. <i>THE ARISTOCRATIC RACE</i>	199
2. <i>CONSERVATIVE ETERNITY</i>	204
CHAPTER FIVE. NATION AND STATE	211
1. <i>NATION AND NATIONALISM</i>	211
2. <i>KINGDOM OF CAESAR</i>	220
CHAPTER SIX. SOBORNOST AND ESCHATOLOGY	230
1. <i>SBORNOST AND SOBORNOST</i>	230
2. <i>THE COMMUNION OF LIFE</i>	235
CHAPTER SEVEN. BERDYAEV: PRO ET CONTRA	245
1. <i>BERDYAEV'S SUSPICION OF DEMOCRACY</i>	245
2. <i>THAT PUZZLING UNGRUND</i>	249
BIBLIOGRAPHY	268
<i>SOURCES IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH</i>	268
<i>SOURCES IN RUSSIAN</i>	280

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A NOTE ON TRANSLATION

All translations from Russian into English are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

The words "person" (*личность*) and "personality" (*характер, личность*) are sometimes used interchangeably, according to the preferences of the English translators. When I cite an English translation of Berdyaev's work that uses the word "personality," I employ for the sake of consistency the same term in the immediate discussion.

The choice to refer to the original Russian titles in Cyrillic is prompted by the development of new technologies that make it easier to discover an electronic copy of the quoted work and also permit an instant, although imperfect, translation of the Russian source.

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We *are* because we are in communion. The decision to write a thesis on personhood and communion is the result of many years of actual communion with family, friends, relatives, colleagues, and teachers. This communion gave me also the inspiration and ability to perform the task. Here I have the opportunity to thank only the people (and organizations) who were most directly involved in my research and writing. But before doing that, I want to express my gratitude to all other persons who helped me in the process. Although not mentioning their names, I want to say that I appreciate and remember their acts of friendship and support.

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I want to thank Fr. Stephen Janos. Everyone who has some interest in Berdyaev knows who Fr. Steve is. For those who don't know, I will say that he is the latest English translator of Berdyaev's work and perhaps the most knowledgeable Berdyaev reader in the Western hemisphere today. Fr. Steve gave me not only advice but also a spirit of hope and wisdom in the sometimes difficult periods of study and writing. Through Berdyaev, Fr. Steve and I became friends, and what is a greater blessing than to win a new friend!

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The state has a responsibility to support arts and science. Private persons and organizations don't. They are free to invest their wealth and resources in values and goods of their own choice. For that reason, when private persons and organizations support culture, science, and research they deserve greater respect and appreciation than any state-sponsored donor or institution. They deserve this respect because they practice the virtue of generosity and thus become examples of social and civic engagement. I thank those persons and organizations who supported financially my studies and research: the Edmonton-Toronto province of the Redemptorists, especially Fr. Mark Miller, with whom were exchanged letters of friendship; the philanthropist John H. McCall MacBain, whom I met personally and in whom I saw a humble and generous man; Eugene McBurney and Jonathan Birks (and their family foundations), both committed and long-time supporters of the School of Religious Studies; and the McConnell Foundation for support in my final year of research. I also thank McGill University for the scholarships and the teaching opportunities it provided. Without this funding, I would not have been able to research and write this dissertation.

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my theological wanderings. Over the years, we have discussed different theological questions; sometimes we argued, but most often we agreed. I admit that many of my theological ideas and convictions came as a result of these conversations and quests. We edited together the final version of this text. Denitsa and I are not native English speakers, and we both wrestled with the challenge to make this discourse clear, convincing, and grammatically correct. I hope that we have succeeded.

"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned,
and revealed them to little children."

(Matt. 11:25)

"I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling
and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom,
but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
so that your faith will not rest on the wisdom of men,
but on the power of God."

(1 Cor. 2:3-5)

PART ONE: INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND AND MILIEU

INTRODUCTION. WHY PERSON AND WHY COMMUNION?

Three immediate questions might arise for the specialist reading the title of this dissertation. The first is, "Is Berdyaev still relevant?" The second, "Why '*person*' and '*communion*'; why not, for example, '*freedom*' and '*creativity*'?" And the third, "Why '*political theology*'?" The answer to the first question should be left to the judgment of the reader. The reader may decide, after examining this work, how relevant this twentieth century Russian thinker is for the contemporary world and political and theological scholarship. Though one important goal of the present dissertation is to demonstrate the significance and the continuing relevance of Berdyaev's thought, the proof should follow naturally and gradually from the text itself, and not from an initial assertion by the author. The answers to the other two questions, however, should be given immediately since they explain the reasons behind the choice of topic and approach.

The short answer to the question "Why '*person*' and '*communion*'?" is because Berdyaev's concept of communion, his Slavophile "*soborny*" (*conciliar*), if we may call it so, "*communitarianism*," has been somewhat neglected by Berdyaev scholarship. His personalism has traditionally been discussed, at least in the English-speaking world, in the light of his philosophy of freedom and creativity and only rarely through his political and social thought. This, I believe, should be corrected.

The short answer to the question "Why political theology?" is because Nikolai Berdyaev is one of the most prominent political theologians of the twentieth century, and yet, his name is seldom mentioned by Western scholars who dominate the academic field of political theology today.¹ This omission should be corrected as well. Berdyaev should be firmly included in the

¹ The journal *Political Theology* hasn't published a single article on Berdyaev in its twenty years history. Berdyaev was mentioned only twice in the comprehensive *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* in an article discussing Paul Evdokimov's political theology (See Michael Plekon, "Eastern Orthodox Thought" in Scott, Peter, and William T Cavanaugh. 2004. *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*. Blackwell Companions to Religion, p.99) Berdyaev was also not included in the *Eerdmans Reader in Contemporary Political Theology*, ed. W. Cavanaugh and C. Hovey, (Eerdmans, 2012).

company of Rauschenbusch, Gutierrez, Barth, Metz, Niebuhr, Murray, Voegelin,² Schmitt, and Peterson. Berdyaev is a religious philosopher, but he is also a political theologian. He is the foremost representative of twentieth-century Christian Orthodox political thought. One just needs to look at the titles of his books, or browse the pages of *Put*, the magazine he edited for almost twenty years, and see the intensity of his engagement with political and social questions, an engagement not of a political theorist or scientist, but, more importantly, of a deeply religious *Christian* man.

In my interpretation of Berdyaev's personalism, I start from a premise that is not commonly shared. I believe that Berdyaev is a systematic thinker. This is not the widespread view. Even Berdyaev himself admitted some flaws in his style of writing that led many of his readers to misunderstand his positions. It seems that all agree that Berdyaev is an unsystematic writer. In fact, I also agree with this view, but I should say that there is a difference between a systematic *writer* and a systematic *thinker*. For example, St. Augustine, in contrast to St. Thomas, is not a systematic writer; nevertheless, he is a systematic thinker. Similarly, Berdyaev is not a systematic writer; yet, he is a *very* systematic thinker. Under systematic thinker, I mean an author who produces a great and diverse body of work and who, despite the huge volume of topics and subjects he covers, succeeds to preserve the unity, harmony, and coherence of all his claims and logical constructions.³ One can hardly find contradictory arguments in Berdyaev's work; there are

² Not Voegelin but Berdyaev was first to describe political ideologies as "political religions." (See Charles C. West, 1958. *Communism and the theologians: study of an encounter*. SCM Press. p.113.) Voegelin was influenced by the French personalism of Jacques Maritain and Henri de Lubac. In the 1950s, he became critical of modern scientism, or what he called "gnoseology," and here one might discern the influence of Nikolai Berdyaev. As Ana Siljak rightly notes, "there is strong evidence to suggest that European intellectuals including Eric Voegelin, Walter Benjamin, Karl Lewith, Hannah Arendt, and Carl Schmitt were familiar with Berdyaev's writings, especially his writings on messianism and his theories of Communism as a political religion. Voegelin in particular believed Berdyaev to be one of Europe's leading thinkers. Hannah Arendt too thought highly of *Origin [of Russian Communism]*." (Ana Siljak, "Nikolai Berdyaev and the Origin of Russian Messianism", *The Journal of Modern History*—2016—88:4)

³ "But, though my style and manner of writing may be fragmentary and disjointed," Berdyaev says, "my thinking is not so: on the contrary, it springs from a single, all-embracing vision, and aims at the discovery of integral and integrating meaning..." (N.A. Berdyaev, 1950. *Dream and Reality An Essay in Autobiography*. Geoffrey Bless, p.82) Berdyaev considered his *The Destiny of Man* as "the most systematic" of his books. (p. 101) Evgenii Lampert writes, "[...] neither the paradoxical character of Berdyaev's philosophy nor, incidentally, the wide range of problems [...]"

developing ideas, but not contradictory conclusions.⁴ This is so because he builds his entire philosophical edifice on four fundamental "pillars": these are his "concepts" of freedom, creativity, personhood, and communion, all connected through the work and idea of Spirit.⁵ None of these four "pillars" could stand alone without reference to the others and represent Berdyaev's general philosophical outlook. That is why Berdyaev's body of work, his philosophy, can and should be read and interpreted holistically. Freedom, creativity, personhood, and communion are interrelated, mutually supporting and mutually confirming. To be fully understood, they have to be discussed in their unity and proper order. The proper order is the following: everything in Berdyaev starts with freedom, even God Himself; then, everything has value and meaning, if it is capable of creativity. Freedom and creativity, however, are just empty abstract ideas, if not accomplished concretely in the person. On the other hand, the person is a person not simply because of freedom and creativity, but also because of its free and creative communion (relation) with God, neighbour, and the world. In other words, personhood and communion, in Berdyaev's thought, are the "accomplishment" of divine freedom and creativity, as personhood is accomplished (or fulfilled) in communion.⁶ Person and communion are the actualization (but not objectification) of the dynamic *potentia* of freedom and creativity.

which he explores in his books, breaks its essential unity." (Evgenii Lampert. 1945. *Nikolai Berdyaev and the New Middle Ages*, p.26)

⁴ This was noticed by George Seaver. "As a matter of fact," he says, "Berdyaev was freer from imputation of logical inexactitude than are most thinkers; and although he made no pretence to formulate a 'system' [...] his philosophy is all of a one piece" (George Seaver. 1950. *Nicholas Berdyaev: An Introduction to His Thought*. Harper & Brothers, p.11)

⁵ Here, I thank Fr. Stephen Janos, a specialist in Berdyaev and translator of his books and articles, for bringing my attention to the central function of the Holy Spirit in Berdyaev's philosophy. In our conversations, Fr. Janos repeatedly told me that he would put the Spirit as the "fourth pillar." Since I cannot replace the "communion" with the Spirit, and since, prompted by Fr. Janos, I have seen the idea of the Spirit everywhere—in Berdyaev's idea of freedom, in his creativity, in the personhood, and in the possibility for communion—I decided that the Spirit should not be just one of the "pillars," but the very "backbone" of Berdyaev's philosophical "system."

⁶ Discussing Berdyaev's thought, Vigen Guroian makes an important observation that may succinctly describe the fundamental argument of my research. In his article "Nicholas Berdyaev. Commentary," published in the collection *The Teachings of Modern Orthodox Christianity on Law, Politics, and Human Nature*, Guroian writes: "[For Berdyaev] personhood is relational and depends upon being in communion with others. Human beings are fully human to the extent that they are in community and that their social existence reflects the perfect communion of the three divine persons through participation in the divine life that God has made possible in Jesus Christ [...] Genuine human togetherness, or what Russian theology calls *sobornost*, is possible because God, in whose

I have adopted this holistic and systematic approach in my own study. I began by exploring the principle of freedom in Berdyaev's work, moved towards his concept of creativity, then focused on the meaning of personhood, communion and forms of collectivity, and finished with his eschatology. My work might have remained in the sphere of religious philosophy, had I chosen to emphasize only Berdyaev's principles of freedom and creativity. But I decided rather to accentuate the actual, concrete result of these principles, namely the formation of the human person and its final accomplishment in the divine-human communion. This decision made my study of Berdyaev a discourse on political theology, rather than a purely metaphysical or philosophical discourse. Theology that discusses man and his relation to God, neighbour and creation, is practical theology. And political theology is, above all, practical or moral theology. Its aim is to explore the life of the Kingdom of God on earth; it is not concerned with the heavens and the eschatological future only, but with the present temporal life as well. Political theology is a prophetic theology that deals with actual persons and events, with political and social relations, with ideologies and political orders. It tries to assess the quality of freedom and the creative capacity of a person, society, or political system, and to pronounce a prophetic judgment. This is what Berdyaev, and in fact the majority of the Russian émigré religious philosophers, did:⁷ they were prophets, political theologians, who explored "the spiritual condition of the people"⁸ (to use their own words) in order to pronounce judgment over the fate of revolution, communism, democracy, capitalism, nationalism, and monarchism.

image human beings are created, is perfect *sobornost*, perfect communion. Theosis of the isolated individual is not possible." The centrality of *sobornost* implies that not "creativity" but *communion* is the "culmination" of Berdyaev's trinitarian vision and philosophy in general. Creativity, I will argue, is just a necessary stage on the way to the *wholeness* of life; creativity (the same is valid for freedom and personhood) is nothing, if it isn't directed to its proper end (See Vigen Guroian. "Nicholas Berdyaev. Commentary" in John Jr. Witte and Frank Alexander. 2007. *The Teachings of Modern Orthodox Christianity on Law, Politics, and Human Nature* (Columbia University Press, p. 119)

⁷ For a good commentary on the Russian political theology in the pre-World War I period or more specifically on the intellectual circle around *Vekhi* (Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Novgorodtsev, Frank, and Struve), see Randall A. Poole, "Russian Political Theology in an Age of Revolution" in *Landmarks Revisited: The Vekhi Symposium 100 Years On*. 2013. R. Aizlewood and Ruth Coates (Academic Studies Press, pp.146-171)

⁸ See the editorial in *Put*, September, 1925, "The Spiritual Tasks of Russian Emigration." ("Духовные Задачи Русской Эмиграции")

CHAPTER ONE. A RUSSIAN THINKER IN THE CHRISTIAN EAST— WEST DIVIDE

Berdyayev has been described as an "existentialist," a "personalist," a "reactionary" (in communist Russia) and a "radical philosopher." In the West, he was generally considered a representative of the Orthodox religious thought and a mystic, while some of his Russian colleagues suspected him of heresy and heterodoxy.⁹ His commitment to the "official" Orthodox line was often questioned at home and he barely escaped forced exile to Siberia, after being convicted by the Russian Orthodox Church of blasphemy.¹⁰ But the most appropriate description of him is that he is first and foremost a *Russian* religious thinker.¹¹

⁹ In a letter to his friend, Lev Shestov, Berdyayev writes: "How strange is my fate: the leftists consider me a rightist, the rightists consider me a leftist, the orthodox consider me a heretic, the heretics consider me an orthodox, and I always feel my image perverted. [...] I am suffocated by this obscurantism. I am equally disgusted by both the Bolshevik and right-wing obscurantism. I am suffocated also by the hatred that everything is imbued with." (A letter from Berlin, 1924 in Николай Бердяев и Лев Шестов. *Переписка и воспоминания*. Публ. Наталии Барановой-Шестовой. - Континент. - №30 (1981 г., IV). С. 293-313.). In the article "Berdyayev: Prophet or Heretic?" S.A. Levitskii writes: "In the Russian rightists' and Orthodox circles [Berdyayev] is considered a malicious heretic. In the Soviet Union, there is silence about him, while in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia there are only a few strokes, full of hateful defamations. At the same time, in the Western philosophical circles, Berdyayev is highly praised, as some (Levitskii has in mind, perhaps, Donald Lowrie) consider him a genius. [The West] sees in him the brightest representative of religious existentialism." (С.А. Левицкий, "Бердяев: пророк или еретик?" [Berdyayev: Prophet or Heretic?] in А.А. Ермичев, ed. 2004. *Н.А.Бердяев: pro et contra. Антология*. Кн. 1. СПб.: Изд-во Русского христианского гуманитарного института) Contradictory descriptions of Berdyayev's philosophy continue to this day. For example, the conservative journalist Roman Vershilo (Роман Вершилло), who is presently the press secretary of the ultra-conservative Public Orthodox and Monarchical Organization *For the Moral Revival of the Fatherland* ["За нравственное возрождение Отечества"], calls Berdyayev "a fanatic of liberalism and theological modernism." (Р. Вершилло, 2018. "Фанатизм Бердяева. Заметки." [Berdyayev's Fanaticism. Notes.] in *Антимодернизм.ру*), while Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, also a conservative, did not hesitate to suggest Berdyayev's work, *The Philosophy of Inequality* (along with I. Ilyin's and V. Solovyov's books), to his high functionaries in the provincial administration. As will be observed in the following pages, Berdyayev was a controversial thinker. In the 1920s, he wrote an intellectual biography of the conservative author Konstantin Leontiev. The reader of this short book is left with the impression that Berdyayev had seen in Leontiev's character something of his own character. For example, he argued (concurring with the observations of V. Rosanov) that Leontiev "did not belong to any school and did not found any school." He was "not typical of any epoch or of any current" (of thought). Leontiev's approach to the "eternal themes," Berdyayev wrote, was "foreign" to the "rightist camp," to which he was "formally and officially close," and "hated" by and "repulsive" to the "leftist camp." (КЛ, 2-6)

¹⁰ The formal reason for the accusation of blasphemy was the publication of an article, entitled "Quenchers of the Spirit," in the newspaper *Russkaya Molitva* (*Russian Prayer*) in which he criticized the coercive actions of the Synod

Berdyaev belonged to and was representative of a great and vibrant political, social, and religious tradition. In its totality, Berdyaev's thought unites and expresses the trends, the spirit, and the character of the Russian intellectual treasury and could serve as an introduction and guide to the inner "chambers" of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Russian mind. The difficulty of defining or placing his philosophy by reference to one particular group or school of thought makes him unique among the representatives of the Russian intelligentsia. His detachment from and, at the same time, closeness to the main currents of Russian thought reveals the universal scope of his approach; a scope that reflects best the peculiar complexity of the Russian philosophical tradition *in general*.

towards the *Imiaslavtsi* (*Name-Glorifiers*) monks. As S.M. Polovinkin notes, Berdyaev did not sympathize with *Imiaslavie*; rather, he was disturbed by the violence employed by the official Church in the resolving of a complex theological question. The newspaper's issue was confiscated and Berdyaev charged with blasphemy. The revolution prevented persecution and the implementation of the conviction. (С.М. Половинкин, "Н.А.Бердяев и Православие," [N.A.Berdyaev and Orthodoxy] *Вестник Русской христианской гуманитарной академии*. 2017. Том 18. Выпуск 3. See also Н.А. Бердяев, "Гасители Духа," [Quenchers of Spirit] *Русская Молитва*, 1913. 5(18) августа. № 232.) His last article in *Put* was one proof that he did not accept the Name-Glorifiers' ideas. "God's energy," he wrote, "is present not in the Name of God, as the magical teaching of the Name-Glorifiers argues, not in the power, as the magical theory of the 'holy kingdom' insists. God's energy is in the freedom, in the free act, in the actual liberation." (Н.А. Бердяев, "Война и эсхатология," [War and Eschatology] *Журнал "Путь"* №61, 1939-40)

¹¹ This is certainly a contested opinion. The most common argument against Berdyaev's Russianness is the influence of Western Romanticism on his philosophy. The most often quoted critique against the "Russian authenticity" of Berdyaev's thought is George Florovsky's opinion that Berdyaev (along with Solovyov, Bulgakov, and Florensky) was a typical representative of the fin-de-siècle Russian theology "dominated by strong Western influences of various kinds." (Brandon Gallaher, "Waiting for the Barbarians: Identity and Polemicism in the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky", *Modern Theology*, 27:4, October 2011) In the *Ways of Russian Theology*, Florovsky writes: "But our religious Renaissance, properly speaking, was only a return to the experience of the Western idealism and mysticism. For some this was a return to Schelling and Hegel; for others, this was Jacob Böhme; for still others, this was Goethe. And the growing influence of Solovyov only supported this fascination with German philosophy. The actual expanses of the history of the Church were left almost unknown. [...] The replacement of theology with 'religious philosophy' was a characteristic of the German romanticism. [...] And in the Russian [theological] development this is one of the most Western episodes. [...] Berdyaev feeds mostly on these German mystical and philosophical sources, and still cannot escape from this fatal German circle." (Г. В. Флоровский. 2009. *Пути русского богословия*. [Ways of Russian Theology] Отв. ред. О. Платонов. Институт русской цивилизации, pp.623-624) However, it should be noted that all this criticism doesn't actually make Berdyaev less of a "Russian" thinker. On the contrary, Florovsky just points out, in my opinion rightly, the existence of a period of a *unique* Russian thought strongly influenced by Western philosophy.

Russian religious and political thought is a part of European religious and political thought, but a part never fully integrated and explored by the Western mind and scholarship. Russian philosophy and theology have developed in close dialogue with their Western counterparts, but Western thought, as the world's dominant and most powerful intellectual tradition, has not sufficiently engaged the wisdom of the East. Yet, we cannot blame the West for its intellectual haughtiness, since there are objective political and cultural factors that prevented the full integration and intermingling of the Russian and Western intellectual streams. However, we can argue with certainty that there is one, fundamental common source from which these two European civilizations sprung and which makes them inevitably belonging to one another. This source is the common Greek and Christian heritage.¹² In addition to this, there is, by virtue of geographical proximity, ongoing interaction between the Christian West and Christian East, and consequently a sense of shared history.¹³

The histories of Europe and Russia cannot be separated, especially after the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. But history was not only a means for unity; it became also a catalyst for divergence and estrangement. The objective factors for the historical division of European civilization into a Christian "East" and "West" have always been political and cultural. Since the reign of Peter I, Europe has traditionally considered Russia as a political threat and adversary in the same way Russia considered Europe as both an example of advanced civilization and a danger to its political traditions and culture. In the span of two centuries only, the European

¹² Georges Florovsky believes that the East and the West have a "common mind," which is their Greco-Christian past. He argued that the unity of Christianity could be achieved only through the creation of a "Neo-Patristic synthesis," through a return to the writings of the Church Fathers. "For many centuries," he says, "the Eastern and Western Churches lived in almost complete separation from one another. Yet this *separateness* is always to be understood in the complementary truth that these different blocks of insights and convictions grew out of what was originally a *common mind*. The East and the West can meet and find one another only if they remember their original kinship and the unity of their common past." (Georges Florovsky. 1974. *Christianity and Culture*, Norland Publishing, p.161)

¹³ Vladimir Solovyov expresses the unity of Russia and Europe through the words of the "Politician" in his last and most prophetic work, *Three Conversations on War, Progress, and the End of World History*. "We Russians," the politician says to his companions, "are Europeans in the same way as the Englishmen, the Frenchmen, and the Germans are Europeans. If I myself feel European, wouldn't it be stupid to argue that I am some kind of Slavo-Russ or Greco-Slav? I am as fully confident of being a European as I am of being a Russian." (И. С. Даниленко. 2005. *Русские философы о войне: Ф. М. Достоевский, Вл. Соловьев, Н. А. Бердяев, С. Н. Булгаков, Е. Н. Трубецкой, С. Л. Франк, В. Ф. Эрн*, [Russian Philosophers on War] Ассоциация "Военная Книга," p. 150)

West penetrated twice the soil of "Holy Russia" (Napoleon's and Hitler's imperial invasions), and Russia, on its turn, responded twice with reverse occupations of parts of Europe (France, between 1814 and 1818, after Napoleon's retreat; and Eastern Europe after the Second World War). We do not count here the numerous Russo-Turkish wars in South-East Europe and the military campaigns in Poland, Ukraine, the Baltic States, and Scandinavia.

Another objective reason for the division between Western and Eastern Europe is to be found in the politico-ideological threats that the two parts posed to each other over the centuries. Historically, the European West had generally ignored the danger of the expansion of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The Eastern Orthodox Church had been normally considered weak and even vulnerable to the influence of Western Catholic and Protestant proselytism, but since the eighteenth century onward, the West had been seriously troubled by the capacity of the Russian monarchy to use its mix of political ideology and military power against its more democratic institutions and imperial interests. We may say with certainty that in the last few centuries, the Russian political order and ideology have traditionally served as an antithesis to the dominant in Western Europe political order and ideology.¹⁴ European liberalism and democracy were countered by Tsarist conservatism and absolutism, while Western capitalism and individualism were challenged by Slavic communitarianism and Soviet communism. For Europe, Russia has always presented a political and ideological alternative, and, for Russia, Europe has always been regarded either as an existential threat to its unique culture and political order or an ideal, a dream that could never be achieved. The latter (Europe as an "ideal"), instead of producing a purely positive effect on the Russian development, often resulted in a sense of inferiority, and caused, as we will see in the next pages, fierce internal debates, conflicts, and divisions with practical historical consequences.

¹⁴ Hans Kohn reminds us of the observations of the French historian Jules Michelet (1798-1874). Michelet was convinced, Kohn says, that the West was "threatened not so much by Russia's military aggression as by her assumption of the role of revolutionary power and of a true friend of progress under an absolutist form. Russian propaganda, he wrote, disseminated doubt and confusion in Europe by using and perverting Western concepts of liberty and of help to the oppressed.[...] Michelet wrote with keen vision, 'Yesterday Russian propaganda told us: I am Christianity—tomorrow, it will tell us: I am Socialism.'" (Hans Kohn. 1955. *The Mind of Modern Russia: Historical and Political Thought of Russia's Great Age*. Rutgers University Press, p.20)

Other reasons for the division between Russia and the West and the resulting insufficient integration of Russian thought in the Western intellectual tradition were the barriers posed by language and modes of living. The Russian upper classes were naturally more open and susceptible to the influence and assimilation of Western cultural norms and values. From the times of Peter the Great and Catherine II, the Russian nobility had been so strongly influenced by German and French culture that some of its members spoke French and German better than they spoke Russian. At the same time, the great mass of the peasantry kept its peculiar way of living and age-old traditions.¹⁵ This cultural estrangement between the upper and lower classes, as we will see later in exploring Berdyaev's interpretation of Russian history, caused the formation of the radical intelligentsia that eventually facilitated the success of the communist revolution. On the other hand, the Western nobility had knowledge neither of the Russian language nor of Russian culture in general. Eastern Tsardom, for the European gentry, was generally regarded as a savage and depressing land, a despotic state having nothing to offer to the civilized West.¹⁶ Catherine the Great tried to correct this image, starting but never finishing a number of political reforms, "flirting" with the ideas of the French *Encyclopédistes*, even inviting Diderot to St Petersburg. But the French Revolution, Napoleon's invasion, and the regime of Nicholas I quickly reversed this process of "Westernization," bringing back the Empire to its natural autocratic state of existence. The lack of reciprocity in mutual respect and knowledge was perhaps the greatest among all factors for the Christian East-West division.

In the next pages, before we focus on Berdyaev, it is necessary to make a short introduction to the Russian political, social, and religious thought. This excursion will be by no means exhaustive; we will review only a few representative and relevant authors. Despite its

¹⁵ See Kohn. 1955, 14-15. In his 1834 article *Russia and the West*, Vissarion Belinsky writes, "And so, the nation or, better to say, the mass of our people and upper classes went separate ways. The former retained its pristine, rude, and half-savage mode of life and its melancholy songs in which it poured out its heart in grief and joy. The latter apparently underwent a change if not an improvement, forgot everything Russian; forgot even how to speak Russian..." (Kohn, Belinsky. 1955, 123)

¹⁶ "When in 1839 [Marquis] de Custine gazed with a mixture of horror and awe at the features of this 'pre-historic' giant [Russia], he instinctively exclaimed: "Il faut être Russe pour vivre en Russie... D'autres nations ont supporté l'oppression, la nation russe l'a animée; elle l'aime encore." (in Hare, Richard. 1964. *Pioneers of Russian Social Thought*, Vintage, p.5)

brevity, it should prepare us to better understand Berdyaev's ideas and should give us a glimpse into the intellectual environment from which Berdyaev emerged as a specifically Russian thinker.

CHAPTER TWO. SIX CURRENTS IN RUSSIAN POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

1. CONSERVATIVES

Nineteenth century Russian thought can be divided into six main currents: conservative, liberal, Slavophile, Westernizing, radical, and religious-philosophical. This is an arbitrary division and it certainly does not reflect the nuances, the complexity, and the overlapping of ideas between these trends. In this and the next sections, we will discuss all six currents in order to build the context for Berdyaev's political theology. Greater attention will be given to the conservative tradition and less to the radical and liberal currents. The reason for a shorter examination of Russian liberalism is that classical liberalism does not have deep roots in Russia¹⁷ and did not influence Berdyaev's thought in a significant way.¹⁸ The detailed discussion of "radicalism," an important part of the Russian intellectual tradition, is postponed and reserved for part 3 of our discourse. This accounts for the brevity of the section on it in this chapter. In part 3, the reader

¹⁷ M.A. Abramov says that Russian liberalism is a relatively new phenomenon. The political party that represented liberal ideas appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century. The word "liberalism" became widely known in Russia only after the Crimean war (1853-1856). In Abramov's opinion, liberalism is the future of Russia, and not her past. For a long time, it was commonly accepted that the "first" and "last" liberal in Russia was the nineteenth-century constitutionalist and publicist B.N. Chicherin. (See M. A. Абрамов. 1997. *Опыт русского либерализма. Антология.*— М.: Канон [Russian Liberalism: Anthology]) However, as Paul Robinson notes in his excellent study on Russian conservatism, Chicherin "defies easy classification," and describes him as a "conservative liberal." To support his opinion, Robinson quotes Chicherin arguing that the "extreme development of liberty, inherent in democracy, inevitably leads to the breakdown of the state organism." So, even Chicherin cannot be unconditionally classified as a "liberal." (See Paul Robinson. 2019. *Russian Conservatism*, Cornell University Press, p. 91)

¹⁸ M.A. Abramov argues that despite his membership in the Kadet party and his philosophy of freedom, Berdyaev cannot be described "univocally" as a "liberal thinker." For Abramov, Berdyaev is more a "classical liberal" than a "social neoliberal." A.S. Tsipko is in the same opinion, interpreting Berdyaev as a liberal-conservative who, as we will see in the section on conservatism, insisted that the mission of "liberal-conservatives" is to keep the "connection between past and future in national life." (M. A. Абрамов. 1997. 327-328, also А.С. Ципко, "Либеральный консерватизм Николая Бердяева и Петра Струве и задачи декоммунизации современной России" [Liberal Conservatism of Nikolai Berdyaev and Petr Struve and the Task of Decommunization of Contemporary Russia] in *Тетради по консерватизму: Альманах Фонда ИСЭПИ*. Форум «Бердяевские чтения», 16 мая 2014 г. 2014. Стенограмма. – М.: Некоммерческий фонд – Институт социально-экономических и политических исследований (Фонд ИСЭПИ), № 2-1)

will have the opportunity to explore the Russian radical current through the ideas of Lunacharsky and Bakunin and through Berdyaev's political-theological criticism.

Modern Russian conservatism starts with Peter the Great, the monarch who tried for the first time to "Westernize" the Eurasian empire, an attempt that won the respect of prominent nineteenth century "Westernizers," such as Alexander Herzen, who called the emperor a "revolutionary on the throne,"¹⁹ but who, at the same time, did not forget to deplore the "bestial aspects" of his "coup."²⁰ The first ideologue of modern Russian conservatism is Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1736), the most educated man in Petrine Russia, as some argue,²¹ and an adviser of the tsar on the Church and educational affairs.

Prokopovich studied at Kiev-Mogylyansk academy and in the Roman-Jesuit College St. Afanasii; he also attended various European universities. In his political theology, Prokopovich was influenced by the early modern natural law theorists Hugo Grotius, Samuel Pufendorf, and Christian Wolff. He believed in the Hobbesian theory of civil contract and supported the idea of "enlightened absolutism." In 1718, when Peter I decided to put the Church under monarchical supervision, it was Prokopovich who helped the emperor to prepare the constituent charter for the future "Holy Synod." The document was called *Duhovnii Reglament (Spiritual Reglament)*, and was described by George Florovsky, in his *Ways of Russian Theology*, as an essentially "political pamphlet," more "a manifest and declaration for a new life" than a "simple law."²² With the *Reglament*, Peter I annulled the Patriarchy and, practically, the independence of the Church, arguing that the "New" and "Old" Testaments had shown that the "pious kings" had traditionally "took care for the correction of the Spiritual rank," and that this care had been best applied through the creation of *Sobornago Pravitelstva (Synodal or Conciliar Government)*. The "manifest" argued that all individual persons, without exception, are susceptible to evil passions, implying

¹⁹ Andrzej Walicki. 2015. *The Flow of Ideas: Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to the Religious-Philosophical Renaissance* (Peter Lang GmbH, p.32.)

²⁰ Лидия Чуковская. 1966. "Отвага знания" [Refuse of Knowledge] in *"Былое и думы" Герцена*, ("Художественная литература," Москва)

²¹ Феофан Прокопович. *Правда Воли Монаршей*. 1722. [The Truth of Monarchical Will] (Retrieved from <http://xn--e1aaejmenocxq.xn--p1ai/node/13642>)

²² Г. В. Флоровский. 2009, 116

with this that spiritual power should not be concentrated in single hands. The Church could be most efficiently defended from corruption through the establishment of a "Spiritual Sobornoe Government" that, according to the emperor, should have the power to direct all spiritual affairs of the Church of All-Russia.²³

In his politics, Peter I tried to be or at least to present himself as a servant of the state, church, and people,²⁴ and Prokopovich was the main ideologue of this effort. Peter wanted to be a good monarch who doesn't put himself above God, but, at the same time, who acted to preserve his dignity as a "Vicar of God," i.e., to assert his earthly supremacy. So we read in Prokopovich's *Sermon on Royal Authority and Honor*, written in 1718, just before the preparation of the *Reglament*, "Let no one think that our intention is to compare an earthly king to the heavenly one."²⁵ People, Prokopovich argued in defense of Peter's policy, "do not know the Christian doctrine concerning lay authorities."²⁶ Using a mix of Eusebian and, in fact, Lutheran arguments,²⁷ he attacked both the will of the people to oppose monarchical power and the supremacy of the Church as presented in the institution of the Papacy. He said that people "know not that the highest power is established and armed with the sword of God and to oppose it is a sin against God Himself, a sin to be punished by death, not temporary, but eternal."²⁸ He complained that the fear of the temporal ruler comes usually from the fear of punishment instead of "Christian conscience." "[H]earing that Christ achieved freedom for us," he explained, "[rebellious people]

²³ Петр I, Архиепископ Феофан. 2015. *Духовный регламент. 1721 год*. [Spiritual Reglament (1721)] (Directmedia, p.5) Berdyaev commented on the creation of the Synod in the following way: "[...] in the Synodal arrangement from the Petersburg period of Russian history, the people of the Church ceased to play any sort of whatsoever, and the idea of *Sobornost* (*conciliarity*) was completely distorted. The Synodal arrangement is non-conciliar not only from that inward point of view, upon which Khomiakov stood, and which cannot be expressed juridically [i.e. from the point of inner freedom and consensus] but non-conciliar also from the external and canonical point of view. This arrangement was an expression of the servility of the Church to the state." (Berdyaev, "The Slavophilism of the Ruling Powers" in *AAWR*, p. 113)

²⁴ Walicki, 2015, 34

²⁵ Feofan Prokopovich. 1718. "Sermon on Royal Authority and Honor" in Marc Raeff. 1996. *Russian Intellectual History* (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. p.16)

²⁶ F. Prokopovich, 1718, 16

²⁷ This should not be a surprise. Peter I's "reformation" had this quality to synthesize the German religious and political experience with elements of the classical, Caesaropapist Orthodox political theology.

²⁸ Prokopovich, Raeff, 1996, 16

interpreted this [freedom] to mean that we are free from obedience to the powers and from the law of the Lord."²⁹ Against the temptation of rebellion, Prokopovich quoted the words of the Apostle: "While they promise their disciples liberty, they themselves are servants of corruption." (1 Peter 2:19) And concluded, "Christ did not give us freedom from obedience to the laws of God nor from due submission to the reigning powers."³⁰ The Lutheran, Protestant character³¹ of Prokopovich's defense of secular power was best revealed in the following words, "[T]hus [through rebellion] the Pope, except[ed] himself and his clergy from [obedience to] state authorities, [and] delud[ed] himself that he has the power to give and take away the scepters of kings; and thus [through rebellion] the Anabaptists forb[ade] a Christian to hold authority."³² This double attack against the political ambitions of the Pope and the political passivity of members of Christian sects, like the Anabaptists, and their refusal to bear responsibility, corresponds completely to Luther's political and theological arguments.³³ The protestant character of Prokopovich's political theology was revealed also in his interpretation of natural law as rooted in man's God-given conscience. For example, he argued that "besides Scripture there is in nature herself a law laid down by God," and quoted Rom. 2:14-15 to support this opinion. "Our own conscience is both the teacher and the witness" of moral laws, he argued. Yet, conscience, he believed, was not enough to bring justice on the earth; there was a need for a temporal authority that could serve as a barrier against the weakness and corruption of the individual will. Through

²⁹ Prokopovich, Raeff, 1996, 17

³⁰ Prokopovich, Raeff, 1996, 17

³¹ In her doctoral dissertation *Feofan Prokopovich's Teaching on the Church*, Olga Nesmiyanova argues that the greatest interest in the study of Prokopovich's theology is the "identification" of his confessional belonging. The common opinion is that the "character" of his theology is protestant. "However," she says, "the close reading of a number of provisions that have a certain analogy with the moderate Lutheran views [...] does not give us a reason to absolutize this analogy. Above all, in questions that are principal for the Orthodox truth on faith (the Filioque, the question of salvation), Feofan demonstrates full agreement with the Eastern Church." Ольга Вячеславовна Несмиянова. 1998. *Учение о церкви Феофана Прокоповича: Историко-религиоведческая реконструкция* [Feofan Prokopovich's Teaching on the Church] (тема диссертации и автореферата по ВАК 09.00.06) In his *Sources and Meaning of Russian Communism*, Berdyaev describes Prokopovich as a protestant. "The renowned metropolitan from the Petrine epoch Feofan Prokopovich," Berdyaev writes, "was indeed a protestant of a rationalist type." (Н.А. Бердяев. 1955 (1933). *Истоки и смысл русского коммунизма*. YMCA Press, Париж, p.13)

³² Prokopovich, Raeff, 1996, 16

³³ See for example Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: to what extent it should be obeyed," tr. J.J.Schindel, in *Luther's Works* (Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986) Vol. 35

his conscience, Prokopovich argued, man knows good and evil, but conscience alone does not prevent man's weakness and corruption of will. Thus, "government and authority" are "necessary" to the "natural law" and order.³⁴

Despite the revolutionary, "protestant" character of his political theology, Feofan Prokopovich belongs to the conservative current of Russian thought, and not only belongs to it, but marks its beginning. This is so because the regime of Peter the Great gave rise to a school of thought and a model of political governance that expressed clearly the ideology and practice of what we call today a "Russian conservatism." The ideology of Russian conservatism is best described by Uvarov's simple dictum: "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationhood." We will discuss Uvarov, but first we should say a few words on the ideas of Nikolai Karamzin (1766–1826), the author most often described as the "father of Russian conservatism."

Karamzin was born four years after the beginning of the reign of Catherine II and died a year after the enthroning of Nicholas I. Author of some of the most popular books on Russian history, he was a firsthand witness of the French Revolution and the Decembrist revolt. A passionate Russian patriot, he was among the last people who abandoned burning Moscow before Napoleon's entry (taking with himself only the manuscript of his *History of the Russian State*).³⁵ If Prokopovich was the ideologue of Peter the Great, Karamzin was the ideologue of the politics of Catherine the Great and her grandson Alexander I. J.L. Black describes Karamzin as "one of the leading exponents" of "secular conservatism," a representative of a "way of thinking [...] similar to, but not exactly like that of his Western European counterparts, Burke and de Maistre."³⁶ Isaiah

³⁴ Prokopovich, Raeff, 1996, 19-20

³⁵ Инна Аркадьевна Соболева. 2012. *Победить Наполеона. Отечественная война 1812 года* [To Defeat Napoleon: The Patriotic War of 1812] (Издательский дом "Питер", p.312)

³⁶ J.L. Black. 1975. *Nicholas Karamzin and Russian Society in the Nineteenth Century* (University of Toronto Press, p.xiv). I tend to agree with Black's observation about Karamzin's conservatism and place him among the "classical" "Petrine" conservatives instead of among the Slavophiles. Belinsky, however, sees in him a Slavophile—moreover, not simply a "Slavophile," but the very originator of this movement. "We know," Belinsky writes, "that in Karamzin's eyes Ivan III stood higher than Peter the Great, and pre-Petrine Russ was better than the new Russia. Here you have the origin of the so-called Slavophilie movement..." (V. Belinsky, *Russia and the Slavophiles* (from "A view on Russian Literature in 1846") in Kohn, 1955, 133.

Berlin is of the same opinion, arguing that Karamzin "set the tone for Russian conservatism much as Burke did for its English prototype."³⁷

In Karamzin's political philosophy, we see both a penetrating realism and surprising naiveté. The realism is in his conservative judgments. He was well aware that the weakening of the monarchical power in Russia would lead to chaos and social disturbances. But he put too much trust in the capacity of the monarch to set the moral tone of the nation and control its destinies. Karamzin argued against the idea of the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, calling its supporters "superficial minds." For him the establishment of a law higher than the will of the tsar was impossible. He argued that neither Senate nor Council would be capable to do anything if the monarch decides to act like a sovereign. "What will the senators do if the monarch breaks the law?" he asked. "Will they incite the people against him? Every good Russian heart will shudder at the thought of this." And he concluded, "Two political authorities in the one state are like two fierce lions in one cage, ready to tear each other apart. [...] Autocracy founded and has resurrected Russia."³⁸ Even the monarch, according to Karamzin, has no right to abdicate voluntarily from his God-given responsibility and if he does so, the people themselves should remind him: "Sire!" they should say, "You exceed the limits of your authority. Taught by a long history of disasters, Russia before the holy altar entrusted the power of autocracy to your ancestor and demanded that he rule over her supremely and indivisibly. [...] You may do anything, but you may not limit your authority by law!"³⁹ This opinion is reminiscent of the words of the Slavophile Konstantin Aksakov, who famously said, years later in a "Memorandum" to the heir of Alexander I, "The Russian people are not political; that is to say, they do not aspire to political power, they have no desire to secure political rights for themselves, and they have not the slightest longing for popular government."⁴⁰ In this opinion, there is a lot of truth and a lot of deception. The Russian people were not more or less conservative and politically indifferent than the other European peoples,

³⁷ See "Russian Intellectual History" in Isaiah Berlin. 2000. *The Power of Ideas*. (Princeton University Press)

³⁸ N.M. Karamzin, "A Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia. (Some Observations on the reign of Alexander I)" in W.J. Leatherbarrow and D.C. Offord. 1987. *A Documentary History of Russian Thought. From the Enlightenment to Marxism*. (Ardis, Ann Arbor, p. 32)

³⁹ Karamzin, Leatherbarrow and Offord, 1987, 33

⁴⁰ Karamzin, Leatherbarrow and Offord, 1987, 95

and, as history proved, they were certainly able to produce political "voices" that represented their desire for freedom and rights.⁴¹ The Bolshevik revolution and the civil war that followed were the evidence that Russian people could take politics to revolutionary extremes.

Failing to see the political capacity of the people, Karamzin represented not simply the "secular conservatism" of Tsarist Russia, as J.L. Black says, but also what Walicki described as the "utopian conservatism"⁴² of the Slavophiles. Karamzin's naive trust in autocratic power and people's passivity was even more visible in his hope that every monarch has the power and character to "reign virtuously and accustom his subjects to goodness." This is a typical Aristotelian view, where power is regarded as the fountainhead of public virtues, but also a view shared by the supporters of enlightened absolutism. Karamzin believed, like Prokopovich before him, that the "good" monarch, unrestrained by Church, senate or parliament, "gives rise to salutary customs, principles and popular opinions" that both keep the monarchy "enlightened" and "responsible" and the people content and righteous.

The political principle of Karamzin, and Russian conservatives in general, was that "all novelty in the political order is an evil to which we should resort only when necessary."⁴³ From this "old precept" it followed that every attempt for revolt should be immediately crushed and fear of punishment should be always present in people. This, again, reminds us of Prokopovich's emphasis on the importance of fear for the existence of a good and righteous political order. Karamzin, like Prokopovich, did not trust in the goodness of autonomous will and the power of individual conscience. "No one," he argued, "can doubt the truth of Machiavelli's dictum that fear is the commonest and most effective of all human motives. [...] How many lambs would become tigers if it were not for fear! The love of virtue for its own sake is the act of a highly moral

⁴¹ Hans Kohn shares the same opinion. "[M]any Russians [under the Tsarist regime]," he writes, "did long for the introduction of parliamentary democracy into Russia and wished to integrate their country into the Western system." (Kohn. 1955, 27)

⁴² There is a difference between the conservatism we discuss now and the Slavophile conservatism as we will see later, but on this point, both trends come very close. The exact description of the Slavophile thought from the 1840s that Walicki gave was "romantic conservative utopianism." (See Andrzej Walicki. 1979. *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism*. Stanford University Press. p.114)

⁴³ Karamzin, Leatherbarrow and Offord, 1987, 33

nature—a rare phenomenon in the world, otherwise the people would not dedicate altars to virtue [...] Give the people freedom and they will kick dirt in your face, but say a firm word in their ear and they will lie at your feet!"⁴⁴ Karamzin was against reforms in the feudal system of Russia; he did not believe that the serf would be better if released and made a hired, landless, worker. Serfdom, he argued, should be abolished only when the people have already built the habit of freedom, that is, the habit of living virtuously. Today, he said, the Russian peasants "have the habits of slaves." "It seems to me," he suggested, "that from the point of view of political stability it is safer to enslave men than to give them freedom at the wrong time. Men must be prepared for such freedom through moral reforms..."⁴⁵

Prokopovich and Karamzin's political philosophies find their theoretical and practical expression in the simple formula of Nicholas I's minister of education Count Sergey Uvarov (1786-1855): "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationhood."⁴⁶ We may argue that once formulated, this maxim represents the political tradition and ideology of tsarist *and* communist Russia. Of course, we would need an entire discussion in order to explain and prove why this dictum is applicable to the atheist Soviets, but since we do not have the space for this, we will only say that the Church "orthodoxy" of tsardom was replaced in Soviet Russia by the "orthodoxy" of the Party (the secular church of the communist regime), "autocracy" was concentrated in the hands of the leader of the Party and in the Party's Central Committee, and "nationhood," or the "people," was the professed aim and ideal of the Bolshevik regime.⁴⁷ Uvarov coined this formula as a response to the revolution in France and to the growth of liberal sentiments in Russia. Russia had the experience of the Decembrist revolt and the Napoleonic wars and needed to assert its independence and traditional form of government against Western influences. "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationhood"

⁴⁴ Karamzin, Leatherbarrow and Offord, 1987, 37-38

⁴⁵ Karamzin, Leatherbarrow and Offord, 1987, 37

⁴⁶ See С. С. Уваров, "Доклады министра народного просвещения С. С. Уварова императору Николаю" [Reports of the Minister of People's Education to Emperor Nicolas] in М. М. Шевченко, 1995. *Река времен. Книга истории и культуры*. [The River of Times. Book of History and Culture] Кн. 1. pp. 60-78

⁴⁷ "[...] like Byzantine Orthodoxy," Hans Kohn writes, "Marxism was soon nationalized and became a Russian Church. The new regime took over from Marxism not so much its economic theories, which the development in the West had proved wrong and which were inapplicable to a backward agrarian community, as its eschatological expectation of the coming perfect social order..." (Kohn. 1955, 29)

could be interpreted as the antithesis of the revolutionary slogan "Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood." Uvarov believed that Western liberalism had an "extremely devastating influence on the development of education" in Russia. He described it as a "moral infection" that put under suspicion everything considered in the past as achievement, and blamed the revolutionary spirit for spreading "countless fallacies." He agreed with Guizot's observation that revolution left society without any moral and religious convictions. Uvarov believed that Russia was still strong enough to oppose the corrupting influence of liberalism, that she still had religious and moral convictions, and proposed to Nicholas I that the government's task is to "assemble" these convictions in one finished "whole." United, morally and religiously, Russia could combat and resist the "storm."

Uvarov, like most of the Russian conservatives, was not completely against the Western political experience and theory. He believed that the combination of what is best in old and new was possible. He considered the "Enlightenment" "necessary for the existence of the great state," but only when purified from its corrupting elements. He proposed that to achieve stability and growth, Russia should rest on "three maxims" that, in his opinion, were "natural" and "undeniable" by "reason." These three maxims were: 1) National religion, 2) Autocracy, and 3) Nationhood. He explained that without religion the nation and the individual person live in a "lower moral and physical order." The existence of autocracy was a "necessary condition" for the existence of the Empire. If Russia adopted the "European institutions" and limited the power of the monarchy, he believed, she would inevitably fall apart. He was convinced that, if implemented, "pseudo-constitutionalism" would bring the Empire down in just "two weeks." He considered Orthodoxy and Autocracy as relatively simple maxims, while "Nationhood" was for him a more "complex" issue. The nation, he argued, should develop like a "human body"—it could change with the time, yet it should always preserve its "core features;" thus, one of the most important things for the nation was to preserve and keep its identity. This explains why Orthodoxy, or national religion, was so important—the consistent education of people in common belief and respect to the traditional monarchical and popular values would guard and preserve national identity.⁴⁸ Once formulated, Uvarov's political views exercised a continuous influence over the minds of Russian

⁴⁸ Уваров, С. С. Шевченко, 1995, 60-78

politicians and intellectuals. It faced a lot of criticism as well. As we will see later, Berdyaev himself, despite being a "philosopher of freedom," adopted and developed some of the principles of Nicholas I's minister, especially his understanding of the nation as ever-changing yet always the same.

The last representative of the conservative stream in Russian intellectual thought whom we will introduce here is the relatively famous (in the West) Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod,⁴⁹ Konstantin Pobedonostsev (1827-1907). Pobedonostsev is remembered mostly as an "evil" personage from the reactionary conservatism of the nineteenth century. He is condemned for anti-Semitism and generally regarded as a cold-hearted bureaucrat. The common opinion about his intellectual work is that he is an unimaginative, unoriginal author.⁵⁰ This opinion does not reflect the truth completely. His intellectual work has merits; it is insightful and deserves attention. Pobedonostsev had a very pedantic, but not boring, style of writing. In his books and articles, he combined common sense with rational arguments and logic. One may find in them an excellent exposition of the conservative philosophy of the nineteenth century, including many echoes of the ideas of Joseph de Maistre and Leo XIII. Also, popular opinion claims that he was a vicious enemy of freedom. It is true that he took with utter seriousness his administrative functions as a servant of an autocratic regime; yet, it is somehow difficult to explain why this "enemy of freedom" was consulted by Dostoyevsky on the writing of the story of the "Grand Inquisitor" and why Pobedonostsev, after reading the draft, did not react against it and its

⁴⁹ Secular supervisor of the Russian Orthodox Church under Alexander III.

⁵⁰ Andrzej Walicki has some harsh words to say about Pobedonostsev. "Konstantin Pobedonostsev," he argues, "was neither an original nor an interesting thinker. If he has a place in Russian intellectual history, it is mainly as a typical and influential representative of reactionary thought during the crisis of Russian absolutism. His name will always be associated with the oppressive, all-encompassing triumph of reaction in Russia during the reign of Alexander III." (Andrzej Walicki. 1979, 297) Berdyaev's opinion is not much different. "Pobedonostsev," he writes in an article, published in 1907, "was a remarkable type: a sincere ideologue of our historical nihilism, of the nihilistic attitude of the official Russian Church and of the state towards life. Pobedonostsev was a thinker neither profound nor individual, his ideas were rather superficial, too typical, and he shares them with those historical forces, which he served, and which he ideologically supported. Pobedonostsev evoked towards himself a burning hatred [...] But when one reads him, the hatred weakens: there resound in him such sincere notes, a sincere humility before that above, love for the nation, a romantic attachment to the old way of life." (N.A. Berdyaev, "Nihilism on a Religious Soil" in SCI, 217)

publication.⁵¹ All this suggests that Pobedonostsev, who has often been described as the prototype of the "Grand Inquisitor,"⁵² should not be interpreted one-sidedly. He is certainly a more interesting, complex, and important author than normally realized.

Pobedonostsev's most popular work in the West is *Reflections of a Russian Statesman*. In it, he makes an exposition of his vision of how society and state should function properly and harmoniously. As an Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod, the institution created by Peter the Great through his *Duhovnii Reglament*, Pobedonostsev was actively engaged with questions of Church and state relations. In his *Reflections*, he argued that in society there should not be discord between the spiritual and temporal authorities, because, as he believed, the result from a conflict between these two centers of power would have unpredictable political and social consequences. Saying this, he had in mind the conflict between the Papacy and monarchy in the West that finished eventually with the division of the Church, the secularisation of the state, and the consequent democratization and liberalization of state power. Following Uvarov's dictum, he argued that statehood rests ultimately on the healthy faith of the people. He was convinced that popular faith sustained and supported the just political order. Despite serving as a lay head of the Holy Synod, Pobedonostsev argued that the state has no authority over the "domain" of "spiritual

⁵¹ In a letter to Dostoyevsky, written on 16 August 1879, Pobedonostsev said, "Your 'Grand Inquisitor' produced in me a strong impression. I have rarely read something so powerful. I was only waiting [to see] from where there would come a rebuff, an objection and clarification [of the Inquisitor's atheistic arguments], and I am still waiting." (Достоевский. Ф. М. - Победоносцеву К. П., 24 августа (5 сентября) 1879. Retrieved from <http://dostoevskiy-lit.ru/dostoevskiy/pisma-dostoevskogo/dostoevskij-m-pobedonoscevu-24-avgusta-1879.htm>.) In a letter to the publisher and critic N.M.Katkov (29 January 1881), Pobedonostsev wrote, "I was struck by the news about the death of F. M. Dostoyevsky. Great loss! [...] He had in himself a fire, from which many caught warmth and light." After the death of Dostoyevsky, Pobedonostsev petitioned for a state pension for the writer's family and became a guardian of his children. (Ф. М. Достоевский. 1973. Ф. М. Достоевский. Новые материалы и исследования. [F.M.Dostoyevsky. New Materials and Studies] Изд. Наука. p. 53)

⁵² Berdyaev himself sees in Pobedonostsev the living image of the Grand Inquisitor. He argued that the Ober-Procurator was a sincere Christian man, but his weakness was in his disbelief in the power of good; that's why he relied so much on the State and on coercion. Pobedonostsev, according to Berdyaev, did not trust the capacity of good to overcome evil, which, finally, was distrust in the capacity of Christ to save the world through good. He was like the Grand Inquisitor, "not believing in mankind, saving it mistrustfully and by force. The atheistic spirit of the Inquisitor moves within Pobedonostsev, and he, just like that terrible old man, repudiates freedom of conscience, he fights temptation for the small things, he defends a religious utilitarianism." (N.A. Berdyaev, "Nihilism on a Religious Soil" in SCI, p.222)

existence." This view corresponded to the expressed will of Peter I that the Church should be free, yet decentralized, and the state, although formally withdrawn from Church affairs, should keep its final authority in cases of "emergency." Obviously, if we recall Carl Schmitt's definition that the "sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception,"⁵³ the Emperor in the Petrine formula, represented now in Pobedonostsev, despite his supposed "silence" on Church affairs, was ultimately the sovereign, who would act beyond and above any other authority in case of need. It should be noted that this was also a typical Caesaro-Papist notion from the Byzantine tradition.

Pobedonostsev, however, carefully veiled this notion of the supremacy of secular power with rational and religious arguments. He argued that all domestic conflicts were based on discord between popular beliefs and state authority. Church and state, he insisted, have the same "natural" goal: the achievement of unity—spiritual and political. And he said that the "dual rule," that is, the division of temporal and spiritual, was unnatural and should be rejected because it worked against the natural tendency of Creation towards unity and wholeness. Life (the temporal) and faith (the spiritual) were not independent of one another, so the division of power, exemplified by the West, was unnatural and full of danger. In his political ruminations, Pobedonostsev defended the supremacy of the state as having the ultimate responsibility for preserving the Church (and faith) from corruption and destruction. He argued that the state cannot and should not be neutral in religious matters and that the masses do not understand and therefore would not approve confusing political theories, proposed by democrats and liberals, such as the idea of "state neutrality." He insisted that people respect simplicity in governance, and the power that is in accordance with the natural order. The French revolutionaries, he argued, used "sophistry and violence" to impose on the people an unnatural and complex political and social order. But the social regeneration that the revolutionaries hoped to achieve could happen, according to Pobedonostsev, only through the application of Christian principles—the only principles that people understand. French revolutionaries, he was convinced, declared war against the "Kingdom of Christ on earth." This conviction was widespread among the Russian conservatives and the Slavophiles, and it was shared, as we will see, by Berdyaev as well.

⁵³ Carl Schmitt. 1985. *Political Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, p. 5)

Pobedonostsev repeated the conventional opinion that Church and state are separated in functions, but exist together as one body. The Church's responsibility was to "teach," its domain of authority was "family life" and "civil society," while the temporal power was entitled to govern and impose order. Although sovereign, the scope of temporal power should be limited to the public domain and should not systematically intrude in the private life of the citizens or control their education.

We should say here that Karamzin, the supporter of absolute monarchy, also agreed that state power should not oversee and control private life.⁵⁴ So, it would not be a mistake to say that the Russian conservatives, in general, were unanimous on the question of particular limits of state power. This unanimity could be explained by the fact that they, after all, were representatives of the nobility, and the nobility traditionally strove to preserve a certain autonomy from the encroachments of central power. The state, Pobedonostsev argued, should not regulate or direct the entire social life, as socialism proposed and demanded. It was wrong, he said, for the state to expand constantly its legislative and administrative power through adding law after law. The socialist ideal, he was convinced, was the "absorption" of individual life in the life of the community. This was another argument that, as we will see later, was heavily employed by Berdyaev in his criticism of socialism.

The idea of a non-neutral state led Pobedonostsev to the conclusion that the state should not treat all religions equally; the secular rule should profess some faith, preferably, the faith of the majority. Neutrality, he was convinced, breeds indifference and indifference was always "amoral." According to Pobedonostsev, the state should have an official religion. If all religions were treated equally by the "neutral" state, he argued, there would be a spiritual division in society and the state would be left alone as the only center of unity, which would result in despotic monism. A greater danger was that the neutral state tended naturally and inevitably towards the creation of "civil religion," whose aim was to educate and indoctrinate people in the ideology of

⁵⁴ Walicki says that Karamzin did not promote totalitarian absolutism. "The tsar's authority was absolute in affairs of state, but did not extend to the private sphere, which was outside the realm of politics." Karamzin's "point of view of the freedom of the individual [...]," which means the view of the member of the gentry, "was infinitely greater under aristocracy than under the Jacobins' 'sovereignty of the people'," or the "tyranny of popular rule." (Walicki. 1979, 55)

monistic power. Only the Church, Pobedonostsev argued, has the "duty of [religious] teaching and direction." In short, "civil religion" was an expression of the despotic monism that arises from the liberal (and atheist in character) idea of state neutrality. It was without question for him that the confidence of the people in its rulers was founded on faith, and that people expected their rulers to have faith in God as well. A government of believers was better than a government of atheists indifferent to faith. The atheism of secular power was the greatest danger in liberalism. For Pobedonostsev, liberalism threatened to undermine the fundament of the Christian state and to replace Christianity with its own secular, civil religion. However, he did not forget to clarify that the state, Christian or not, has no right to impose a particular religion on its citizens and that they should have the right also not to believe.

As might be expected, Pobedonostsev was an enemy of democracy. He considered universal suffrage as a "fatal error" that, in fact, destroys equality. One vote, he argued, is nothing, but the one "who controls" the majority of votes "is master of all power." In a democracy, he explained, the real rulers were the "manipulators of votes," and he was convinced that democracy leads to dictatorship. People without education were manipulated through the press, they were deceived by arguments that "the voice of people" is like the voice of God. This claim was "a deplorable error." The principle of the people's sovereignty, he insisted, was false. And nothing could be good if it rested on falsification. For Pobedonostsev, the conservative, and for his radical antipodes, the Bolsheviks, Lenin among them, parliament was just a means for pursuing self-interest and a talking shop.⁵⁵

Finally, it is interesting that Pobedonostsev's conservatism did not have particular sympathies to the Slavophiles, as Walicki argues,⁵⁶ especially those of them, like Khomiakov

⁵⁵ See V.I. Lenin. 2015. *State and Revolution*. (Haymarket Books, p.84)

⁵⁶ "Despite his largely friendly relations with Ivan Akasakov," Walicki writes, "and the high esteem in which he held Slavophilism, [Pobedonostsev] was little influenced by it; the bureaucratic conservatism of the reign of Nicholas was much closer to his heart. In contrast to the Slavophiles, Pobedonostsev did not believe in the fellowship of *sobornost'*, since he could not have reconciled such a belief with his deep conviction that man's weak and indeed wicked nature required strong discipline imposed from without [...] [he] prized the Petrine reforms largely because they had consolidated autocracy." (Walicki. 1979, 299)

(although he liked certain aspects of Khomakov's theology),⁵⁷ who wished unity through freedom and who were critical of Peter's reforms that put secular power over the spiritual and thus broke the organic, natural unity and development of Russian people.⁵⁸ In his *Reflections*, Pobedonostsev attacked the Slavophiles directly, arguing that they, with "amazing inconsistency," shared with the liberals the "same delusion" that the free press is an "essential element of social well-being."

2. SLAVOPHILES

Now, bringing the Slavophiles into our narrative, we should say a few words on their political, social, and religious vision. I will comment on only one author from this influential current of Russian thought and conservatism. This author is Alexei Khomiakov (1804-1860), perhaps the most popular name, along with Ivan Kireevsky, of the group of Slavophiles that includes also Konstantin Aksakov and his brother Ivan Aksakov, the poet-diplomat Fyodor Tyutchev, Yury Smarin, Nikolai Danilevsky, and the writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky, among others.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ He approved, for example, Khomiakov's treatment of the Western "absolutist-scholastic" polemics on faith and works. See К.П. Победоносцев. 1896 *Московский сборник*. Церковь.

⁵⁸ As mentioned in the previous section ("A Russian Thinker in The East-West Divide."), there was a disconnect between the upper strata of Russian society and the ordinary folk, which eventually resulted in radicalisation and disjointment in the Russian political life—the elites did not understand the people and the people did not comprehend the elites. According to the Slavophiles this division was created by Peter's reforms and autocratic style of governance. Walicki writes, "The Petrine reforms, according to the Slavophiles, cut the links between Russia's upper strata and the common people. [They] maintained that before Peter the higher estates were an organic part of the 'people.' In fact, by 'people' they meant all sections of society who had remained faithful to the old tradition—for instance the old Moscow merchant families were part of the 'people,' whereas Westernized merchants belonged to 'society.'" (Walicki. 1979, 98)

⁵⁹ Here I agree with Hans Kohn's description of Dostoyevsky as a "Slavophile." (Kohn. 1955, 17) Berdyaev would not include outright Dostoyevsky in the group of the Slavophiles. In his monograph *Dostoyevsky's Worldview* (*Мирозерцание Достоевского*), Berdyaev describes Dostoyevsky as a "man of Apocalypse," while the Slavophiles, he says, were not yet enough "sick of the apocalyptic malady." Dostoyevsky, according to Berdyaev, was not a genuine "Slavophile type." He did not have a "soil" under his feet like the Slavophiles, he was rather an "underground man," his element was the "fire" (the Spirit), not the earth. (Н.А. Бердяев. 2016 (1921). *Русская идея. Мирозерцание Достоевского* (сборник). Библиотека всемирной литературы, С. 388-9) Berdyaev is right to say that Dostoyevsky was not a genuine Slavophile. Dostoyevsky himself admits in his *Diaries* some differences from the Slavophiles. In his *Confessions of a Slavophile* (*Признания Славянофила*), he says, "In many beliefs that are purely Slavophile, I am, perhaps, not completely a Slavophile." But in one regard, in one conviction, he was a Slavophile, and because of this conviction, I put him firmly among the Slavophiles. This conviction was his belief in the unification of all nations into one spiritual brotherhood, following the example of the unification of the Slavs under Russia. (See Ф.М. Достоевский *Дневник писателя. 1877. Июль-Август*. [Writer's Diary. 1877. July-August] Глава вторая. II. Признания

Another important reason to turn to Khomiakov is the influence that he exercised on Berdyaev and on Russian religious and political thought in general, especially on questions of community and freedom. In the words of Berdyaev, Khomiakov and the Slavophiles made the "first attempt at an ecclesial self-consciousness of the Orthodox East"; they, for the first time, "clearly formulated" the idea of Russia as a specifically "religious" nation.⁶⁰ Making religion a "center" of Russian culture, identity, and life fostered the creation of a strong national narrative marked by a sense of exceptionality and mission. It would not be wrong to say that Slavophilism introduced, or at least encouraged, messianic and apocalyptic sentiments among nineteenth and twentieth century Russians and that it could be held partly responsible for the appearance of the pre-revolutionary radical intelligentsia. Fr. Alexandr Men, perhaps borrowing Berdyaev's opinion, expressed in the *Russian Idea*, was right to note that anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin adopted their radical ideas of freedom namely from the Slavophiles, especially from Khomiakov, who, as Fr. Men says, argued that "every state governance is evil" and that the Tsar's authority was sanctioned by the people, not by God.⁶¹

According to Berdyaev, the Slavophiles were the first who diverted Russian religious and political thought from the orbits of Byzantism, Catholicism, and Protestantism. The Slavophiles created, he says in his monograph on Alexei Khomiakov, the genuine Russian tradition in philosophy and social thought, a tradition that was markedly religious and Orthodox and that combined the spiritual with the practical, speculation with experience, the conservative with the liberal and progressive. All that is original in Russian thought, Berdyaev believed, is religious,⁶² and all that is religious in modern Russian thought has for its source the nineteenth-century

славянофила. Ф.М. Достоевский. Собрание сочинений в 15 томах. СПб.: Наука, 1995. Т. 14. С. 229—233. Also Steven Cassedy. 2005. *Dostoevsky's Religion*. Stanford University Press, pp. 77-82)

⁶⁰ See N.A. Berdyaev. 1912. *Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov*. Ch. I. The Origins of Slavophilism. (frsj Publications, pp. 3-23.)

⁶¹ Alexandr Men. 2015. *Russian Religious Philosophy. 1989-1990 Lectures*. (frsj Publications, p.12)

⁶² It seems that Berdyaev expresses (or borrows?) an argument similar to what we find in the work of the Slavophile Nikolai Danilevsky. "Outside religion," Danilevsky writes, "the Jews created nothing worthy of the attention of their contemporaries or of posterity... But the religious aspect of their life and activity was so exalted and so perfect that these people are justly called the people chosen by God." (N. Danilevsky, "The Slav Role in World Civilization" (from *Russia and Europe*, 1869) in Kohn. 1955. 197.

Slavophile impulse. Berdyaev considered Khomiakov a theological genius,⁶³ who almost single-handedly reintroduced the concept of true, authentic conciliarity (not Petrine conciliarity) in Christian society and the idea of unity based on freedom.⁶⁴

Khomiakov was a conservative thinker, but not of the Petrine tradition. On the contrary, the followers of the Petrine tradition were not only the conservatives like Uvarov and Pobedonostsev but also the opponents of the Slavophiles, the Westernizers, who, preserving in their philosophy the revolutionary seed of Peter's reformism and secularism, produced from their ranks the late nineteenth-century radical intelligentsia. The Westernizers, according to Berdyaev, were not so original in their thinking as the Slavophiles; even less original were their heirs, the atheistic radicals. But, as we have said, following Fr. Men, these two opposing Slavophilism reformist and radical currents inherited their utopianism and passion for freedom not from Peter, the autocrat reformer, but from the religious and messianic spirit of Slavophilism. We will discuss this paradox later, in the third part of this thesis, in the chapter on the Russian revolution and communism.

What do we mean exactly by arguing that Khomiakov was a conservative, but not of the Petrine tradition? We mean that Khomiakov and the Slavophiles did not reject monarchy, did not ask for a representative government. They, in fact, looked at the tsar as a father of the nation. Their political philosophy was patriarchal. They looked at the national community as a patriarchy in which the monarch acts from love in the same way as the father of the family rules from love. Obviously, they were idealists, and their idealism was most clearly expressed in their idea of freedom and *sobornost*. Their political theology, in contrast to the Petrine conservatism discussed above, had for its starting point not the apology of state power and sovereignty but the argument for freedom in Christ, the ideal of the Church life and community, the Nicene Credo and the catholicity of the Church. In other words, their political theology starts with the Church, not the

⁶³ N.A. Berdyaev. 2017 (1912). *Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov*. (frsj Publications, p.9)

⁶⁴ Sergey Horujy (Horuzhy) writes in *After the Break. Ways of Russian Philosophy* that for Khomiakov freedom was always the primary, "fundamental attribute" of realized *sobornost* (communion); freedom and unity were the identical expressions of the "law of spiritual love." (Сергей Сергеевич Хоружий. 1994. *После перерыва. Пути русской философии*. СПб)

state, and all their subsequent political and social conclusions are bent around this center, the Church, as they understood it. One may argue that the emphasis on Church life and community somehow blurred the Slavophile vision of the importance of personhood, that personhood came to play a lesser role in their scheme of just social and political order; but this argument, although not far from the truth, has its weaknesses. The dignity of man was a Christian concept and the dignity of man can be discussed only if man belongs to a community. It is difficult to start a debate on the value of the human person if one does not have already a concept and understanding of the value and quality of the community in which the individual person lives. So, instead of pointing out their disengagement with the question of personhood, it might be better if we say that the Slavophiles opened the way for the development of the idea of human dignity in Russian thought through a discussion on the ideal community, namely, a discussion on the dignity and meaning of the Christian Church.

What was the Church for Khomiakov? What was the beginning of the Slavophile political theology? In a word, the Church was the beginning and the Church is freedom. Freedom is the keyword in communitarian Slavophile thought. The unity of the Church is a necessary result of the unity of God, Khomiakov argued in his *The Foundations of the Theology of the One Church*.⁶⁵ God's freedom translates into the freedom of the Church, and the freedom of the One and Triune God is the basis of the unity of the One Church. The Church, Khomiakov argued, is not the many faces in their personal autonomy, but the unity of divine grace. The Church's unity is not metaphysical; it is real, historical, and existential, in the same way that the reality of life is real for the many members of the living body. The Church is one, despite its many members and despite its external divisions. Spiritually, the Church is one and it has always been so. The Church is holy, and for that reason, it does not stand a lie. But the Church is also incomprehensible. It is incomprehensible, unreal, and invisible for the liars, for those who do not belong to it, who are not bound up with it through the inner spirit of truth. The Church, Khomiakov says, knows the entire truth without any admixture of error. Those who live in the Church do not submit to any false

⁶⁵ А.С. Хомяков, "Основы Вероучения Церков Одна" [The Foundations of the Theology of the One Church] in А.С. Хомяков. 2011. *Всемирная Задача России* [The World Task of Russia] (Институт Русской Цивилизации, Благословение, С. 17-39)

teaching, they do not take the mystery from a false teacher, they do not observe false ceremonies. The Church takes counsel, it exists in agreement, it knows in agreement when an error is committed; it discerns through its councils when a layperson or a bishop is wrong. Divisions within the Church arise from false teachings, but they neither destroy the Church nor remain in it forever. The Church, Khomiakov believed, is Truth and as Truth is eternal, so the Church is pure and eternal. The Church is catholic, *sobornaya*, because it belongs to the whole world. The Church does not belong to a province, nation, or state. It does not stand division. Its essence is the agreement in freedom, a "spiritual (and free) unity" of all members. The Church, Khomiakov argued, is revealed in and as "diversity," but this diversity, as has been said, is not produced because of the multiplicity of its members and voices, but because of the unity of the Spirit.

This, we may say here, is an interesting feature of Khomiakov's vision. It is not multiplicity that creates diversity, but rather unity. Unity makes possible the existence of diversity. Here Khomiakov follows the Bible, arguing that the Spirit creates the plurality of personalities and forms, of talents and vocations. As the Apostle says: "There are different kinds of gifts. But they are all given to believers by the same Spirit. There are different ways to serve. But they all come from the same Lord." (1 Cor. 12:4-5) In the diversity of the Church, there is no contradiction or competition; all are together in agreement and freedom. All agree and know the truth *together*, but no individual part of this divine organism knows the whole truth or has the whole Spirit in itself. In Christ are the wholeness and the Spirit without limit. (John 3:34) The Church speaks truth, and knows the truth, only united in agreement. The truth of the Church is not in rational argument; its truth is spiritual, an inner knowledge of right and wrong. Christian knowledge, Khomiakov argued, is not an act of reason, an act of the inquiring mind; it is an act of faith and inner feeling. In faith, he says, the Church is one, and nobody is saved alone, outside the Church, removed and exalted from communion with others. Salvation, according to Khomiakov, and as we will see in Berdyaev as well, is not individual: if one is saved, it is so because others, in the Church, are saved.⁶⁶ There is no private salvation; salvation is always in communion with others.

⁶⁶ See also George Florovsky. 1974. *Christianity and Culture: Collected Works*, Vol. II (Nordland Publishing, pp.137-138)

According to Berdyaev, the concept of collective salvation is a typical Russian idea. "It is a Russian idea that individual salvation is impossible, that salvation is communitarian, that all are responsible for all," Berdyaev wrote.⁶⁷ It seems that the Slavophiles were the first who formulated and expressed theologically this element of the Russian psyche.

A specific feature of Khomiakov's ecclesiology is his understanding that unity, the *sobornost*, the agreement, does not come from teaching, from coercive education in values and the artificial creation of a habit of togetherness. Unity does not arise from rational argumentation or imposed discipline. It comes, through the Spirit, from the inner feeling and spontaneous sympathy and appreciation of truth. The Church, for him, was not an authority.⁶⁸ The interior, not the exterior, is what makes genuine unity and agreement possible. Authority is "something external to us," he said, whereas the Church is the "truth" and, at the same time, "the inner life of the Christian, since God, Christ, the Church, live in him."⁶⁹ "The unity of the Church was free; more precisely, the unity was freedom itself, the harmonious expression of inner agreement." And "when this living [in freedom in agreement] was rejected [in history], ecclesiastical freedom was sacrificed for the maintenance of a contrived and arbitrary unity." Thus, "the spiritual intuition of truth was replaced by an external token or sign."⁷⁰ "In the True Church," Khomiakov insisted, "there is no Teaching Church."⁷¹ One only is necessary for the existence of the "true Church,"—confession, *faith* that Christ is God, and love. So, he concluded, "Let us love one another, and with one mind confess the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."⁷²

It is not a surprise that Pobedonostsev, and the official Church, did not appreciate enough or immediately Khomiakov's theology and religious enthusiasm. In their eyes, his thought was naive and impractical. Despite good intentions, it contained a seed of revolt. In Khomiakov, one might discover elements of anarchism and utopianism. It was a revolutionary, romantic,

⁶⁷ ПИ, p.243

⁶⁸ A.S. Khomiakov, "On the Western Confessions of Faith" in A. Schmemmann, 1977. *Ultimate Questions: An Anthology of Russian Religious Thought* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, pp. 31-71.)

⁶⁹ Khomiakov, Schmemmann, 1977, 50

⁷⁰ Khomiakov, Schmemmann, 1977, 63

⁷¹ Khomiakov, Schmemmann, 1977, 56

⁷² Khomiakov, Schmemmann, 1977, 69

otherworldly teaching—good for the pulpit as a single sermon, but impossible to sustain in life. It might inspire, but could not be fully lived. While speaking of unity, it undermined unity in practice by pleading for an ideal freedom impossible to achieve in society apart from authority. In other words, Khomiakov's thought was interpreted as a subtle attack against all established authority and order in society. For that reason, his theological work was for a long time left unpublished in Russia and even banned by the censors. It was only after his death that Khomiakov was recognized by the Orthodox Church as a "great Russian theologian."⁷³

The Slavophiles, as we have said, were not concerned with human dignity, and Berdyaev was right to note that they did not go far enough in their theology of freedom. However, they prepared the soil for the creation of a genuine Russian philosophy of human dignity, a philosophy that crystallized in the early twentieth century in Berdyaev's own personalism.

3. LIBERALS

The beginnings of the modern Russian ethical teaching on the value and dignity of personhood can be found in what I call the "liberal current" of the Russian intellectual tradition. The first stirrings of this current appeared before the Slavophiles in A.P. Sumarkov and N.I. Novikov (who wrote *On the Dignity of Man in His Relation to God and the World* and who believed that every man has the right to say "The entire world belongs to me!"⁷⁴), and also in Radishchev, Muraviev, and Pestel (the last two were Decembrists). Here we will only focus on the "father of the Russian intelligentsia,"⁷⁵ Aleksandr Radishchev (1749-1802), whom I consider the most original thinker among the "liberals" and, because of his spiritual suffering and eventual suicide,

⁷³ А.Д. Сухов. 1998. *Столетняя дискуссия: западничество и самобытность в русской философии* [The Hundred Years Discussion: Westernism and Originality in the Russian Philosophy] (ИФ РАН, С. 21)

⁷⁴ Н.И. Новиков, "О Достоинстве Человека в Отношениях к Богу и Миру" [On the Dignity of Man in His Relation to God and the World] in Т.В. Артемьева. 2010. *Общественная Мысль России, XVIII века*, [Russia's Public Thought, XVIII century] Том 2 (Институт Общественной Мысли, С. 251)

⁷⁵ Н.А. Бердяев. 2008. *Русская Идея* [The Russian Idea], (Издательский Дом "Азбука-классика," Санкт-Петербург, С. 57)

the most tragic character. By "most original" I do not refer to the originality of his thought, but rather to the intensity of his social feeling.⁷⁶

"You ask who I am and where I am going? I am as I was and shall be forever: Neither beast, nor log, nor slave—but a man!"⁷⁷ This poem, written by Radishchev on the way to his place of exile in Siberia, reveals the depth of his sensitivity to the value and dignity of the human person. The reason for his conviction (initially with a death sentence), imprisonment, and finally banishment to Siberia by Catherine II, was a book he wrote, entitled *A Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow*. In this work, in contrast to that of Karamzin, Radishchev strongly opposed serfdom and expressed his conviction that every man has the right to possess the fruits of his labor and the land of his toil. Through serfdom and servitude, he argued, Russia had departed not simply from civilized but also primitive society, in which proprietary rights were already natural and real. He asked, "Can a state in which two thirds of the citizens are deprived of civil rights and are to a degree dead to the law, be called happy?"⁷⁸ Slavery and happiness are incompatible, he said. "Therefore let us not be blinded by the outward peace and order of the country, and let us not consider it happy on those grounds alone. You must always look into the hearts of the citizens."⁷⁹ The society of masters and slaves, he insisted, brings no virtues but arrogance on the one side, and servility on the other. "There can be no bond here," he concluded, "other than brute force."⁸⁰ In this conclusion we see an alternative and a certainly more realistic understanding of the political and social situation in Tsarist Russia than we have seen in the views of the Petrine conservatives and the Slavophiles. The rationalism and political prudence of the conservatives, their hope in a top-down education in virtues, and the romantic faith in the Orthodox community of the Slavophiles, clash with the realism of Radishchev's criticism of the Russian feudal system. Here we

⁷⁶ Berdyaev has a similar impression of Radishchev as the most original and tragic character among the liberals. See Бердяев, 2008, 57

⁷⁷ Quoted in Andrzej Walicki. 1979, 38. See also Радищев А.Н. "Ты хочешь знать: кто я?" [You Want to Know: Who I Am?] in А.Н. Радищев. 1938. *Полное собрание сочинений. 1938-1952*. Т. 1. [A.N.Radishchev. Collected Works.] Изд-во Академии Наук СССР, С. 123.

⁷⁸ Aleksandr Radishchev, "A Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow" in Leatherbarrow and Offord (1987, 28)

⁷⁹ Radishchev. Leatherbarrow and Offord, 1987, 29

⁸⁰ Radishchev. Leatherbarrow and Offord, 1987, 30

should say that Radishchev believed in the immortality of the soul,⁸¹ that he was a religious man like the Slavophiles and the conservatives, and that his passionate social philosophy was similarly inspired by religious feelings. He had a sincere "Samaritan" pity towards the fate and the woes of his fellow-neighbours that prompted him to engage politically on their side and to expect the same from others. He asked, "[S]hall we not be courageous enough to overcome our prejudices, scorn selfishness, [and] free our brethren from the fetters of slavery and re-establish the natural equality of all?"⁸²

In another text,⁸³ written a year before the *Journey*, Radishchev argued that Russia is "poor of citizens," because the citizen, "the son of the fatherland," is a man, a human person. "But where is [the human person]?" he asked. The serf is not a human person, but lower than cattle. For him, the "smallest desire is forbidden and the slightest initiative punished." "They [the serfs] are allowed only to grow and die, they are not asked what they have done worthy of humanity, what praiseworthy accomplishments they have left behind to testify for their existence, or what good or value has been brought to the state by this great legion of hands."⁸⁴ The citizen is a noble person, a man who recognizes the dignity of others and whose dignity is recognized in response. Every human person has the potential for nobility. There is a multitude "sunk in the darkness of barbarism, bestiality and servitude," Radishchev wrote, "but this in no way proves that man is not born with an instinctive striving towards the exalted and towards self-perfection, that is to say with an instinctive love of true glory and honor."⁸⁵ There is equality in human dignity, and those who happen to be noble by social status should approve and respect the innate nobility of all men.

⁸¹ Believing that he would not return from exile and would not see his friends again, Radishchev wrote a philosophical tract, entitled *On Man, His Mortality and Immortality*. See A.H. Радищев. 1941. *О человеке, о его смертности и бессмертии* [On Man, His Mortality and Immortality] in A.H. Радищев. *Полное собрание сочинений*. [Collected Works] Изд-во Академии Наук СССР, 1938-1952. Т. 2. С. 37–142. See also J. Harvie. 1974. "A Russian View of Immortality" *Religious Studies*, 10 (4), 479-485.

⁸² Radishchev. Leatherbarrow and Offord, 1987, 31

⁸³ Radishchev, "A Discourse on What it Means to be a Son of the Fatherland" in Leatherbarrow and Offord, 1987, 18-25

⁸⁴ Radishchev. Leatherbarrow and Offord, 1987, 19

⁸⁵ Radishchev. Leatherbarrow and Offord, 1987, 21

"For the true nobility consists of virtuous deeds animated by true honour, and this is to be found only in the ceaseless work for the benefit of the human race..."⁸⁶

4. WESTERNIZERS

The humanistic and social pathos of liberals—or "radicals," as some prefer to call them—such as Radishchev was inherited by the Westernizers before being adopted by the true radicals and nihilists of the late nineteenth-century. The Westernizers are the other influential current of Russian social and political thought. Some scholars argue⁸⁷ that they are the first bearers of the Russian "personalism" that later spread among the fin-de-siècle religious philosophers Solovyev, Frank, Bulgakov, and others. The most notable Westernizer is Alexandr Herzen. There are volumes written on Herzen,⁸⁸ and for that reason we will not discuss him here. Another notable name is Vissarion Belinsky, but he, in my view, should be placed among the radicals. He is a thinker closer in passion and political agitation to Chernishevsky and Bakunin than to Herzen. I agree with Richard Hare's (and Bulgakov's) opinion that he is one of the principal founders of the radical school of thought.⁸⁹ Therefore Belinsky will not be discussed as part of this group. The third most known name of the Russian Westernizers is Chaadaev and we should say a few words about him.

Chaadaev is not a "personalist," engaged with the dignity of the human person. His interest is in the history and development of society. As Berdyaev says, he is the first Russian philosopher of history.⁹⁰ He is very close to the Slavophiles in his attention to the primacy of faith and the Church in human history, politics, and society. What makes him different from Kireevsky and Khomiakov is his criticism of the Russian religious tradition. Because of his criticism, he is considered a Westernizer—an intellectual, a thinker, who sees in Western Christianity and political

⁸⁶ Radishchev. Leatherbarrow W.J. and Offord D.C. 1987, 23

⁸⁷ Nathaniel Kyle Wood. 2017. *Deifying Democracy: Liberalism and the Politics of Theosis*. ETD Collection for Fordham University. AAI10279786. <https://fordham.bepress.com/dissertations/AAI10279786>

⁸⁸ See, for example, one of the recently published monographs Aileen M. Kelly. 2017. *The Discovery of Chance: The Life and Thought of Alexander Herzen*. (Harvard University Press) and also Maryin Malia's now classical study *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, 1812-1855* (Harvard University Press, 1961)

⁸⁹ Richard Hare. 1964. *Pioneers of Russian Social Thought*, (Vintage, 43)

⁹⁰ ПИ, 64

order a better model and form of existence. Chaadaev did not look back into Russian history to find a proof for the idea of Russian exceptionalism; he, in contrast to the Slavophiles, did not discover some ideal Russia in the Muscovite, pre-Petrine kingdom. He did not have an idealized vision of the traditional, communitarian society of the Orthodox East. On the contrary, he saw Russia as a drop-out from the universal Western culture, its antithesis, a tragic exception. In his *First Letter*, which brought him so much trouble with Nicholas I's regime, he lamented the Russian lack of originality and genuine history. Thus, he was neither conservative nor liberal. He did not believe that a country without a past could have a future. He argued that Russia should create her own tradition, as Western Christendom had, and then she would have the capacity to make her own future.

Chaadaev believed in the catholicity of the Church, and like the Slavophiles, his political theology starts with the Church. He also shared the Slavophile belief in the importance of faith for the creation of a good society. The Church was unity, and Russia had failed to enter this unity. "It is one of the most deplorable traits of our peculiar [Slavic] civilization that we are still discovering truths which other peoples, even some much less advanced than we, have taken for granted. The reason is that we have never marched with the other peoples [...] Placed, as it were, outside of time, we have not been touched by the universal education of the human race."⁹¹ There was no historical dynamism and "internal development" in Russia, according to Chaadaev; there was only a "dead calm," a living in a "narrow present, without a past as without a future."⁹² The fundamental reason for this stagnation was that Russia was "deep" in her "schism," and "nothing that happened in Europe" had "reached" her.⁹³ He explained the backwardness of Russian society and institutions as a failure of the national spirit to open to the influence of the true Christian spirit. He saw the cultural, the social, and political development of Western Europe as a result of its "religious history," as a result of Christianity that "transformed all human interests into its own, replacing material needs by moral, giving rise in the realm of thought to those great debates

⁹¹ Petr Chaadaev, "Letters on the Philosophy of History" in Raeff, Marc. 1996. *Russian Intellectual History* (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. p.162-163)

⁹² Chaadaev, Raeff. 163

⁹³ Chaadaev, Raeff. 168

which are without parallel at any other period or any other society, to those terrible struggles between opposing views in which the whole life of a people was reduced to one great idea [...] Everything [in Europe] has turned into Christianity, and Christianity alone."⁹⁴

Russia was far from this transformation and Chaadaev found the reason for her estrangement in the adoption of the Byzantine religious and political tradition. Writing to his French Catholic friend, Count Adolphe de Circourt, Chaadaev argued, "Our Church is essentially an ascetic one, yours is essentially a social one." "It was a disaster for Russia," he insisted, "that she derived her Christianity not from the republican monarchy of the early Caesars, but from an oriental despotism imagined by Diocletian, from the government of Constantine, where the emperor in fact ruled the Church councils, which were apostolic only in name."⁹⁵ Again, we should remind ourselves that he was not so much a supporter of the Catholic Church and the institutions it created or helped to create, but rather a critic of the socially and politically passive, state-controlled Orthodox tradition. In one sense he comes close to the Slavophiles and this was his belief that Christianity and society in general should be kept united, not by the bond of temporal coercion, but by the bond of spirit and faith. In a letter to Turgenev, he writes that the "reins of the world guidance have naturally to fall from the hands of the Roman pontiff; political Christianity has to make way for a Christianity that is purely spiritual, and in that sphere where earthly powers have dominated so long, there will remain the symbol of unity of thought, the high example and memorials of past ages."⁹⁶ Close to the Slavophiles in his fundamental vision about the necessity of unity in freedom, he was nevertheless "troubled" (says Hare) by their "arrogance" and "self-deception."⁹⁷ He could not agree with the Slavophile "repudiation" of "all the serious and fruitful lessons which Europe had taught us." He believed that the Slavophiles "wanted to set up on Russian soil a completely new moral order," which would "throw" Russia "back to some Christian East."⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Chaadaev, Raeff. 172

⁹⁵ Hare, 1964, 22-23

⁹⁶ Hare, 16

⁹⁷ Hare, 24

⁹⁸ Hare, 25

According to Richard Hare, Chaadaev did not have influential disciples. Only Vladimir Solovyev, Hare supposes, followed Chaadaev's idea of the unity of Eastern and Western Christianity, where the West, as a "more experienced partner," should be recognized as a leader. One of the more prominent Westernizers who had clear sympathies for Roman Catholicism and even became a Redemptorist monk was V.S. Pecherin. He, however, was condemned by Herzen for his religious choice. Pecherin, we should note, had a good and realistic sense of the intellectual and political developments in Russia and the world. He warned that whenever intellectuals "undertook to rebuild the social order" the result would be "brutal despotism" and, like Tocqueville before him, he believed that Russia and the United States "would start a new cycle of world history." He predicted that Russia had the capacity to become the first socialist society and was troubled by the thought that nobody would escape the tyranny of the "colossal materialist civilization," in which Christians would be forced to work in factories that build the "garden of Eden, here on earth."⁹⁹

Another Westernizer with a similarly insightful and realistic judgment was Nicholas Ogarev, who, having experience with land reforms, realized that mere liberty does not, in fact, change the peasants' productiveness and incentive, that peasants have no "sense of honor" and cannot become "citizens" or behave like such. With his famous observation, "Our (Russian) *mir* (world/commune) really consists of equality in slavery," he predicted the character of the future communist collectivism. His pessimism and skepticism towards the Russian commune made him an author opposed to Slavophile communitarianism. "In the West," Ogarev wrote, "the idea of equality demands that all people should live equally well, in the commune it demands in fact that they should live in equal wretchedness. The result of this whole communal structure is that the peasant (one may say the Russian man altogether) is unable to grasp how any man can exist on his own without belonging to something or somebody."¹⁰⁰

5. RADICALS

The Westernizers' critical realism and, more importantly, the insistence on *action here and now* that underlies their entire political and social vision, led to the formation of a new and more

⁹⁹ Hare, 32-33

¹⁰⁰ Hare, 35-38

radical intelligentsia, with anarchist leanings, which would eventually overturn the political and social order of Russia. Its most prominent representatives were Vissarion Belinsky, Nikolay Chernishevsky, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Leo Tolstoy. We will focus on Bakunin.

Herzen's faith in the value of man and his present life was shared by most of these radicals, and it is somewhat paradoxical that the Westernizers' personalistic philosophy would in consequence of their views develop into a collectivist totalitarian ideology. Herzen did not like ideologies and utopianism¹⁰¹; he did not approve of the sacrifice of man (or of an entire generation) for an ideal that would be enjoyed in practice by future generations. He wrote that man "lives not for the fulfillment of an idea, not in order to embody an idea, not for progress," he was rather born for the "present." We, Herzen argued, are not "dolls destined to endure progress."¹⁰² For him, each person was "an irreplaceable reality"¹⁰³ with a unique value and dignity here and now.

Being initially under the influence of Hegel, Vissarion Belinsky at first believed that individual persons, like human history in general, were just clay in the hands of the divine potter. In the great acts of people like Napoleon and Peter the Great, he saw the realization of a "task" entrusted to them by God. Later in life, however, Belinsky abandoned Hegelian determinism and turned to personalism, asserting like Herzen that "the human personality is higher than history, than society, than mankind itself."¹⁰⁴ "From now on," he wrote in a letter to his friend Vasily Botkin, "the words *liberal* and *man* are one and the same [...]. The idea of liberalism is rational and Christian in the highest degree, for its aim is to restore the rights of the individual and reinstate man's dignity, and Christ himself came into this world and suffered on the cross for the sake of the *individual*."¹⁰⁵ "With Hegel," he explained, "the subject is not an end in itself but a means for the momentary expression of the universal, and this universal takes on the nature of a Moloch

¹⁰¹ Isaiah Berlin. 1994. *Russian Thinkers*. ed. Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (Penguin Books, pp.111-112)

¹⁰² As we will see in the final part of this work, Nikolai Fedorov becomes one of the best critics of the idea of progress—an ideology, in essence, utopian and inhumane; and that Berdyaev uses Fedorov's criticism in his eschatological theory.

¹⁰³ Alexander Ivanovich Herzen, "Robert Owen" in Leatherbarrow and Offord (1987, pp. 155-159)

¹⁰⁴ V.G. Belinsky, "Letter to Botkin, 1 March, 1841," in Hare, (1964, pp. 54-56)

¹⁰⁵ V.G. Belinsky, "Letters to V.P.Botkin 1840-1841, 11 December, 1840" in Leatherbarrow and Offord (1987, p. 124)

with regard to the subject, for when it has finished parading about in the subject it casts it off like a pair of old trousers. [...] The fate of the subject, the individual, the personality is more important than the fate of the whole world and the well-being of the Chinese emperor (i.e. Hegel's *Allgemeinheit*).¹⁰⁶

Perhaps the most radical among nineteenth-century Russian thinkers was Mikhail Bakunin, a close friend and mentor of Belinsky. In Bakunin, who was another former disciple of Hegel, the personalistic humanism and the ideal of action that we see in the liberals and Westernizers develop into an explosive rejection of the state and Church authority. Herzen's and Belinsky's criticism of the individual sacrifice for some abstract universal ideal finds a completely distorted expression in Bakunin's revolt against authority. In a curious and unpredictable way, Bakunin's rejection of despotism, instead of liberating the person from the duty of sacrifice, throws it into a collective battle that requires complete and total devotion to the achievement of the common *ideal* of freedom. The possible reason for this unintended and unexpected result of liberal humanism and populism is the rejection of God Himself. In the anarchism of Bakunin, and later in the ideology of the atheistic revolutionaries, we discover the logic of Dostoyevsky's personage Kirilov, from the novel *Demons*, who discovers that if there is no God, then one is free to do whatever he wants. To prove his freedom, the true atheist would kill himself immediately, because the suicide would reveal the absolute reality of individual self-will.¹⁰⁷ "For three years," Kirilov says, "I have been searching for the attribute of my divinity, and I have found it: the attribute of my divinity is—Self-will! [...] I kill myself to show my insubordination and my new fearsome freedom."¹⁰⁸ Bakunin is not far from this conclusion. He, as Sergii Bulgakov notes, formulated the notion that the spirit of destruction is a creative spirit, a belief that became central for the "mentality of heroism" of the revolutionary intelligentsia. Bakunin sacrificed his entire life for the achievement of an ideal and he, in his revolutionary work, required the same from others.

¹⁰⁶ V.G. Belinsky, "Letters to V.P. Botkin 1840-1841, 1 March, 1841" in Leatherbarrow and Offord (1987, p. 125)

¹⁰⁷ For Berdyaev's interpretation of Kirilov's nihilism, see his article *О самоубийстве*. 1931. [On Suicide] Париж: YMCA Press. The source in English: "On Suicide," http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1931_27.html (accessed, April 1, 2019)

¹⁰⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky. 2000. *Demons*, tr. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Everyman's Library)

But one may ask, following Bulgakov's criticism, "Is this heroism, or is it [mere] suicide?"¹⁰⁹ On his gravestone in Bern, Switzerland, it had been written, "Remember those who sacrificed everything for the freedom of their country." The epitaph was later replaced by the following sentence, "By striving to do the impossible, man has always achieved what is possible." Both statements describe succinctly and symbolically the philosophy of the radicals and its natural end.

The humanism that we saw in the liberals and the Westernizers, thus radicalized and stripped of religious feeling, transformed itself into anti-humanism. If God, according to Bakunin, is everything, then the man and the real world are nothing. "God being a master, man is the slave."¹¹⁰ Man should prove his freedom through an act, but an act not of creative good, but of "creative" revolt and destruction¹¹¹ from which he might expect the good to appear. Berdyaev, as we will see later, strongly opposed the negative ideology of the Russian radicals, which seems empty of any actual hope in the present, while approving their criticism of "hypocritical religiosity."

6. RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHERS

Our discussion of Russian anarchism and radicalism, on freedom, authority, and personhood, will continue in the next chapters. For now, we should turn our attention to the last current in the Russian political and social thought—the religious philosophers. This group of thinkers, as Nathaniel Wood argues, was to a certain extent a successor of liberal personalism, but an heir of a different kind.¹¹² The liberalism, socialism, and conservatism of the religious thinkers of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century were spiritual and Christian. Their philosophy was generally more complex and insightful than the thought of most of the authors discussed above. It was also more prophetic and, from a historical point of view, more correct. To this intellectual stream belongs Nikolai Berdyaev, and we may argue with

¹⁰⁹ Sergei Bulgakov, "Heroism and Asceticism: Reflections on the Religious Nature of the Russian Intelligentsia" in *Vekhi (Landmarks): A Collection of Articles about the Russian Intelligentsia*, 1994. (M.E.Sharpe Inc. p.30)

¹¹⁰ Mikhail Bakunin, "God and the State" in *The Communist Manifesto and Other Revolutionary Writings*. ed. Robert Blaisdell (Dover Publications, 2003, 188)

¹¹¹ See ПИ, 187

¹¹² N. K. Wood, 2017

certainty that he succeeded, more than any author in this category, to balance, synthesize, and reconcile the contradicting and partially true perspectives of the intellectual streams already described. It will be explained how he succeeded and what exactly he did as a specifically Russian thinker representing the so-called "Russian Idea," but first we should make a short overview of the political ideas of two representative authors of Russian religious philosophy.

The towering figure among the fin-de-siècle religious philosophers is Vladimir Solovyev (1853-1900). The reason for his prominence is perhaps due to the fact that he was the most systematic writer among all and the one who had the greatest discipleship in terms of number. Solovyev's idea of all-unity, his concept of Godmanhood, and his Sophiology exercised a strong influence on authors such as Evgenii Trubetskoy, Semyon Frank, and Sergii Bulgakov, also on symbolists such as Alexandr Blok, Andrei Bely, and Vyacheslav Ivanov.¹¹³ Compared to these authors, Berdyaev was less influenced by Solovyev. In fact, he considered him less "interesting" and "original" as a philosopher than as a person.¹¹⁴ For Berdyaev, the greatest value of Solovyev's thought for Russian religious philosophy was his teaching of Godmanhood.¹¹⁵

The book that made Solovyev's work popular, according to Berdyaev,¹¹⁶ was his *The National Question in Russia* (1891).¹¹⁷ In this work—a collection of articles, letters, and essays—Vladimir Solovyev makes an important turn that we haven't seen thus far. This turn is the explicit need for "morality" in politics.¹¹⁸ Solovyev's interpretation of social and political realities, as

¹¹³ РИ, 219-20

¹¹⁴ РИ, 206. "It is enough to look at his face," Berdyaev wrote in an article on Solovyev's religious consciousness, "and sense all his extraordinariness, spirituality, uniqueness. But his philosophical tracts induce annoyance and criticism." (Н.А. Бердяев, "Проблема Востока и Запада в религиозном сознании Вл. Соловьева" [The Problem of the East and West in the Religious Consciousness of Vladimir Solovyov] in Н.А. Бердяев. 1989. *Типы религиозной мысли в России* [Types of Religious Thought in Russia], YMKA-PRESS, С. 205-21.)

¹¹⁵ РИ, р.212. Also Бердяев, "Основная Идея Вл. Соловьева" [Vl. Solovyov's Main Idea] in Н.А. Бердяев. 1989. *Типы религиозной мысли в России* [Types of Religious Thought in Russia], YMKA-PRESS, С. 214-241. See Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov and Peter Peter Zouboff. 1948. *Lectures on Godmanhood*. D. Dobson.

¹¹⁶ Бердяев, 1989, 214-241

¹¹⁷ Владимир Сергеевич Соловьев. 2007. *Национальный вопрос в России* [The National Question in Russia](АСТ Москва)

¹¹⁸ This turn should be remembered because it reflected the ideological formation of the group of religious "liberal-conservatives" (as they were called by some) at the beginning of the twentieth century. This group, to which Berdyaev

presented in *The National Question*, departs from both the shortsighted conservative pragmatism of Karamzin, Uvarov, and Pobedonostsev and the dangerously radical, even suicidal, idealism of Radishchev and Bakunin. Although in agreement with Leo Tolstoy on questions such as the abolition of capital punishment, and similarly ostracized from the academy for his "unorthodox views" (unlike Tolstoy, he was not excommunicated from the Church), Solovyev's morality was of a very different kind compared to the ethics of the author of *War and Peace*. Tolstoy's radical rejection of any violence, including violence in self-defense and defense of others, which could be deemed irresponsible and utopian, contrasted with Solovyov's morality that, although being deeply spiritual, was nevertheless rational, realistic, and balanced,¹¹⁹ concerned with the question of personal responsibility, equally engaged with the fate of the individual and society.

We may argue that the question of morality in politics was only marginally present in the five currents of thought described above. It was certainly there, but mostly in an implicit, not explicit, form. Morality was not the central issue. The central issues were the state, the

also belonged, produced three collections of articles concerned with the moral and spiritual basis of politics and society. These were *Problems of Idealism* (1902), *Vekhi* (1909), and *Out of the Depths (Iz Glubiny)* (1918). N.P. Poltoratskii says that the common "problematic" of the three volumes could be expressed in the general form "Intelligentsia, revolution and Russia." The major stages of development of the three collections could be presented, according to Poltoratskii, in the following order: "from a critique of positivism and defense of idealism (*Problems of Idealism*) through a critique of positivism and radicalism and defense of metaphysics and spiritual foundations of society (*Vekhi*) to a critique of revolution and Bolshevism in defense of religious beginnings of society and culture (*Out of the Depths*)." The editor of the first volume was Pavel Novgorodtsev, the second one was initiated by M. Gershenzon, and the third was produced by Struve and Frank. (*Манифесты русского идеализма*, сост. Вадим Сапов [Problems of Idealism. Manifests of Russian Idealism, ed. Vadim Sapov], p.18).

¹¹⁹ Solovyov's rationalism and his balanced style of writing, however, were too "schematic" for Berdyaev. He saw in them a certain kind of restraint, rigidity, and scholastic pedanticism. Berdyaev argued that Solovyov was a Slavophile in inspiration and a Westernizer in expression. The Slavophile character of his work was best revealed in his messianic trust in a salvation coming from the Slavic East. His Westernism was most clearly shown in his theocratic utopia and his solutions for the improvement of the world. According to Berdyaev, Solovyov was most attracted to the social character of Catholic Christianity, to its active and "bellicose" Christian spirit, and most repulsed by the social and political passivity of the Eastern Church. In his theocratic visions, Solovyov imagined the Pope as the head of the universal Church and the Tsar as the head of the universal state. Both Christian worlds, however, had their faults: the Western Catholic tradition, Berdyaev argued, tended to "the man without God," the Eastern Orthodox to "the God without the man." And Solovyov's theocratic utopia, Berdyaev judged, did not actually overcome these deficiencies and did not explain the division of these two main streams of Christianity with their divergent religious experiences. For more, see Berdyaev's essays on Solovyov in Бердяев, 1989. *Типы религиозной мысли в России* [Types of Religious Thought in Russia], YMCA-PRESS.

community, the Church, the tradition, the Slavs, the peasants, the serfs, the world revolution, and so on, but never morality in its explicit and defined form and conception. The Petrine conservatives were pragmatic to the core; they could sacrifice the individual and the Church for the practical goal of an orderly and peaceful state. The Slavophiles were sensitive to freedom and community, but failed, except for Dostoyevsky perhaps (the *writer* not the publicist), to elevate the human person to its proper level of dignity. Their communitarianism was idealism, based on a paradisiacal image of an *historical* past that had never really existed. The liberals were borrowing from the Western Enlightenment, and despite their social sensitivity, sentimentality, and richness of expression, they were pragmatically and schematically concerned with the actual improvement of humankind. Their weakness was the import of ideas, the lack of genuine originality of thought. The Westernizers, as we have seen, made of the *here* and *now* an absolute. Their rejection of Slavophile communitarianism turned them into hopeless rationalists. It was not a coincidence that most of the Westernizers, including Chaadaev and Herzen, after losing their hope in the cultural ideal they imagined at one or another point in their lives, had changed their views in the direction of Slavophilism. They somehow sensed that their philosophy was lacking precisely what it aimed to achieve—a comprehensive idea of a society where the individual person lives in freedom and dignity. The radicals, on the other hand, obsessed with the present and the future, full of passionate hatred towards tradition and authority, were active and ready to burn down the entire world in the flames of revolution. Despite the humanistic rhetoric, there was no morality in their fanaticism as there was no real future. All these faults in perspective were avoided by Solovyov through his moral vision of "Christian politics."

In the preface to the second edition of *The National Question in Russia*, Solovyov wrote that "Man exists in dignity when he subordinates his life and deeds according to the moral law and directs them towards unconditional moral goals."¹²⁰ Politicians and political ideologues, however, did not recognize this truth and the complete separation of morality and politics turned out to be

¹²⁰ Владимир Сергеевич Соловьев. 2007. *Национальный вопрос в России* [The National Question in Russia](АСТ Москва, С. 6)

"one of the most prevalent errors and evils" in modern times.¹²¹ The fundamental reason for this separation was the rejection of the genuine Christian politics that required the compliance of political act with the common or universal good. It is necessary to acknowledge, Solovyov argued, that not self-interest and self-importance but moral duty is the "highest guiding principle of all politics."¹²² He believed that the Christian idea of duty was the only "certain principle in politics" that could advise what is right and good in any given political situation. For Solovyov, Christian duty was the very expression of realism in politics: against the radical striving towards the achievement of the impossible (a principle, which we have seen carved on Bakunin's gravestone)¹²³ the Christian duty has always required the possible (*ad impossibilia nemo obligatur*). It does not ask for fruitless sacrifices or for the achievement of imaginary goals. On the contrary, material interest and egoism, Solovyov wrote, "lured" the people to "heights that cannot be reached"¹²⁴ and to acts that cannot be described as "good."

In this sense, there was confusion about the meaning of "national interest."¹²⁵ If national interest, Solovyov argued, were understood as "supremacy," "outward might," and "wealth," this would justify all sorts of crimes. National interest, thus interpreted, was leading not to some regeneration of the nation but to a national catastrophe. True patriotism "must be in accordance with the Christian conscience." The Christian conscience, or duty, did not permit "international cannibalism" as a form of political praxis. "The claims of one nation for a privileged position in humankind," Solovyov wrote, "exclude the same claim of another nation."¹²⁶ There was no morality and realism in exclusivist and expansionist "nationalistic" politics, Solovyov concluded.

But this did not mean that Christianity abolishes nationality. "No," Solovyov argued, "rather it preserves it." "Nationality is not abolished, but nationalism is."¹²⁷ "We distinguish

¹²¹ V.S. Solovyov, "Christianity and Revolution" in Solovyov, V.S. 2008. *Politics, Law, Morality: Essays by Vladimir Solovyov*. ed. V. Woznik. (Yale University Press, p. 6)

¹²² Solovyov, 2008, 12

¹²³ "By striving to do the impossible, man has always achieved what is possible."

¹²⁴ Solovyov, 2008, 12-13

¹²⁵ Solovyov, 2008, 7

¹²⁶ Solovyov, 2008, 9

¹²⁷ Solovyov, 2008, 11

nationality from nationalism by their fruits," he explained, clarifying that nationality is a "positive force," and that "every nation by its own character is appointed for a particular service" in the world.¹²⁸ For him, every nation was a part of the universal organism of humanity, having its proper functions and unique value.

This perspective, however, was lost for the "pagan state." The pagan state was controlled by materialism; its ideology and justice were "formal." Their "ought" was disingenuous and false. Officially, the pagan state could profess "Christianity," but in reality, it was "godless," aiming to impose its own "truth" through "violence and murder." "[W]hen one admits only a material principle existing in the world and the man," Solovyov believed, "one does not have the right to speak what ought to be, to say that there is something which does not exist, but which ought to exist." For the pagan state and its proponents, everything was a "material fact" and there could not be any "absolute principle" for them.¹²⁹ This simply meant that in the pagan state and politics there could be no true aspiration to good, no positive change, and no clear understanding of the nature of evil. The pagan state, in Solovyov's view, was an idol and a false divinity; it was its own principle and aim of existence. Conversely, the Christian state had always acknowledged a higher goal than itself.¹³⁰ This goal was Christ and the transformation of man and society into Christ (*theosis*). In Solovyov's vision, the Christian state should have three basic goals: 1) the propagation of Christianity in the world; 2) the peaceful drawing together of nations within Christianity itself; 3) The arrangement of societal relations in accordance with the Christian ideal within each nation.¹³¹

Solovyov was as critical of revolutionary socialism as of nationalism and imperialism, and his views strongly influenced the next generation of Russian religious thinkers. Sergii Bulgakov and Semyon Frank, both close collaborators of Berdyaev, were among Solovyov's most devoted disciples. In a lecture entitled *The Debacle of Idols*,¹³² read to Russian students in Berlin in 1923,

¹²⁸ Solovyov, 2008, 11

¹²⁹ Solovyov, "Christianity and Revolution" in Solovyov, Woznik, 2008, 4

¹³⁰ Solovyov, "On the Christian State and Society" in Solovyov, Woznik, 2008. 23-24

¹³¹ Solovyov, 2008, 24

¹³² Семён Людвигович Франк. 1924. *Крушение кумиров* [The Debacle of Idols] (YMCA Press)

Semyon Frank attacked all modern political ideologies and theories. In his criticism, he borrowed from Solovyov and additionally clarified the meaning of morality in politics. In the pre-revolutionary epoch, the overwhelming majority of Russian intelligentsia, Frank explained, had one "faith"—the faith in revolution.¹³³ The revolutionary intelligentsia, and the Russian people in general, felt that they are suffering and dying under the yoke of an old and egoistic arbitrary power. State authorities, along with the tsar, were "culpable" for all the disasters in Russian life. So there was a prevalent belief that it was time to destroy the existing political form and all associated with it. The requisite good will would somehow appear by itself. The moral situation was simple: all that is evil is on the "right" side of the political spectrum, and all that is good is on the "left." This simplicity of perspective, however, was dangerous, because on such a thin view not only the religion associated with the old regime but "every non-materialistic and non-positivist philosophy" was considered "suspicious" or "outright deceptive." Frank argued that in pre-revolutionary Russia there was little tolerance of religious thinkers—like Solovyov, for example—and only as far as their ideas were in agreement with the revolutionary ideas or as far as these thinkers were victims of state repression.

The moral failure of the revolutionary activity and ideology, according to Frank, was in its spiritless rejection of everything past and present and in its lack of positive and creative vision for the future. "For that reason," Frank said, "the faith of this epoch should not be described as faith in political freedom, not even as faith in socialism, but in its inner content, as faith in the revolution, in the rejection of the existing order."¹³⁴ There was no positive rhetoric and vision in the competing factions among the radical intelligentsia and their opponents; there was no qualitative difference between the diverse positions and programs. The difference, according to Frank, was only in the "intensity of hatred." All revolutionaries were *narodniki*, populists who wanted to serve not God, not even the country, but the "well-being of the people," their "material wealth." But as Solovyov argued, a revolution or politics based only on materialistic principles could not produce anything good—there was no future in materialism, every "interest" bound to

¹³³ Франк, 1924

¹³⁴ Франк, 1924

the principle of material success and the sense of exclusive self-righteousness would lead not to social regeneration but to catastrophe. Materialism cannot produce an adequate *ought*. That's why, Frank said, the negative, materialist, revolutionary faith was eventually compromised and revealed as a "dead idol." Socialism as a "universal system" of "social life" was revealed as a lie, as much as the radical "economic individualism" and the "sacredness of private property" proved to be a lie. Revolution and counter-revolution, as absolute principles—i.e., as principles of total rejection, of exclusion, and material aspiration—were two sides of the same coin. For Frank, and the religious philosophers in general, "all socio-political principles in the world" were "relative." However, for the political partisans this was hard to comprehend. The greatest problem in every political system and ideology, Frank argued, following Solovyov, was its "self-worship."

Another evil related to morality, to the disrespect of Christian politics that requires the unification of a political act with the common or universal good, was the manner of promotion of political ideas and interests. All evil on earth, Frank argued, is a result of some "fanatical faith in some holy principles," accompanied by the will for the destruction of all opposition. Frank was a Christian moralist in politics, but he did not forget to emphasize that the violent and coercive realization of any political or social ideal should be avoided. In sum, Frank argued that 1) every fanatical rejection and revolt takes, sooner or later, the form of "a holy principle" itself; 2) that every particular, materialistic view tends to take the form of "self-worship"; 3) that every coercive imposition of a political or social ideal is evil.

Like Herzen, Frank did not believe in the "abstract good" or personal sacrifice for an idea. Although an early student of Kant, he did not accept the Kantian concept of duty. For Frank, Kantian morality was not like Christian morality. Kantian ethics was simply a codex of authoritarian rules and normative formalism. "We could be saved," Frank said, "not by an 'ideal,' not by some moral court, and not by words and thoughts. We could be saved only by love."¹³⁵ Love is the Christian ethics and politics. Christian love is the love of one who does not act as a judge of his neighbor. There is no rage and vengeance in Christian love and politics. "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." (1 John 4:16) Love is not a judge of those who need

¹³⁵ Франк, 1924

help. Quoting a poem from Solovyov,¹³⁶ Frank said, "God is with us." He is *Emmanu-El*, "God with us." God is not transcendent; there is no real dialectics between our soul and God. Through God in us, we learn how to love everything. Through him, we learn first how to love ourselves and then how to love "everything and everyone." There is no need for idols, for revolt and hatred, for multiple ideas, imperatives, and rules, Frank argued, because we have two commands that are one, and this is the command to love God and neighbor as ourselves (Gal. 5:14, John 13:34, Matt. 22:37-40).

Frank and Solovyov, as we will see, are not only key representatives of the stream of the religious philosophers in the Russian intellectual tradition, but also thinkers who often express ideas very similar to Berdyaev's. For a good general description of the Russian religious philosophy, we might look at the commentaries of Fr. Vasilii Zenkovsky (another follower of Solovyov) and Alexei Fedorovich Losev, or, of Berdyaev himself. In his *History of Russian Philosophy*, Zenkovsky argues that philosophical thought flourishes only in conditions of freedom, an inner freedom no less important than external freedom. Like Berdyaev, he believed that Russian philosophy was always connected to its "religious soil," that is, to the Church, and, like Berdyaev, he was of the opinion that "almost always not the Church, but the state, was a transmitter of a limiting censure in Russia."¹³⁷ If the Church acted as a limit to Russian thought, Zenkovsky explained, it was only because of the influence of the state. Zenkovsky and Berdyaev¹³⁸ believed that Russian philosophy was born from a combination of freedom of thought (for the organized Church in Russia did not have opportunity to cultivate and control the formation and expression of ideas as in the West) with a Western, primarily German, intellectual influence. The moment of appearance of the original Russian philosophy was the nineteenth century, with Pushkin and the Slavophiles.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Владимир Сергеевич Соловьев. 1896. *Имману-Эль* [Emmanu-El]

¹³⁷ Василий Васильевич Зеньковский. "История Русской Философии. Введение" [History of Russian Philosophy. Introduction] in Б.Н. Тарасов. 2008. *Человек и История в Русской Религиозной Философии и Классической Литературе* [Man and History in the Russian Religious Philosophy and Classical Literature] (Кругъ, С.19)

¹³⁸ Бердяев, 1989

¹³⁹ Зеньковский, Тарасов. 2008, 20

The nineteenth-century Russian religious philosophy had its own distinctive features and originality. Compared to Western philosophy, it was more intuitive than rationalistic. Knowledge played in it a secondary role. Its primary principle was ontological, a concern with existence. It was original also with its specific lack of "system." Berdyaev explains the unsystematic character of Russian philosophy with the Slavophiles. The Slavophiles generate the tradition of "journalistic philosophy," the philosophy of letters, articles, and essays engaged with the diverse problems of life. Another definite feature of Russian philosophy, according to Zenkovsky, is its "anthropocentrism."¹⁴⁰ Despite its fundamentally religious character, Russian philosophy, he argued, is not "theocentric." It is not "cosmocentric" or "naturalistic" either. It is concerned, above all, with the "theme of the human person," with the human "fate and ways," with the "meaning and aims of history."¹⁴¹ It is also (as has been noted) "panmoralistic." The source of its moralism can be found mainly in engagement with the fate of man. For the Russian thinker, Zenkovsky argued, the division between theoretical and practical spheres was impossible. And this led, despite the lack of system in the way of presentation, to a philosophy that respected to the highest degree "the ideal of wholeness" (*целостности*). Finally, Russian thought is marked by a strong eschatological vision; it is concerned with the meaning and end of history. A.F. Losev formulated three main characteristics of Russian philosophy: 1) In contrast to European and German philosophy it did not tend to purely intellectual and abstract systematization of views. It was an inner, intuitive knowledge that was best expressed through symbols, and not through logical categories. 2) Russian philosophy was closely related to actual life, which explains why it was so often presented in journalistic form, with all positive and negative consequences. 3) Russian literature was a philosophy itself and served as a source for abstract philosophical thinking.¹⁴²

With this summary, we end this chapter and turn to Berdyaev himself, to his evaluation and interpretation of these intellectual currents. We may say with certainty that Berdyaev had a

¹⁴⁰ Зеньковский, Тарасов. 2008, 23

¹⁴¹ Зеньковский, Тарасов. 2008, 23

¹⁴² А. Ф. Лосев, "Русская Философия" [Russian Philosophy] in Тарасов. 2008. *Человек и История в Русской Религиозной Философии и Классической Литературе* [Man and History in the Russian Religious Philosophy and Classical Literature] (Кругъ, Москва. С.43)

deep knowledge of the Russian tradition and that he used this knowledge for his own philosophical and religious insights.

CHAPTER THREE. INFLUENCES, PHILOSOPHY, AND CHARACTER

"I never remain passive in the process of reading," Berdyaev wrote in his autobiography, *Dream and Reality* (the original Russian title is *Self-Knowledge, Samopoznanie*); "while I read I am engaged in a constant creative activity, which leads me to remember not so much the actual matter of the book as the thoughts evoked in my mind by it, directly or indirectly."¹⁴³ This confession explains a lot about Berdyaev's manner of work and use of sources. Very often in Western scholarship, we read about Western influences on Berdyaev's thought, such as Eckhart, Böhme, Silesius, German idealism, and Marxism, but very rarely do we find a meaningful discussion on Russian influences. Without underestimating Western research and analysis of Berdyaev's work, this omission may perhaps be explained by the generally limited knowledge of the Russian intellectual tradition, not only in the West but even in Russia where it was held back for decades by ideological and political censorship.

Berdyaev was immersed in Russian culture; he was a voracious reader and he wrote a lot on the Russian history of ideas. One need only consider two works, *The Russian Idea* and the collection of essays *Types of Religious Thought in Russia*, in order to grasp the enormous amount of knowledge that he had about the Russian intellectual tradition. If we add the fact that he was not simply a reader and "presenter"—i.e., a detached historian of ideas—but rather an active and creative debater and interpreter, we might argue that the strongest influence on Berdyaev's thought was not (as some seem to think) Böhme, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard,¹⁴⁴ etc., but rather the *Russian Idea*, the complex tradition that we have portrayed with bold strokes.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ DR, 12-13

¹⁴⁴ In his long essay *Nikolai Berdyaev: Gnosis and Existential Philosophy* (Николай Бердяев: Гнозис и экзистенциальная философия), Lev Shestov writes that Berdyaev, although highly respectful of Kierkegaard's philosophy, was "little interested" in it and, at one point, even "sharply" critical of its "non-Christian maximalism." In the same book, Shestov argues that Berdyaev was much more influenced by Böhme and by German idealism, especially Kant. (See Лев Шестов. 1995. Сочинения [Oeuvres] Николай Бердяев: Гнозис и экзистенциальная философия.)

¹⁴⁵ Vigen Guroian notes approvingly Fielding Clarke's observation that the "doctrines and practice of the Russian Orthodox Church" were in the "background" of "all that he wrote." Berdyaev, Guroian says, "was a creative, eclectic, and even eccentric thinker. Although he drew from such Eastern Patristic writers as Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-

Every author that Berdyaev read left an impression on him, whether greater or lesser. There was no indifference or detachment in Berdyaev's approach to the thoughts of others. He was always engaged, always attentive and active. He was in conversation with the ideas of others, and in his responses and understanding we discover the traces of influences and impressions that shaped his own philosophy and political theology.

Let's take as an example *The Russian Idea*. Berdyaev's commentary on Khomiakov in this book reveals not simply Khomiakov's theology, but also Berdyaev's own view on freedom and the Church, a view that we find fully developed or interwoven in the tapestry of his philosophical works. Khomiakov's influence on Berdyaev is not a secret. Losev, for example, directly argues that Berdyaev (like Bulgakov) was a "Slavophile(s) with an added apocalyptic mysticism that comes from Soloveian gnosticism and dialectics."¹⁴⁶ Berdyaev himself openly admits, in *Dream and Reality*, the influence of Khomiakov on his formation. In the *Russian Idea*, he quotes the father of Slavophilism, saying: "We do not recognize any head of the Church either spiritual or temporal. Christ is the head, and another we do not know."¹⁴⁷ It is evident that Berdyaev took these words to heart. Everywhere in his philosophy, he emphasized the Khomiakovian argument that the Church, properly speaking, is not a coercive organization, that God is not a tyrant, and that Christ, the Crucified, is not an "authority," because "authority" means something "external" and dominant. Berdyaev respected and adopted the Slavophile faith and passion for freedom. He wrote that "the theme of freedom was most strongly expressed in Khomiakov and Dostoyevsky,"¹⁴⁸ as it was in his own work. The *Sobornost* these two Slavophile authors imagined, he explained, was not the Catholic "authoritarianism" nor the Protestant "individualism," but rather the "inner" feeling of

Dionysius, he was also steeped in the German mystics Jacob Böhme and Meister Eckhart. Berdyaev saw himself as following in the footsteps of the great nineteenth-century Russian religious philosophers Aleksei Khomiakov, Nikolas Fedorov, and Vladimir Solovyov, but Friedrich W.J. Schelling, Arthur Schopenhauer, and especially Immanuel Kant were formative influences." (In John Witte and Frank S Alexander. 2007. *The Teachings of Modern Orthodox Christianity on Law, Politics, and Human Nature*. Columbia University Press, pp.111-112)

¹⁴⁶ Лосев, Тарасов. 2008. 70

¹⁴⁷ ПИ, 202-203

¹⁴⁸ ПИ, 203

togetherness, the unity and feeling of free agreement that goes beyond any external sign, tradition, and confession, a unity and feeling in which the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, was the sole actor.

Berdyaev's commentaries on Solovyov in the *Russian Idea* also reveal what he took from this author and what he chose not to adopt. Berdyaev regarded Solovyov as a "rational" thinker, in whose work abstract "schemes" played an important role. Schematism, or what he called "scholasticism," had always repulsed him. The main reason for this repulsion was his view that "scholastic thinking" does not admit freedom and creativity; freedom and creativity in scholastic reasoning are subordinated under the necessity of logic. This explains, for Berdyaev, why freedom in Solovyov's philosophy did not play such an important role as in Khomiakov. There was no "irrational freedom" in Solovyov, there was no "Ungrund."¹⁴⁹

But there was a lot in Solovyov that Berdyaev appreciated. One thing, for example, was Solovyov's approach to socialism. Berdyaev completely agreed with Solovyov's opinion that in order to overcome the "non-truth" in socialism one first should admit its truth.¹⁵⁰ Another idea that Berdyaev took from Solovyov was the idea of "all-unity."¹⁵¹ There was no emphasis on freedom in Solovyov, but there was a beautiful philosophy of unity, harmony, and wholeness. Berdyaev shared Solovyov's belief that the "victory over death is the achievement of all-unity, the transformation not only of man but of the entire cosmos."¹⁵² He appreciated and used Solovyov's teaching of Godmanhood that interpreted Christianity not simply as faith in God but also in man, in the divine revelation of man.¹⁵³

Berdyaev was critical of the early Solovyov, who, through his theocratic visions, believed in the realization of Christianity in history, in human society.¹⁵⁴ This, for Berdyaev, was a utopian idea. According to him, the contradiction in Solovyov's concept of Godmanhood was that he believed in the achievement of *theosis* in history, something that Berdyaev would describe as an

¹⁴⁹ ПИ, 208-209

¹⁵⁰ cf. EOT, 191

¹⁵¹ ПИ, 210

¹⁵² ПИ, 210

¹⁵³ ПИ, 212

¹⁵⁴ ПИ, 214

achievement by necessity. Unlike eternity, history was a process of necessity; it was a different kind of reality. Because the problem of freedom was not well-considered, Berdyaev argued, Solovyov was unable to understand that freedom is also an opposing force to the realization of Godmanhood, of the imagined and expected *theosis*.¹⁵⁵ This prevented Solovyov from seeing the full tragedy and drama of human existence. There was no tragedy in Solovyov's philosophy and Berdyaev considered this a major flaw.¹⁵⁶

The idea and understanding of the tragic character of human existence, Berdyaev believed, could come only from the idea and understanding of freedom. The author, who achieved such an understanding and who truly felt the tragedy of human existence was Dostoyevsky, the thinker most respected by Berdyaev. Berdyaev began his "pneumatological" philosophy under the influence of Dostoyevsky; he adopted the writer's "metaphysics of freedom" and his "idea of suffering."¹⁵⁷ In *Dream and Reality*, Berdyaev says that the thinker who "nourished" his "love for the freedom of the spirit" was Dostoyevsky, particularly his "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor."¹⁵⁸ He also took from Dostoyevsky the antinomies, his "existential dialectics."¹⁵⁹ Berdyaev discovered in Dostoyevsky's literary work a belief in man. The "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" revealed for him "the secret of crucifixion" as a "secret of freedom."¹⁶⁰

Another influence on Berdyaev's thought, discernible through his commentaries, or openly admitted in his autobiography, was the anthropocentric philosophy and theology of Victor Ivanovich Nesmelov.¹⁶¹ Berdyaev calls Nesmelov "the greatest phenomenon in Russian religious philosophy that came from the theological seminaries," describing him as one "of the most

¹⁵⁵ ПИ, 213-214, cf. "Lecture Nine" in Solovyov Zouboff. 1948. *Lectures on Godmanhood*.

¹⁵⁶ See Бердяев, "Основная Идея Вл. Соловьева" [The Fundamental Idea of Vl. Solovyov] in Бердяев. 1989. *Типы религиозной мысли в России*. [Собрание сочинений. Т. III] Париж: YMCA-Press, [Types of Religious Thought in Russia]

¹⁵⁷ ПИ, 220-221

¹⁵⁸ DR, 49

¹⁵⁹ ПИ, 221

¹⁶⁰ ПИ, 221

¹⁶¹ See, for example, Berdyaev, N.A. "Attempt at a Philosophical Justification of Christianity" (Concerning the book of V. Nesmelov "The Science of Man") in N.A. Berdyaev. 2015. *The Spiritual Crisis of the Intelligentsia* (fjr Publications, pp. 295-323)

amazing religious thinkers."¹⁶² He adopted Nesmelov's idea that man is the only and greatest secret of creation. There is no greater secret than man himself. God revealed Himself to man, and now God waits for man to reveal himself to God. Berdyaev described Nesmelov's philosophy as much more "personalistic" than Solovyov's.

Berdyaev was also influenced and inspired by Westernizers like Chaadaev, and more concretely by Chaadaev's "love for truth."¹⁶³ He quoted approvingly Chaadaev's admission, "Love for the fatherland is a beautiful thing, but love for truth is even more beautiful."¹⁶⁴ He shared the common Westernizer, Slavophile, radical and liberal, typically Russian faith in collective salvation. Berdyaev adopted the "Russian idea" that "individual salvation is impossible, that salvation is communitarian, that all are responsible for all."¹⁶⁵ But he seemed to go beyond the Russian Slavic-Orthodox East, learning also from the teachings of Catholic philosophers such as the Polish thinker, August Cieszkowski. Berdyaev shared Cieszkowski's Joachimite belief that a new epoch of the Holy Spirit is coming,¹⁶⁶ that humankind is on the verge of creating, through the power of the Holy Spirit, a new world. In this epoch, according to Cieszkowski, man will be the active part in creation; there will be a new social harmony, not a new religion, but a "creative development of

¹⁶² РИ, 229-230

¹⁶³ РИ, 65

¹⁶⁴ РИ, 65

¹⁶⁵ РИ, 243

¹⁶⁶ cf. "О Третьем Завете и Его Связи со Смыслом Истории" [Concerning the Third Testament and Its Relation to the Meaning of History] in ФС/РФ. The idea of the "Third Testament" was also present in Merezhkovsky's religious philosophy, in his expectation for the coming revelation of the Holy Spirit, and in his grand and utopian project for the creation of a new community (Church) of *active* Christians—a project, in which Berdyaev and Bulgakov were invited as participants. While Berdyaev embraced the idea of a Christianity *consciously* active in the world and believed in the role of the Holy Spirit in human history, he was nevertheless critical of Zinaida and Dimitr Merezhkovskys' project, arguing that they have no understanding of the universal nature of the Church and that they wanted to create "a small intimate religion," which was nothing but an expression of a "gnostic" temptation. See Н.А. Бердяев. 1999. *Новое религиозное сознание и общественность*, [New Religious Consciousness and Society] Составление и комментарии В. В. Сапова (Канон+) and Д. С. Мережковский, "О новом религиозном действии (Открытое письмо Н. А. Бердяеву)" [On the New Religious Action (An Open Letter to N.A. Berdyaev)] in Д. С. Мережковский, *Не мир, но меч*. [Not Peace but a Sword] (Издательство АСТ, 2000)

the eternal religion." Berdyaev admitted that in some regards Cieszkowski's thought exceeded in quality and insight Solovyov's.¹⁶⁷

Despite all influences, Berdyaev preserved his independence of thought, his individuality as a person and philosopher. In *Dream and Reality*, he wrote: "I never belonged, or indeed could belong, to any 'school' of thought [...] I have always broken with every group to which I belonged; I could never conform to any collective."¹⁶⁸ He always sensed a kind of mystical alienation, and it seems that this sense was stronger in him than the sense of belonging. He says that throughout his entire life he was "strongly attracted by the Orphic myth concerning the origin of the human soul, which speaks of a falling away of man's spirit from a higher world into a lower."¹⁶⁹ His soul did not feel at home in the temporal world. "All my life," he said, "I have re-echoed Zarathustra's immortal words: Eternity, I love thee." "If eternity is not," he believed, "then nothing is."¹⁷⁰

The sense of detachment, the inability to unite with the world completely, made him believe that "every actualization in the here and now is but a symbol of something other [or] beyond."¹⁷¹ Berdyaev searched for the truth, but the truth, he felt, was elusive; the reality of "here and now" was secondary, a reduced reality, a projection, an image of something actual but never fully visible and explicable. That is why his favourite poet was Fyodor Tyutchev,¹⁷² the Slavophile, the poet-diplomat, who said in his famous *Silentium!*: "How can a heart expression find?/How should another know your mind?/Will he discern what quickens you?/A thought once uttered is untrue./Dimmed is the fountainhead when stirred:/drink at the source and speak no word."¹⁷³

This alienation, however, had its positive effects and was a beautiful part of life. Life was not all darkness, murkiness, and illusion; it was also a source of diversity and interaction, of freedom, desire, action, and revelation. "My thinking," he explained, "is not a totalitarian

¹⁶⁷ PI, 257

¹⁶⁸ DR, 13-15

¹⁶⁹ DR, 1

¹⁷⁰ DR, 29-30

¹⁷¹ DR, 30; cf. TMH, 121

¹⁷² Donald Lowrie. 1960. *Rebellious Prophet: A Life of Nikolai Berdyaev* (Harper and Brothers. New York)

¹⁷³ Fyodor Tyutchev. 1830. *Silentium!* (translated by Vladimir Nabokov)

monologue."¹⁷⁴ It was a "dialogue" with the thoughts and the being of others. He was in conversation with Dostoyevsky, Kant, and Ibsen.¹⁷⁵ It was Kant's "critique of pure reason" that helped him to formulate and discern the inability of mind and senses to grasp things in themselves. Under the influence of Kant (and Plato), Berdyaev transformed his sense of alienation into a philosophical problem. He said, "My true master in philosophy was Kant [...] Kant provided me [...] with the [...] radical difference between the realm of "phenomena" and the realm of 'things in themselves,' between the order of nature and the order of freedom; it also awoke me with the realization of the truth that man is an end in himself."¹⁷⁶ He considered Kant "a profoundly Christian thinker, more so than Thomas Aquinas."¹⁷⁷ What he did not like in Kant was his "ethical formalism," his formulas and imperatives; also, his "concepts of duty, obligation, oath, contract, vow." These, Berdyaev argued, were "hostile to [the genuine] moral life," to freedom and love. That's why his true intellectual teachers were the writers of literature, such as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. They had a better way of interpreting and explaining reality. Their symbolism and ethics were not confined to a dead logic or cold formalism. They flourished in a cathartic description of life, in the tradition of the old Hebraic, biblical stories of truth. Through the stories, through the art of storytelling, through what Aristotle called "*mimesis*," man, the *prosopon* (the "mask," the person), was able to break into the deepest meaning of life and reality and discover the inexplicable meaning of reality. "The heroes in Tolstoy's and Dostoyevsky's novels," Berdyaev wrote, "were of greater importance for me than philosophical and theological schools of thought."¹⁷⁸

Berdyaev's life can be divided into two definite parts: the pre-revolutionary Russian period and the post-exile, post-revolutionary European period. He remembers with greater fondness the Russian period and considers this time of his life intellectually more dynamic and rewarding. In

¹⁷⁴ DR, 36

¹⁷⁵ DR, 49

¹⁷⁶ DR, 93

¹⁷⁷ DR, 104

¹⁷⁸ DR, 80

Russia, he was constantly involved in tense and passionate debates. Pre-revolutionary Russia was experiencing a cultural and intellectual renaissance, of which he was an active part.

In his so-called "Moscow period" (1908-1922),¹⁷⁹ the time of his return from St Petersburg (where he moved in the fashionable intellectual circles around Dmitry Merezhkovsky and Zinaida Gippius), Berdyaev studied intensely the "theological tradition of the Orthodox Church." This was also the period when he read Nesmelov's *The Science of Man* and contemplated his anthropocentric theology. During these years, he "embarked upon a systematic study of the Slavophiles, for whose theological ideas" he "had had a little sympathy in the past." While Khomiakov aroused the "greatest interest," his exploration of "a great deal of Patristic literature" did not "on the whole excite ... enthusiasm."¹⁸⁰

At the beginning of *Dream and Reality*, Berdyaev conceded, "I am quick-tempered and inclined to outbursts of anger."¹⁸¹ So, it is not a surprise that he was always involved in controversies and conflicts. Because of his outspoken character, he was "disliked by the Marxists, by wide circles of the Russian intelligentsia, by politicians, by the representatives of 'official' and academic philosophy and 'science,' in literary and ecclesiastical circles."¹⁸² This does not mean that he was judgmental or aggressive; on the contrary, he was a person who "suffered from the sensation of pity most intensely."¹⁸³ The gospel words that had most profoundly impressed him were "judge not that ye be not judged."¹⁸⁴ Yet, he was not shy to criticise colleagues and friends for work and positions he did not like or share. One of the authors who met his criticism was Fr. Pavel

¹⁷⁹ See Н. К. Дмитриева, А. П. Моисеева. 1993. *Философ свободного духа (Николай Бердяев: жизнь и творчество)*, [Philosopher of the Free Spirit. Nikolai Berdyaev's life and work], (Высш. школа. Москва). In Russia, we can divide Berdyaev's intellectual life into three periods: 1) the "Kievan," which lasts until 1904. This was the Marxist and idealist period 2) the Petersburg period (1904-1908), which is the transformative time from idealism to religious philosophy under the influence of Silver Age writers and 3) the Moscow period when Berdyaev became a religious philosopher.

¹⁸⁰ DR, 165

¹⁸¹ DR, 6

¹⁸² DR, 37

¹⁸³ DR, 58

¹⁸⁴ DR, 58

Florensky. For Berdyaev, Florensky's acclaimed book *Pillar and Ground of the Truth* was an example of "stylized archaism and primitivism," a work of "artistic impotence."¹⁸⁵

The criticism of Florensky's style of writing reveals what Berdyaev disliked in the work of others and what he strove to avoid or achieve in his own writing. "In *Pillar and Ground of the Truth* there is nothing simple, spontaneous, not a word coming directly from the depth of the soul," Berdyaev wrote. "Such books cannot be religiously stimulating. This is an exquisite book, so clever, so scholarly, devoid of any inspiration. Fr. Florensky cannot say a word loudly, strongly, inspiredly. [In his work, there is] escape from himself, a dread of himself. [...] Artificiality and craft are felt in everything. People like him should not preach."¹⁸⁶ In *Dream and Reality*, he wrote, "Whenever I came up against the ideas of a Merezhkovsky or a (Vyacheslav) Ivanov, a Rozanov or a Florensky [...] I saw man relegated to the cosmic cycle, in which he is paralyzed and crushed by inexorable necessity and reduced to the semblance of a 'thing' or 'object.'"¹⁸⁷ In short, Berdyaev did not like the constraint of thought and the artificiality of expression. He expected from the other, as from himself, a full devotion, and full revelation, not only in the intellectual work but in personal behavior and posture. Berdyaev valued genuine aristocratism and directness in manners and expression. He was disturbed by both behavior and writing that is intentionally constrained and concealed. He wrote about Florensky that his "[personal] presence had a strangulating, suffocating effect" on him, that he "spoke in a deliberately soft voice, with his eyes on the ground, and never looking straight into the face."¹⁸⁸ We find similar commentaries about the learned environment of French intellectuals, whom Berdyaev described as "indifferent" and

¹⁸⁵ Н.А. Бердяев, "Стилизованное Православие. (Отец Павел Флоренский)" [Stylized Orthodoxy. (Fr. Pavel Florensky)] in Бердяев. 1989. Типы религиозной мысли в России. [Types of Religious Thought in Russia] (YMCA-Press. Париж) Sergii Bulgakov had a great respect for Fr Pavel Florensky, but nevertheless he shared Berdyaev's opinion on *Pillar and Ground of the Truth*. See С.Н. Булгаков, "Ялтинский дневник" [Yalta Diary] in О. В. Богданова. 2003. *Булгаков: Pro et Contra: Антология*, РХГА, С. 137

¹⁸⁶ Бердяев, "Стилизованное Православие. (Отец Павел Флоренский)" [Stylized Orthodoxy. (Fr. Pavel Florensky)] in Бердяев, 1989. Типы религиозной мысли в России. [Types of Religious Thought in Russia] (YMCA-Press. Париж)

¹⁸⁷ DR, 166

¹⁸⁸ DR, 166

"dispassionate."¹⁸⁹ He liked spontaneity, directness. Being an aristocrat in origin (and spirit), he was intolerant of disingenuous nobility and false aesthetics.¹⁹⁰

Berdyayev was an aesthete and he appreciated the beautiful expression of truth, wherever he found it. During his Moscow period, for example, he discovered "the beauty of Orthodox liturgical life,"¹⁹¹ a "symbol" of divine reality. In a letter to Dmitry Filosofov, Berdyayev wrote, "The sacraments are the very essence of life, the joy of religious being... Without the sacraments, I could not live long."¹⁹² At the same time, he admired the genuine devotion and simplicity of faith in the ordinary, non-orthodox Christians, the people belonging to groups, sects, and movements outside the official church. He distanced himself from the sophisticated Merezhkovskys, who wanted to create a "new religious society," considering their spirituality and rituals sacrilegious, trying to reconcile "Christ with anti-Christ."¹⁹³ He preferred the company of ordinary Christians and "sectarians." His greatest friend among these "informal" Christians was the "simple peasant," the illiterate and almost blind Animushka, from the sect of *Dobrolubtsy* (Good-lovers). Never having heard about Böhme, Animushka believed that in life we face darkness and nothingness, but God would inevitably consume them in his "all-consuming light."¹⁹⁴ Berdyayev's relation to and sympathy for the informal groups led him eventually into trouble. He was charged with blasphemy and punished with exile in Siberia for an article, "Quenchers of the Spirit," in which he attacked the Holy Synod for its politics of suppression of the *Imyaslavtsy*. As mentioned earlier, the war postponed the court hearing and the revolution put an end to it altogether. In his

¹⁸⁹ DR, 273

¹⁹⁰ Donald Lowrie quotes a letter written by Berdyayev, in which he complained: "In all the St. Petersburg literary society I have scarcely met any purity or nobility. I am so painfully surprised at the impurity and shallowness of this milieu [...] In this musty mess of "circles," there is no interest in God's world and in world-problems [...] and they esteem themselves to be the salt of the earth! [...] An aesthetic softening had taken place." (Lowrie, 1960, 84).

¹⁹¹ DR, 174

¹⁹² Lowrie, 1960, 97

¹⁹³ Lowrie, 1960, 90

¹⁹⁴ DR, 200

intellectual autobiography, he wrote: "Had there been no revolution I should have been exiled for life to Siberia instead of Paris."¹⁹⁵

Berdyaev's relation to the Orthodox Church and tradition was complicated. In Moscow he read "a great many theological works" from all Christian traditions and was "led to the conclusion that Orthodoxy is less susceptible to definition and rationalization than either Catholicism or Protestantism."¹⁹⁶ This, for him, was proof of "greater freedom" and "evidence of the pre-eminence of Orthodoxy." Orthodoxy, he became convinced, was the religious tradition most closely embracing the ideal of personalism and human dignity. The Orthodox mysticism and refusal of systematic rationalisation of faith led him to the "recognition of uncreated or uncaused freedom."¹⁹⁷ Yet, one of his most important books, *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, was written partially in reaction to the official Orthodox circles in Moscow and from his experience with the Novoselov group and the meetings of the Religious Philosophical Society.¹⁹⁸ He believed that their worldview and theology did not consider freedom as important, and for that reason, they could not also understand the importance of creativity in religion and life.

After his expulsion from Russia, Berdyaev settled initially in Berlin, and then, two years later, in Paris, where he moved in the Russian émigré and foreign intellectual circles. Donald Lowrie argues that "other contemporary Russian philosophers like N. Lossky, Frank, and Shestov [all exiles like him] can scarcely be said to have influenced" him.¹⁹⁹ I do not agree with that opinion. One need only look at Berdyaev's long-standing collaboration and friendship with his Jewish friends Frank and Shestov, read their work and Berdyaev's comments on it, and recognize the high level of intellectual exchange that existed between them.²⁰⁰ Even the St. Petersburg's literary society, from which he was estranged, left a significant impact on his philosophy; this, as

¹⁹⁵ DR, 202

¹⁹⁶ DR, 177

¹⁹⁷ DR, 178

¹⁹⁸ DR, 111-112

¹⁹⁹ Lowrie, 1960, 256

²⁰⁰ This is especially valid for D. Merezhkovsky. Merezhkovsky's political-theological writings, the majority of which still untranslated in English, reveal many common themes and ideas. See, for example, the collection of essays Дмитрий Сергеевич Мережковский. 1914 (8). *Не мир, но меч* [Not Peace but a Sword], ("Русского Слова")

Michael Meerson notices, was especially true for the Symbolists.²⁰¹ Lowrie's opinion, however, could be valid for Berdyaev's interaction with contemporary Western thought. Despite his acquaintance with Max Scheler and von Keyserling, and his knowledge of the work of Heidegger, Bergson, and Barth, Berdyaev seems generally immune to their influence. On the other hand, it is difficult to say how strong the influence of Martin Buber was,²⁰² since Buber's concept of "I and Thou" was already present in one or another form in the Russian Symbolists, such as Vyacheslav Ivanov,²⁰³ and in the followers of Solovyov, such as Semyon Frank.²⁰⁴

Surprisingly, in France Berdyaev felt best in the company of the French Thomists. He organized, along with Jacques Maritain, "inter-confessional" (a word that he did not like) meetings, at which questions of faith and politics were discussed. In his autobiography, he admits that he was "prejudiced against Thomism, Catholic Orthodoxy and those who hated the Modernists," but "nonetheless, Maritain instantly won [his] heart." He wrote that Maritain

²⁰¹ According to Michael A. Meerson, in his personalism and existentialism, Berdyaev synthesized Solovyov's doctrine of God's humanity, Merezhkovskys' ideas about the Trinity and mystical amorousness, and Vyacheslav Ivanov's "symbolic exemplarism." (Michael Aksionov Meerson. 1996. *The love paradigm and the retrieval of Western medieval love mysticism in modern Russian Trinitarian thought (from Solov'ev to Bulgakov)*" ETD Collection for Fordham University. AAI9628346. <https://fordham.bepress.com/dissertations/AAI9628346>, p.8) Berdyaev himself admits in the preface of *Новое религиозное сознание и общественность* [The New Religious Consciousness and Society] how much he was influenced by his "communion" with Merezhkovsky, Z. Gippius, D.V. Filosofov, and A. Kartashev. (H.A. Бердяев. 1999. *Новое религиозное сознание и общественность*, Канон+, С.7)

²⁰² It is certain, as we will see later, that Berdyaev approved Buber's personalism. He, like many others, might have borrowed and consciously utilized Buber's "I" and "Thou" concept. Berdyaev certainly had great respect for this Jewish thinker. A 1933 review of Buber's book *Ich und Du* in *Put* is clear evidence that Berdyaev was engaged with Buber's thought (see Fr Janos translation at http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1933_385.html). We also know that Buber and Berdyaev entered into a polemic on the question of the meaning of evil. Berdyaev did not approve Buber's treatment of the problem of evil, as it is evident from an exchange between them at a conference in France. After listening to Buber's presentation, Berdyaev said that the problem of evil cannot be resolved; it cannot even be rationally discussed. Thus, he asked Buber, "How can we fight evil?" Berdyaev (as we will see in the last chapter) doubted even the legitimacy of the idea of the absolutely good prelapsarian world. For him, both good and evil, in man, were flowing from the "abysmal darkness." About ten years later, Buber wrote his *Images of Good and Evil* partially in response to Berdyaev's criticism. See Павел Семёнович Гуревич. 2015. "Н. А. Бердяев в Контексте Европейской Философии," [N.A. Berdyaev in the Context of European Philosophy] *Вестник Славянских Культур*, (3.37, 2015) [Slavic Culture Newspaper] С. 13-31.

²⁰³ Meerson, 1996, 138-143

²⁰⁴ Семен Франк. 1925. "Религиозные основы общественности" [The Religious Foundations of Society], *Путь*, [Put'] № 1. Сентябрь, 1925. See also Frank's *The Spiritual Foundations of Society* (Ohio University Press, 1987) In fact, Frank, V. Ivanov, Mikhail Bakhtin were all influenced by Martin Buber.

"seemed to forgive [him] his heterodox convictions [...] which he [Maritain] did not tolerate in others."²⁰⁵ Compared to his relationship with the French Thomists and personalists, Berdyaev had much less success in his dealings with the Russian émigré society. He was in conflict, for example, with the members of the Russian Christian Student Movement. The political and ideological differences between him and the leaders of this organization were so strong that he finally stopped attending their meetings and conferences. Berdyaev wrote that for the members of this organization, "his name became a symbol of disgrace, and a new term was coined: '*Berdyaevschina*,' denoting all the most hateful things a Russian émigré could think of, such as love of freedom, heresy, modernism, Bolshevism, and what not."²⁰⁶ Most of his friends among the Russians were from the so-called Eurasian movement, but they also, on his view, "showed little apprehension of freedom."²⁰⁷ He did not approve their understanding of Russia as a "non-European culture." The Berlin-based pro-fascist *Mladorussy* were the "least acceptable" to him. Political and personal reasons led him to sever his connection and communication with Merezhkovsky (whom he considered cold-hearted and insincere), Peter Struve (who suspected Berdyaev of political naiveté and communist sympathies), Zaitsev and Muratov. But he preserved his long-standing relation with Sergii Bulgakov, his friendship with Lev Shestov and Mother Maria (Skobtsova), and remained close to Bunakov-Fondaminsky and Georgy Fedotov.²⁰⁸ During the French occupation (1940-1944), the Nazi authorities arrested Mother Maria and Bunakov-Fondaminsky and killed them in the concentration camps.

²⁰⁵ DR, 257-258

²⁰⁶ DR, 257-258

²⁰⁷ This opinion was expressed in *Dream and Reality*. Berdyaev also wrote an article critical of the movement, entitled "Евразийцы" [Eurasians] published in *Путь* [Put] (№1, С. 134-139) in 1925. In it, he warned that the Eurasianism could eventually turn into fascism, radical anti-Westernism, and nationalism. The religious philosopher Lev Karsavin, who was married to Anna Yosifovna, a niece of Alexander Khomiakov, and who became one of the theoreticians of the Eurasian movement (for which he was convicted in 1950 by the Soviet regime and sent to prison, where he died), answered Berdyaev's criticism in the next issue of *Put*, arguing that Eurasianism was actually a "free system" permitting the diversity of opinions and interpretation. "We may say," Karsavin wrote, "that Eurasianism holds and is imbued with the conciliar [*sobornny*] principle." "The conciliar principle," he said, "needs individual freedom..." (See Л.П. Карсавин "Ответ на статью Бердяева об евразийцах." [Reply to Berdyaev's article on Eurasians] *Путь*, № 2, 1925, С. 124-127)

²⁰⁸ DR, 279

The *Mladorussy*, and the majority of Russian emigrants, were counter-revolutionaries, many of them right-wing radicals. The rightist radicalism was not only a problem of the "white" emigration. Berdyaev understood early that Europe "was increasingly becoming the victim of excessive nationalism." He wrote that "every European nation seemed obsessed by the idea of its own magnitude and by the crucial and world-wide importance which it has in human affairs."²⁰⁹ He said that his "reactions to these manifestations were similar to those of Vladimir Solovyov, as expressed in his remarkable essay [which we already discussed] *The National Question in Russia*."²¹⁰ At the same time, true to his independent character, he rejected all leftist conceptions "opening with the prefix 'inter'". So, for him, internationalism was "an abstraction as devoid of real existence as inter-confessionalism." He was disposed to defend "internationalism" only as a protest against "the growing nationalism" and nothing more. As we will see in the next chapters, Berdyaev had a positive opinion on nation and nationality, similar to Solovyov's, but this did not stop him from saying that "few things are more repulsive than national conceit, arrogance and exclusiveness [...] This applies above all to anti-Semitism and every form of racial discrimination."²¹¹

Interacting with "cultured" French society, Berdyaev felt the "spiritual exhaustion" of the Western nations. His intellectual experience abroad could not be compared in intensity and quality to the experience he had in pre-revolutionary Russia. As it has been said, Berdyaev saw in the dispassionate and "cold" rationalism of Western intellectuals, not wisdom, but a sign of indifference and moral weakness. "Here," he once said, describing the meetings of the *Union pour Verite*, "matters of vital importance for the survival of mankind were discussed in a way, which suggested that they had in fact no relation whatever to the real struggle in life, and dynamite was handled as if it were a withered leaf. Only occasionally there was a faint sign of fear—fear of war, of revolution, of reaction—but a fear that was impotent and only served to prove the innate timidity of its victims."²¹² His pessimism and repulsion were balanced only by his good feelings

²⁰⁹ DR, 264

²¹⁰ DR, 265

²¹¹ DR, 265

²¹² DR, 273-274

toward the circle around Gabriel Marcel, the Thomists, and the "personalists" around *L'Esprit*. He wrote about *L'Esprit*, "I was greatly moved when at the foundation meeting [of the periodical], it was unanimously adopted that the fundamental purpose and concern of *Esprit* should be the vindication of man."²¹³

Generally, Berdyaev believed that the problems of the twentieth-century world were coming from the lack of creativity, from the inability of the new century to produce original ideas and respond adequately to the "much despised" nineteenth century. He argued that the new century "was a time of few gifts, and the ideas, which move the modern man to react against the nineteenth century are largely derived from this same century." The makers of the nineteenth century, he argued, were De Maistre, Hegel, Saint-Simon, Marx, Comte, Wagner, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, Carlyle, Gobineau, and Darwin. "Nearly all ideologies," he wrote, "which loom large on the horizon of modern Europe—communism, 'etatisme', nationalism, radicalism, individualism and anti-individualism, positivism, and the rest—were set forth in the last century." The "great contribution" of the twentieth century was the "skillful vulgarization and falsification" of the nineteenth century ideas. So, the nineteenth century was, on the one hand, more significant intellectually and spiritually than the twentieth, and on the other hand, less significant than the eighteenth. "For my part," he admitted, "I belong to my age, but I have reacted against my age inasmuch as it has forgotten and betrayed its heritage."²¹⁴ "I feel with Konstantin Leontiev," he wrote, "the hideousness of the democratic age and share his passionate hatred of the democratic herd. Leontiev's worst enemies were those who believe in progress and want to introduce their paltry democratic perfection into this splendidly imperfect world."²¹⁵

²¹³ DR, 273-274

²¹⁴ DR, 282

²¹⁵ DR, 282

PART TWO: PERSON

CHAPTER ONE. FREEDOM

1. THE ARISTOCRACY OF SPIRIT

What does Berdyaev mean by saying that he feels a "passionate hatred" against the "democratic herd"? Is he a defender of autocracy, of totalitarianism, of "reactionary forces"? Of course, he is not—Berdyaev is a defender of freedom, but he does not make the mistake of reducing "liberty" to "democracy." On the contrary, democracy for him is the dictatorship of the number, of the multitude, of the abstract, and of the average over the single and unique. There is no freedom in the "number," even less in the "average." There is no dignity in the abstract, nor distinction in the common. There is no sense of "sin" in it and no true suffering. The "pilgrims" who are "hungering and thirsting after the truth"²¹⁶ cannot be found in the faceless mass of the democratic herd. The "numberless 'bourgeois Christians,' who pride themselves on their pharisaical religion," Berdyaev says, and who think that they own religion, or truth, do not understand, any more than the Orthodox world, "imbued with traditionalism" understands, that Christianity is ceasing to be a religion of simple, average people. They do not understand that a transformation is at work, that "more complex souls" thirst for a more "profound spirituality."²¹⁷

For Berdyaev the political and social philosophies discussed in Chapter 2 (Part I) offer neither a true insight nor a practical solution to the problem of human existence. And Berdyaev takes up the burden—it was a "burden", as is clear from his personal story of exile and alienation—to question and analyze them, to find their truth and their lie. Berdyaev could be described as a thinker from the Socratic tradition. He certainly read Vladimir Solovyov's long essay *Plato's Life-Drama*, and he certainly envisioned himself in the position of a modern Socrates.²¹⁸ In this essay,

²¹⁶ FS, viii

²¹⁷ FS, ix

²¹⁸ "Wine," Berdyaev wrote in his autobiography *Self-knowledge*, "never intoxicated me. I could drink a lot and never get drunk, staying sober among the drunk. In this respect, there is something Socratic in me." (In the English translation of the autobiography, this last sentence from Ch. 5 has for some reason been cut from the original Russian text). Berdyaev related the Socratic stance to man's capacity to stay sober, balanced, in a world intoxicated by private interest, idolatry, will-to-power, and false opinion. Russia, for him, was "intoxicated" by the warring factions of ideological fanaticism. (See "Темное вино" [Dark Wine] in *Судьба России: Опыты по психологии войны и*

Solovyov argued that Socrates was dragged into the whirlpool of an age of deep historical and spiritual transformation. He was born in a period when the beliefs and the traditions of the clan society of ancient Greece (of Athens, to be more precise) were challenged by philosophers and Sophists. It was a time when the old hierarchical society and order were undermined by new ideas on the meaning of citizenship, by foreign teachings flowing to Athens through its colonies and world trade. It was a time of great spiritual and intellectual ferment. Two groups emerged in this transformative period for the Athenian democracy: the "guardians" of the old traditions and way of life and the Sophists, critics of the past and the present. For some time, there was no alternative to this division; the two camps were incapable of any compromise or mutual understanding. Then, as Solovyov notes, Socrates appeared, and he appeared precisely as the "third principle," a position that would make him a martyr of truth. As a "third principle," he was the connecting point between conservatism and radicalism, between past and future, establishment and anti-establishment. According to Solovyov, because of his belonging to both groups (the conservatives and the radicals) Socrates was feared and despised by all. He was not considered a reconciler, a peacemaker; he was rather regarded as a traitor, who showed the faults of his own party. Socrates, Solovyov wrote, was an "embodiment of truly conservative and truly critical principles," a "living insult of both poor guardians [of tradition] and poor critics."²¹⁹

Berdyaev, being at the same time "conservative" and "radical," became in a similar way an "insult" to both conservatives and radicals. On the one hand, he criticised the "democratic herd" and its radical supporters and ideologues, on the other, he denounced the "conservative obscurantism," represented by Pobedonostsev, Uvarov and the other hard-line supporters of the

национальности. М.: Г.А.Леман и С.И.Сахаров. 1918. [The Fate of Russia: Essays on Psychology of War and Nationality]) For him, any kind of "orthodoxy," "left" or "right," "radical" or "conservative," was similar to Dionysian, diabolical drunkenness. "I declared war on all orthodoxies," he wrote in *Self-knowledge*. "The greatest falsifications of truth," he argued, "were made by the orthodoxies." Socrates, accused and sentenced to death by the "conservative" (religious fanatic) Meletus, the "democrat" Anytus, and the "demagogue" Laertius, believed that "the philosopher's mission was the search of truth in 'myself' and in 'other men.'" (*Apology* 29 a-b) In the same way, Berdyaev always searched for the truth *in man*. "I saw the truth in anthropocentrism and understood Christianity itself as deep anthropocentrism." This search for self-knowledge made him a target for the hardliners of radical and conservative "collectivism."

²¹⁹ Solovyov, "Plato's Life-Drama" in Solovyov, 2008, 224.

old regime. Like Socrates, Berdyaev lived in an age of transformation with two camps locked in a deadly struggle that caused two World Wars and a Cold War, and that were incapable of seeing the possibility of a "third way." Thinking about Berdyaev as a Socratic philosopher would help us to understand him better and, most importantly, to see in him neither the mere "radical philosopher," as he was conceived in the West, nor the "political conservative," as he was often presented by Soviet ideologues and the post-Soviet political theorists in Russia.

We should note that Berdyaev's friends were neither the militant anti-communists expelled along with him, such as Struve and Ivan Ilyin, nor his former political associates, the leftist radicals and Marxists such as Lunacharsky, nor yet the orthodox clerics from Sremski Karlovici and St. Sergius Theological Institute,²²⁰ or his old acquaintances such as the religious anarchists and spiritualists Madame Blavatsky and the Merezhkovskys. He was part of all these groups of "hard-liners,"²²¹ yet he always stayed on the fringe of their societies, somehow in the middle between them, and his position was often judged as disloyal, that of a traitor and a heretic. Berdyaev's true friends, as he says in his biography, were rather the martyrs, such as Mother Maria and Bunakov-Fondaminsky, the people who stood for the truth even at the cost of their life. These were the people, as it were, on the right side of history. They had the nobility of spirit to see the corruption of the times. From prisoners and victims of political terror, faithful to death, they became winners of truth, receiving, so to say, the "crown of life." (Rev. 2:10)

Mother Maria, Bunakov-Fondaminsky, Frank, Shestov, Fedotov, Radishchev, Chaadev, Khomiakov, Solovyov, Tolstoy, Fr Pavel Florensky (who was shot dead by the NKVD in the woods near St Petersburg), Bakhtin, and many others, belonged to the "spiritual aristocracy." They,

²²⁰ In 1939, in an article entitled *Is There Freedom of Thought and Conscience in Orthodoxy? In Defense of Georgy Fedotov*, Berdyaev criticised the attack of St. Sergius' administration on Fedotov's anti-nationalist, Christian-democratic political writings. See Н.А. Бердяев, "Существует ли в православии свобода мысли и совести?: В защиту Георгия Федотова," [Is There Freedom of Thought and Conscience in Orthodoxy? In Defense of Georgy Fedotov] *Путь*. — 1939. — № 59. — С. 46-54.

²²¹ In his autobiography, Berdyaev says that in Paris, he did not communicate or meet with his old acquaintances. Merezhkovsky, he says, wrote "rude articles" against him, Struve also attacked him in the press. But he describes his meeting and friendship with Mother Maria as the "most significant" in the years of his European exile; he was in "social unanimity" with her and Lev Shestov.

despite differences in their political and social views, had suffered the same fate—their noble spirit, their deep insight, put them against the "herd"; they were not "average" persons, and they paid with their lives for their "mutiny." The socialists often argue, Berdyaev says, that the "privileged minority" oppresses the "majority." This is true. But there is another truth, he says, that is more profound. It is that the "collective" has "always oppressed and persecuted" the "minority," "the truly spiritual individuals."²²² For him, history is a paradox. The Spirit moves and shapes it and yet, as an "objectification" of the workings of the Spirit, history seems to work against the people of Spirit, of those who move it to its realization and end. History, Berdyaev says, "works out habitually in favour of the average man, and the collective."²²³ If we paraphrase Danton's memorable words, history, in Berdyaev's view, tends to "eat her children." It feeds on the sacrifice of the spiritual, of what literally sustains it, in the same way as the collective feeds on the individual, and the average on the exceptional.

"All collectives, state, church, law, were produced for the average man," Berdyaev says. "The right-wing and the left, conservatives and revolutionaries, monarchists and socialists, all alike belong to the collective 'democratic type.'"²²⁴ The average man is everywhere—in the nobility, in the peasantry, in the middle class, among the workers. Berdyaev agreed with the old Christian insight, found in one or another form in Irenaeus,²²⁵ Luther,²²⁶ and other Christian thinkers, that

²²² FS, xi

²²³ FS, xi

²²⁴ FS, xi. For a critique of Berdyaev's "aristocracy of the spirit," See Vernon J. Bourke, "The Gnosticism of N. Berdyaev," *Thought: A Review of Culture and Idea*, Fordham University Quarterly, no. 11 (Dec. 1936): 409.

²²⁵ Cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.24: "For since man, by departing from God, reached such a pitch of bestiality as even to look upon his kinsman as his enemy, and engaged without fear in every kind of disordered conduct, murder, and avarice, God imposed upon mankind the fear of man, as they did not acknowledge the fear of God; in order that being subjected to the authority of men, and under the custody of their laws, they might attain to some degree of justice, and exercise mutual forbearance through dread of the sword..." (Quoted from Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan. 1999. *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought, 100-1625*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. pp. 16-22.)

²²⁶ Luther says that those who belong to the kingdom of God "need no temporal law or sword." They "are subject to the governing authorities" and are "ready to do every good work, not that they shall in this way be justified, since they already are righteous through faith, but that in the liberty of Spirit" they "serve others and the authorities [...] and obey their will freely and out of love." The state, the earthly kingdom, Luther believed, exists because of the "wicked," to prevent them from sinning. "If all the world was of real Christians," he says, "that is true believers, there will be no

coercive hierarchies were a necessary consequence of the fall. He argued that "it is never for the aristocracy of spirit that governments are established, constitutions elaborated." All these were done for the "average" person, for the person who does not live in the freedom of the Spirit. "Saints, prophets, geniuses," the people of faith and spirit, he believed, did not need laws, social and political systems to control, constrain, and direct their will. They, however, were tragically caught in the world, "bearing the burden" of the "sin of the average man." "They cannot isolate themselves from 'the world' [...] and serve the universal cause of freedom and civilization."²²⁷ These same people belonged to the "aristocracy of the spirit," they were a "race of men who have always been oppressed and persecuted." They were servants, and the burden of stewardship fell on them. They were not proud like the ancient gnostics, and did not flee the world; being *not of* the world, they choose to stay and be *active in* the world.

2. THE UNITY OF SPIRIT AND THE ABYSS OF FREEDOM

Nothing can be truly known, Berdyaev argues, if not experienced spiritually. There are types of experience. The experience of a soul bound only to the demands of the body and not illuminated by the Spirit is purely psychic, "concentrated within the self." In this experience, "personality remains self-absorbed."²²⁸ Such an experience is always marked by an insurmountable separation. In it, the individual soul and body do not have a sense of their connection with the whole of Creation and with God. The positivist, the empiricist, and the materialist worldview, as well as some Christian theologies that emphasize the absolute transcendence of God, do not comprehend the fundamental relationship that exists between human persons, the world, and the divine. In positivism, Berdyaev says, "God, the world, and the soul are separated from one another, and in consequence spiritual experience becomes impossible." The spiritual experience, he argues, can only "exist when man is regarded as a microcosm in which the whole universe is revealed and in which there are no transcendent limits

need for or benefits from prince, king, lord, sword, or law." (Martin Luther. 1955-1986. "Temporal Authority: to what extent it should be obeyed," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Walter Brandt, Concordia Publishing House, Vol. 35, p. 89)

²²⁷ FS, xii

²²⁸ FS, xii

isolating man from God and from the world."²²⁹ There is no true knowledge, true existence, if there is no spiritual experience.

*In the Spirit, for the Spirit, there is nothing transcendent. God, according to Berdyaev, is not transcendent to anyone or anything.*²³⁰ Like Böhme, he sees "everywhere in the world and in

²²⁹ FS, 15. Berdyaev's understanding of positivism is similar to Bulgakov's, who defines it as the worldview that rejects the existence of transcendental (God) and the value of metaphysics. (See С. Н. Булгаков, "Основные проблемы теории прогресса" in *Проблемы идеализма* (1902), *Манифесты русского идеализма*, сост. Вадим Сапов; translated, with an introduction by Randall Allen Poole [2003], as *Problems of Idealism: Essays in Russian Social Philosophy. Russian Literature and Thought*. New Haven: Yale University Press.) In *Freedom and the Spirit*, Berdyaev says that positivism, materialism, and rationalistic naturalism identify a "limited area of consciousness with the whole of being" (p. 98). He says that positivism (and materialism) "reflects the struggle against God and Christianity" (p. 3), in its immanentism, that is, its "concentration upon the reality of physical and social life," it is characterized by a complete lack of any "mystical understanding of life." (p. 290)

²³⁰ Berdyaev argued against Karl Barth's dialectical Christology and "transcendentalism," which he regarded as a threat to "personality." Ashley Cocksworth contends that "Barth downplays the 'cosmic' significance of the incarnation: in becoming human, God has 'overcome...the transcendent abyss between Creator and creature.' Barth's Word-centered Christology assumes a radical distinction where, for Berdyaev, because of the incarnation, there is none. And Barth's dialectical Christology is insufficiently dialectical in the sense that it is too 'one-sided.' The movement from God to humanity is affirmed at the (nondialectical) denial of any movement from humanity to God. There can be no 'answer of the human nature in a corresponding activity.' Consequently, in Barth, Berdyaev concludes, there does not 'exist any theosis, no deification of the creaturely world.' Undialectical, insufficiently Christological in his final critique of Barth's dialectical theology, Berdyaev joins what will become a long line of critics who are unsatisfied by Barth's pneumatology." (Ashley Cocksworth, "'Soborny' Spirituality: Spirit and Spirituality in Berdyaev and Barth" in Ashley John Moyse, Scott A. Kirkland, John C. McDowell, 2016. *Correlating Sobornost: Conversations between Karl Barth and the Russian Orthodox Tradition*. Augsburg Fortress Publishers, pp.217-218) However, it should be emphasized that it is the early Barth that Berdyaev is criticizing. Barth himself addresses this problem from 1932 onwards. (See especially his 1956 essay, *The Humanity of God*. See also, at great length, volume 4 of the *Dogmatics*.) But more important for our context is Berdyaev's understanding of the transcendent-immanent nature of the Divine-human relationship. A good source for a better understanding of the trajectory of his views is Sergii Bulgakov's *Unfading Light*. First, note that here it is argued that *in the Spirit* and *for the Spirit* there is nothing transcendent. But *for man* God is transcendent. In what sense? Bulgakov rightly notes that the concepts "transcendent" and "immanent" have "extraordinarily many meanings." For him, the immanent is that which is "contained in the confines of a given closed circle of consciousness." That which is found "beyond this circle is transcendent." Therefore, the transcendent is a certain "frontier domain for the immanent." "God is the Transcendent," Bulgakov says, "He is the sole and authentic Not-I; inasmuch as I (Fichtean) includes everything, the whole world, in itself." The distance between the world and God, he says, is absolute and insurmountable and only God's grace (Spirit) could overcome it. "Any immanence of the Transcendent, the touch of Divinity, is an act truly miraculous and free." Through grace, through the Spirit, God is both outside us and in us, and "the absolutely transcendent becomes absolutely immanent." But the quest for God, according to Bulgakov and as we will see according to Berdyaev as well, the "disclosure of the divine in the self is accomplished by human effort which God expects of us... The decisive moment remains the encounter with God in the human spirit, the contact of the

man the trinitarian principle, a reflection of the divine Trinity."²³¹ The Father is not transcendent to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, neither are the Son and the Holy Spirit transcendent to the Father. God is all in all on heaven and on earth. And God brings all to all, or, in the words of Aquinas, "God will be all in all."²³² (1 Cor. 15:28) Berdyaev quotes Jesus saying, "I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you." (John 14:20)²³³ For him, not only is it true to say that "God is Spirit"²³⁴ (John 4:24), but true also to say that man and creation are spirit in that they have the Spirit *in* themselves.

Positivism, however, having no sense and concept for the unity of Spirit, has no understanding of what personality means. Personality, Berdyaev says, is neither "substance" nor the negation of substance. "Personality [личность] is above all, a spiritual energy of qualitative originality, a spiritual activity [...]. The existence of personality does not [...] imply its separation from God and the world,"²³⁵ in the same way as the Holy Trinity does not imply separation between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The "supra-personal element within personality, does not mean the denial of personality, but rather its affirmation."²³⁶ The existence of personality, of "qualitative uniqueness," is "only possible through the manifestation in it of spiritual principles which assist in liberating it from a state of isolation while uniting it to what is divine."²³⁷ In other words, the person is the communion, the relation of the individual being with the whole of creation, and with God from Whom the very Spirit of Unity (of communion, relation) proceeds. "Personality," Berdyaev says, "is the divine idea, God's design."²³⁸

transcendent with the immanent, the act of faith. *God exists.*" (See Sergius Bulgakov. 2013. *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. pp. 45-48)

²³¹ Berdyaev. 1930. "Studies Concerning Jacob Böhme. Etude One. The Teaching about the Ungrund and Freedom." *Put'*, Feb. 1930. No. 20, pp. 47-79. Tr. Fr. Stephen Janos.

²³² Thomas Aquinas. 1861. *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected out of the Works of the Fathers*. (Primedia E-launch LLC)

²³³ FS, 17

²³⁴ FS, 2

²³⁵ FS, 16

²³⁶ FS, 16

²³⁷ FS, 16

²³⁸ FS, 16

"In the spiritual life," Berdyaev says, "the personal [microcosm] and supra-personal [macrocosm] are united [...] the personal is not annihilated or denied, it is raised to the level of supra-personal."²³⁹ In a similar way, the Persons (*hypostases*) in the Holy Trinity are not annihilated or denied in the Godhead (*ousia*) but *united* and *affirmed*. Echoing Khomiakov, Berdyaev says that in the diversity of existence, there is one unifying principle or element: the Spirit. Like Khomiakov, he argues that the diversity in Creation is possible, not because of the separation of its constituting parts and entities, but rather because of the unification of all parts and entities under one single Spirit. Were there no unity, there could be no "qualitative originality." Without the Spirit, all is separated, self-enclosed, isolated. How will a being show its unique self in an empty space? Separation, self-absorption, is mortification, loss of existence. Moreover, it is a loss of both consciousness and self-consciousness. To be self-conscious means to be conscious, first, of that which is not self. To be self-conscious is knowing and feeling yourself, but in order to know and feel who you are, you should first go beyond yourself and meet the Other in yourself.²⁴⁰ Only when the self (the ego) discovers the Other, which happens through the Spirit,

²³⁹ FS, 16. The other name of the term "supra-personal" is *sobornost*, the "*soborni* experience," it is also the Church, in which the person is not annihilated but affirmed and fulfilled. According to Berdyaev, the personal overcomes death only through the supra-personal. (cf. FS, 331)

²⁴⁰ The "Other" is God, but also the neighbour (and creation). In early writing from 1902 (written in Vologda) that reveals Kantian and Schellingian influences, Berdyaev argues that each human person has absolute worth, that each man is an end in itself and not a means for the achievement of another end. But in his "empirical" life, the human person often witnesses that man, who according to Berdyaev is an image of God and the only bearer of the moral law, is often degraded, that he is not considered as an absolute value. So (and here is the possible Schellingian influence) the tragic moral problem is the contradiction between the empirical "I" and the ideal, moral "I." Morality, Berdyaev says, is above all how the man thinks of himself. The level of self-respect reveals the level of respect one has for others; in his treatment of the other he shows how he treats himself. In other words, in order to respect the other and treat him in a humane and sensitive way one should see oneself in the other, one should see in him one's own value and being. This would be an expression and a result of a developed consciousness and self-consciousness, a spiritual and actual unification of the personal "I" with the universal "I," a transformation of the individual into the universal, of the human into the divine. Or, as Randall Poole says, this would be a "recognition" of the personhood of others in "one's spiritual self." It should be noted that this early essay of Berdyaev, entitled "The Ethical Problem in the Light of the Philosophical Idealism," is not representative enough of his work. In a short but very informative article on Berdyaev's personalism, published in the *Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, Ana Siljak rightly describes this 1902 essay of Berdyaev as "an initial sketch of the elements that would later become [Berdyaev's] full-fledged personalist philosophy." While it is worth noticing that one of the most crucial elements of Berdyaev's personalism, *creativity*, is still missing from this sketch and that we do not yet find in it a Trinitarian principle or the concept of *sobornost*, it is nevertheless true that it contains many of the seeds from which the harvest of Berdyaev's mature

does the self (the ego) become conscious of itself.²⁴¹ Consciousness and self-consciousness are an act of relation, of outreach, and not of separation, self-enclosure. Therefore, through the spiritual relation between one and the many, both the one and the many become possible as one and many. In the Spirit, the "anti-thesis" between multiplicity and unity is nonexistent, Berdyaev says.²⁴² The unity of Spirit makes possible the "life of multiplicity."²⁴³ The anti-thesis of one and the many has its origin in space, time, and matter; that is, in the materialist perception of reality.

The spiritual experience, Berdyaev says, is not a detachment from the natural world, as positivism or false religiosity suggest. It is rather the "proper attachment" to the world. Moreover, the Spirit is "incarnated" (but not contained) in matter and history. As we will see in the next section, for Berdyaev (as for Böhme), matter and history are "symbols" of the inner Spirit.²⁴⁴ Everything external, material, visible, for him, is a symbol (but not "incarnation" in the proper sense) of the *inner* and the *invisible*. This proposition plays a significant role in Berdyaev's analysis of history, society, and politics. As symbols and signs pointing to a deeper reality, space, time, and matter cannot be the absolute criteria of what *is*. They are symbols, and as such, they rather *express* meaning and reality, they are not *the producer and origin* of life. Thanks to the "profound intuition of religious tradition," Berdyaev says, man has discovered that real life and the

anthropocentrism and humanism would arise. Written in a rather winding manner, beginning with Kantian ethics and idealism and going on to criticize positivist, hedonist, and utilitarian worldviews before offering a sympathetic but critical treatment of the Nietzschean revolt, its significance derives in part from the volume where it appeared. *Problems of Idealism*, as pointed out earlier, was the first in a series of collections of critical essays that brought together the work of Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Frank, and Struve et al. (See Н.А. Бердяев, "Этическая проблема в свете философского идеализма" in *Проблемы идеализма* (1902), *Манифесты русского идеализма*, сост. Вадим Сапов; translated, with an introduction by Randall Allen Poole [2003], as *Problems of Idealism: Essays in Russian Social Philosophy. Russian Literature and Thought*. New Haven: Yale University Press.)

²⁴¹ We find a similar interpretation of being and self-consciousness in the writings of John Zizioulas. For example, in *Being and Otherness*, Zizioulas writes, "The human being is defined through otherness. It is a being whose identity emerges only in relation to other beings, God, the animals of creation. It is almost impossible to define the human being substantially." (John Zizioulas. 2009. *Communion and Otherness*, T&T Clark, London, p.39)

²⁴² FS, 17

²⁴³ FS, 17

²⁴⁴ FS, 18

foundation of existence is not in external nature only, nor in abstract thought (in the insights of contemplation), but in the living, spiritual experience of each individual person and society.²⁴⁵

Berdyaev is a religious philosopher. We should always keep in mind that he is a Christian thinker and that his philosophy is founded on the Christian faith and Scripture. As a Christian, he believes that "the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor.3:17; John 4:24) and that the Spirit "gives life." (John 6:63) For him, God creates *ex nihilo*, out of "formlessness," "emptiness," "darkness" and "depth." (Gen. 1:2) Through Him, "all things are made." (John 1:1-5) All is illuminated, animated. There is life in Him, and that life is the light of all "creation" and "mankind."²⁴⁶ (Gen 1:3; John 6:63; John 1:1-5) Where the Spirit is, Berdyaev is convinced, there is freedom. (2 Cor.3:17) The "defense of the freedom of the Spirit," of the *idea* of the freedom of the Spirit, as he admits, is the "basic motive" behind his entire philosophical work.²⁴⁷

The basis of Berdyaev's existential, "apophatic" philosophy, it might be argued, is the freedom of the Spirit as found in Scripture,²⁴⁸ and not in Plato,²⁴⁹ or in Böhme, Hegel, or any other German thinker.²⁵⁰ Berdyaev accepts some of the concepts of the Hegelian philosophy of spirit but

²⁴⁵ FS, 18

²⁴⁶ "Life depends on God," Berdyaev says, "Man does not possess life by himself." (Бердяев. 1994. "Дух и реальность. Основы богочеловеческой духовности" [Spirit and Reality. The Foundations of God-man's Spirituality] in Н.А. Бердяев, *Философия свободного духа*. [Philosophy of Free Spirit] М.: Республика, С. 371.)

²⁴⁷ Бердяев, "В защиту христианской свободы. Письмо в редакцию." [In defense of Christian Freedom. Letter to the editor." - *Современные записки*. - 1925. - №24. - С. 285-303.

²⁴⁸ "In the Gospel everything comes from the spirit and through the spirit. This is not the *nous* of philosophy, but the *pneuma* of religious revelation. In the New Testament, *pneuma* is not a human consciousness and thought, but a spiritual condition, a definite divine inspiration. [...] In the apostolic Church, the Spirit is not dogma or teaching, but a central fact of religious *life*." (Бердяев, 1994, 374)

²⁴⁹ "But the Spirit is freedom," Berdyaev says; "the Spirit cannot be determined by the world of ideas in the Platonic sense. One of the perceptions of the Spirit is the perception of Him as breath, as Divine inspiration that is not the determinism typical for the logical universalism. [...] [T]he Kingdom of Spirit is the kingdom of love and freedom." (Бердяев, 1994, 371)

²⁵⁰ N.V. Motroshilova rightly notes that Berdyaev does not see in Kant a "genuine philosophy of Spirit," nor in Herder, Fichte, or Schelling. (Неля Васильевна Мотрошилова, "Актуальность философии духа Н. Бердяева в её соотношении с гегелевской философией духа" [The Actuality of Berdyaev's Philosophy of Spirit and Its Correlation to the Hegelian Philosophy of Spirit.] *Историко-философский ежегодник*, 2016, pp. 296-315.) According to Shestov, however, both Berdyaev and Böhme, especially in their understanding of freedom, do not rely only on Scripture but

does not find in Hegel the truly *Christian* idea of the Spirit as *freedom*. "The most impressive thing in the Hegelian teaching of spirit," he writes, "is that in it there is not an abyss of objectivity between man and God, spirit and Spirit. The Spirit is being in itself and for itself, that is, it is not an object for the subject." However, the spirit for Hegel is "logos," and this is an "element of Greek intellectualism." The main characteristic of the spirit, for Berdyaev, is freedom, which has Christian, not Greek origins.²⁵¹ "Hegel is a monist," he concludes, "and in him, there is no human and divine reason and spirit, only a singular reason and spirit that makes of man man."²⁵²

The oft-quoted Böhme, on the other hand, was just an intellectual "soulmate," whom Berdyaev discovered in his readings of Western thought. If one asks who is responsible for Berdyaev's theory of "*Ungrund*," or Uncreated Freedom, the most adequate answer, I think, is—the Bible, or Berdyaev's *interpretation* of the Bible. The same could be argued about Böhme. That is why Böhme won Berdyaev's praise and respect. This German mystic did not know Greek philosophy; he was not knowledgeable in theology. All he wrote, as Berdyaev says, was from his inner feeling, from his *spiritual experience*. Like Berdyaev, who died on his desk with a Bible open in front of him, Böhme was "immersed" in the Bible and at the same time, not a bookish person, a professional theologian or scholar (he was a shoemaker). These two aspects—the Bible and life experience—led him to the understanding that there is a division or "separation" of good and evil in the world, and that the unity and goodness of the Spirit overcomes this division constantly. The basis for this separation is what Böhme called "*Ungrund*," a "dark principle within the primal sources of being, deeper than being itself."²⁵³

Now, we should say that in his treatment of existence and reality, Berdyaev adopted a view similar to, if not quite the same as, Böhme's. The main difference between Böhme's "theosophy," as Berdyaev calls it, and Berdyaev's religious philosophy is that *Ungrund*, the abyss, in Berdyaev's

also on "gnosis." "Gnosis," Shestov says, was the *other* "source of revelation" for the German idealists, Böhme, and Berdyaev. (See Шестов, 1995)

²⁵¹ Бердяев Н.А. 1994. 376

²⁵² Бердяев Н.А. 1994. 376

²⁵³ Berdyaev. 1930. "Studies Concerning Jacob Böhme. Etude One. The Teaching about the Ungrund and Freedom." *Put'*, Feb. 1930. No. 20, pp. 47-79. Tr. Father Stephen Janos.

system is not grounded in God, as it is in Böhme (and Schelling), but is "outside" God; that is, nowhere.²⁵⁴ *Ungrund* cannot be described, it actually cannot be thought; it is close to what we might imagine as void, darkness, and irrationality; it is a "primordial meonic freedom, indeterminate even by God."²⁵⁵ It is "uncreated freedom" because it is a pure *potentia*, disclosed only *after* an act of God. We have to emphasize again that *Ungrund* in Berdyaev should not be understood as an absolute unity and reality *vis-a-vis* God's unity and reality, nor as part of God's very unity, nor as some independent substance. It is rather *nothingness*,²⁵⁶ a "void" *for* and *against* the divine *creative act*. It is not primal to God, but it is primal in the sense that it situates, so to say, the act of God.²⁵⁷ Like everything, it is revealed in the act of God itself. The idea of *Ungrund*

²⁵⁴ See Vigen Guroian, "Nicholas Berdyaev. Commentary" in Witte and Frank, 2007, 124. Berdyaev finishes his "First Etude" on Böhme with the following: "There was an aberration of Böhme in this, that he thought the Ungrund, the dark principle was in God Himself, rather than seeing the principle of freedom in the nothing, in the meonic, outside God. It is necessary to distinguish between the Divine Nothing and non-being outside God. [...] Böhme's teaching concerning the Ungrund and freedom needs, however, to be further developed regarding the distinction between the Divine abyss and Divine freedom, in contrast to the meonic abyss and meonic freedom." Perhaps, John Zizioulas's treatment of nothingness would be of some help in explaining this concept. "When I write that nothingness is 'ontologically absolute,'" Zizioulas says in response to a critical letter from Dr. Philip Sherrard, "this means that, regarded from an ontological point of view (i.e. ontologically), nothingness is an absolute, that is to say, it has absolutely no relation to being; it is not an existent thing. Therefore, since it has no ontological content, nothingness cannot constitute a reality alongside God—it does not constitute a reality in any sense at all; it has no being (*ouk einai*)."

(John Zizioulas. 2009. *Communion and Otherness*, T&T Clark, London, p. 273)

²⁵⁵ "A nothingness in the sense of *me on*, and *not ouk on*." Berdyaev. 1930. "Studies Concerning Jacob Böhme. Etude One. The Teaching about the Ungrund and Freedom." *Put*, Feb. 1930. No. 20, pp. 47-79. Tr. Father Stephen Janos. Böhme calls it "eternal silence." See James McLachlan, "Mythology and Freedom: Nicholas Berdyaev's Uses of Jacob Böhme's Ungrund Myth," *Philosophy Today* (1996) 40.4, 474-485. Some authors like David Rey Griffin see in Berdyaev's "Boehmian" metaphysics a kind of process theology, limited however by its irrationalism, mysticism, anthropocentrism, and Divine "amoralism." McLachlan rejects Griffin's classification and charges, arguing that Berdyaev's mysticism does not necessarily translate into irrationalism and that Berdyaev's thought should be "more adequately understood as a type of the dialogical personalism that flourished in the first half of the century," and should be "much more properly grouped with Buber, Marcel, Baxtin [M. Bahtin], Rosenzweig, and Levinas than with Bergson and Whitehead."

²⁵⁶ RSRC, 102

²⁵⁷ cf. F.W.J. Schelling. 2006. *Philosophical investigations into the essence of human freedom*, State University of New York Press. Schelling believes that God has in himself an "inner ground of his existence that in this respect precedes him in existence; but precisely in this way, God is again the *prius* [what is before] of the ground in so far as the ground, even as such, could not exist if God did not exist *actu*." (Schelling, 2006, 28) Schelling also argues that "God as spirit" is "the purest love," and as such, "there can never be a will to evil in love." But, he says, God himself "requires a ground so that he can exist; but only as ground that is not outside but inside him and has in itself a nature which, although belonging to him, is yet different from him." (Schelling, 2006, 42) We see in this quote some

permits Berdyaev to explain God's act as *absolutely free, and so to assert the primacy of freedom over necessity*. In this idea, God's act is preceded not by God's Being, but by an unfathomable *Nothing*.²⁵⁸ This concept of "freedom," which is another aspect of the concept of the freedom of the Spirit, helps Berdyaev (and Böhme) to explain creation *ex nihilo* (out of *nothing*), the meaning and source of "evil" (the *irrational* and *indeterminate*), and the presence of death in life (return to *nothingness, non-being*). It also explains Berdyaev's argument of the primacy of freedom over being, and the existence of what we call "future," the fundamental reality and presence of the unknown that we face at each moment in our life.

But let us return to the Spirit. The *Ungrund* is not the source of life. The Spirit is. And the Spirit is freedom as well. The Spirit does what it wants and goes where it wants; like the wind, "you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going." (John 3:8) It is free. So drawing on his faith and interpretation of the biblical story of creation, Berdyaev accepts that the fundamental principle of life and reality is the Spirit. And where the Spirit is, as Paul says, there is freedom; not necessity and law, but freedom. God might be a "lawgiver," a "judge," and "king," but God is not "law." The world He creates does not rest on mechanical rules. The visible "crust of necessity," that is, the world of matter, time, and space, rests on an *abyss of freedom*: the freedom of the divine Spirit and the emptiness of abysmal *darkness*. The biblical myth of creation does not permit

resemblances and differences between Berdyaev's and Schelling's views. It is not clear what exactly Berdyaev borrowed from Schelling or from any other author, or whether his views of *Ungrund* are the fruit of his own thinking and experience as he, in fact, argues speaking about the importance of personal mystical experience, but we must say that Schelling and Berdyaev could be read and interpreted together. Like Berdyaev, Schelling (following Leibnitz) accepts the idea, evident from Scripture, that evil (along with good as well) must be found in knowledge, although knowledge in itself and for itself, is not evil, and that man has to decide between evil and good, which makes man, and not God, the source of the antinomic to unity separation, that is, for Schelling, the evil (the "tragic" for Berdyaev) aspect of selfhood and freedom. Similarly, Schelling speaks about a will of God, a "will of love," that is on the one hand incapable to "withstand" and "abolish" the "will of the ground"—because such an act would prevent the revelation of love. And on the other hand, this will of love is nevertheless capable to defeat the ground, because, only in such a way, it may reveal in *actu* the presence of the divine omnipotence. For Schelling, the ground can be treated just as a "will to revelation." (Schelling, 2006, 42)

²⁵⁸ RSRC, 102. This is a "necessary" concept for Berdyaev since it allows him to resolve the problem of the primacy of freedom over being. If the being was primary, then inevitably freedom would become secondary, which would make authority and coercion fundamental elements of reality and of "God's order."

a hypothesis of the material foundation of life. And this leaves man in the difficult position of being suspended over a bottomless abyss, maintained only by his faith and creative imagination.

The abyss of the invisible and unknown is horrifying. Man tends to fear and oppose it. Man cannot walk like Christ on the "waters," in the darkest hour of the night. (Matt.14:22-33) The visible crust, the "hard soil" of matter, space, and time, is his natural environment. It is the creation that is given to him as his dominion. (Gen. 1:26-28) Nature's seemingly predictable behavior, and reason's capacity to overcome and control it, produces in man a conviction that necessity, the laws of matter and mechanics, are the foundation of life. Observing the natural world, and horrified by the thought of an abysmal freedom all around him, of an abysmal *unknown*, man wants not only to put his trust in the constancy, security, and primacy of the natural world but also to impose this constancy, security, and primacy on himself and on human society. In other words, man wants to replace freedom, the abysmal (*groundless*) foundation of reality, with necessity, to make primary what is secondary and derivative. In this desire, Berdyaev says, one can find the origins of authoritarianism.²⁵⁹

For Berdyaev, authoritarianism is precisely the search for criteria of truth in a lower world for the purposes of a higher one.²⁶⁰ Authoritarianism is a confused perception of reality. "Caesaropapism" and "Papo-Cesarism," or the state and the authoritarian Church (not the Catholic, the conciliar or *sobornaya* Church) "are alike extreme manifestations of this quenching of the Spirit by nature and of the search for visible evidences of the truth."²⁶¹ In their fear of the abyss of freedom, in which they see only darkness, the state and the Church become darkness, confusing the lower with the higher, as the lower becomes for them the only criterion for the higher.²⁶² The state and authoritarian Church, Berdyaev argues, may aspire to unity and love, but for the achievement of these aspirations, they use "hate" and "animosity," that is, separation. They

²⁵⁹ cf. Jurgen Moltmann. 1973. *The First Liberated Men in Creation in Theology and Joy*, CSM Press. Also, Paul Scaringi. 2007. *Freedom and the 'Creative Act' in the Writings of Nikolai Berdyaev: An Evaluation in Light of Jurgen Moltmann's Theology of Freedom*. A PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews

²⁶⁰ FS, 26

²⁶¹ FS, 27

²⁶² FS, 27

employ violence and oppression in the service of liberty, destroying the freedom and unity of Spirit, replacing it with the false unity of state bureaucracy, human custom, and tradition.²⁶³ But the ends of the Spirit, Berdyaev says, can be achieved only through the ends themselves, not through some other means.²⁶⁴ Thus, he concludes, only freedom can achieve freedom, truth can achieve truth, and love can achieve love.

3. THE SYMBOL AND DYNAMIC OF SPIRIT

The world of means that progresses towards the achievement, not of real ends but of other means, is futile. It is a cyclical world, a self-enclosed movement without end. What makes the world meaningful, that is, what makes the world alive, is the end, and the end is (*in*) the Spirit.²⁶⁵ The end creates the connections between things in the material world. When "the mind is turned towards the divine world, it discovers everywhere an inner connection and meaning."²⁶⁶ The human mind reads the deeper meaning of the divine End through its symbols. For Berdyaev, all that is in the material, empirical world is a symbol of the Spirit. History, as we have said, is for him a symbol and expression of the movements of the Spirit. Berdyaev explains that any symbol presupposes two worlds that are united.²⁶⁷ The symbol is a sign of unity. Take, for example, a book or a painting. They have material existence; they are symbolic representations of the spirit of the writer and the artist. They are also objects that bring together two subjects, two souls, two worlds. We read the soul and the mind of the artist through the symbols of language and image. In the same way, we read the "soul" and the "mind" of God in history and nature. Society and politics are reflections of the inner state of the people who create them. Architecture and physical environment are symbols of the inner, spiritual environment and architecture. The symbol is relation-in-separation,²⁶⁸ and for that reason, it is something positive, something intrinsically good. The symbol can be a relation between spiritual and natural, a relation between I and Thou,

²⁶³ FS, 43

²⁶⁴ FS, 44

²⁶⁵ FS, 53

²⁶⁶ FS, 53

²⁶⁷ FS, 53, sf. TMH, 121 "The symbol is a bridge between two worlds: it affirms that perfect form is attainable only beyond a certain boundary, but not in the closed circle of terrestrial life." (TMH, 121)

²⁶⁸ FS, 53

between us and God. The symbol is an image of the inner world, of that which Kant described as the "things in themselves." Through the symbol, things in themselves go out of themselves and reveal themselves. They reveal not their symbolic nature, i.e., their material qualities, but their spiritual meaning, their *end*. So, while delimiting two worlds, the symbol unites them to one another for an end.²⁶⁹

The world as a symbol of the Spirit is dynamic because the Spirit is dynamic. The autocratic worldview, however, does not respect or accept the dynamic nature of the world. It desires a "static" world, a world of security and peace, and it is "hostile to every form of dynamism."²⁷⁰ Everything that achieves or tends to achieve peace and stillness in the temporal, visible world opens itself to the possibility of becoming an idol. National habits, monarchies, political regimes that survived attacks from their opponents and held power for years, long-lasting organizations, and different kinds of dogma, state constitutions, and political leaders, tend to acquire over time a "sacred significance" presented in their authoritarian worldview as "absolute and unchangeable."²⁷¹ This makes of the symbol, of its positive nature, something negative; it transforms the symbol from a sign of the divine and the real into an idol of the profane and unreal. It is not possible, Berdyaev says, for the world that is a symbol of life, an expression of the Spirit, to be static, unchangeable. The origin of the anti-religious feeling, of "atheistic materialism and positivism," is rooted in the false perception of the world as static and permanent.²⁷²

The Spirit "stirs" the world. The Spirit creates constitutions, political regimes, organizations; they are its symbols and expression. But the Spirit does not rest in them forever. It continues to make history. The symbols come from the Spirit, but once created, the Spirit leaves them and goes ahead, to express itself anew, to reveal itself anew. The Spirit is a divine dynamic, an abyss of movement, a stirred sea, which leaves man in awe and dread. Matter collapses within the Spirit and arises through the Spirit. The Spirit departs and disappears, while the outward

²⁶⁹ FS, 53

²⁷⁰ FS, 57

²⁷¹ FS, 57

²⁷² FS, 58

embodiment, like an impression of reality on a dream, remains and is regarded with veneration.²⁷³ The Spirit, Berdyaev says, cannot tolerate any subordination to the static, it cannot be imprisoned in customs and traditions.²⁷⁴ "When the 'carnal' and exterior symbolism no longer gives expression to the inner life of the Spirit, its sanctity disappears, and the kingdoms and civilizations which were based upon its support fall into ruin."²⁷⁵ Then, a new form of symbolism appears and gives expression to a spiritual state, which is different.²⁷⁶ The alternative, Berdyaev says, to a static perception of the world, to materialist conservatism and authoritarianism, is the concept that apprehends the reality of spiritual dynamic, and that reads the signs of another world wherever they appear.²⁷⁷

What, then, are Christian "dogmas"? Are they, too, quenchers of the Spirit? No, Berdyaev says, because Christian dogmas are irrational, paradoxical, unnatural; they are not bound to any necessity, they do not rest on reason and logic, but on inner sense and faith. Because of their irrationality, they find new forms of expression in every new generation.²⁷⁸ "The dogmas of the Divine Trinity, the dual nature of God-Man Christ, and of Redemption through the mystery of the Cross, have always been folly."²⁷⁹ Their folly makes them permanent; through their foolishness they transfigure the world ceaselessly. The "folly of the Cross" is a "revelation of another world," of a "truth which is from above."²⁸⁰ The folly itself proves the otherworldliness of the Kingdom of the Spirit. Jesus says, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children." (Matt. 11:25) The permanent can be found only in the perplexing, in the miracle; only the miracle and the paradox can preserve the dynamic of Spirit, and stay unchanged. That's why, Berdyaev says, the full adaptation of Christianity to *this* world, to its mind, wisdom, and learning, is wrong. To adapt a

²⁷³ FS, 58

²⁷⁴ FS, 58

²⁷⁵ FS, 58

²⁷⁶ FS, 58

²⁷⁷ FS, 59

²⁷⁸ FS, 81

²⁷⁹ FS, 78

²⁸⁰ FS, 79

miracle, to explain a miracle, to "de-mythologize" a miracle, is to kill it, to make of it a "truth from the past," a truth that once was, and now is not. It is to make of it a superstition. What Max Weber and Charles Taylor call "disenchantment," is in fact, mortification of life. If the Christian dogma of the crucified God-man is rationalized and sterilized in another, this time human, dogma of a "historical" Jesus, its truth as a permanent sign of the Kingdom of Heaven would be lost. Thus will be lost all imagination, creativity, life.

4. REVELATION AND FREEDOM IN SPIRIT

For Berdyaev, the miracle of Christianity is the miracle of all miracles. Christianity is "the religion of religions."²⁸¹ The Divine, he says, is "revealed in pagan religions as well as in Christianity, and it is manifested through nature and natural religions." But there is no religion or manifestation of the Divine greater than the manifestation of "Christ and His Personality." In Christ, the hope, the imagination, the faith of all religions was fulfilled.²⁸² In many religions, Berdyaev says, immortality was anticipated, but only in Christianity was it "ontologically accomplished."²⁸³ Christianity, he believes, appeared in the world precisely as the "realization of all these expectations and prefigurings."²⁸⁴

The revelation of God is manifested everywhere in varying degrees. His revelation in nature, for example, is just a stage leading to his full revelation in the Son. Revelation takes place in the Spirit, and through the Spirit in the world. "The Father is revealed in nature objectively before He is revealed by the Son at the deepest spiritual levels."²⁸⁵ The Father is manifested in the world, first as power, and not so much as truth.²⁸⁶ In the Old Testament, the search for truth is the search for the manifestation of the Father as Truth. "Fear from God" is accompanied by the "search for God," because God as Truth is still unknown. Power is a natural category, while truth

²⁸¹ FS, 88. See also "Lecture Seven" in Solovyov, Zouboff. 1948, 151-153

²⁸² FS, 89

²⁸³ FS, 89

²⁸⁴ FS, 89

²⁸⁵ FS, 91

²⁸⁶ FS, 91

is a spiritual one.²⁸⁷ Power is the visible, truth the hidden. "It is only in the Son, in Christ, that the inner nature of the heavenly Father is [fully] revealed."²⁸⁸ In the Son, the Father was not revealed as natural power, but as a suffering man, bearing the hidden meaning of life. The revelation of the Trinity is not that of a "heavenly monarchy," a unity that rests on power, but that of heavenly love, of "divine *sobornost*."²⁸⁹

Revelation is seen through the signs of history and the world, but it actually happens in the depths of the Spirit. It happens in the heart of man, in the form of meaning, as a discovery of "truth." It does not come as a natural category, through power and coercion; it comes spiritually. We cannot understand the Gospel, Berdyaev says, the revelation and truth, except in the light of our spiritual experiences.²⁹⁰ God is revealed only in the "religious consciousness," revealed to my own spirit through the means of His Spirit. Again, the end (the revelation of God, the Spirit) comes through the end itself. It is "Spirit to spirit, and Meaning to meaning."²⁹¹ The revelation is a "Divine-Human process," the meeting of two natures, "which are inwardly allied to one another."²⁹² It is a "free spiritual act," where the search for proofs is unnecessary. When the spirit of man meets the Spirit of God, man does not need proof that he has met Him. Why? Because the spirit of man is from the Spirit of God, and the two are in agreement. There is no antithesis in the Spirit. There is unity, *sobornost* that rests on absolute, undeterred agreement. This is a fellowship devoid of all coercion, legalism, domination, argument, and division. In other words, it is a "freedom unconstrained by the outward and objective."²⁹³

Liberty, Berdyaev says, is a spiritual and religious category.²⁹⁴ It is not a political concept. It is not a naturalistic or metaphysical concept either. And he believes that Christianity is the teaching, the religion, that brings freedom and liberty to the world. Apart from Christianity there

²⁸⁷ FS, 91

²⁸⁸ FS, 91

²⁸⁹ FS, 91

²⁹⁰ FS, 93-94

²⁹¹ FS, 94

²⁹² FS, 94

²⁹³ FS, 117

²⁹⁴ FS, 94

is no freedom, he says.²⁹⁵ There is no political project or program, no human aspiration, that could be called "liberal" or productive of freedom while remaining apart from Christianity and its religious, spiritual truth. Only Christian freedom is truly liberating. For him, Christian truth brings the Spirit to the soul and the body of a person and a nation. Man, for Berdyaev, is not "born free," but in Christianity man is "re-born" in the Spirit and so liberated from his past and his fallen nature. Through Christianity, a person and a nation are liberated from the dictates of the "material crust," from reliance on false security and from burdening necessity.

5. BEING, PERSON, FREEDOM, AND GOD

"I have long had my doubts," Berdyaev says, "about the truth of ontologism in general and of Plato's ontology in particular."²⁹⁶ It has been said that Berdyaev affirms freedom over being, and the fundamental reason for this assertion is in his personalist and existentialist philosophical and theological outlook. "True philosophy," he says, "must reach out towards concrete reality,"²⁹⁷ and concrete reality is found in the existential experience of the human person. One may say that person and being are fundamental ontological concepts, and one would not be far from the truth. But the problem that Berdyaev discerns regarding ontology and the concept of "being" is that being is understood, not so much as a concrete reality, but as "nature" and "idea." Being is often understood as something general, something "common" that serves as a reference point to concrete being. Take, for example, the proposition "Socrates is a man, but 'man' (the genus) is not, properly speaking, Socrates." According to this proposition, Socrates is first man, and only then Socrates. This makes of Socrates a derivative, so to say, from man, and as a derivative, Socrates could always be sacrificed for man in general, which is what in fact happened to him. *He* (Socrates the person) was sentenced to death for the "good" of *it* (society, the whole). He, with his teaching and questioning, endangers the *stasis* of the whole to which he belongs. The whole can do without Socrates, but Socrates cannot do without the whole, and Socrates himself has proved this through

²⁹⁵ FS, 120

²⁹⁶ SF, 73

²⁹⁷ FS, 73

his own actions, choosing death (i.e., the will and supremacy of the whole) instead of exile (i.e., individual salvation).

Similar was the fate of Jesus. The "ontological view" of reality and the world, according to Berdyaev, supports the sacrifice of the part for the whole. It supports, on a deeper and principal level, the sacrifice of Socrates and Jesus: the world can go on without them; moreover, it even could be "saved" through destroying them. The ontological perspective that gives primacy to the whole over the single individual is articulated by Caiaphas: "You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." (John 11:50) The concrete person, the existing being, is dissolved in the concept, the idea of being. For Berdyaev, what we describe as a "whole," as "nature" (the universal), is not prior to what we see as single and concrete. "In Parmenides and Plato," he says, "the idea of being is a 'universal common.'"²⁹⁸ The "individually unique" is either "derivative, subordinate, or illusory." In Plato, "real things are universals," whereas "plurality and individuality" are a "secondary world," a "neglected world, not completely real." Berdyaev does not agree with such a view. And we should note here that he is not a nominalist.²⁹⁹ In fact he often criticizes nominalism; he does not reject the existence and

²⁹⁸ FS, 74

²⁹⁹ Here is Vincent McNamara's insightful description of Berdyaev's treatment of nominalism and realism: "For Berdyaev, the problem of what is the truth in regard to universals and the objective world is incorrectly presented. It is true, according to Berdyaev, that universals are found neither *ante rem* (realism and platonic idealism), nor *post rem* (empirical nominalism), but in *rebus*; universals exist in the singular, that is, in the person as a primary quality. Universals are not found in an ideal supra-personal sphere, but in the person situated on the existential level. The universal and supra-personal values are part of the world of subjectivity, and thus the cosmos, humanity, society, are in the person and not the contrary. The universal, then, is not general, abstract, but is in the concrete. [...] For him, both nominalism and realism are two extremes of abstractions, and for this reason cannot arrive at the singular existent. He makes a distinction between the general and the universal; the universals are product of objectifications, and thus are not existential, whereas the general is spirit, and in the subject, and, in a true sense, is the universal. Thus, the true universality which man wishes to attain is in the subject." V. McNamara, "Some Basic Notions of the Personalism of Nicolas Berdyaev." *Laval théologique et philosophique*, (1960) 16(2), 278-302. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019996ar>. D.B. Richardson also argues that Berdyaev's philosophy "cannot be an extreme realism, where the idea is more real than the thing, nor a nominalism, where the meaning, the logos of the thing is unreal." He refers to Berdyaev's own words in *Dream and Reality* on "the traditional controversy between the 'realists' and the 'nominalists.'": "I am, both intellectually and emotionally, opposed to realist conceptualism and do not believe in any general ideas or universals representing not particular and individual images but a supposed essence of things. ... On the other hand, I cannot identify myself with the nominalist position, because it appears to undermine the idea of the human person, and fails to recognize the eternal image of man. I am not concerned to deny

reality of universals; he rather rejects the view that makes them prior or superior to the reality of the concrete person, that transforms them into "objectified principles."³⁰⁰

All unity is made of separate individuals; without them, there is no unity at all, the genus consists of individuals, and the genus does not give the entire truth about every particular. It is easy to prove this. Can we say that our "idea" of humanity explains completely the person of Socrates? No, rather we should say that Socrates, as a unique person, goes beyond what we may describe with the general term "humanity" and that he gives us much more information about human being than any abstract ontological concept. And Socrates is not the best proof and example. Jesus could serve as an even better illustration. Can we say that our knowledge of what "man" is can reveal what kind of man Jesus Christ is? No. On the contrary, the man Jesus Christ reveals, in his *concrete* person and experience, what man is, and what he reveals is much more than what we could say following an empirical or Platonic ontological theory. Thus, we understand what Berdyaev means by arguing that "within existence, the one, the individual, is universal, concretely universal."³⁰¹

Being, he says, is "nature" (*ousia*), what is common (the Godhead). But the Spirit is not nature, it is "subject," "act," "freedom," "person."³⁰² "God is not being in the sense of substance."³⁰³ When I say, "I am existing," the "I" in the sentence, is primary to "existing," to being.³⁰⁴ "Personality (I) is more primary than being (exist)," Berdyaev says. "And this is the basis

any reality to universals or to restrict philosophy to the particular; rather, I am concerned to find a universal in the particular, to understand the abstract concretely, instead of understanding the concrete abstractly... The revolt against the domination of the "general," therefore, is legitimate and receives its impetus from the Christian conception of God, who is neither Plato's idea of the Good nor Aristotle's concept of the pure act, but the 'God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,' the God who is made man and with whom man enters into personal relations. I am convinced that all philosophical foundations demand re-examination in the light of this Christian affirmation of the pre-eminence of the personal and the singular." (D.B. Richardson.1968. *Berdyaev's Philosophy of History*, Marlinus Nijholl, The Hague, pp.116-117; DR, 289)

³⁰⁰ SF, 74

³⁰¹ SF, 74

³⁰² SF, 75

³⁰³ SF, 75

³⁰⁴ This argument reminds us of Plotinus's "aphophatic" interpretation of Being. Although critical of Plotinus' interpretation of God and the soul, Berdyaev shares some of his basic views. "Negative theology," he says, "recognizes

of personalism."³⁰⁵ He is convinced that the idea of being as primary has become "one of the sources of slavery for man."³⁰⁶ Being, nature, existence cannot serve as a basis for freedom. There is no dynamism in the idea of "nature." What we call nature is something we think of as static and unchangeable. Nature is something that does not change. But if we believe in the Divine-human communion, in *theosis*, we cannot accept the dictate of "nature." *Theosis* is a dynamic process. This does not mean that nature does not exist or that it has no place in theory and reality, it means rather that nature is not primary when we speak about personhood and freedom. Within the subject, that is, within the person, the "individual is higher and the common is lower."³⁰⁷

that there is something higher than being. God is not being. He is greater and higher, more mysterious than our rationalized concept of being. Knowledge of being is not the last thing, nor the first. The One in Plotinus is on the other side of being. The depth of the apophatic theology of Plotinus, however, is distorted by monism according to which the separate entity issues from the addition of non-being." (N.A. Berdyaev. 1952. *The Beginning and the End*, [Russian title *Опыт Эсхатологической Метафизики*] YMCA-Press, p.100) For more on Plotinus see Paul Di Rado, and Michael Wiitala, "In What Sense Does the One Exist? Existence and Hypostasis in Plotinus" in Finamor and Layne (Ed.) 2018. *Platonic Pathways* (The Prometheus Trust, pp.77-92.) See also Charles Kahn. "A Return to the Theory of the Verb Be and the Concept of Being." *Ancient Philosophy* 24, no. 2 (2004): 381-405. Berdyaev's argument reminds also of Pseudo-Dionysius' mystical theology where the "essence," or the "I" of God, is absolutely unknown. For a commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius and Plotinus, see Vladimir Lossky. 1944. *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient*. (Aubier. <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/1955209.html>) In his "*The Courage to Be*," Paul Tillich describes Berdyaev as a "follower of both Dionysius and Böhme," but this description, in my opinion, is a bit exaggerated. (Paul Tillich. 1980. *The Courage to Be*. Yale University Press. p. 33)

³⁰⁵ SF, 75

³⁰⁶ SF, 75

³⁰⁷ SF, 78. This claim does not contradict the Thomistic (or Catholic) idea of the "common good." It is of utmost importance how one interprets the common good and individual good, between which there should be no discrepancy or contradiction, because the common and the private belong to one universal good; that is, the Supreme Good, God. When we speak about individuals, or parts, we should say, following Aquinas, that the "being of the part is for the sake of the being of the whole." (SCG, 27) This claim could be challenged because it seems to lead to "totalitarian" conclusions—that one can spare the being of the particular for the good and survival of the whole. However, we should note that here Aquinas speaks about the being, not about the *destruction*, of the part. Aquinas continues: "So it is that *the good of the nation is more godlike than the good of one man*" (SCG, 27). We should emphasize here that his conclusion does not imply that the *destruction* of one man is more godlike if done for the sake of the nation. The common good about which Aquinas speaks does not contradict the particular good of the part, nor does he suggest that the particular good can be greater than the common good. In other words, the common good, if it is truly common and good, does not require the destruction of any of its constituent parts. We should remember that Jesus was (wrongly) sentenced to death for the sake of the nation, but (rightly) resurrected for the sake of the Truth, that is, for the sake of the Supreme Good. So, on this question, we should note that Berdyaev's opinion does not contradict the Catholic, Thomistic idea of the common good. (See Thomas Aquinas. 1944. *The Basic Writings of Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. 2. The Summa Contra Gentiles, Ch. XVII, That All Things Are Directed to One End, Which is God. pp.27-28)

"Personalism," Berdyaev says, "is also universalism," but on better ground, the non-ground (*Ungrund*) of freedom. It is a paradox, and close to non-sense, to base something on an abyss, but the paradox and the miracle, as already observed, is the only source of constant regeneration and creation. We admit that the earth, on whose ground we walk and live, hangs on "nothing." (Job 26:7) In the same way, being hangs on nothing, on void, and freedom, and neither earth nor being are annihilated or destroyed by this fundamental void and freedom; this freedom and void rather permit earthly things and beings to go beyond themselves (beyond their "nature"); to go, metaphorically *and* literally speaking, to "heaven."

Berdyaev notes that Christianity is "personalism,"³⁰⁸ and in Christianity the "person rebels against the world order." In its revolt, "it is united with God" who is a "Person," and "certainly not" an "abstract being." Jesus is a concrete person, and not an "idea"—something that Feuerbach and positivism, in general, tried to prove. God, according to Berdyaev, does not create "world order," he rather creates "persons" that are an image and likeness of Him. And man is "confronted not by abstract truth, but by the Truth, as the way and the life. 'I am the Truth, the Way, and the Life.'"³⁰⁹ (John 14:6)

And here we come to the Trinitarian terms on which Berdyaev builds his political theology. Man, he says, is part of the Second Hypostasis (Christ, the God-man), and man receives his liberation through the Spirit, that is the Third Hypostasis,³¹⁰ which comes through Christ from the Father, the First Hypostasis. Man receives his liberty through grace—through an act of freedom, not of necessity. "The mystery of the unity between two persons finds its solution in the Trinity" Berdyaev says, "No resolution of the relations between God and man is apart from the Third Person, that is, apart from the Spirit, Who is love realized. The kingdom of Love in freedom is the kingdom of the Trinity."³¹¹ For that very reason, Berdyaev says, "it is only within Christianity that fullness of human liberty exists."³¹² Christianity reveals through Christ, the God-man, the reality

³⁰⁸ SF, 80-81

³⁰⁹ SF, 81

³¹⁰ FS, 139

³¹¹ FS, 139

³¹² FS, 139

of existence, which is based on love and freedom. Here we do not speak about "Trinitarian monarchism," in fact, we do not speak about "hierarchism," as the Orthodox critique of the *Filioque* is sometimes described. It is not about who is first and who is last (there is no such thing in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity). We rather speak about persons and communion in freedom. We also do not speak about nature, some abstract unity, but about an actual and concrete "dynamism" between the divine Persons, in whom the divine Nature (God) is revealed as a non-coercive unity. God in Christianity is not an "absolute monarch."³¹³ "Only the religion of God in Three Persons," Berdyaev says, "succeeds definitely in getting past this monarchist or imperialist conception of God by revealing the life of God as a divine Trinity and thus vindicating liberty."³¹⁴ And what is even more amazing, "God, the Son, veiled beneath the form of a crucified slave, does not force recognition of Himself upon anyone."³¹⁵ Only "the religion of truth crucified is the religion of the freedom of the spirit. Truth crucified possesses no logical nor juridical power of compulsion [...] It made its appearance in the world as infinite love."³¹⁶

In Christianity, God is not "objectified," he is not an "object of servile reverence,"³¹⁷ he is a Creator, he is a "lawgiver," and a "final judge," if you like, but he is not "Baal" (a "master") or a coercive imposer of private will (cf. Hosea 2:16). God permits human autonomy; what he does not *ultimately* permit is the abuse of power. That's why he is not like an earthly Caesar, a prince of this world, because the prince of this world is a liar and abuser of power. He needs neither God nor man, his only dream is self-power. But the Lord is a suffering God, a "Lover who yearns for His other." This was not understood by the "average" wisdom that made of God a "human idea."³¹⁸ In his writings, Berdyaev often blamed the perverted "absolutist monarchical understanding of God," equating the Lord of Hosts to the prince of this world, for the rise of

³¹³ FS, 139

³¹⁴ FS, 139

³¹⁵ FS, 140

³¹⁶ FS, 141

³¹⁷ SF, 82

³¹⁸ SF, 82

atheism as a "righteous revolt"³¹⁹ and for the appearance of all kinds of authoritarianism and totalitarianism in human history.

³¹⁹ SF, 85

CHAPTER TWO. CREATIVITY

1. THE ETHICS OF LAW

Freedom is still nothing (pure *potentia*) if it does not serve for a good purpose. The existence of freedom, of *Ungrund*, cannot be revealed if there is no act of creation. The act of creation produces Being, and the act of creation reveals the existence of freedom. Without a creative act, there is no freedom at all. The creative act is always an act of freedom, but it is not freedom that gives birth to creativity, life, and being. It is creativity in the Spirit that produces life and being and freedom.

In this part of our discourse, we will discuss Berdyaev's theory of creativity. Creativity, as we have said in the introduction, is the second pillar of Berdyaev's philosophy and political theology. If freedom is a rather morally ambiguous idea, creativity, on the other hand, is a purely positive ethical concept. In freedom, we can have both darkness and light. We have, for example, the freedom of the Spirit ("light") and the freedom of the abyss ("darkness"), of non-existence and of not yet created. In Scripture, when God creates, He calls the creation "good," so His creative act is "good" *par excellence*. But the darkness of the abyss against which the creative act takes place is described neither as "good" nor as "evil." In the Genesis story, there is no openly expressed ethical evaluation of the "chaos," of *Ungrund*, and we just presume that the abyss is bad since the good is in God and creation. The abyss is still nothing and there are no ethical categories applied to it. In the Gospel of John (John 1:1-5), the darkness is described as contrary to the "light," that is, to the good, and we assume that the darkness is something evil. But, again, even in John we do not have an explicit description of nothingness as "something bad." So, with the concept of freedom as nothingness or darkness, we are confronted by a kind of ethical ambiguity.³²⁰

Freedom is *potency*. As potency, the ethical evaluation of freedom is still unfinished. Freedom, properly speaking, should not be interpreted as an ethical concept. In its pure form, it is

³²⁰ Here, to help our understanding, we could appeal again to John Zizioulas. Since nothingness has "absolutely no ontological content," Zizioulas says in *Communion and Otherness*, it has neither positive nor negative character. (Zizioulas, 2009, 273-4)

simply *potentia* (capacity). On a fundamental level, freedom is before and beyond ethics. It becomes an ethical concept only when *potentia* is transformed into being through an act of creation. And even then, as we have said, it is not yet a fully ethical concept, because in the creative act, freedom, or *potentia*, takes the shape *only* of something good. Without the creative act, freedom is still unrealized good or barren nothingness.

This means that the question of ethics and morality, if we follow Berdyaev, appears not with freedom, but with the Fall (Original Sin). The Fall produces an ethical dimension of reality and existence. According to Berdyaev, we have three types of ethics related to creativity and freedom that correspond to three general periods in human history. The first type is the "ethics of law" (or normative ethics). This ethics deals with the negative aspects of freedom and with the fallen world. In the ethics of law, creativity is stalled, and freedom is considered only as a source of sin. The second type is the "ethics of redemption." This ethics is about positive freedom in Christ. In the epoch of the ethics of redemption, the good in creation that had been lost with the Fall is restored through the free and creative act of Christ's sacrifice. And the third type of ethics is the "ethics of creativity," which is the ethics of the "last times." This ethics is concerned with the positive freedom that is not only in God but also in man; this is the ethics of personhood and human dignity. Now, we shall discuss these three types of ethics one by one.

The existence of "ethical dualism," Berdyaev says, implies that creation "has been damaged."³²¹ The existence of morality is due not so much to the existence of "good," as we have seen in the story of Creation (where "good" is not confronted by "evil," but by nothingness, or darkness), but rather to the "fall," to the original sin. To discern between "good" and "evil," Berdyaev says, is to face sin. Sin, properly speaking, makes of good a "necessity," it distorts the "nature" of good as an act of freedom. "Herein lies the fundamental paradox of ethics: the moral good has a bad origin and its bad origin pursues it like a curse."³²² Thus, "law comes from sin and

³²¹ DM, 109

³²² DM, 110

makes sin manifest."³²³ The *moral* good, represented by law, cannot conquer sin, as the Apostle says.³²⁴ It can only expose it and keep it within limits.

According to Berdyaev, the law has a "double nature": it is good, but not enough for salvation.³²⁵ And the ethics of law is "essentially social,"³²⁶ not like the ethics of redemption and creativeness that are essentially "personalistic." In the ethics of law, the human person is subordinated, made secondary. This ethic is simultaneously humanistic and anti-human—both helping and enslaving. In the primitive mind, Berdyaev says, the ethics of law is ethics, first of all, of "vengeance." It is used as "retributive justice" and "moral discrimination."³²⁷ The aim of the ethics of law is not so much to bring good but to deliver justice. It is a communal or social ethics that aims to restrain unruly instincts and to create order. This is the ethics of conservatives like Pobedonostsev and Karamzin; social and political ethics that aim to educate and impose norms, that impose justice from above. The ethics of law is the ethics of the absolutist state; it is not the ethics of the Slavophiles, who imagined an order based on freedom and spiritual agreement.

The problem with normative ethics is that it prevents the creation of a "new order." It is not a coincidence that the conservatives are its political representatives and defenders. The aim of the *profane* (secular) conservatism is not to "create," but to preserve. The problem with this is that it preserves an already fallen world, and that it wants to present this fallen world as the best possible one. That is why the ethics of law degenerates very easily into an instrument for "tyrannical instincts."³²⁸ Another issue with normative ethics is that it regards the individual person as secondary and subdued under the dictate of the whole. Normative ethics is the ethics of the ontological worldview, which we have discussed in the previous section.

³²³ DM, 110

³²⁴ "For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace." (Rom. 6:14) "But now, having died to what bound us, we have been released from the Law, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." (Rom. 7:6) "For in Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death." (Rom. 8:2) "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law." (Gal. 5:18)

³²⁵ DM, 111

³²⁶ DM, 112

³²⁷ DM, 114

³²⁸ DM, 116

Berdyayev says that Socrates was among the first who tried to place personal conscience, the "law in the heart of man", above the positive law of state and community. For Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, obedience to God (or "Natural Right") meant more than obedience to a monarch or community. But the Greek conscience, Berdyayev adds, "never completely liberated personality from the power of the city-state." "This liberation," he says, "was only achieved by Christianity."³²⁹

Berdyayev is convinced that normative ethics, legalism, leads man to slavery, to a "slavish relation to the monarch, the chief, the rich and powerful, as well as to the mass, the crowd, the majority."³³⁰ In other words, for him, legalism brings the human person under the dictate of monarchy, capital, communism, and democracy. Legalism, according to Berdyayev, is always about external compulsion and external order. It has no real, positive power over the souls of people. Its main tools are physical coercion and fear. We have seen in Part One how important the role of "fear" was for Petrine conservatives like Prokopovich and Karamzin. We also have seen that through Uvarov's dictum there was an attempt of the conservatives to relate faith, monarchy, and people, and so to import external legalism into the "soul" of the nation. This attempt, as history showed, had failed. The "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, People" of the old regime was defeated by another group of "legalists" and "moralists"—the communists. And history showed again that the order that communism imposed also failed. Because it was, again, an external order, an order that does not really appeal to or change the "soul" of the people, and that does not care for the dignity and freedom of the individual person. Normative ethics imposes an institutional order that rests on coercion and necessity, it destroys certain vices and opposes anarchy and mass violence, but it does not change the spirit of the people, nor educate them, as Karamzin and Pobedonostev hoped, in civic virtues and morality. Berdyayev concludes that the highest expression of legal positivism, of normative ethics, is the state. "The State," he says, "is not only from God, it is also from the devil."³³¹

³²⁹ DM, 120

³³⁰ DM, 121

³³¹ DM, 121

In Scripture, normative ethics is represented by the Pharisees.³³² Phariseism put Jesus to death. All prophets were persecuted and killed "according to the law." But the Gospel, Berdyaev says, places "the sinner [...] above the Pharisees."³³³ The Phariseism of Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor "does not need" a "Savior and salvation." As far as there are peace and order, it does not really care for the inner disposition from which human sin proceeds. Pharisaic legalism is powerless against sin. Law preserves ("conserves"), as we have said, but it does not heal. In its best form, normative ethics is expressed in the idea of "duty," and its natural limit and the most excellent display is the act of duty. Normative ethics never extends into love. It does not believe in love. As a duty, the ethics of law says, "I must love my neighbour in Christ [...]" But if I have no love [...] I must, in any case, fulfill the law [...] and treat him [my neighbour] justly and honorably."³³⁴ This is what Kantian normative ethics teaches. But "the higher," Berdyaev says, love and grace, "does not conceal the lower [duty], but includes it in a sublimated form."³³⁵

2. THE ETHICS OF REDEMPTION

The ethic that restores the good in the fallen world is the ethics of redemption. The ethics of redemption does not know limits. It is not concerned with the coercive imposition of order. It is the ethics of love and freedom. In it, duty is melted into an act of love. But this is not, properly speaking, a human ethics. The ethics of redemption is a "reconciliation of man to God, the Creator." Its first act comes from God Himself. It springs from God. The ethics of redemption is a "victory over atheism,"³³⁶ over the mere reliance on duty. It does not conserve, it *heals*. It destroys the root of sin because it restores the health of the spirit. Through the ethics of redemption, man is liberated from the judgment of law and coercion. This ethics is personalistic. In it, society is secondary. It brings salvation first to man, the individual person, and then to society in general.

³³² DM, 125

³³³ DM, 127

³³⁴ DM, 131

³³⁵ DM, 131

³³⁶ DM, 134

In the ethics of redemption that Christ performs on the cross, there is not an *idea* of "supreme good." Christianity, Berdyaev says, is not built on an "abstract idea of good."³³⁷ It is built on an *actual* sacrifice, on a *deed*, performed by *one concrete person*, a deed that appeals to all who witness and are ready to respond. In Christianity, which absorbs the ethics of law within the ethics of redemption, the person is above "any idea of good." This means, according to Berdyaev, that the "ethics of the Gospel is based upon existence," upon a performed act, "and not upon (an ideal) norm."³³⁸ "The Sabbath," Berdyaev reminds, "is for man and not man for the Sabbath—this is the great moral revolution made by Christianity." (Luke 6:1, Mark 3:1-6) The ethics of redemption is not social ethics; it is not concerned with the delivery of justice. It is concerned with the gift of redemption and freedom. In it, freedom is not the "gate" to sin or the source of destruction. It is rather an opportunity, a *potentia* for practical good. It is the primordial freedom, the mystical "darkness" beyond good and evil, pregnant with the act of love, with *the creative act*.

Christianity, Berdyaev says, "knows no abstract moral norms, binding upon all men and at all times [...]; for a Christian every moral problem demands its own individual solution."³³⁹ In other words, for the Christian every moral problem demands a creative response rather than a legal prescription. The creative response is a response out of freedom and love, and as such, it is bound only to the situation that waits for a solution and not to an abstract norm. The Samaritan in the Christian Gospel (Luke 10:25-37) did not follow a particular moral rule when helping the man in trouble. He did not create "a situation," he did not go out with the intention to save human lives, he was not appointed by a state or by some other authority to help people in need, that is, he was not an official on duty, nor was he prepared for the "case" with special norms, duties, or legal rights. The Samaritan acted *spontaneously* and in a concrete way, helping a concrete person. He was not a lawgiver or a judge, yet he acted as a lawgiver because he performed the law (without thinking of the "letter of the law"). In contrast to the lawgiver and the judge, duty (or some written norm or rule) did not play a role in his generous, just, and salvific (*redeeming*) act. Only love played a role. He saved the life of the man without resorting to violence, without arguing or

³³⁷ DM, 136

³³⁸ DM, 136

³³⁹ DM, 137

defending some fine intellectual, ethical point, he did not seek for justice for the beaten and robbed, he did not judge, blame, or persecute the perpetrators. He just turned out of his way, acted (helped), and resumed his journey. Finally, he did not expect or ask for a reward; he just did his loving act, his *moral* act, with diligence, in silence. The Good Samaritan went on his way and, in his salvific act of love, no human dignity was violated.

The ethics of redemption is the ethics of Christ. It is the ethics of love. "Love," Berdyaev says, "can only be directed towards a person."³⁴⁰ And he adds: "The only thing higher than the love for man is the love for God, Who is [...] a Person and not an abstract idea. The love of God and the love of man sums up the Gospel morality."³⁴¹ The "common good" in Aristotelian ethics and legalism is still an abstract good. True, it has its place in the order of things, but the "common good" (Cicero's "*summun bonum*"), for Berdyaev, is not and cannot be the supreme and leading principle of Christian ethics. The supreme, he believes, is not in the common, but in *this* concrete person, our "neighbour," and in God, without Whom, we would never see our neighbour with the eyes of love. Christianity, Berdyaev says—perhaps borrowing and Christianizing the belief of secular Westernizers such as Herzen and authors such as N. Fedorov—teaches love for those who are close to us, and is not concerned with some "abstract other," "good," or "idea." He reminds us that for the sake of abstract love—the love for principles, dogmas, and idols—men were "ready to sacrifice concrete living beings." Christian love is a concrete love, a love for a concrete person, for the one who is near us, whom we know personally, whom we can see and touch, with whom we communicate daily,³⁴² while the love of the "humanist," of the theoretician, the moralist, the

³⁴⁰ DM, 137

³⁴¹ DM, 137

³⁴² In an article entitled "In Defense of Ethics," published in *Put'*, Georgy Fedotov, who read and commented approvingly on Berdyaev's *Destiny of Man*, writes that the ethical act is like an act of "art" and "creativity." The creative act, Fedotov says, comes from the "concrete intuition of the artist." "Absolutely similar," he argues, "is the structure of the ethical act. The moral act does not consist at all in the application of the law. The latter [the law] has its place in a lower moral sphere that corresponds to a lower sphere of art—the almost mechanical reproduction, the ready-made cliché. [...] It is not the law that defines the moral meaning of an act, but consideration of the optimal solution, i.e., the choice of the best possibility. The law could be followed, but it could also be avoided. [...] The law [the positive law] is not one; there are many laws, often inconsistent and contradictory. And, finally, along with the laws, there is an entire world of living people, natures, and personalities. [...] The moral heroism is accessible to everyone. Everyone can repeat it, can show his own metaphysical depth, and can become what we call an "ethical

philosopher, the socialist, the nationalist, etc., is "abstract and impersonal."³⁴³ In fact, secular humanism is not love at all, in its best it is just duty and nothing more. The Gospel, Berdyaev concludes, is based not upon the law (or duty), nor upon abstraction, but upon Christ, and the Person of Christ.³⁴⁴

The ethics of redemption, in Berdyaev's philosophy, is an ethics of the sublime. Love overflows and bears fruit; this "emptying" or "overflowing" finds its expression in creativity. The ethics of redemption, that is an ethic of freedom, restores the creative spirit in man and reveals his "creative vocation."³⁴⁵ The very fact of creativity tells us that law and necessity are of a lesser order. But as love is not opposed to justice, so creativity is not opposed to law: love and creativity always contain in themselves justice and law.

3. THE ETHICS OF CREATIVITY

The ethics of redemption shows that man has a creative vocation, that every man is "talented" and that every man or thing is and could be a subject of love and creative action. Following Scripture, Berdyaev says that the "talents" that man receives from the Spirit of God should be multiplied; they should not be "buried under ground."³⁴⁶ (Matt. 25:14-30) Man has God-given gifts that are various for each individual person. These gifts are not "nothingness," they are not supposed to rest in the form of "unrealized freedom"; these are spiritual gifts, inclinations that aim to grow and bear fruit. In their dynamic—that we may describe as "realized freedom"—they are the source of created good and the basis of communion. They reveal the image of the triune Creator in man.

genius." In this all-inclusiveness [...] lies the closeness between morality and religion. That's why in the Gospel, Christ speaks about how to treat our neighbor [we are all able to treat him well], and says nothing about how to write poetry or compute." In short, Fedotov compares the moral act with the creative act of the genius, because it is an act of excellence and novelty and of the right choice, an act that does not depend on a written rule, an act to perform for the sake of one's neighbor that is well within the reach of everyone. See Г.П.Федотов, "В Защиту Этики" [In Defence of Ethics] in *Путь*, 1939. May-September, No. 60, pp. 4-18

³⁴³ DM, 138

³⁴⁴ DM, 159

³⁴⁵ Berdyaev, "The Ethics of Creativity" in A. Schmemmann, 1965. *Ultimate Questions: An Anthology of Modern Russian Religious Thought*, (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston), p. 243

³⁴⁶ Berdyaev, Schmemmann. 1965, 243

What is creativeness (*tvorchestvo*)? It is growth, Berdyaev says, "addition," making something new, something "that had not existed in the world before." "Creativeness is bringing forth out of nothing. Nothing becomes something."³⁴⁷ "Creativeness presupposes non-being."³⁴⁸ It is also an escape from sin and necessity. Creativeness is neither generation nor emanation; it is not evolution or redistribution.³⁴⁹ Creativeness is freedom. Human creativity, Berdyaev believes, is possible because the world was created out of nothing by a free and creative God, and because man was created in the divine image and likeness. (Gen. 1:26)

There are three elements in human creativity, Berdyaev says: the element of 1) freedom; 2) the gift of vocation, and 3) the already created world from which man can borrow his materials.³⁵⁰ Man is not the source of his gifts and vocation, and man did not create the matter from which he builds his "new creation."³⁵¹ Man, Berdyaev notes, does not create from an unfathomable, absolute void; nevertheless, like his Creator, when man creates, he creates out of freedom. Out of freedom means out of nothing, not out of necessity. Every act that brings forth something new, no matter whether this is a moral deed and (or) an act of professional skill and knowledge, is an act of freedom.

The creative act is a product of the creative spirit in man. Berdyaev compares this spirit and act to fire.³⁵² The creative act is an act of insight that brings the best and most excellent solution to a situation or a problem and that melts the reality of matter, space, and time in the furnace of spiritual inspiration and vision. In the creative act, the necessity of this world, the temporal and the earthly, is dissolved into the freedom of another world, the realm of the eternal and spiritual. The creative act is a transformative act. There is power, miraculous energy, in it—the power and energy of the spirit, of the undifferentiated and sudden insight that moves and transforms the whole of reality and that disappears as suddenly as it has appeared. What is left

³⁴⁷ Berdyaev, Schmemmann. 1965, 243

³⁴⁸ Berdyaev, Schmemmann. 1965, 243

³⁴⁹ Berdyaev, Schmemmann. 1965, 244

³⁵⁰ Berdyaev, Schmemmann. 1965, 245

³⁵¹ Berdyaev, Schmemmann. 1965, 245

³⁵² Berdyaev, Schmemmann. 1965, 246

behind the creative act is what we call "actuality," a cooling down of the fire, a symbol, but not the fire itself.³⁵³ In this cooling down is the tragedy of the creative act. The creative spirit, the fire, cannot be contained and kept for long in the temporal, in the material; it leaves its traces of excellence on matter, on history; it bequeaths its "artifacts of civilization," its symbols of sublimity and signs of eternity, but it cannot be caught, controlled, and directed.

In contrast to the Socratic *daemon*, the creative spirit does not just tell us what we should *not* do or say, but what we should do; it prompts us with the audacity *to* create. In Berdyaev's vision, the creative spirit is an active, positive principle: more a principle of freedom *for* (or *to*) than a principle of freedom *from* (or *against*). That is why its ethics is the generous and active ethics of a world, a creation restored from the wound of sin. Freedom and redemption bring forth creativeness. Thus, before his creative act, the creator does not ask himself moral questions. He is not concerned with rules or models. He does not hesitate to act and no reality, or necessity, is able to resist the energy of his passion.

The creative Spirit, according to Berdyaev's vision, does not contemplate, calculate, compare, it does not learn or repeat or imitate slavishly, it does not follow commands. It is skilled, swift, and intuitive. For that reason, in each creative act, we find dignity and nobility, maturity and an inborn experience. The creative spirit is aimless by the standards of this world and selfless. It does not aim to win a material gain or the approval of authority—human or divine. Also, again by the standards of this world, it cannot be described as rational or prudent, although it is the source of the greatest works of rational thought and of the greatest acts of prudence. It might be ignited, exorcised, so to say, by some pressing material need, or by some request, or by life-saving necessity, as in the story of the Good Samaritan, but its solutions and moving force are not in the selfish gain and utility. If we take for example the great representatives of art and science, we could clearly see that in order to create the men of excellence did not depend on the expectation of material gain. Dostoyevsky, the man, used to pay his gambling debts with his author's payments, he certainly wrote his books under the pressure of material need, but he, the *creative genius*, did

³⁵³ Berdyaev, Schmemmann. 1965, 246

not create Alyosha's character or Fr Zosima's wisdom, in the novel *Brothers Karamazov*, motivated by the profane inspiration of material remuneration. Alyosha's character and Zosima's wisdom came from the depths of the Spirit, from the same source able to make a "choice wine" from the insipid water at the wedding at Cana. (John 2:1-11)

All creativity, Berdyaev says, is ethical and moral, even if it does not consciously aim to achieve good. The moral life, as we have said, is a trait of the creative character.³⁵⁴ Moral rules are not a necessity for creative action. This action is moral because it comes from an innate (and restored) goodness or excellence. Creativeness solves all problems in all circumstances without consulting any arbitrary rules. Every act of creativity is moral, because it is an "invention of good."

The creative act is not an act of society in general, of some amorphous whole. It cannot be an act, for example, of state government. According to Berdyaev, the creative act comes always from the person, from the concrete human being. Moreover, man finds his realization, his true self and vocation, in his creative act, and the creative act is possible only for a person (in a community). There is no creativity in nature, in the common and undifferentiated. The creativity of the Spirit *creates* personalities and unites them in a diverse unity of a single community. We may recall here the Slavophiles, who argued, following Scripture, that the Spirit creates the community, and the Spirit creates the diversity of the ecclesial unity.

The Spirit "fills" the person with energy and life; it makes the man active, willing, audacious. To repeat, the creative act is a "positive principle" and not so much an expression of negative freedom, that is, the freedom *from*. Although creativity needs freedom from the "quenchers of the spirit," it ultimately relies on positive energy. The creative act is a result of the freedom *for* (or *to*), it is always for something, it always aims *to do* something. In the creative act, wrath and despair are replaced by hope.

The positive quality of creativity is important to keep in view because it has real practical implications. For example, in Part One, we noted that Semyon Frank saw in pre-revolutionary Russia a society imbued with hatred and rejection, a divided country, tormented by anger and

³⁵⁴ Berdyaev, Schmemmann. 1965, 250

negation. For that very reason, Frank argued, the Russian revolution had failed. Russia, after the Revolution, did not succeed at creating a better society because her will for change was not motivated by the positive spirit of freedom and redemption. As we have seen, and will continue to demonstrate in the third part of this dissertation, Berdyaev, like Frank, explained the failure of the twentieth-century world with its lack of a creative approach to the ideas of the nineteenth century. By "creative approach" he meant a positive one. In other words, he explained the tragedies of the twentieth century by the negative spirit that dominated the revolutionary movements.

The lack of positive and creative freedom (and spirit) produces what Georgy Fedotov called a "thirst for self-destruction," a condition of spiritual depression. This condition produces political types like the above-mentioned personage of Dostoyevsky—Kirilov, the "nihilist." The negativism of the "freedom *from*" that marked an entire epoch of social and political revolutions, that rejected Christianity along with the entire political and social tradition, and (most unfortunately) that had never transformed itself into a "freedom *to*," brought once again to the world the shadow of sin, although never the reign of sin. "Man," Fedotov wrote in 1936, "became disgusted with himself to the point of hatred, to the point of killing himself, or, at least, of crushing his reflection in the mirror." And yet, even in this situation, redemption and salvation were at hand; even in this age of darkness, of negative Dionysian freedom, the creative spirit surmounted the inertia of evil. "When man is killed completely, or, let us say, when in him is left only a muscle energy," to quote Fedotov again, "from the pressed residue of people still capable of burning enthusiasm, as from brick, is build a 'new society,' from the dead ideas is built theology, from the dead sounds music—Stravinsky. Picasso and Stravinsky in the spiritual world are like Lenin and Mussolini in the social."³⁵⁵ "The art of our time," Fedotov continued, "obviously does not bring the newness of the

³⁵⁵ Г. П. Федотов, "Четверодневный Лазарь" [The Lazarus of the Fourth Day] in *Круг*, 1936, No. 1. We cannot judge Stravinsky's (or Picasso's) work absolutely negatively. Fedotov is right in arguing that Stravinsky's work reflects the destruction of the meaning and beauty in the world; it represents the darkest forces of time, the abyss. It is, as we have said following Berdyaev, an expression of something behind the "visible." Yet, the work of Stravinsky (and Picasso) is still creative, i.e., it *still achieves something out of nothing*. And this is how Igor Stravinsky himself interpreted his vocation and life. In an interview, he said, "the interest in my life—my intellectual life and my everyday life—is to make, I am a maker (creator) [...] I like to compose, and I like to compose more than the music itself." (*Igor Stravinsky: The Composer*, A film by Janos Darvas) In these words, we can discover what creativity means as "fire," act, and symbol. The "music," which is the symbol and product of the creative act, what Berdyaev calls "the cooling

graceful revival of power. It obviously stinks like Lazarus on the fourth day. But, perhaps, the resurrection is close. Perhaps, in the creative depths, unsuspected by the artist himself, grows up the seed of new life, of whom it is said: 'What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.'"³⁵⁶ (1 Cor. 15-36)

All this is meant to say that there should not be a "depression," a spiritual weakness, in the creative process, there should not be in it what Scripture calls "broken bones." Creativity heals from the sense of emptiness, from depression and desperation; it heals in the same way as redemption heals from sin. Creativity overcomes nothingness, the abyss that seems, but only seems, to consume everything. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, who knew Berdyaev's work well, and who, as an editor, chose to include the "Ethics of Creativity" (an excerpt from "*The Destiny of Man*") in his *Ultimate Questions: An Anthology of Modern Russian Religious Thought*, wrote in his diaries, perhaps following Berdyaev, that "depression" and "boredom," which he witnessed in many of his contemporaries, were actually maladies of the soul, empty of the Spirit of love and creativity. Like Berdyaev, Schmemmann argued that he never felt true boredom in his life. Creativity cures depression because creativity is fullness, fire, life, and positive energy. "When the soul feels empty," Berdyaev writes, "it experiences boredom, which is a truly terrible and diabolical state. Evil lust and evil passions are, to a great extent, generated by boredom and emptiness."³⁵⁷ It might sound exaggerated, but we may argue, following the logic of Berdyaev, that conflicts on a great scale, destruction of kingdoms and empires, come, not only from the fervent pursuit of negative freedom, but also, and to a great extent, because of the "boredom" of the *status quo*, the stillness of peace without creativity, an *autocratic* peace and false security. Silence, stillness, emptiness, self-enclosure and atheism breed madness that sooner or later implodes with the power of destruction and perdition. War and conflict, therefore, are a result of spiritual emptiness and lack of creativity.

down," is always less enjoyable for the artist than the very act of creation, of expression and performance. It is worthwhile to note that Stravinsky abandoned his law education at the University of Saint Petersburg in order to study music with Rimsky-Korsakov.

³⁵⁶ Федотов, "Четверодневный Лазарь" [The Lazarus of the Fourth Day] in *Круг*, 1936, No. 1, C. 143

³⁵⁷ Berdyaev, Schmemmann. 1965, 257

Lust, Berdyaev says, is not a source of creativeness.³⁵⁸ The prideful and ambitious man is lustful. When he feels "higher" than others, he also feels empty and futile. When he takes from others, he is impoverishing himself. His robberies make him poorer. Man is truly satisfied, Berdyaev observes, when he gives abundantly. As we have said, creativity is giving, multiplying, adding; it is something noble. It is not wasting, or preserving, or destroying, it is growing. Berdyaev, as we have noted, defined creativity as "growth." Creativity is not only preservation—what the secular, or autocratic conservatism aims to achieve—it is not just burying in the ground the "talents" we received, it is rather a cultivation, multiplication, and giving away.

Finally, the ethics of creativity, Berdyaev says, "is the highest and most mature form of moral consciousness."³⁵⁹ Creativity is the source of imagination. The moral imagination is not so much a discovery of the proper end of things, but activity, *doing the ends*, so to say. It is not finding the means for the achievement of the ends, but achieving the ends through the application of the very ends: so love achieves love, freedom achieves freedom, good achieves good. Here, when we speak about active ends, not of ends that are static, fixed in the horizon of the future, we speak above all about energy, about immanent presence, and not about transcendence. In the creative act of man, good is realized, Berdyaev argues, echoing the view of Martin Luther,³⁶⁰ not because of some distant purpose, but because man and his act are *already good*. Only goodness can *create* goodness. The goodness of law that comes from sin cannot be a perfect goodness. It is rather "right." That is why when we speak about legalistic good, it is better to use the term "natural right" instead of "natural good." Right is a result of rectifying wrongs, while good, we must say if we follow Berdyaev, should always be a result of good.

Whenever we act well, when we are generous, caring, loving, creative, we are actually performing the "end." And here Berdyaev notes that from an ontological and cosmological point of view, the final end must be thought of as beauty and not as goodness. Goodness is already in the

³⁵⁸ Berdyaev, Schmemmann. 1965, 262

³⁵⁹ Berdyaev, Schmemmann. 1965, 263

³⁶⁰ "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works [...]. Consequently it is always necessary a person to be good before there can be any good works." Martin Luther. 1989. "The Freedom of a Christian," ed. Timothy F. Lull, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Fortress Press, p. 613)

Creation, and the fallen world is constantly saved, or regenerated, through redemption, whose fruit is in the human creativity, in the acts of realized (consumated) freedom and goodness. The good is not in the future. It is already here. Berdyaev reminds us that "Christ teaches us not to care about the future."³⁶¹ We create not for the sake of something, to achieve something, but because we wish to do so, and can. "A creator," he concludes, "is neither a slave nor a master; he is one who gives, and gives abundantly."³⁶² He is an "aristocrat of spirit."

4. CREATIVITY AS GOD-LIKE FREEDOM AND SOVEREIGNTY

Berdyaev relates human creativity to what he calls the "last mystery of God." The concept of creativity helps him explain the meaning of human existence; it gives him a hypothesis, so to say, for a rational explanation of the existence of the human person and humanity. The idea of creativity is a kind of original theological concept that has no clear scriptural basis. In his book *The Meaning of Creative Act*, Berdyaev admits that there is "not one word in the Gospel about creativeness."³⁶³ And he explains this absence with the argument that the creative power of the human person should be "discovered" by man, and not imposed by God. Creativeness, like freedom, cannot be taught, cannot be formulated as a command or transformed into law. "If the ways of creativeness," he says, "were indicated and justified in the Holy Scripture, then creativeness would be obedience, which is to say that there would be no creativeness."³⁶⁴ So, creativeness is a mystery, it is a function of freedom, and of God's wisdom.

Law and redemption, Berdyaev says, are revealed. But creativeness is "something mysterious and hidden."³⁶⁵ And, what is more important, it is something human: not just divine, but human as well. Creativeness is fire; it is the creative spirit in man, as we have said, that, once enkindled from above through the "baptism" of the human soul with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, starts to blaze from below, from within. That is why, Berdyaev says, creativeness is something anthropological. In His creativeness, God is not alone. God is not transcendent to his creation, and

³⁶¹ Berdyaev, Schmemann. 1965, 269

³⁶² Berdyaev, Schmemann. 1965, 271

³⁶³ TMCA, 96

³⁶⁴ TMCA, 97

³⁶⁵ TMCA, 98

man is not just an animal, a finished and static product of God's creative act. He is something more. Through creativeness that man inherits from God, man becomes a God-man, as the first God-man is Christ.³⁶⁶ The secret and dignity of man are in man's creative nature, a nature that is divine in character. It is not an immutable and impersonal nature, as we have said explaining Berdyaev's criticism of ontology, but a nature of concrete, divine dynamic and development (self-revelation) within each human person. This is a nature of the "Trinitarian relationship," where man is revealed as a unique, active, and free person in the image and likeness of God.

"The final human mystery," Berdyaev says, "is the birth of God in man. The last mystery of God is the birth of man in God. And this mystery is one and only one mystery: for not only does man have need of God, but God also has need of man. In this lies the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the God-man."³⁶⁷ In other words, creativity is the birth of God in man; moreover, it is the birth of man in God. God opens Himself for man, admits man into Himself through the gift of man's capacity for creative action. The first God-man is Christ, the Lord, and through Him all men are invited to God.³⁶⁸

For Berdyaev, creativity is the only solution to the power of nature and necessity. It is the only source and expression of human dignity. Freedom is *potentia*, capacity, but freedom is still nothingness, an abyss, without the act, and the act is what Berdyaev calls "creativity." The creative act makes of the nothingness of freedom something, it makes, as we have said, something out of nothing; it makes of man a person, an image and likeness of God. Thus, if we follow Berdyaev, we cannot say that the source of human dignity is freedom. It is freedom, but freedom *made actual*

³⁶⁶ "In the image of Christ," Berdyaev writes in *The Meaning of History*, "is brought about the genesis of God in man and of man in God, and the perfection of both is manifest. Thus, for the first time, in response to God's movement and longing, a perfect man is revealed to Him. [...] The revelation of history can be apprehended only through Christ as perfect man and God, as their perfect union, as the genesis of God in man and of man in God, and, finally, as God's revelation in man and the reciprocal revelation of man in God." (TMH, 59-60)

³⁶⁷ Here, Berdyaev argues something close to what Martin Buber said in his *I and Thou*. "That you need God more than anything," Buber says, "you know at all times in your heart. But don't you know also that God needs you—in the fullness of his eternity, you? [...] You need God in order to be, and God needs you—for that which is the meaning of your life. [...] The world is not divine plan, it is divine fate. That there are the world, man, the human person, you and I, has divine meaning." (Martin Buber. 1971 (1923). *I and Thou*. Free Press, The University of Virginia, p. 130)

³⁶⁸ TMCA, 19

and *possible* through an act of creativity, of *active* goodness. As there is no creativity without freedom, so there is no freedom without a creative act.

Man was not created by God for sinfulness and weakness. God, according to Berdyaev, did not create human beings only to sin and be saved. Sin and salvation cannot be the meaning of human life and existence. In fact, there is no real dignity in such a destiny. Berdyaev does not imagine a paternalistic, autocratic God, who reigns over corrupted and weak subjects that need salvation from above. On the contrary, he thinks that when God created man, God was born in man. And now man, like God, as a child of God, should be born in God. What does it mean to be born in God? What is the difference between God born in man and man born in God? The difference is in active power. In the first case, God is active, creative, and man is passive, or receptive; in the second, man is active, creative, and God is receptive.

Berdyaev explains that God created man having the capacity to respond freely to God's call,³⁶⁹ that is, to be born in God. This is the meaning of human life and existence: the Divine-human communion in freedom. Through the redemptive act of Christ, which is the very call of God, and the very proof that God is in man, man is invited to answer. This answer is nothing but an act of creative faith, of revealed goodness, of free will. In the creative act, man is, as it were, "left to himself," he is free, "alone, and has no direct aid from high."³⁷⁰ As we have said, to be born in God is to act faithfully towards a receptive God. Man is invited, not coerced, to accept Christ, and to be received in Christ; he is invited to choose freely the mystery and promise of life. Through this choice, man escapes, thanks to his own faith and will, the illusion of death and natural necessity. He transforms himself from an animal creature into a human person. Thus, man is born in God, born for life. Through the creative act of faith, man makes something (life) out of nothing (death). And so, God becomes all in all. (cf. 1 Cor. 15)

³⁶⁹ We find a similar interpretation in Vladimir Lossky's Trinitarian personalism. For a concise overview of Lossky's understanding of God, creation, and communion, see Papanikolaou, Aristotle. "Creation as Communion in Contemporary Orthodox Theology" in John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz. 2013. *Toward an ecology of transfiguration: orthodox Christian perspectives on environment, nature, and creation*. Fordham University Press. pp.106-120

³⁷⁰ TMCA, 97

According to Berdyaev, God has given man full freedom, so full that God, Himself, does not know what man would do with his freedom. It is paradoxical, but man is a mystery even for God, his Creator. But the Creator knows that his creation is good, so good that He puts his trust, his faith, not just his will, in it. Man cannot trust a man (Jer. 17:5), but God, his Creator, can and does. God expects man to put his trust in God, so man may be trusted by man as well. He expects man to trust the Son of Man. The Creator endowed His creation, that is, man, with dignity equal to the dignity of God Himself—only through such dignity could God be born in man and man in God. Dignity does not permit coercion. It is what we call "sovereignty." The sovereign has the last word. Berdyaev speaks about human sovereignty that is so full and great that man himself does not fully realize the power and excellence of his being and calling.³⁷¹ God waits for man to awake and reveal his excellence to God and to himself. God is not and cannot be a "coercive"³⁷² power over the "sovereign" man. We are taught by political theory that the sovereign is either the people or the king (the leader); we are also taught by theologians and clerics that the sovereign is God. It is God, indeed, but it is also man, this or that living person. It is you and I. The sovereignty and dignity of each individual person equals the sovereignty of God and surpasses the authority of peoples, nations, and secular powers.

In this exaltation of individual human dignity, we discover traces of the mystical poetry of Silesius, which Berdyaev knew well.³⁷³ "I know that God cannot live one instant without me," wrote Silesius, "if I should come to naught, needs must He cease to be," and also, "Naught is but I and Thou, Were there not Thou and I, then God is no more God, and Heaven falls from the Sky."

³⁷¹ Here, one may discover traces of Schelling's influence. In his *Berlin Lectures*, Schelling says that man is destined to be the "goal or culmination of a new process," of a "new world" made by the man himself. Man is "destined," he says, "to sublate nature within himself, to continue beyond nature, and to begin for himself a new chain of events." The *purpose* of the entire creation is man, but the greatest "riddle" is that man, himself, doesn't know his *own* purpose and that he is unconscious of it. Thus, being the purpose of everything, man finds himself "purposeless," and the paradox from this for Schelling is that in this way everything "becomes again purposeless." "Thus far," Schelling writes, "from man and his endeavors making the world comprehensible, it is man himself that is most incomprehensible." Which leads Schelling to "the final desperate question: Why is there anything at all? Why is there not nothing?" (F. W. J. Schelling and Bruce Matthews. 2007. *Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*. *Suny Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*. State University of New York Press, pp. 93-94).

³⁷² TMCA, 101

³⁷³ RSRC, 38; FS, 194

In this bond of co-existence and communion of Divine and human, we find the concrete man as a center of all existence, as an indispensable element of life, without which nothing, not even God, would be possible. It says that if I die, the entire world dies with me. If you die, an entire world dies with you. What would be left from the world if *I am not*? How can I say that you are in the world if I am not anymore there? And what is the sense of your existence, if I do not exist? Since the life and the world is *in* me now, since God is *in* me, the entire world, even God Himself, hangs on me, and I hang on them. If I die, then God dies with me. If you die, then I lose faith in God, because God dies with you. *If God dies, then we all die*. Every human person, even in her most desperate situation, is a sovereign, a Lord, a center of a universe; in each human face we should see, as God does, the "face of the Lord." God is born in every person, and every person has the capacity to be born in God for life, following the way and the truth of Christ, the God-man. (John 14:6) Thus, for Berdyaev, in the face of our brother, we must see the Lord, and the sovereign; and this is an act of creative faith and love.

CHAPTER THREE. PERSONHOOD

1. MICROCOSM AND MACROCOSM: HUMAN PERSON AS A CENTER OF BEING

Man is a mystery.³⁷⁴ He is a mystery to God and to himself. God knows the heart of man, but God does not know what this heart is going to do. God, as we have said, puts his trust in man. He expects man to reveal not so much what he has in himself (God knows what is *in* man), but what he will do with himself, with the freedom and the "talent" he received as gifts. God expects of man an act of creative freedom and love, an act of outreach and fruit-bearing. The creative act happens in man, in the human person. It happens first in the person of God, the Creator, and then in man, the image of God.³⁷⁵ The creative act is an act of existence, of revelation, of growth; it is the birth of man in God, the beginning of life and the world, initiated not only by God but also by man.

Berdyayev believes that if we solve the mystery of man, we would solve the mystery of being, of existence.³⁷⁶ "Know thyself," he says, following the Delphic maxim, and adds, "and through this know the world."³⁷⁷ The meaning of things, of the world, cannot be found in the external; that is, in what they represent in time and space. The visible is a relation; it is a sign, as we have said, of the invisible. But the invisible cannot be known simply or only through external signs. The Spirit, as we have said, is known through spirit. Meaning is known through meaning.

³⁷⁴ As we have noted in Part One, this is one of Berdyayev's fundamental notions, adopted probably from Nesmelov's theology. We should say that the "mystery of man" is one of the greatest themes of the twentieth century Christian theology. It could be found as a key concept in the Orthodox teachings (for example in Kallistos Ware's works) where man as an image of God is regarded as a mystery and secret like God himself, and in Protestant thinkers such as Reinhold Niebuhr, who knew well Berdyayev's work (see, for example, the opening paragraph of Niebuhr's *Nature and Destiny of Man*). The idea of man as a "mystery" was a major theme for the nineteenth-century Russian thinkers as well. For example, in 1839, Dostoyevsky, Berdyayev's spiritual teacher, wrote in a letter to his brother, "Man is a mystery. It [this mystery] should be revealed and if you need to reveal it during your entire life, then, do not say that you wasted your time; I am engaged with this mystery because I want to be a man." (Ф.М. Достоевский, *Письма*. 10. М. М. Достоевскому. 16 августа 1839. Петербург [Letters. 16 August 1839.] in Ф.М. Достоевский. 1996. *Собрание сочинений в 15 томах*. [Collected Works in 15th volumes] СПб.: Наука, Т. 15. С. 20–22.)

³⁷⁵ TMCA, 135

³⁷⁶ TMCA, 57

³⁷⁷ TMCA, 57

The sign is a revelation of the inner, of the Spirit, but this revelation is comprehended only in and through the spirit. The external that we see in matter, space, and time, is the "empty shell" or the "trace" of the inner Spirit. It does not contain the Spirit anymore, it is an impression of the workings of the living truth on matter, in time and space; it is not the truth itself. Reality cannot be known through externals only. On the contrary, externals, if taken as an absolute and only criterion of existence might distort our perception of reality. We live and witness a world of necessity and sinfulness, and we could easily take natural necessity and human sin as foundational principles of reality. But the truth, if we follow Berdyaev's logic, is that neither necessity nor sin is foundational for the world, for creation. Creation is a result of freedom, the freedom of God; man is entitled to freedom, in which he can reveal his creative energy; and creation is made good by his Creator. The work of Freedom and Love is freedom and love. How could true freedom produce necessity, and pure love hatred or sin? So, the world, according to Berdyaev, cannot be judged only by external signs that give the impression of a distorted reality—the reality of necessity and sinfulness. If we begin our study of reality with the external and base all our knowledge and conclusions on it, we may learn about the properties and mechanics of creation, but we would never grasp creation's inner and true value, its beginning and end, its meaning.

For the empiricist, everything would be a "thing," even the human person, who, for Berdyaev, is not a "thing," but a spirit and creative energy. Positivism and naturalism make of human being and the world *things*. But as we have seen, the human person and creation are not "things" for God, their Creator, and if we want to know them as they are in themselves we cannot interpret them only according to their external qualities, or differently from the Creator's interpretation. We are free to err in our judgment and will, but not at liberty to give the person or creation a meaning different from the meaning that God has put in them. Positivism and naturalism are not concerned with the value, the inner and proper meaning of the things they observe; rather, they are interested in the functioning of things and only in order to qualify these "things" either as harmless or harmful, either as utile or inutile. And they make this evaluation in a detached, "scientific," calculated, and individualistic (or egoistic) way; that is, they judge the harm and utility of a thing as far as this thing corresponds to the immediate and particular

interest and goal of the individual observer. There is no actual relation between observer and the thing observed, no correspondence, or sense of mutuality other than the sense that concerns the particular interest of the observer. The one who evaluates and explores the "object" in this way puts himself above and against the object. In this "empirical" and "scientific" approach to reality, the sense of the inner, fundamental goodness of creation, its unique and absolute meaning, value, and relation to God and man, is not comprehended clearly. This is a partial and distorted understanding of reality. Moreover, if this approach becomes dominant and presents itself as the only possible and adequate *modus operandi*, if it turns into a political ideology, similar to so-called "scientific materialism" taught at the universities of communist Russia and its satellites, then this approach is not only inadequate and mistaken but also dangerous and destructive.

According to Berdyaev, all knowledge should start with man. Man is the "entrance" to the universe. In the Old Testament, man was asked to fear and search for God, not to *know* God. In the New Testament, God revealed Himself as the God-man, as a Crucified slave, and so man rediscovered his capacity to know God through the God-man, and through this God-*man* to know his own self and being. "Anthropology," Berdyaev says, "precedes all philosophy, all knowledge."³⁷⁸ But here anthropology is informed by the revelation of Christ. Christ gave us freedom. Through Christ, God was born in man. He let us know God. Now we know that God should not be feared, that he is not a despot. He is a suffering God, a "Lover who yearns for His other." Christ gave us the freedom to reveal ourselves to God and to ourselves. With the revelation of Christ, the revelation of man became possible and along with this, the revelation of creation, of the world, became also possible. On Berdyaev's approach, it is no mistake to argue that true knowledge, even true science, begins with Christ, and with man who turns, through Christ, to himself, and through himself, through the meaning he finds in himself, to the world. Knowledge begins with a (self-) comprehension of the spirit of man, with the "unburying," so to say, of man's spirit from the clutter of things and matter, from the erosion of time and space. Nothing in creation, not even God, could be known without a knowledge of oneself. Man starts to learn, turning to himself, and finding in himself the *Other*, whose meeting "face to face," as Aquinas

³⁷⁸ TMCA, 57

argued, is the end of all knowledge. Turning to himself man receives immediate access to creation as it is, and not as it is imagined through the "secondary" data of matter, space, and time.

Why should man explore and know himself? Because, as we have said, man contains the universe in himself.³⁷⁹ Man is a "center of being" and as such, he is a center of a universe and a universe in himself.³⁸⁰ He is a microcosm and a macrocosm simultaneously. Man, Berdyaev says, should be the "Sun of the World, radiating light."³⁸¹ Berdyaev wants us to take his proposition seriously: If I am the center of being and universe, then the whole universe hangs on me. Then, if the "light in me is darkness" then all, the entire universe, will be darkness, a spiral into the abyss of perdition. Christ warns for a reason, "Be careful then that the light in you is not darkness" (Lk. 11:35). I should be careful, because if my eyes and body are "full of darkness," I, the center of being, bring my darkness to the entire creation, and thus I cut all connections between God and creation, destroy the life in me, and through me the life of an entire universe rooted in me. If I am light, if I am creative, if I love God, whom I find in me, who is born in me, I am, thus, "radiant," (Lk. 11:36) born in God for life; with my life an entire universe is born for life. If I love my neighbour, and do not consider him a "thing," a utility or threat, if I appreciate him and know him as equal to me, a "Lord" like me, if I am kind, tender, and forgiving, then I care for and save a world, an entire universe, a macrocosm, a center of being. I save an entire world through my creative relation with this concrete human person. This is the idea that Russian intellectuals like Herzen and Fedorov promoted, and Berdyaev adopted—that man should not strive for the achievement of some distant ideal, should not dream of changing the world through sacrificing one generation, or even one person, for the happiness and life of a future generation; man's only concern and great act is love for his neighbour, the concrete human being in front of him, inspired

³⁷⁹ TMCA, 58

³⁸⁰ We find a similar question in *Gadium et Spes* (Joy and Hope), the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, adopted at the Second Vatican Council: "According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown. But what is man?" (*Gadium et Spes*.1965. *Pastoral Constitution On The Church In The Modern World*. Ch. 1.12 The Dignity of Human Person)

³⁸¹ ИО, 149. Here is the entire quote: "[...] the fall of the man is expressed in the fall of Sun from him to outside him; he remains in darkness and receives light from the external Sun. The man should have been the Sun of the World, radiating light, but he spreads his darkness to all cosmic life."

by Christ. Loving my neighbour is saving his life, as the Samaritan did, and with him, saving an entire world; and, finally, with the entire world, I save myself, my universe, life, and being, because alone, without my neighbour and the world, *I am not*.

Berdyaev's conclusion is that man should explore himself and his self-consciousness; that is, his light and darkness, his heart and perceptions, his actions, non-actions, desires, choices, and will. Containing the world in himself, man has the capacity to "penetrate into the meaning of universe."³⁸² In his knowledge, he finds the Other in himself, and thus he cannot put himself above or against the other. To go against the Other entails a suicidal stance against one's self. In his knowledge, man discovers that he is not a "closed-off individual" surrounded by "things."³⁸³

Berdyaev's perspective can be described as Christian humanism. This humanism is not concealed, limited to man only. It is not about the individual person and its particular interest, dignity, and well-being. This humanism embraces the entire creation—nothing is excluded from it. Man, as a center of being, man as an image of a creative God, the human person as "creative energy," contains in himself the whole world, his God-given dominion (Gen. 1:26). Through his life, through his "light," man preserves and animates not only the life and existence of his neighbour, but the life and existence of the entire creation.

Following Zohar, Berdayev says that man is the "highest point of creation,"³⁸⁴ and as such, in him is included the entire creation. In himself, Berdyaev says, man "unites all forms."³⁸⁵ And what is this unity? Is it a dead stillness? Or a living spirit that incessantly brings the parts of the universe together, finding their meaning and direction, animating them, and so elevating them to the "heavens" of the divine Spirit? Man, as the highest point of creation and as an image of God, is a life-giving spirit, energy from the divine Energies. Humanism cannot be limited to the idea of the dignity of the human being. If the entire universe is contained in man, then the entire creation is humanized and so it becomes a part of the human and the divine. "Nature must be humanised,

³⁸² TMCA, 59

³⁸³ TMCA, 58

³⁸⁴ TMCA, 65

³⁸⁵ TMCA, 65

liberated, made alive and inspired by man," says Berdyaev. Like God who is able to raise up children to Abraham even from the stones (Matt. 3:9), so man, as the image of the living God, "must give back spirit to stones, reveal the living nature of stones," and so, through this creative act, release his own self from "their stony, oppressing power."³⁸⁶ The Christian humanism of Berdyaev is the humanism that looks at nature as creation that "groans as in the pains of childbirth" (Rom. 8:22), that waits for man's liberation from his stony earthly nature and thus liberates creation from the burden of human sin and immaturity (cf. Is. 3-4; Eccl. 10:16).³⁸⁷ In this humanism, man becomes a Lord and servant like the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. "There is a heavy layer of dead stone in man," Berdayev says, "and there is no other way of escaping from it than by liberating the stone itself."³⁸⁸ Creation waits for the awakening of man's conscious dominion and true lordship. Man is bound to the "cosmos," but man is called,³⁸⁹ destined to change it,³⁹⁰ as he does, indeed, in each of his creative acts of love.

Science is part of this Christian humanism. Science is a means for the liberation of man from nature and for the liberation of nature from man, the sinner. Berdyaev is critical of positivism and naturalism, yet he believes that a "naturalistic anthropocentrism" does not destroy the dignity of man as a center of being.³⁹¹ Science, Berdyaev is convinced, does not destroy the truth of the Bible regarding man and creation. But to be true science, it should necessarily follow the principles of Christian faith and humanism. It should bring to the world an inspired humanistic meaning. Science is making the "stones live," it is the practical wisdom of God in man.

³⁸⁶ TMCA, 72

³⁸⁷ We find a similar interpretation in Vladimir Lossky. "Man," Lossky writes, "is a personal being like God, and not a blind nature. Such is the character of the divine image in him. His relationship with the universe finds itself somehow inverted when compared with the conceptions of antiquity: instead of becoming "disindividualized" to become "cosmic" and to merge thus in a divine impersonal, his absolute correspondence of person with a personal God allows him to "personalize" the world. Man no longer saves himself through the universe, but the universe is saved through man. For man is the hypostasis of the whole cosmos which participates in his nature. And the earth finds its personal meaning, hypostatic in man. [...] Subjected to disorder and death by man, creation also attends upon man, become sons of God through grace, for its liberation [...] We are therefore responsible for the world." (Vladimir Lossky. 1978. *Orthodox Theology*, St. Vladimir Seminary Press, pp.70-73)

³⁸⁸ TMCA, 72

³⁸⁹ Lossky, 1978, 72

³⁹⁰ Lossky, 1978, 72

³⁹¹ TMCA, 76

It is the *conditioning* of the world, through man's creative love and energy, to the divine command to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and to love your neighbour as yourself. (Luke 10:27) It is not a coincidence that the first sprouts of science, of systematic knowledge, and of the transformation of nature according to the "human idea" came with the development of religiously inspired humanism. It is not a coincidence that the modern temples of science, the universities, came from the medieval temples of faith, the scholastic schools, or that modern hospitals and medicine came from the medieval almshouses, that modern economy and cultivation of land began in the medieval monasteries,³⁹² and that the principles of good government were formulated by the medieval scholars who took over the pagan political culture and transformed it into a Christian political theology. We have been used to calling these formative years "Dark Ages," and indeed they were dark. From the divine darkness of medieval Europe, the light of universal science appeared, and Berdyaev's great hope was that the "end of our time" will be the beginning of "new middle ages."³⁹³

2. SECULAR VS CHRISTIAN HUMANISM: THE ILLUSION OF AUTARKY AND AUTOCRACY

Berdyaev's Christian humanism, his vision of the human person as a center of being, micro- and macrocosm, differs from the forms of secular humanism that regard man as a self-sufficient individual, as an independent "autocrat," who serves nobody and nothing, but expects the whole world to serve him—his needs, desires, illusions and fantasies. The autocrat is not an "authority," in Berdyaev's sense, a servant of others; he is a self-sufficient individual, whose primary care is his own self-exaltation and survival. He is an *Übermensch*. He is definitely not a person, because he seeks relationship neither with God nor with man nor with creation. For secular humanism, the ideal human being is a man-god, while the ideal of Christian humanism is a God-man. The *Übermensch*, the man-god, is a degradation of man as an image of the Trinitarian

³⁹² See, for example, Sidney Pollard's "The Medieval Monasteries" in Pollard. 1997. *Marginal Europe: The Contribution of Marginal Lands since the Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press)

³⁹³ See EOT, 69-120

God, a degradation of human dignity. The error of secular humanism, Berdyaev says, is in its "tendency to consider man self-sufficient, and hence to have too low an idea of him."³⁹⁴

Self-sufficiency is the absence of communion. Absolute self-sufficiency is total power, isolation, transcendence; it is an implosion, a black hole, so to say, in which the whole universe collapses and disappears in the darkness of the self. Autarky, self-sufficiency, is an ancient Greek political and economic ideal that in modern times developed into a humanistic ideal. The "autarkic" ideal, the idea that one could subsist in oneself, gave rise to diverse political forms such as absolute monarchy, liberal capitalism, and the twentieth-century totalitarianisms. The ideal of self-sufficiency is the belief that I or We can exist without being in relationship with others, that I or We can be self-dependent, that I or We, as a nation, could isolate ourselves from the community of others, and not only isolate from but use others as a potential source of energy and life. In this confused condition it is not the *I* who gives life to the world, but the world that gives life to the *I*—which remains an *It* rather than an *I*—"naturally," by the means of a necessity that follows from the coercive individual will to power.

Autarky and autocracy (self-power) permit neither creativity nor freedom. If there is any freedom in autarky and autocracy, it is only the freedom *from* and never the freedom *to* (or *for*)—freedom to do, to give, to grow, and to bless. This is the negative freedom that legitimized the secular ideologies which, through the power of their demonic energy, destroyed in wars and economic crises an entire generation. Secular humanism, with its basis in the idea of the independent (but not creative) and self-sufficient (but not free *to* or *for*) individual is a secular ideology opposed to Christian humanism, in which relationship, communion, mutuality, and interdependence are of primary importance.

Secular humanism promotes individualism. Christian humanism advances personalism. In secular humanism, the quality of interaction and relationship is corrupted by the ideal of individual self-sufficiency, of absolute individual freedom and right; in Christian humanism, relationship, mutuality, and interaction are the fundament of existence. In secular humanism,

³⁹⁴ RSRC, 41

there is a consuming "one" that makes nothing out of something. In Christian humanism, there are many as one, creating something out of nothing. The basic difference between secular humanism and Christian humanism is the existence and quality of relationship. In Christian humanism, we have multiple relationships: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God and man, man and God, man and man, man and creation, creation and man. In secular humanism (and autocracy) man is left alone. In it there is necessity and servitude. Conversely, in Christian humanism (and authority), there is service, that is, interdependence: God serves man, and man, through the Spirit, serves God and man, man serves the creation, and the creation serves man, every one serves every one, and every one is a lord for every one. Servitude is slavery, service is freedom. In slavery, there is no personhood, dignity, creativity. Creativity and personhood are possible only in freedom—the freedom of the divine-human communion.

Absolute self-sufficiency and autocracy are impossible fictions, not only for man, but also for God. For Berdyaev, the Christian God is not a self-sufficient, transcendent autarkical power, nor an immanent autocrat that sacrifices its "children" for its own good. The Christian God is not like Moloch, the ancient idol (Lev. 18:21). On the contrary, He, as the Son of Man, sacrifices Himself for the good of His children, his brethren. God needs man as the Lover needs his loved one. Thus, Berdyaev is convinced, the idea that "before God man is nothing, is quite false and degrading."³⁹⁵ It degrades both man and God.

For Berdyaev, it is absurd and wrong to imagine God as an autocrat. "God is not a master and director of the world," he insists.³⁹⁶ God is a *person*, not an "individual." And as a person, the "contact and relationship" with Him is "possible, not as relationship with the Absolute, for whom there can be no other [i.e. self-sufficiency], with whom there can be no relationship, not with the God of apophatic theology, but with a real, personal God who has relationship with others."³⁹⁷ In God's lack of self-sufficiency, in His openness and relation to man, "lies the secret of human existence: it proves the existence of something higher than man and in this is man's own

³⁹⁵ RSRC, 39

³⁹⁶ RSRC, 40

³⁹⁷ RSRC, 40

worth."³⁹⁸ "Personality," Berdyaev says, "is not the absolute, and God as the Absolute is not a Person. God as a Person presupposes His other, another Person, and is love and sacrifice. The Person of the Father presupposes the Persons of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."³⁹⁹ The personalistic metaphysics and ethics of Christian humanism are based upon the Christian Doctrine of the Holy Trinity. "The moral life of every individual person must be interpreted after the image of the Divine Tri-unity, revealed and reflected in the world."⁴⁰⁰

3. GOD, MAN, AND THE GOD-MAN

"The basic and original phenomenon of religious life," Berdyaev says, "is the meeting and mutual interaction between God and man, the movement of God towards man and of man towards God."⁴⁰¹ God, as it has been said, is not self-sufficient, He is not transcendent. Absolute transcendence, for Berdyaev, is evil; it is life-suffocating self-enclosure. God, he says, "without man, an inhuman God," that has no deep and personal relation with his other, with the creation, "would be Satan, not God-in-Trinity."⁴⁰² The Christian God is the "human" God, the God that communicates, the "Word," the "Logos." Is there a deeper relationship and communion than the transformation of one into another? There is *no* absolute transcendence, but there *is* an absolute relationship, which is the divine-human communion, performed by Christ, who, in his divine love became man. The God-man is the image and the proof for the existence of an absolute relationship, of unity between uncreated and created, between God and Creature. "The coming of Christ," Berdyaev says, "the God-man, is a perfect union of these two movements: the realization of unity in duality and of divine-human mystery."⁴⁰³

This unity was achieved in freedom and through freedom. Man, the creation, is not forced to answer God's act of communion. Man is not forced by God to become a God-man. Secular humanism, however, through its methods of "social engineering," tries to force, to "convert" man

³⁹⁸ RSRC, 40

³⁹⁹ DM, 74

⁴⁰⁰ DM, 74

⁴⁰¹ FS, 189

⁴⁰² FS, 187

⁴⁰³ FS, 187

into a man-god. It tries to impose on man the fictitious idea of the supreme value of an autonomous, autarkic existence. Man is taught by the secular humanist to become strong and independent, self-sufficient. But Christianity is "mild," because the Christian God is not an autocrat. On the contrary, He is a "friend," and an equal in dignity Person. His only "command" is "Love one another as I have loved you." And His reasoning is "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." "You are my friends," this Lord says, "if you do what I command you." And admits, "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (John 15:12-15). So, we see in Christianity a serving and loving Lord—one that communicates and reveals Himself.

The quality of relationship presupposes equality, neither God abasing Himself in becoming man nor man exalting himself in becoming equal to God. Christ reveals that both man and God are equally great. Berdyaev quotes Eckhart: "'Before the creature existed God was not God,' God became God only in relation to creation."⁴⁰⁴ "The Creator," Berdyaev says, "is manifested at the same time as creation, God and man appear simultaneously."⁴⁰⁵ The Being of the One presupposes the being of the other. If there is a relationship between man and God then there is fundamental equality in duality. Silesius, Berdyaev reminds, has said: "I am as great as God, and He is as little as me."⁴⁰⁶

Does this equality make God less "God," less "omnipotent"? No, on the contrary, the relational nature of the Christian God proves the potency, the freedom, the perfect capacity of this God to exceed all givenness, even the "givenness" of His own omnipotence. Relationship, properly speaking, is breaking limits; and the absolute relationship, the divine-human communion, is breaking all "natural" limits. There is nothing more powerful than to have the freedom to

⁴⁰⁴ FS, 194, Cf. Meister Eckhart's Sermon 52 *Beati Pauperes Spiritu Quoniam Ipsorum Est Regnum Caelorum*: "But when I emerged by free choice and received my created being, I came into the possession of a God for, until creatures came into existence, God was not 'God', but was rather what he was. Then, when creatures emerged and received their created being, God was not 'God' in himself but in creatures."

⁴⁰⁵ FS, 194

⁴⁰⁶ FS, 194

transcend—not the creation, not the others, but oneself. "The fact that God longs for his other self," Berdyaev says, "for the free response to his love, shows not that there is some insufficiency or absence of fullness in the divine Being, but precisely the superabundance of His plenitude and perfection."⁴⁰⁷

The relation between God and man should be reciprocal. Here we do not speak speculatively about gift-giving, about the modern philosophy of Levinas, Derrida, or Marion, that tries to explain the meaning of grace and sacrifice. We do not speak about contract or self-sacrifice. Here "reciprocity" does not mean "*in return*." The meaning of reciprocity here is the simple expectation of the Giver that the one who receives His gift will be happy (not "thankful"), just happy, joyful, and safe (from his own sin and the sin of others).⁴⁰⁸ The Samaritan returns, after finishing his job, to the inn where he left his "neighbour," not to receive something back from him, not even thankfulness, but to pay any possible additional costs for his healing and to see whether the "stranger" has recovered from his wretched condition. The only thing that the Samaritan wants is to see his "neighbour" healthy and alive. The only reciprocity that God expects from His relationship with man, we may argue following Berdyaev, is to see man *alive*, to hear him exclaiming: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55) In this, and only in this, the reciprocity to divine grace is contained. At the moment when the man says these words, man would be born in God, and at this moment the "end of history" will come,

⁴⁰⁷ FS, 192

⁴⁰⁸ In his book *Influence*, popular among businessmen and money-makers, the psychologist Robert B. Cialdini quotes the anthropologist Marcel Mauss who explains the "social pressures surrounding the gift-giving process" in human culture. Mauss says that "there is an obligation to give, an obligation to receive, and an obligation to repay." Cialdini notes that the obligation to "repay" is what makes us vulnerable to the "exploitation" of the giver. "The obligation to receive," he writes, "reduces our ability to choose whom we wish to be indebted to and puts that power in the hands of others." (Robert Cialdini. 2006. *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Harper Business, pp.22-23) In Christianity, the giver should expect neither power nor influence coming from his act of generosity. The one who receives Divine grace is not obliged (nor capable) to return the favour of the hidden and humble God, and the crucifixion of Christ, no matter whether one takes it as a mere symbol (myth) or as a symbol *and* reality, serves as an example of the Divine, and not human, nature of Christian "reciprocity." God, in Christianity, is not a free and powerful manipulator using reciprocity as a tool for dominance. There is no deception in the generosity of the Divine Giver.

and the Kingdom of God will be realized. This is the fulfillment, the meaning of the divine-human communion.

"The Kingdom of God," Berdyaev says, "is that of God-humanity, in which God is finally in man and man in God, and this is realized in the Spirit."⁴⁰⁹ The Kingdom of God *is*, and *not yet*. It *is* in Christ and *not yet* in us. "In the Son, in the divine Man, in the God-man is comprised the whole human race, mankind in all its multiplicity and in every shape and form."⁴¹⁰ The Person of Christ is the Kingdom of God. Christ, as *the* "center of being" is the Kingdom of God and His light has no way to darken, so nothing that is in Him can be lost. *The entire world hangs on Christ, the Pantocrator*. And in Christ, the entire creation becomes a Kingdom of God, where every part contains all others.⁴¹¹ "In Him the antithesis between one and the many is mysteriously resolved."⁴¹² "Christ is in man and man is in Christ. He is the Vine and we are the branches."⁴¹³ Through Christ the "Logos" (the communicating Word, the One Who breaks the limits) "not only

⁴⁰⁹ FS, 197

⁴¹⁰ FS, 198

⁴¹¹ Obviously, this part of our narrative is the culmination of a discussion that argued that man, every human person, is "a center of being." This discussion is very much related to Solovyov's concept of Godmanhood that Berdyaev explored and adopted as the majority of Silver Age Russian thinkers. In the book *Lectures* (or "readings") *on Godmanhood*, Vladimir Solovyov argued that feeling and perception are absolutely necessary for the existence of the world. One may insist that if all creatures that feel and perceive disappear from the world, the world would nevertheless remain as it is, but then the analogical question arises: "What is a sound without hearing?" or "What is a color without sight?" What is an unperceived world but a void? The music or speech would be mere sound waves if there is no one to perceive them as music and speech. If one is blind, the world would not stop being visible, because there would be many others (witnesses) capable to see it. But the world (the word "свер" in Russian means both "world" and "light") would, indeed, stop being visible, if we are all blind. So we return to the expressed above formula: "If I die, the entire world dies with me. If you die, an entire world dies with you. What would be left from the world if I am not? How can I say that you are in the world if I am not anymore there? And what is the sense of your existence, if I do not exist? Since the life and the world is in me now, since God is in me, the entire world, even God Himself, hangs on me, and I hang on them. If I die, then God dies with me. If you die, then I lose faith in God, because God dies with you. *If God dies, then we all die.*" According to this formula, there is a need for one man only to stay alive and save the world rooted in him. This man, for Christianity, is Christ, the God-man, and for that reason, it is argued that *the entire world hangs on Christ, the Pantocrator*. That's why it is also said that we, as persons ("centers of being"), are saved in Christ, *the center of being*. (See Владимир Сергеевич Соловьев. 2011. *Чтения О Богочеловечестве*. "Чтение четвертое." *Filosofskie Tekhnologii*. Moskva: Akademicheskii Proekt. Solovyov, Zouboff. 1948. *Lectures on Godmanhood*. D. Dobson.)

⁴¹² FS, 198

⁴¹³ FS, 198

the human race but the entire universe turns to God and responds to the divine appeal and the divine need of love."⁴¹⁴

The Kingdom of God is "community," a perfect community. This community is first realized in Christ and in the Trinity and through Christ and the Trinity in the world. Again, Berdyaev returns to this sublime model of communion and relation that makes life possible. "The Trinity," he says, "is a sacred and divine number, which signifies fullness and the victory over strife and division; it is *sobornost*, the perfect society, in which there is no opposition between personalities, hypostases, and the one Being."⁴¹⁵ This model is brought to the world through Christ and is kept *for* the world through the Spirit by Christianity, whose entire "structure" rests on faith in Christ, the God-man, and on the Trinitarian confession. "The mystery of Christianity," Berdyaev says, "is the mystery of unity in duality finding its solution in trinity-in-unity. This is why Christianity is based both upon the Christological dogma of the divine-human nature of the Son and upon the dogma of the Trinity."⁴¹⁶ Christ and the Trinity are persons (*prosopa*) in unity, in communion. "Life is in principle both differentiation and the unity of personalities. The fullness of life is *sobornost*, in which personality [each personality—mine and yours as well] finds its final realization and integration."⁴¹⁷

4. HUMAN PERSON

"Man is a child of God," Berdyaev says, "and of non-being, of meonic freedom."⁴¹⁸ His "roots," he says, are "in heaven, in God, and in the nethermost depths."⁴¹⁹ In other words, man is a child of divine Freedom and of the Abyss. This understanding differs from the understanding of man in modern anthropology. "The theory most prevalent in modern Europe," Berdyaev says, "is that of man as a social being, a product of society and also as an inventor of tools (*homo faber*)."⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁴ FS, 199

⁴¹⁵ FS, 199

⁴¹⁶ FS, 199

⁴¹⁷ FS, 200

⁴¹⁸ DM, 60

⁴¹⁹ DM, 60

⁴²⁰ DM, 64

We find in Durkheim and Marx, he says, that the social life "turns the animal into man."⁴²¹ This is a completely naturalistic view. Man in his "bareness" is an animal, and will stay an animal if there is no society that could convert him into a human being. The reason, according to this theory, inevitably receives a secondary function—it comes second after society and its main purpose is the invention of *tools*, of *utilities*, and not of *values*. Man as a "social being," in this modern sense, is not the rational and political animal we know from the classical Aristotelian theory.

If we follow the logic of this modern interpretation of humanity, we would eventually conclude that everything depends on society, that society plays the mystical role of a creator that produces *fabri* ("makers") in its own image and likeness. Reason, as Logos, as a primary ordering principle, would be depreciated, God, as an "hypothesis," would be completely forbidden, considered an illusion, a phantasm, a side-effect of "objective" material conditions and political interests. And Society would be left as *prima principia*. From such a perspective comes the nineteenth and twentieth-century idealization (and mystification) of the "social class" as a fundamental existential category, of capital as demonic or, conversely, as a creative power acting in the world, and of the state as a supreme ordering principle. Obviously, there is no space for the concept of "person" in such an understanding. Man is conceived as a mere by-product of social relations and interests, a result of some form of collectivity. The answer to the question of how this collectivity was initially formed, and from where it receives its creative capacity and supreme authority, is left wrapped in the mist of gnostic scientism.

It is not surprising that Berdyaev strongly opposes modern "sociologism" that puts society above personhood. His immediate criticism of the idea of man as a product of society and as a simple inventor of tools is that in such a view there is no place for freedom. How could a man be free, if his destiny depends, ultimately, on the matrix and quality of social formation? Moreover, how would a man be truly creative, an "inventor," if he is not free? Creativity needs freedom—the freedom *from* social and material oppression and the freedom *to* act. Man, Berdyaev says, "can only be a creative being, if he has freedom."⁴²² This means that every "system" or "structure" that

⁴²¹ DM, 64

⁴²² DM, 70

is deficient in freedom destroys the most human principle in humanity, namely, its creative capacity.

"There are two elements in human nature," Berdyaev says, and these two elements are freedom and creativity. What would be the constituting element of human nature if man is a pure product of society? One cannot think of something else than the element of servitude and submission. Berdyaev is convinced that the human person is not a product of society; on the contrary, society is a product of the human person, of the concrete human person and not of some "general idea" of the human. The elements of freedom and creativity and "their combination and interaction" constitute man.⁴²³ Freedom comes from the "abyss of non-being" and creativity from "the image and likeness of God;" so man is not just a rational animal, or a political animal, or a social being and *homo faber*, but, above all, a person, a free spirit, a creative energy, a center of being, a fundamental constituting element of existence, a "mediator,"⁴²⁴ a "crux" of the universe.

Making society a producer of humans is breaking the natural order. Man is a center of being; the creation depends on him. As such he is the "mediator between God and himself."⁴²⁵ It is not society, or nature, that mediates God to man, but man Himself. "The only way [of creation, of the world] to God is through man."⁴²⁶ God, as God-man, "expresses himself in the world through interaction with man."⁴²⁷ God is a Person. Thus, Berdyaev concludes, "our conception of man must be founded upon the conception of personality. The anthropology is bound to be personalistic."⁴²⁸

It should be noted that Berdyaev's Christian humanism draws a difference between "individuality" and "personality" (hence between individualism and personalism). "Individuality is a naturalistic and biological category, while personality is a religious and spiritual one."⁴²⁹ Sociologism thinks of man as a product of society, naturalism may consider him just a biological

⁴²³ DM, 70

⁴²⁴ DM, 70

⁴²⁵ DM, 70

⁴²⁶ DM, 70

⁴²⁷ DM, 70

⁴²⁸ DM, 71

⁴²⁹ DM, 71

species. Neither of the two understands man fully. "Personality"—"me" and "you" as "persons," we as "creative energies" —are "created by God."⁴³⁰ The love we feel, the desire for beauty, peace, eternity, is created by God for us through the "light" and the "fact" of life. Personality, Berdyaev is convinced, is "God's idea, God's conception, which springs up in eternity."⁴³¹ It is also a "task to be achieved,"⁴³² that is, the task of man to be born in God. To be sure, man is an individual, a biological species, a generated creature; he is a social and rational being. But personality is not "a product of biological process or of social organization."⁴³³ At the bottom of all that man truly is, is God. Man is recognized as a person by another Person and by persons. And man becomes a person when he recognizes the personality of God and others. He becomes a person not when he thinks of God as an idea that lacks any concreteness, or when he sees in others just a mass of individuals with their own self-enclosed existence and destiny, but when he sees in God the Crucified, and in man the Neighbor. The only way for an "individual" to become a "person" is to have consciousness of the other as of himself.

From this arises, as we have said, a system of ethics that goes beyond the ethics of law, of general principles and rules—this is a personalistic ethics. "An impersonal system of ethics," a system of rules and impersonal values, "is a *contradictio in adjecto*."⁴³⁴ "Moral life is centered in the person and not in generalities. Personality is a higher value than the state, the nation, mankind or nature." The life of personality is not a life of individual or societal self-preservation but of spiritual "self-development and self-determination."⁴³⁵ Teachings such as those of German Idealism, for example, are "unfavorable to the idea of personality." All ideologies and social systems that degrade the fundamental value of concrete personhood—divine and human—fall short of their professed ideals of justice, good, and happiness. Berdyaev's concern is that modern social theories and organization lead simultaneously in two wrong directions: through them "man

⁴³⁰ DM, 71

⁴³¹ DM, 71

⁴³² DM, 71

⁴³³ DM, 72

⁴³⁴ DM, 72

⁴³⁵ DM, 73

is becoming more social,"⁴³⁶ that is more dependent on society and on impersonal social structures, and more "individual,"⁴³⁷ that is more alienated and self-enclosed, not recognizing the personhood and the innate dignity of his neighbor. Berdyaev argues that modern social theorists like Comte, Marx, and Durkheim "denied personality and believed that only the individual is correlative to the social group."⁴³⁸ With this belief they not only failed to create a valuable social theory but destroyed the proper understanding of the idea of society itself.

5. I, THOU, WE, AND IT

We end this part of our discourse with a final description of what "person" means, according to Berdyaev, and with clarification of what is meant by a "proper understanding of the idea of society." This final section will prepare us for the next part when we will discuss the forms of social organization and their political and social ideologies.

One of the authors who won Berdyaev's attention and respect was Martin Buber. Buber, according to Berdyaev's old friend Lev Shestov, was a man of Scripture. Like Böhme, and like Berdyaev himself, Buber was a "mystic" immersed in the Bible—he not only read the Torah, he translated it into German, performing, as Shestov says, an "enormous, almost impossible, task for the modern man." Shestov had serious reasons to believe that all of Buber's works, "even those that at first sight, according to their title and theme, had nothing to do with the Bible, were in the final analysis only commentaries and interpretations of this enigmatic book."⁴³⁹ Berdyaev had the same opinion. For him, Buber's famous *I and Thou* was not about man and man, but about man and God. In *Solitude and Society*, Berdyaev writes that for Buber, "the primary relationship between the Ego and the Thou is one between man and God."⁴⁴⁰ "This relationship," Berdyaev says, "is dialogical and dialectic." "For the Ego," he continues, "the Thou is not an object or a thing. But when the Thou is transformed into object, it becomes [...] the It. In [...] my own philosophy

⁴³⁶ DM, 75

⁴³⁷ DM, 75

⁴³⁸ DM, 76

⁴³⁹ Л. И. Шестов, "Мартин Бубер" [Martin Buber] *Путь*. 1933. № 39

⁴⁴⁰ SS, 106

this It is the outcome of an objectifying process, which obscures the Thou..."⁴⁴¹ So Berdyaev agrees with Buber that "the Ego has no real existence outside of its relationship with the Other self or the Thou,"⁴⁴² but emphasizes that Buber does not offer a complete—anthropological and social—interpretation of dialogical process. His investigations "do not extend to the relationship between human consciousness [...] between human beings [...] nor does he consider the problem of social and human metaphysics, that of the We."⁴⁴³

The proper understanding of what "We" means would give us a proper understanding of what "I" and "Thou" mean and what "society" means. "The existence of the We cannot be ignored," Berdyaev says, "and its relationship to the Ego, the Thou, and the It must be considered."⁴⁴⁴ There are two possibilities of the treatment of the We. The first is the above-discussed "sociological" interpretation. In it, the We is transformed into It, the We is "objectified," "socialized."⁴⁴⁵ In it all constituting members become parts of a whole that is We and thus lose their unique quality of persons. There is no I and Thou in the objectified We, there is no concreteness in it. On the contrary, the We becomes an abstraction, a fiction that we call "society," or "social class," or "corporation," or "nation," or any other collectivity, in which the "face" of the constituting member is dissolved in the "image" (the "idea" or the "mechanism") of the constituted whole. "[T]he social We," Berdyaev says, "is objective, and abstraction from the concrete person."⁴⁴⁶ This abstraction cannot have "personal" qualities. It has the features of a "Leviathan." It is ambiguous, and for that reason elusive and dominant. In addition, the social We does not feel pain like a human person nor can it feel joy or love or, in fact, any human emotion. It cannot be punished or rewarded. The punishment and the reward fall on its individual members, and only to a different degree. This abstract We is a tool, a utility, and not a person. It is an invention or mechanism, a technology similar to other "means of production." In other words, the objectified We is *It*. Only I, as a person, and Thou, as a person, have "the capacity to feel suffering

⁴⁴¹ SS, 106

⁴⁴² SS, 106

⁴⁴³ SS, 107

⁴⁴⁴ SS, 107

⁴⁴⁵ SS, 107

⁴⁴⁶ SS, 107

and joy."⁴⁴⁷ Only the I and the Thou can have emotions and concrete existence, the objectified We, however, is passionless and for that reason is a "thing." The value and the goal of the objectified We is not in *it*, properly speaking, but in something beyond *it*, its value is imaginary, "constructed," incomparable to the value of the human person that is a value in itself.

But there is another understanding of the We—the *personalistic* understanding. There exists another kind of communion between "human consciousness" that is not "It."⁴⁴⁸ How do we find it? Where do we find it? We find it in the fact that the non-objectified We is "immanent in the Ego," for every "Ego is inevitably related not only to the Thou but also to multiple mankind."⁴⁴⁹ "I cannot say 'I,'" Berdyaev notes, "without thereby affirming and postulating the Thou and the We."⁴⁵⁰ There is no I without Thou, and there is no I and Thou without the fact of the We. "In this light, sociability is a constituent property of the Ego's intimate existence." Or, the real We is consciousness of the existence of "natural" communion in the very essence of personal being. The We should be understood, according to Berdyaev, as a relationship, as a spiritual unity. This We does not have the inhuman qualities of the sociological It: it actually rests on reason, intuition, and emotions. As such, this We does not have a physical body, it is a spiritual body. "[O]ur knowledge of another's body is very limited," Berdyaev says, "We can only perceive it superficially [...] but our knowledge of other people's psychic life is infinitely greater; we are better able to grasp it and to penetrate more immediately into it." I do not feel your physical pain with my body, yet I feel your pain with my heart and mind. I might even feel or imagine a stronger pain than the pain you might actually have. Thus, being with you in your suffering, not only physical but also psychological suffering, or being with you emotionally, sharing with you your joy, sorrow, hope, or even shame, I am moved to be with you as one of us, or as We. In the act of feeling and moving towards the other, the We is born. In other words, through my spirit, I *participate* in Thou being.

Note here that according to Berdyaev's understanding of the relationship between I and Thou, we do not speak just about communication, which cannot express the fullness of life; we

⁴⁴⁷ SF, 26

⁴⁴⁸ SS, 107

⁴⁴⁹ SS, 107

⁴⁵⁰ SS, 107

rather speak about participation. This relationship is not just dialogical, it is synthetic, direct, participatory; it is a unity beyond the words, inexplicable by neither of the persons in communion, it happens on the level of intuition. "The intuition of another Ego's spiritual life is equivalent to communion with it."⁴⁵¹

Berdayev says that we should draw a difference between "communication" and "participation." "Participation is something real [...] Communication is [...] symbolic; it makes use [...] of exterior signs to denote an interior reality."⁴⁵² Communication is still a lesser level of communion, it is reciprocity "*in response*," and not reciprocity as "grace" (as described above). Participation is communion, it is creativity. It is creativity, on the one hand, because one is able to go beyond oneself through one's spiritual imagination, and on the other, because of the creation of something that overflows the singular dyad of I and Thou. The We is the *growth* of the I and the Thou, the absolute realization of the ideal society that happens through the power of spiritual imagination. This communion is the Khomiakovian *sobornost*—a free "hesychastic" agreement, a communion of love. This communion is the alternative to the modern Leviathan, to the "sociological" collectivity. "The solution," Berdyaev says, "lies in love."⁴⁵³

⁴⁵¹ SS, 109

⁴⁵² SS, 110

⁴⁵³ SS, 114

PART THREE: COMMUNION

CHAPTER ONE. REVOLUTION AND COMMUNISM

1. BERDYAEV'S "ENEMIES"

Love and communion are "stumbling blocks" and as impossible and absurd it may sound they can have "enemies." Not everyone is convinced, or conscious, that personhood and *sobornost* are fundamental realities of life; not everyone would accept Berdyaev's Trinitarian personalism as an ideal for the creation of a just and peaceful society. Berdyaev himself noted on numerous occasions that his communitarian and personalistic philosophy had many critics. This criticism was not only expressed in the polemics of academic and intellectual debates, but also in the hostile and coercive actions of state authorities and institutions. Berdyaev's life was frequently put in danger because of his ideas. He was fortunate to be set free after his interrogation in the basements of Lubyanka in 1922 and to avoid arrest by the Nazi authorities when they visited his home at Clamart. However, many of his friends who shared his ideals of Christian love and *sobornost*, like Mother Maria (Skobtsova) and Lev Karsavin, lost their lives in prisons and concentration camps both in Russia and Germany.

In 1918, still living in Moscow, Berdyaev wrote, despite the communist terror and the civil war, an angry book on social philosophy, *The Philosophy of Inequality*, directed against "his enemies" whom he described as those who opposed him in "spirit, thought, and life."⁴⁵⁴ The book was banned in Russia by the censors of the communist regime and never translated into French or English.⁴⁵⁵ Berdyaev himself did not have a high opinion of it, admitting that it was written in a state of agitation. For almost a hundred years, *The Philosophy of Inequality* was generally unknown. The only major systematic study of this text was a dissertation by Marko Markovic

⁴⁵⁴ ΦΗ, 19

⁴⁵⁵ The first English translation appeared in 2018 thanks to the personal efforts of Fr Stefan Janos.

published in French under the title *La Philosophie de l'inégalité et les idées politiques de Nicolas Berdiaev*.⁴⁵⁶

The lack of scholarly attention to this relatively early writing, and Berdyaev's apparently low appreciation of it, should not lead us to the conclusion that *The Philosophy of Inequality* is an insignificant, secondary work. On the contrary, in this substantive treatise, one can find some of the most systematic critiques of political ideologies made by Berdyaev. This work can be viewed as a bridge between Berdyaev's metaphysics and personalism and his social philosophy.

Berdyaev describes the book as a response to his enemies. Who were these adversaries? In the first pages, he describes them as the enemies of his faith, namely those who "betray" Christ in their spirit, and who "rebel against Him in the name of earthly idols and gods."⁴⁵⁷ He calls them "spiritual plebeians," people from the "artistic intelligentsia," who cannot find even "one word in defence of eternity and the higher life of Spirit."⁴⁵⁸ "I will not call your names," he writes, "I am concerned with the manifestation of spirit, not with people and their weaknesses and mysterious fate."⁴⁵⁹ Indeed, *The Philosophy of Inequality* has few references to specific authors; this is a book about ideas and ideologies, not about people and characters. However, we can identify Berdyaev's interlocutors—these were the ideologues of the political regimes under which he lived; Berdyaev did analyze and describe their thought and personality in numerous articles and books such as *The Russian Idea* and *The Origin of Russian Communism*.

In this and following chapters, we return to the earlier discussions of Russian conservatism, liberalism, Slavophilism, Westernism, radicalism, and religious philosophy in order to situate Berdyaev's political theology in its immediate and proper context. But before we proceed with Berdyaev's general critiques of revolution and communism, we should introduce two significant representatives of the Russian revolutionary movement, Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875-

⁴⁵⁶ Marko Marcovic. 1978. *La Philosophie de l'inégalité et les idées politiques de Nicolas Berdiaev*. (Nouvelles Editions Latines)

⁴⁵⁷ ΦΗ, 19

⁴⁵⁸ ΦΗ, 23

⁴⁵⁹ ΦΗ, 23

1933) and Georgy Plekhanov (1856-1918). Both of them were critics of Berdyaev's personalism and religious communitarianism and both were influential representatives of two major factions of the early Russian Marxist movement—the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. Lunacharsky, a sometime friend of Berdyaev, was the first "Commissar of Enlightenment" in the Bolshevik government and one of the ideologues of Lenin's cult of personality. Georgy Plekhanov was a founder of the social-democratic movement in Russia, a friend of Engels and early teacher of Lenin, and a critic of radical Bolshevism.

2. RELIGIOUS ATHEISM

Although they were two different types of revolutionaries, Lunacharsky and Plekhanov reflect the collective image of the nineteenth and twentieth-century revolutionary. Plekhanov could be described as a representative of the "Westernizing" as well as the radical current in Russian thought. His liberal and rational understanding of society and politics was likely shaped by his long exile in Europe, where he spent more than thirty years. He only returned to Russia in 1917, after the October Revolution, and died a year later in Finland. Lunacharsky, on the other hand, could be firmly placed in the camp of the radicals. After the revolution of 1905, Lunacharsky also lived in exile in France, Italy, and Switzerland, and joined the Bolsheviks when they took power in 1917.

In *The Origins of Russian Communism*, Berdyaev describes Plekhanov as a man "lacking understanding of Russia," an intellectual too "Westernized" to see that Russia is destined to have its "own form of communism," a form that was not evolutionary, but radical.⁴⁶⁰ In contrast to Lunacharsky and Lenin, Plekhanov believed that the "liberation of workers will come from the workers themselves, and not from some revolutionary circle" that operated as a revolutionary "elite" or "vanguard."⁴⁶¹ "Plekhanov, the head of the Menshevik faction of social-democracy," Berdyaev wrote, was a cold-minded "cabinet theoretician of Marxism, not a revolutionary leader (like Lenin)."

⁴⁶⁰ ИСПС, 86

⁴⁶¹ ИСПС, 92

Lunacharsky was a completely different character: a passionate revolutionary, a bitter ideological opponent of Berdyaev, and an admirer of Durkheim and Feuerbach. Lunacharsky, according to Berdyaev, was not an ordinary "dialectical-materialist."⁴⁶² Under the influence of Feuerbach, he belonged to the small group of "God-builders" (*богостроители*) in the Bolshevik faction that included prominent revolutionaries such as V. Bazarov and Maxim Gorky. This group surfaced after 1905, when the realities of political life disillusioned significant segments of the Russian intelligentsia, including people like S. Bulgakov, and drew them towards religion and mysticism. The God-building movement, in which Lunacharsky played a central role, was not a religious movement in the usual sense of the word. Its professed goal was the creation of a "new Godless religion" and a "new man." The name for this Godless religion was the "religion of scientific socialism." However, this school of thought was marked by a certain distrust of science and promoted a scientific relativism, arguing that the laws and discoveries of science were, as Lunacharsky claimed, always revised through the evolution of science itself. The only stable truth in this dynamic world was, Lunacharsky argued, the "socialist ideal," which should be conceived not simply as a social theory, but as an object of faith and veneration. Marxism, Lunacharsky insisted, was the most perfect form of religion. Its socialist ideal embodied beauty, reason, freedom, and humanism. The "God-builder" of this new religion was the "proletariat," the people, "man-God." Lunacharsky argued that Marxism should be presented to the masses not simply as a cold theory, but also as an emotionally inspiring faith, that after the disappearance of the idea of God, only "Man" and the "Cosmos" will remain. This will be a time of a great "religious atheism," the realisation of the socialist and humanistic aspirations that lie at the core of religion.

Lunacharsky and Berdyaev knew each other from their youth. They were both sent by the Tsarist regime into exile in Vologda, a city in northwest Russia, where, along with many other young radicals and revolutionaries, they spent months, even years, in passionate intellectual debates.⁴⁶³ The disagreements between Lunacharsky and Berdyaev lasted for life. For example, in

⁴⁶² ИСПС, 98

⁴⁶³ Stalin was also interned in Vologda between 1911 and 1912. Among the Vologda exiles were A. Bogdanov, B.V. Savinkov, A.M. Remoziv, B.A. Kistiakovsky, and P.E. Stegolev. Olga Volkogonova, Berdyaev's biographer, says that Lenin closely followed these intellectual debates. She quotes the future Bolshevik leader, saying: "From Vologda (where are

1924, Lunacharsky wrote an article, published in the journal *Red Field (Красная Нива)*, where he recalled that he had held Berdyaev in great esteem, seeing in him a "brilliant young Marxist writer," who published successfully in the venerated and "unapproachable" journal *Neue Zeit*, edited by the "teacher" Kautsky, but who, later, fell from his Marxist and revolutionary positions under the spell of a "foggy, even dark mysticism"⁴⁶⁴ In this piece, entitled "You Cannot Go Farther," Lunacharsky suspected that this transformation of Berdyaev happened under the influence of Sergii Bulgakov, whom Berdyaev met during a vacation in Zitomir. He recalls that Berdyaev returned from the trip with "sparkling in pleasure eyes," and proclaimed: "Here it is a brave man [Bulgakov], he already accepted Christ!" Lunacharsky shared this information with Alexander Bogdanov, another prominent Bolshevik exiled in Vologda. Bogdanov was a physician who believed in the possible achievement of eternal youth and who experimented with blood transfusions on himself and on people like Maria Ulyanova, Lenin's sister, experiments that eventually, as many believe, cost him his life. According to Lunacharsky, Bogdanov responded with the following prediction: that Berdyaev is "hopeless and will inevitably become, after just a few years, a Black Hundred writer." Lunacharsky says that he initially did not believe in Bogdanov's judgment but finally conceded that this was what exactly happened, although not to such a degree as Bulgakov. "Beginning with Marxism," Lunacharsky notes, "Berdyaev ended with philosophically interpreted Orthodoxy, Orthodoxy deeply churchly and even fanatical."

In this same article, as in others, Lunacharsky attacked Berdyaev as an "obscurantist," who longed for a return to the "Dark Middle Ages." He was shocked by Berdyaev's claim that the nineteenth century, with its technological development, led to the exhaustion of the spiritual and artistic energy of humanity, and bewildered by his assertion that radical individualism and radical socialism were "two forms" that put an end to the Renaissance. He was particularly outraged by Berdyaev's view that Nietzsche and Marx were the "genial spokesmen of self-destructing

Berdyaev and Bogdanov) inform us that the exiles there eagerly argue about philosophy, and Berdyaev, as the 'most knowledgeable,' seemingly wins the debates." Bogdanov remembers that Berdyaev "usually opposed us (the socialists); at that time," and also notes that he [Berdyaev] "was a very good orator (better than us), but with little knowledge in scientific matters..." Ольга Волкогонова. 2000. *Бердяев. Молодая гвардия*, С.35

⁴⁶⁴ А. В. Луначарский, "Дальше идти некуда." *Красная нива*, 1924, № 11, с. 260–261; also in Луначарский. 1924. *Против идеализма. Этюды полемические*. [Against Idealism. Polemical Etudes] Москва. , с. 157–163

humanism." Marx's ideology, according to Berdyaev, promoted the destruction of the human person; Nietzsche wanted man to become a "Superman." "We all know," Lunacharsky wrote, "that the Marxist collective is the very limit of free society, of stateless society and here comes one Berdyaev, who defends the hierarchisation of life." Scientific Marxism, Lunacharsky argued, leads to the greatest organization of society and, at the same time, declares war against the principles of authority and hierarchy.

As a political ideologue, Lunacharsky had a particular interest in religion. In 1925, in a public dispute with Metropolitan Vvedensky,⁴⁶⁵ he described communism and Christianity as two closely interconnected "social movements" that sought the realization of a particular social ideal. However, these "two cities," as he called them, used different means for the achievement of their goal. Lunacharsky viewed early Christianity as a communist social movement, represented by working people without interests in private property. He believed that there was a proletariat in the ancient world; but, in contrast to the modern proletariat, the ancient working class was unconscious about the importance of labor. The worker today, he said, realizes that labor is an "element" (*смуща*) that should be liberated and organized, and that labor alone has the capacity to deliver and secure happiness for the entirety of humanity. Contemporary workers understand, Lunacharsky argued, that if labor dominates, if it is free, not used by exploiters or "parasites," it would advance ideals of beauty, goodness, and happiness in concrete practice. A similar social consciousness could not arise in the minds of the workers of antiquity; labor for them was only for subsistence, they could not envisage any actual exit from the hard conditions in which they lived.

What were the similarities and the differences between these "two cities"—the communist and the Christian? "Was early Christianity democratic?" Lunacharsky asked rhetorically. Yes, it was "deeply democratic" through its faith in the prophetic saying that the "last will be first." Was it revolutionary? Yes, it was revolutionary because it relied on the "Final Judgment" for those who abused and robbed their neighbors. Was it socialist? It was, because the early Christians, as

⁴⁶⁵ Alexander Vvedensky was one of the leaders of the so-called "*obnovlenchestvo*" movement (Renovationist Church) that supported the communist regime and was used by the Bolsheviks to cause schism in the Church. See A. B. Луначарский. 1926. *Христианство или коммунизм. Диспут с митрополитом А. Введенским*. [Christianity or Communism] Государственное издательство, Ленинград. С. 45–75

Lunacharsky imagined, desired a social order of "consumerist socialism," where nobody works for a wage; and second, because the realization of this order would be achieved through conflict and violence, through the Final Judgment. Then, what was the difference between these "two cities"?

First, Lunacharsky argued, Christianity has changed; its primitive communist spirit has been lost over the course of history. Christianity was democratic only while it was dominated by proletarians with proletarian mentality. The proletarian spirit disappeared from Christianity with the establishment of the clergy. Its revolutionary character was preserved, but left impotent. Christianity today, Lunacharsky argued, does not summon the masses for revolution; on the contrary, it appeals for patience and hope. The Church asks us to "wait" and be "patient," although it does not know the time of the Messiah's return. When the currents of revolutionary aspiration began to penetrate the masses, Christianity told the people: "Do not rebel, but hope." Thus, this message of hope became a "counter-revolution"; it "hypnotized" the people, and "paralyzed" their "revolutionary energy."

Second, Lunacharsky said, Christianity rejects money. Communism, on the contrary, admits that capital is good. Communism believes, he explained to his listeners, that capitalism, despite its evils, appeared in order to discipline and train humanity, to bring it to the level of scientifically organized labor, without which no truth and righteousness, no dignified co-existence is possible. Only through the way of science and technology could humanity become materially rich and happy. Lunacharsky argued that, for the communists, it was clear that knowledge and technology should not be rejected, but taken out of the "hands of the capitalists." In taking over the "culture" and the "industry of the city," the communists would acquire the "keys" for the achievement of man's victory over nature and religious destiny. In this sense, Lunacharsky added, the communists are the true inheritors of Cain, the first city-builder. They do not protest against Babel. If "god" divided the people, the appeal, "Proletarians of all countries, unite!," appears as a true call for overcoming sacred divisions and for a new unification of humanity that will finish the building of the Tower of Babel and achieve the final victory of man.

In 1908, shortly after his immigration to Europe, Lunacharsky wrote *Religion and Socialism*,⁴⁶⁶ a partial realization of his old dream to make a systematic exposition of the phenomenon of religion and its role in the development of society and history. The book was also written in response to a debate between him and Berdyaev that had started years before. The polemic in question seemed to begin at a conference in Kiev in 1898, at which Lunacharsky read a "referat" under the title "Idealism and Marxism." As Lunacharsky says in the introduction to *Religion and Socialism*, during the conference his views were met with "friendly criticism" by Nikolai Berdyaev. He explained that both he and Berdyaev worked on essentially the same problem, that is, on idealism and Marxism, but "how different were the results!" Berdyaev became a "Bulgakovian," while he, Lunacharsky, continued to adhere to "scientific socialism." "Scientific socialism," he explained, "was a synthetic philosophy, harmonically uniting ideal and practice," reflecting the thought of Marx, "the greatest German idealist." "What were Hegel and Feuerbach for Herzen and his friends, the same was Marx for our generation." Thus, in contrast to Berdyaev, Lunacharsky would not repudiate or betray Marxism. He discovered in Marx an "iron logic." For him, Marx and Engels were describing reality "from the point of view of necessity, i.e., from the perspective of scientific knowledge," a perspective that Berdyaev, a "captive of freedom," did not embrace.⁴⁶⁷ Despite his opposition to the idea of necessity, Lunacharsky says, at this conference, Berdyaev clearly formulated the "task" of the Marxists raising the question: According to Marx, socialism was a sociological necessity, but was this necessarily good? According to Marx, socialism was the work of the working class, but should it be viewed as the task of the entirety of humanity as well? In other words, as Lunacharsky clarified, in 1898 Berdyaev had posed the question of whether we should try to make the case to everyone, despite the perception of an inevitable victory of socialism in history, that socialism should be embraced as the "highest social ideal of our times." Lunacharsky's answer to this question was a firm "yes." In taking this stance, he confronted not only the views of the "Bulgakovians," but also the positions of some prominent socialists, such as Plekhanov, who insisted that socialism shouldn't be presented as an object of

⁴⁶⁶ А. В. Луначарский. 1908. *Религия и социализм* (Шиповник)

⁴⁶⁷ The phrase "captive of freedom" is used by Spinka. (Matthew Spinka. 1950. *Nicolas Berdyaev: Captive of Freedom*, Westminster Press)

veneration or promoted as religious teaching. Lunacharsky argued that those who were against socialist preaching, against the "winning of hearts," were "narrow-minded" and acting against the actual realization of the socialist ideal. He was convinced that the "ideological hegemony" of the working-class would promote the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and insisted that it was necessary for Marxism to win the sympathies of the greatest majority of people. Ideological propaganda, he declared, was critical to revolutionary success.

Ironically, this is where Lunacharsky attracted some of the most severe criticism from his own party. He was viewed as a "prophet" or rather an "apostle" of a "new religion." In his memoirs, A.M. Deborin, a Marxist philosopher, who, under the influence of Plekhanov, moved ideologically from Bolshevism to Menshevism, critiqued Lunacharsky's *Religion and Socialism* as a form of "Berdyayevshchina" (a derogatory term denoting a follower of Berdyayev's ideas). For Deborin, the "religious atheism" of Lunacharsky was not essentially different from the "religious mysticism" of Berdyayev. He noted that Lunacharsky's ideas were criticized by Plekhanov in a series of "brilliant" essays against "God-seeking" and "God-building" and that Lenin also expressed his disagreement with Lunacharsky in his letters to Maxim Gorky.⁴⁶⁸

3. MATERIALISM

What was exactly the problem with Lunacharsky's revolutionary enthusiasm? The problem was that it did not fit well with orthodox Marxist theory, or more concretely, with Marxist materialism. Plekhanov rightly notes in one of the articles mentioned by Deborin that "Mr Lunacharsky knows nothing at all of materialist literature."⁴⁶⁹ Lunacharsky's "religious atheism" was an idealization, even a "caricature" of the deeply secular and materialistic world-view of Marxism that was seeking the total elimination of religious feeling and ideas.

⁴⁶⁸ А. М. Деборин, "Воспоминания академика А. М. Деборина" (Фрагменты) [Academic A.M.Deborin's Memoirs; Fragments] Журнал "Вопросы философии", № 2, Февраль 2009, С. 113-133

⁴⁶⁹ Georgi Plekhanov. 1909. "On the So-Called Religious Seekings in Russia," in Georgi Plekhanov. 1976. *Selected Philosophical Works*, Volume 3 (Progress Publishers, Moscow.), pp. 306-413. First published in "Современный мир" [Contemporary World], no. 9, 10 and 12, 1909.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels describe the appearance of the human being as a result of its capacity to produce. Human beings begin to "distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means for subsistence."⁴⁷⁰ The animal does not work, humans do; the animal does not have a capacity for the achievement of self-sufficiency, only the human does.⁴⁷¹ It is natural for human beings to produce more than they could consume or need. And, strictly speaking, what humans are "coincides with *what they produce and how they produce*."⁴⁷² Here, we do not think of humans as "persons" and "creators," as viewed by Berdyaev, we rather understand them as "autarkic producers" and "*homo fabers*." By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life and their material life, in reverse, determines their character and being. "The nature of individuals," Marx says, "thus depends on the material conditions determining their production." This is another fundamental difference with Berdyaev's anthropology. In Marx, matter takes the role of spirit.⁴⁷³ The nature of individuals, their essence and being, depends on their material conditions and modes of production. Moreover, the "intercourse" between humans, the character of their social interaction, depends on *what* they produce and *how*. Their self-consciousness depends on what they do and how, and on what is done unto them by the material and social environment. This concept could be applied both to individuals and to nations. It includes also the phenomenon of private property and division of labor that, on the one hand, determines human relationships, and, on the other, the general level of development of particular nations and classes. Men are not only producers of tools and things; they are also "producers of their conceptions, ideas," that are, as it has been said, determined by material conditions and modes of production. "In direct contrast to German philosophy," Marx writes, "which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to

⁴⁷⁰ Marx, K. *The German Ideology* in Marx, K. 2000. *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, Oxford University Press, p.177

⁴⁷¹ See Marx, K. 1959. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

⁴⁷² Marx, 2000, 177

⁴⁷³ cf. Евгений Трубецкой, "К характеристике учения Маркса и Энгельса о значении идей в истории" in *Проблемы идеализма* (1902), *Манифесты русского идеализма*, сост. Вадим Сапов [Problems of Idealism. Manifests of Russian Idealism, ed. Vadim Sapov]; See in English Randall Allen Poole. 2003. *Problems of Idealism: Essays in Russian Social Philosophy. Russian Literature and Thought*. New Haven: Yale University Press. pp.124-142

heaven."⁴⁷⁴ "The phantoms [i.e. ideas, philosophical concepts, religious feelings, etc.] formed in the human brain are [...] necessarily, sublimates of material life-process."⁴⁷⁵ Thus, Marx concludes, "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life."⁴⁷⁶

Ideas, morality, religion, metaphysics, are not independent from material life nor from political, social, or economic factors; they have only a "semblance of independence." Marx believes that the "class which has the means of material production at its disposal," and this could be the bourgeoisie, the financial class, the proletariat, or any other socio-economic group that is in control of material production, also has "control [...] over the means of mental production."⁴⁷⁷ Therefore, "the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas."⁴⁷⁸ For that reason, Marx says later, "the communists do not preach morality at all [...] They do not put to people the moral demand: love one another, don't be egoists, etc."⁴⁷⁹ They know that what men are is a function of their material condition. If this condition changes, the mental or the "spiritual disposition" changes as well. Whether one is an egoist or altruist, a Samaritan or a Levite, a Pharisee or a robber, depends on his material condition, on his "material life-process."

In the light of Marxism, Lunacharsky's failure is his forgetfulness or down-playing of the primary element of human nature and condition—namely, the material foundation of life. The importance of the material foundation is what Plekhanov highlighted in his series of articles, entitled *On the So-Called Religious Seekings in Russia*, published in 1909 in the journal *Contemporary World*, a magazine that, until 1906, existed under the name *God's World (Bojii Mir)*.⁴⁸⁰ In these essays, Plekhanov wanted to discuss, and reject as senseless, the "religious

⁴⁷⁴ Marx, 2000, 180

⁴⁷⁵ Marx, 2000, 180

⁴⁷⁶ Marx, 2000, 181

⁴⁷⁷ Marx, 2000, 192

⁴⁷⁸ Marx, 2000, 192

⁴⁷⁹ Marx, 2000, 199

⁴⁸⁰ Berdyaev also published in this journal, while his stay in Vologda. The essay was entitled "*Fight for Idealism*."

seekings" in Russia, "one of the most topical subjects," in his view, of the modern era along with "pornography and wrestling."⁴⁸¹

Plekhanov begins his series of discussions with Sergii Bulgakov, whom he described as "one of our best known god-seekers." He starts with a quote from Bulgakov's "Heroism and Asceticism: Reflections on the Religious Nature of the Russian Intelligentsia," published in the famous collection of critical essays *Landmarks* (*Vekhi*), to which Berdyaev was also a contributor. "The most striking thing of Russian atheism," Bulgakov wrote, "is its dogmatism. [...] Our intelligentsia shows a startling ignorance of religious matters. I say this not as an accusation because there may perhaps be sufficient historical justification for it, but to diagnose their mental condition."⁴⁸² Plekhanov partially agrees with Bulgakov's observation. "What Mr. Bulgakov says," he notes, "is the truth, but not the whole truth. He has forgotten to add that ignorance in religious matters is displayed not only by those who profess atheism but also by those who engage in one way or another in 'god-seeking' and 'god-building'."⁴⁸³ Here, Plekhanov has Lunacharsky in mind, as well as Tolstoy, Merezhkovsky, Struve, Gershenson, and Bulgakov himself.

"Like Bulgakov," Plekhanov says, "I am not accusing anyone, but only diagnosing the mental condition." This condition, according to him, could be described as "an irresistible disposition to religious dogmatism." Plekhanov takes up the task of showing what religion truly is and how disturbing it is to make it into a dogma and a rule of life. He defines religion as a "more or less orderly system of conceptions, sentiments, and actions." The conceptions consist of the "mythological" element of religion; the sentiments belong to the domain of religious feelings; the actions to the religious worship. Myth, Plekhanov says, is born when man is engaged in a fruitless search for an explanation of a phenomenon: when he does not find such an explanation, he constructs a myth. Myth, for Plekhanov, is an expression of a "primitive world-outlook." This outlook explains all natural phenomena as "actions of particular beings," which like the man himself, "are endowed with consciousness, needs, passions, desires, and will." This transposition

⁴⁸¹ Plekhanov, 1909 (1976). 306-413

⁴⁸² Quoted by Plekhanov in Plekhanov, 1909

⁴⁸³ Plekhanov, 1909

of one's own image on external things and events is what E. Tylor called "animism," namely, a personification of the unknown and "humanization" of natural objects, phenomena, events, etc.⁴⁸⁴

Following Marx, Plekhanov says that by simple necessity all human concepts have material nature. Sometimes the "material signs" are more discernible, sometimes more obscure, making religious concepts seem particularly abstract. Concurring with Marx, Plekhanov argues that in the development of human thought, practice always precedes theory. Similarly, political organization and social order always precede the spiritual or ideological order. To prove the dominance of material over spiritual, Plekhanov gives as an example the creation story in Scripture. The Bible says: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed in his nostrils: and man became a living soul." When Adam sinned, God told him: "For dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return." In Plekhanov's account, beneath the myth that man was created of earth by *someone* lies the existing practice of producing things from clay. Ancient people created pottery from clay, their buildings, their idols, and primitive art. Accordingly, the creation myth was a projection of a very common practice and life-experience and also a personification of an unknown phenomenon—the creation of the world and man—through the means of psychological self-imaging. God, in the creationist myth, is actually the man—*God is an image of man producing things and tools*. The "clay" as material for creation is just a reflection of man's knowledge of pottery. "The nature of theory regarding the origin of the world," Plekhanov concludes, "is, in general, determined by the level of primitive technique." All concepts and ideas rest on the material environment and the modes of production. In the contemporary world, material progress advanced and raised man's self-conscious power over nature to such a "height" that the "'hypothesis of God' creating the world" is "no longer necessary."⁴⁸⁵

Lunacharsky, Plekhanov says, wants to "eliminate the animistic conceptions in religion, while keeping its other elements intact." He wants a religion without God. But this, for Plekhanov, is impossible, and it does not do the work that should be actually done, namely the destruction of the very idea of God. Lunacharsky, Plekhanov says, goes so far to declare Marxism as the "fifth

⁴⁸⁴ See Edward B. Tylor. 1958 (1871). *Primitive Culture*. The Library of Religion and Culture. Harper

⁴⁸⁵ Plekhanov, 1909

great religion formulated by Judaism" and takes upon himself the role of its prophet. "If I am right," Plekhanov declares, "there is no religion without god; where there is religion there must be a god." Religion is impossible without "animistic notions." With cold irony, Plekhanov mocks Lunacharsky's "prayerful mood," quoting him:

'Let the Kingdom of God prevail [...] 'His Will shall be.' The Will of the Master from limit to limit, that is, without limit. 'Holy be His Name.' On the throne of worlds [he] shall take his seat Someone in the image of man, and the well organized-world, through the lips of living and dead elements and by the voice of its beauty, exclaims: 'Holy, Holy, Holy; Heaven and Earth abounds with Thy Glory. [...] And the man-God will look round and smile, for everything is very good.'⁴⁸⁶

To this, Plekhanov remarks with scorn:

Who knows, perhaps it might be like this; if so it will be a great comfort. There is only one fly in the ointment: not everything by far in our prophet's dissertations is 'very good.' [...] The religion devised by Mr Lunacharsky has only one 'value,' truly a quite big one: it may put the serious reader in a very cheerful mood.

In his view, Lunacharsky's religious outbursts were a reflection of the fact that he was "simply adapting himself to the social mood now prevailing" in Russia.

4. REVOLUTION

One may ask who was Berdyaev's greatest enemy—Lunacharsky or Plekhanov, Bolshevism or Menshevism? The surprising answer may be that it is Menshevism. Perhaps Lunacharsky, or someone of similar views in the Bolshevik government, who still believed, if not in the greatness and dignity of God, at least in the (metaphysical) dignity of man, spared Berdyaev's life, sending him abroad instead of killing him.⁴⁸⁷ If Russia had fallen into the hands of the Mensheviks,

⁴⁸⁶ А. Луначарский, "Атеизм" [Atheism] in Луначарский. 1908. *Очерки по философии марксизма*. [Essays on Philosophy of Marxism] М., С. 107—161

⁴⁸⁷ Berdyaev notes in his autobiography that Alexander Bogdanov believed that if a person has any kind of "idealistic/metaphysical" world-outlook, he or she should be classified as mentally deranged. Berdyaev recalls in

Berdyayev would not have faced the threats of execution or exile, but would have been "suffocated" in a "democratic" evolutionary project of spiritual destruction. "The most terrible forms of atheism," Berdyayev wrote, "are not the militant and passionate fights against the idea of God and against God Himself, but the practical and existential godlessness, the indifference and mortification."⁴⁸⁸ By all accounts, Plekhanov seems a much darker figure than the "light-minded" Lunacharsky; his scientific realism had a greater potential for the actual delivering of the materialistic visions of Marx and his followers. It is indisputable that Plekhanov, the social-democrat, played a greater role in Russian history than Lunacharsky, the Bolshevik. Plekhanov was the person who introduced Lenin to the influential circle of European social-democrats, who "patronized" the future communist leader and helped him to "get on his feet."⁴⁸⁹ According to a document published in 1999 in *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*,⁴⁹⁰ Plekhanov left a political testament that,

Samopoznanie that in Vologda, Bogdanov, being a physician, secretly examined him as an interesting medical case. But later, Berdyayev says, Bogdanov proved that he himself suffered from a serious nervous disease and spent time in a mental home. (DR, 129-130, See also Волкогонова, 2000. Ch.35) Berdyayev's life was probably saved by Petr Bogdanov—the chairman of the Soviet ministry of economy. At a meeting of GPU (the Soviet Secret Service) on July 22, 1922, Bogdanov argued for expelling Berdyayev to Europe instead of exiling him to Siberia, which was equal to capital punishment. He opposed Yonov and Lebedev-Polianskii (the director of Glavlit, the Soviet censorship agency), who insisted on Berdyayev's banishment to Siberia. Years later, in 1938, Bogdanov himself was convicted to death and shot in a polygon near Moscow. (See Постановление Политбюро ЦК РКП(б) об утверждении списка высылаемых из России интеллигентов, 10 августа 1922 г. [Decree of Politbureau of the Central Committee of Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on the approval of the list of deported from Russia intellectuals. August 10, 1922] "Отечественные архивы" [Domestic Archives] № 1. 2003) Political calculation was the most probable reason for the expulsion and not execution of Russian intellectuals opposing the regime. The Bolsheviks wanted to "eliminate" the "anti-soviet" intelligentsia, but were cautious not to kill them all. In an interview for the American journalist Ann-Louise Strong, published on August 30, 1922, in the newspaper *Izvestia*, Leon Trotsky explained, "These elements whom we are expelling or are going to expel, are by themselves insignificant. But they are potential weapons in the hands of our enemies [...] all these [...] elements could become [one day] military-political agents of the enemy. And we will be forced to shoot them according to the laws of war. That's why we now prefer, in a peaceful time, to expel them in advance. I hope that you will not refuse to recognize our prudential humanism." (See A. B. Квакин, "Высылка интеллигенции в 1922–1923 годы: мифы и реальность." [A.V. Kavkin, The Expulsion of the Intelligentsia in 1922–1923: Myths and Reality] *Гуманитарные науки* [Humanitarian Sciences], №1 (9)/2013) (See Also www.portal.rusarchives.ru/evants/exhibitions/phliner_doc.shtml (Russian Federal State Archive))

⁴⁸⁸ ИО, 92

⁴⁸⁹ Г.В. Плеханов. 1918. Плеханов О Ленине. Из "Политического завещания" [Political Testament], published in *Независимая газета*, 1.12.1999

⁴⁹⁰ The authorship and authenticity of the document is still contested by historians, but all agree that it reflects the Menshevik views at the time. Reading the document, I believe that it was forged, but the arguments in it are not far from the historical truth.

although critical of Bolshevism, revealed his key role in the creation of the radical communist movement. Whether the "testament" was forged or not, whether it was composed by Leo Deutsch or not, we find in it some truths: "In 1903," Plekhanov is purported to have said, "I supported Lenin in his conflict with (Julius) Martov, which, in result, led to the birth of Bolshevism."⁴⁹¹ This, he admits, was his greatest mistake, a mistake "unfortunately, impossible to correct." Plekhanov knew that Bolshevism, which he helped to launch but was not able to stop, had a greater capacity to destroy the socialist project than any other external political or ideological enemy.

Berdyaev's diagnosis of the spread of revolutionary fever, with its religious atheism and materialism, was that Russia was tempted by the Anti-Christ and his "workers."⁴⁹² These workers, he claims, started with "innocent and inspiring preaching" of "humanistic and progressive ideas," but they soon turned from liberators into oppressors. In the beginning, the revolutionaries were just "spiritual oppressors taking over the weak soul of the Russian intelligentsia." Fighting the "highest spiritual realities and values,"⁴⁹³ they were "persecutors" of the "religious meaning of life" and of the "religious goal of life." They did this, Berdyaev says, by denouncing the errors of the old regime. But after they took power, they embraced the opportunity to become material oppressors as well, and this exposed their true nature. As servants of the Anti-Christ, Berdyaev says, they had always been enemies of freedom and extinguishers of the spirit. Their goal was always material—the pursuit of temporal interest. They were, Berdyaev argues, destroyers of eternity. Through them, "the time that brings death" waged a struggle against "eternity."⁴⁹⁴

For Berdyaev, the effects of revolution were not entirely evil. He seemed to have grasped Plekhanov's concern that Bolshevism was an unconscious enemy of the materialistic project. Paradoxically, revolutions could serve as a "vaccine" against the slow development of materialistic maladies. Survival from the atheistic revolutionary terror could eventually result in the creation of immunity against the process of "de-spiritualization," against the gradual expansion of unfreedom and oppression. Revolution should be understood, Berdyaev argues, as a "social experiment."

⁴⁹¹ Г.В.Плеханов. "Политического завещания" [Political Testament], *Независимая газета*, 1.12.1999

⁴⁹² ФН, 21

⁴⁹³ ФН, 21

⁴⁹⁴ ФН, 21

Being a social experiment, the revolution in Russia was not a "spiritual" upheaval capable of giving "birth to a new man and a new consciousness."⁴⁹⁵ The revolution did not create a new man and a new consciousness. The "mystical idealization" of the revolution is a type of "spiritual fornication." Intellectuals, educated people, and artists who justify revolutionary crimes, Berdyaev says, "decompose" their souls, losing the sense of "all difference between truth and lie (untruth), between reality and ghosts." In other words, for Berdyaev all political revolutions, not just the Russian one, were just social experiments, violent political events, caused by low passions and temporal interests, and not by deep spiritual hopes and motives.

All revolutions are irreligious by nature, Berdyaev says. But a revolution that is great in size could have a religious meaning. How so? The great revolution, according to Berdyaev, could be interpreted as a *sign* of Providence, not simply as a social experiment or political cataclysm. Berdyaev is convinced that one may find in every great revolution the judgment of God's Providence.⁴⁹⁶ And this is what he detected in the most anti-religious revolution of all time, the Russian revolution. Berdyaev notes that some of the revolutionaries had started to speak about the need for religion, and its usefulness in pursuing the goals of communism. But religion, as Moltmann (following Schleiermacher) observed years later,⁴⁹⁷ cannot be used for utilitarian, positivistic goals. It is impossible for unbelievers, Berdyaev says, to use and employ religion for the goals of their materialistic social and political project. In fact, atheistic governments that hope to use religion in one or another way for the creation of good and obedient citizens do not know what atheism makes of people. People, consciously or unconsciously, thirst for *meaning*, and life has no real meaning in a materialist civilization. Thus, knowing the *end* of Russian communism and its consequences, Berdyaev predicts that "a new generation of Russian people will grow and

⁴⁹⁵ ΦH, 22

⁴⁹⁶ ΦH, 24

⁴⁹⁷ "When religion, Church and faith are considered only from the standpoint of their expediency and usefulness for society [i.e. when religion ceases to be an end in itself], they are bound to vanish as soon as the purposes of society can be served by other means." (Moltmann, 1973, 78)

learn how to hate and despise (the communist and atheistic) ideas, and will curse the evils these ideas had brought."⁴⁹⁸

Through revolutionary experience, Berdyaev argues, man will learn that "social dreaming is debauchery,"⁴⁹⁹ that the simple borrowing of foreign ideas and practices, the speech in readymade declarations, clichés, and phrases, and the unconscious usage of language is senseless, dangerous and harmful. Moreover, through this experience, he would learn that the revolutionary political reformers worship falsehoods and that their first and greatest lie is atheism and unbelief. The revolutionary experience should lead, Berdyaev expects, to a "healthy social pessimism, far more complex and subtle than the optimism of the dull hope of social fanatics."⁵⁰⁰ "The striving for abstract social perfectibility is a wicked and godless aspiration," he declares. "Attempts for the realization of an earthly paradise always lead to hell on earth, to hatred, mutual destruction, bloodshed and violence."⁵⁰¹ Berdyaev insists that man has no right to be naive and dreamy in social life, that he should not permit sentimentality. On the contrary, man should become a responsible realist, who knows about the existence of evil and sin, and who strives to achieve, not perfectibility, but a skill to "discern spirits."⁵⁰² There are no miracles in social life, he concludes, so revolutionary Messianism is a great lie and temptation.

Revolution, Berdyaev thinks, is a result of old sins; it is a "fatal consequence of old evils."⁵⁰³ This is how the French revolution was seen by people like Joseph de Maistre and Carlyle. Berdyaev says that Carlyle believed that the French revolution was a result of atheism and punishment for sins. It was man's own punishment for man's own sins. This is the work of God's Providence: not God, but unrepentant man inflicts punishment and correction on himself through his own sin. "Revolution redeems the sins of the past."⁵⁰⁴ It is a sin, but also a judgment against sin. Revolution reveals that the governing power is swept out for not performing its God-given duties to keep

⁴⁹⁸ ΦH, 42

⁴⁹⁹ ΦH, 45

⁵⁰⁰ ΦH, 45

⁵⁰¹ ΦH, 46

⁵⁰² ΦH, 46

⁵⁰³ ΦH, 24

⁵⁰⁴ ΦH, 24

justice and peace. Revolutions are not brought to history by God or by the revolutionaries: they are rather a result of the irresponsibility of the governing elites; corrupt power makes revolution possible. Berdyaev is convinced that injustice in society prepares the ground for revolution. He concludes that if there can be no creative development from on high, if the high does not shine in the splendor of truth and right, then the darkness below overcomes. This, for him, was a "natural law."

If the "darkness" dominates the phenomenon of political revolution, then revolution cannot be described or interpreted as a creative process. On the contrary, revolution results in destruction, putrefaction, decomposition. Every revolution, Berdyaev declares, is "sealed" with the "seal" of ungratefulness, atheism, and damnation. The nation possessed by revolutionary rage is a slave to "dark forces." Revolution is always an enemy of the spirit of freedom, and, as an enemy of freedom, it is also an enemy of personhood. Revolution, Berdyaev says, is faceless. It does not create human persons in the image and likeness of God.⁵⁰⁵ On the contrary, it makes people "sick."

It is an illusion to believe that revolutions can produce true leaders. They are fundamentally moved by faceless masses, and the masses produce Jacobins and Bolsheviks. Nobody can truly direct the revolutionary process. That is why revolutionary terror destroys its own makers. Büchner's Danton was right saying that revolution is like "Saturn" who "devours its own children."⁵⁰⁶ If there is no person behind the revolution, then there would not be a creative process in it. Berdyaev says that it is wrong to think that the Bolsheviks, the Marxists, the anarchists, all partisans of the "new order" are active and creative persons. They are not. They are passive and "spiritually immobile."⁵⁰⁷ They succumb under the power of passions and they "deceive themselves that in them a new man is born."⁵⁰⁸ The truth is that they are "old souls," terminating in the old man with his sins and weaknesses. "Was Robespierre a new soul, a new

⁵⁰⁵ ΦΗ, 25

⁵⁰⁶ Georg Büchner, Howard Brenton, and Jane Fry. 1982. *Danton's Death: A New Version*. Methuen Theatre Classic. (p.18). It is not clear who the original author of this adage is. I have seen it attributed to Robespierre, Jacques Mallet du Pan, and Marat.

⁵⁰⁷ ΦΗ, 25

⁵⁰⁸ ΦΗ, 26

man?" Berdyaev asks. No, he answers, Robespierre was an "old man with old violent instincts."⁵⁰⁹ In fact, Robespierre and Lenin were destroyers of every creative impulse. Lenin and Robespierre fought for equality, but creativity, Berdyaev argued, presupposes inequality.

There is no real dynamism in revolution. Its dynamic is only external. Internally, that is, spiritually, it is static. If there is any movement in this external revolutionary dynamism, it is a movement of self-destruction. True movement, Berdyaev says, never happens on the surface, it is in the depth of the spirit. The revolution of the spirit, which is the true dynamism and re-volution, has nothing to do with external, material, political, and social revolution. "Marx," Berdyaev says, "was never a revolutionary of Spirit." Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky, however, were. Nietzsche despised the "plebs," and Dostoyevsky was seen as conservative and reactionary.

All revolutions end with reaction, with counter-revolution, Berdyaev says. Counter-revolution, he argues, is not evil, and it could be in fact creative and truthful, because it can never restore the old order and life.⁵¹⁰ In every spiritual reaction against revolution, there is something new. The truth is, Berdyaev concludes, that Joseph de Maistre, not Robespierre or Marat, was a "new man". The reactionary de Maistre believed in the possibility of a new revelation, not revolution, the revelation of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹¹ In counter-revolutionary reaction, Berdyaev says, there is spiritual depth. Revolutionary ideology, on the other hand, cannot be described as "insightful." It just does not know, and does not want to know, the ancient sources of the world; it is optimistic, utopian, directed to the future. But one cannot find depth in hope blind to its true origins.

5. THE ORIGINS OF RUSSIAN COMMUNISM AND REVOLUTION

Russia, Berdyaev believes, did not pass the test of war. World War I revealed a Russian "soul" that was weaker in comparison to the "souls" of other nations. The Russian people, he

⁵⁰⁹ ΦH, 26

⁵¹⁰ ΦH, 29

⁵¹¹ ΦH, 29. Berdyaev expresses similar thoughts about the Russian conservative Konstantin Leontiev. In his article "Russian God-Seekers," Berdyaev describes Leontiev as "almost a genius of a reactionary," but "Who would guess, that in this reactionary there was something in truth revolutionary, in whom stormed religious passions?" (SCI, 31)

argues, were not completely "Western," they also had an Asiatic and Eastern character. Russian weakness was a result of the division between these two elements, Eastern and the Western, that had never united harmoniously to form a whole and complete national character. The inconsistency of the Russian spirit, Berdyaev explains, was due to the complexity of Russian history and the conflict of the Eastern and Western elements within her.⁵¹² This conflicted quality of the Russian spirit was also reflected in the character of the Russian intelligentsia. The revolutionaries, Berdyaev observes, always studied Western culture and thought and yet never understood its "secrets" and "spirit." The intelligentsia only superficially united the "unenlightened Eastern element" (*стухия*) with a borrowed "Western consciousness," and were incapable of expressing or producing a genuine national "self-consciousness."⁵¹³ Thus, Russia turned out to be an enigma, including for the Russians themselves.

Neither Westernizers nor Slavophiles were able to understand the secret of Russia, Berdyaev says. To reveal what Russia was, one had to pursue a "third" way and struggle towards an "ascent over the opposition of the two natures—the Eastern and the Western, the Westernizing and the Slavophile."⁵¹⁴ The very truth was that "according to God's Providence" and according to its "empirical" worldly condition, Russia was not two natures and two cultures, but one single nature and culture—a great and united East-West.⁵¹⁵ This truth, however, was not readily grasped. Russian revolutionaries, Berdyaev says, continued to be Easterners in character and Westerners in education, blind to the "great providential meaning of Russia."⁵¹⁶ The incapacity of the Russian intelligentsia, of the Russian people in general, to connect and unite the two elements, prevented the nation from growing to its natural wholeness and all-humanness (*всечеловечность*).⁵¹⁷

Berdyaev compares Russia to a "harlot that slept with many but married no one." Russian people, he says, always looked abroad for their political and administrative organization; they

⁵¹² ORC, 8

⁵¹³ ФН, 32

⁵¹⁴ ФН, 32

⁵¹⁵ ФН, 33

⁵¹⁶ ФН, 33

⁵¹⁷ ФН, 34

always relied on the advice and services of "enemies" and "German administrators." Their political order followed the model of an alien system, Byzantine Caesarism. When this system began to disintegrate, Russia, being unconscious of its authentic character and destiny, was threatened with complete destruction.

Berdyaev observes that the Russian people have had an abnormal, unhealthy attitude to state power. On the one hand, the people felt the need for authority; on the other hand, they felt estranged from ruling authorities. The people of Russia never exercised control over political power and for that reason they displayed a tendency to support autocracy. The insufficient development of social classes, with their proper political interests, along with the strong state bureaucracy and political dependence, revealed a lack of "masculinity" in the Russian soul, that is, the lack of a capacity for self-rule and self-organization. According to Berdyaev, Russian autocracy, as a specific manifestation of the Russian life, exposed the "exceptionally feminine character" of the Russian soul.⁵¹⁸ The power of Peter the Great was not "masculine." For Berdyaev, Peter was more of an oppressor than a man.⁵¹⁹ The "marriage" between Russian masculinity and femininity, the androgenic unification of the Russian spirit, did not happen under Peter. The early Slavophiles realized this fact and critiqued the Tsar-Reformer as an anti-Christ, not a unifier. In silent disagreement, these people submitted to the power of the autocrat only to launch, as Berdyaev notes, a century-long battle for the destruction of his legacy.

⁵¹⁸ ФН, 34

⁵¹⁹ It is not clear whether Jean-Jacques Rousseau's opinion on Peter I, and on Russia in general, played a role in the perception of Peter's character by thinkers such as Chaadaev, or in this particular case, Berdyaev. In Chaadev's private library there is a copy of only one of Rousseau's books, *Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar*. (See Ореханов, Прот. Георгий, "Религиозный кризис" (Лев Толстой и Петр Чаадаев) in *Logos I Ethos*. – 2016- Vol. 43) In his most influential work *The Social Contract*, Rousseau argues that "Peter had an imitative genius; he had not the true genius that creates and produces anything from nothing. Some of his measures were beneficial, but the majority were ill-timed. He saw that his people were barbarous, but he did not see that they were unripe for government; he wished to civilize them, when it was necessary only to discipline them. He wished to produce at once Germans or Englishmen, when he should have begun by making Russians; he prevented his subjects from ever becoming what they might have been, by persuading them that they were what they were not." (Jean-Jacques Rousseau. 2012. *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*, Yale University Press, pp.184-185)

But it was not only Peter, with his imported German system of government, who was preventing the fulfillment of Russian destiny. A specific form of Russian Orthodoxy presented another obstacle to the revelation and development of Russian all-humanity (universality). If Russian autocracy adopted the Byzantine political model, Russian Orthodoxy preserved its authentic character. Russian Orthodoxy, although allied with state power, did not completely transform into an old-style Byzantine, Greek Orthodoxy. It was and continued to be an original phenomenon, very different from the Greek Church. "I speak not about the Universal Church," Berdyaev clarifies here, "but about the peculiar religiosity of the Russian people."⁵²⁰ The religiosity of the Russian people was different from the religiosity of Western Christians. The religious teachers of Russian people were not the clergy and the theologians, as in the West, but the so-called "holy fools" (*юродивые*). These men, wandering monks and ascetics, did not teach self-discipline, civilized manners, or "culture." On the contrary, they were unique examples of religious passion, freedom, and prophetic otherworldliness.

If Catholicism, Berdyaev says, perhaps borrowing and modifying Chaadaev's interpretation of Russian and European history, gave the soul a strong and clear form along with clear criteria for good and evil, Orthodoxy, not only in Russia but in general, did not define limits or produce "forms." The Russian Orthodox soul gravitated towards the abyss of "infinity" and "boundlessness" (*безбрежность*). This, according to Berdyaev, exposed Russia to the hold of "dark elements" and wild "spontaneity" (*стихийность*).⁵²¹ This was the source of Russian apocalypticism. Western education, even secularized, always created culture, because it had a sense of limits. In the West, Berdyaev says, everything was "bounded, formulated, arranged in categories," everything was "favorable to the organization and development of civilization."⁵²² Not so with Russia, educated in the spontaneity of the Orthodox faith. The "landscape" of the Russian soul corresponded to the landscape of Russia, the same "boundlessness," "formlessness," "reaching out into infinity."⁵²³ If the Russian man were somehow to lose his boundless faith, he

⁵²⁰ ФН, 34

⁵²¹ ФН, 35

⁵²² ORC, 9

⁵²³ ORC, 9

would inevitably succumb under the power of equally boundless nihilism, rejection, and revolt. "One could create culture dogmatically or skeptically," Berdyaev says, "But it is impossible to create culture apocalyptically, or nihilistically." Dostoyevsky clearly understood that apocalypse and nihilism put everything to an end.⁵²⁴ "Neither apocalypse nor nihilism," Berdyaev says, accepted the "middle kingdom of culture."

All this explains the specificities of Russian communism. It speaks to the question of why the Mensheviks did not succeed against the Bolsheviks, and why Berdyaev believed that the cultured Plekhanov was a man with no understanding of Russia. The spontaneity of the Russian national character, rooted in the spontaneity of Russian Orthodoxy and reflecting the landscape and geography of this vast country, explains the impatience and spontaneity of Russian revolutionaries. The revolutionaries did not have the nerve, the "culture," to wait for the gradual disappearance of the bourgeois society; they could not wait for the natural death of capitalism. The horizons of history were too vast for them, the passions of the soul too strong. In Marxism, they found a vision for the coming apocalypse of the old order and they had no time to waste waiting for its delivery.

Berdyaev explains Russian apocalyptic and messianic tendencies with the specifics of Russian Orthodoxy. But, of course, there were other elements that combined and reinforced developments in Russian communism. One of them, for example, was the Asiatic element in Russian history and character. Centuries of Mongol dominance played a role in the despotic character of the communist regime. Mongol dominance put some limits on the people and on their princes, although, as Berdyaev says, it did not constrain the freedom of the Church.⁵²⁵ Similarly, communism put stringent limits on people, but went farther attempting to destroy their religious faith as well.

⁵²⁴ ΦΗ, 35

⁵²⁵ The church and monasteries were exempt from paying tributes to the Mongols. As Richard Pipes notes the Golden Age of the Orthodox Church in Russia coincided with Mongol domination. "The Mongols exempted all the clergy living under their rule," Pipes writes, "from the burdens which they imposed on the rest of the subjugated population. The Great Iasa, a charter issued by Genghis Khan, granted the Orthodox church protection and exemption from tribute and taxes in return for the pledge to pray for the khan and his family." (Richard Pipes. 1997. *Russia under the Old Regime*. Penguin Random House, p. 225)

If we speak about the existence of limits in Russia, we should always search for them beyond, outside people's "*ungrund*." Tsarism and despotism were the only sources of limit and constraint in Russia, and these sources, according to Berdyaev, had a foreign, not genuinely Russian origin—Byzantium, the Mongol dominance or the influence of the Western-European "enlightened autocracy." Historically, the Tsar served as the gravitational center of the nation. The emperor, in alliance with the Church, was the ("*katechonic*") power that kept and preserved the fragile unity of the nation. The supreme autocrat, although acting against the real unification of the Russian soul, nevertheless played a positive role in preventing the complete disintegration of the national community. Berdyaev says that there was a "thin crust of culture" on the huge body of Russia guarded by the Tsar, against the encroachments of "people's darkness." When the monarchy fell, all discipline, culture, and restraint disappeared, and Russia, now free from political shackles, seemed to face two tragic options: either complete self-destruction or a new autocracy.

But how can one explain the historical union between Church and autocracy?⁵²⁶ Using the same metaphor, Berdyaev explains this unity with Russian "femininity." Nihilism is passive by

⁵²⁶ Vasilii Rosanov explains this union with the historical development of Russia. He says that the Byzantine Christian "statutes" and Church practices became the essence of Russian Orthodox faith and the "manner" for the salvation of the Russian soul. To imitate Byzantium—this was the historical task of Russia. Prince E.N.Trubetskoy has a more original explanation of this union. He agrees that for a long time the Russian Church was held in captivity by a form of Caesaro-Papism, the original sin of the Russian Church-State order. The Russian people adapted themselves to this captivity. This is the root of the tendency to connect Orthodoxy to absolutism and include it in the triune formula "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality." This, Trubetskoy argues, was a "sacrilegious" formula because it equated the eternal with the temporal and gave legitimacy to the "slander" that absolutism is integral to the Orthodox Church. But this "slander" reflects ignorance. In reality, he insists, Orthodoxy had more in common with the republican order of Northern Russia (Novgorod and Pskov). In Novgorod, he notes, spiritual freedom and great religious art flourished. The religious art of Novgorod expressed the idea of a spiritual temple that should contain everything earthly and heavenly. Its message was that the world had the task to transform itself and enter the spiritual temple. When the center of iconography moved from Novgorod to Moscow, Trubetskoy says, religious art fell in the orbit of the monarch and was corrupted. The icon became a decoration in the king's palace. The decline of religious art and faith began to unfold. The attention of the iconographers was not directed towards the religious meaning, but to the interests of the throne, on which was sitting a Savior. Sacred iconography died because instead of serving God, it served an earthly power. In the fate of religious art, Trubetskoy concludes, one finds the fate of the Church. The spiritual enslavement of the Church, he believes, was caused not by the monarchical form of government as such, but rather by the transformation of the temporal power into an idol exalted above the Church. (Е. Н. Трубецкой, "О

nature. It is passive, not because it cannot and does not act—on the contrary, it is very active on the surface—but because it cannot control itself and permits forces of passion to exploit human freedom and weakness. As we have said, Russian Orthodoxy did not promote self-control or self-limitation; but it did not teach freedom as well. Unable to constrain the boundless passion and energy of the people, to transform their faith into a "culture," the Church turned to autocracy for help, following Byzantine and then German models. This was our "tragedy," Berdyaev says, that Russians had a culture of obedience to an autocratic, paternalistic power, and a character not accustomed to self-discipline.⁵²⁷ These two elements—obedience under despotism and lack of self-discipline—had be attended to, he advised, no matter what political ideal Russia would attempt to advance in history.

The "feminine" character of Russia was also revealed, according to Berdyaev, in its adoption of Marxism. He says that Marx did a terrible violence to the soul of the Russian intelligentsia. The "masculine German spirit," of which Marx was a representative, took the task to "civilize the feminine soul of Russian soil." The German spirit acted in complex and diverse ways through Marx, Kant, and Stirner.⁵²⁸ The weakness and division of the Russian soul permitted the intrusion of German culture. The results were pitiful since a transplanted culture can never achieve the quality and force of an original culture. It cannot produce the spirit that Fichte produced for the Germans leading them "into national self-consciousness."⁵²⁹ What did Berdyaev mean by "national self-consciousness"? It was the "secret unification of masculine and feminine," of "masculine *spirit* and feminine *spontaneity*." In every nation, Berdyaev complains, echoing

христианском отношении к современным событиям" [On Christian Position to Contemporary Events] in *Православие Pro Et Contra: Осмысление роли Православия в судьбе России деятелями русской культуры и Церкви* (Издательство Русского Христианского гуманитарного института Санкт-Петербург, 2001); Розанов, В. В. "Русская церковь" [Russian Church] in *Православие Pro Et Contra: Осмысление роли Православия в судьбе России деятелями русской культуры и Церкви* (Издательство Русского Христианского гуманитарного института Санкт-Петербург, 2001)

⁵²⁷ ФН, 36

⁵²⁸ ФН, 37

⁵²⁹ ФН, 37; See Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Bela Kapossy. 2013. *Addresses to the German Nation*. Hackett Publishing Company

Chaadaev, this unification had happened independently, only in Russia did this unification remain unrealized.⁵³⁰

Berdyaev repeats that national self-consciousness will appear when Russia overcomes its Slavophilism and Westernism. Besides the tendency towards obedience under the external authority and lack of self-discipline, there was another objective reason that prevented Russia from the creation of a mature national self-consciousness. This was, according to Berdyaev, Russian *narodnichestvo*, namely Russian populism. Populism in Russia, he says, can be divided into two groups of opposing forces: conservative and revolutionary, religious and materialist. In each of its forms, he argues, populism was a capitulation of the "cultural crust" to the "darkness of *muzhik* kingdom." Populism, Berdyaev believes, leads to idol worship. Its pragmatism promises material gains for the people but does not change their spirit and culture. Populism aims at curing the effects rather than the causes. Its greatest fault is its materialism. Like socialism, populism teaches that if there is a positive change in the material condition of the people there will inevitably follow a change in their consciousness. But as the Westernizer Nicolas Ogarev observed (cited in the first part of this work), land reform did not actually make the Russian peasant rich or a better citizen. Any reform, Berdyaev is convinced, should start with a reform of minds and souls and only then will their material condition improve. In other words, only spiritual goodness can bring material wellbeing. The desire for a change of mind and spirit, however, must come from the people themselves, and not from above, that is, from the paternalistic power of the monarch, as Karamzin, the conservative, taught.

Berdyaev notes that Slavophilism was a specific type of religious populism, much higher in quality and vision than the revolutionary and materialist populism of the Westernized Russian intelligentsia.⁵³¹ Slavophilism, as discussed in the first part of this work, had a spiritual and romantic vision of community. Even in its late, more radical-conservative forms, it never threatened Russia to the degree that the radicalized Westernizers did. Populism of the left was, for Berdyaev, idol-worship and far more dangerous than Slavophile religious patriotism. In leftist

⁵³⁰ ФН, 37

⁵³¹ ФН, 38

ideologies, God was replaced by "people," "values" by "interests," and "spiritual realities" were replaced by the "wellbeing of social classes." Through the idealization of the people, not of the individual human person, Berdyaev argued, populism destroyed the autocracy that was the only barrier left against the abyss of nihilistic spontaneity. It replaced the Tsar with the People; it secularized, through the idea of people's autonomy, the only true and good foundation of the Russian soul, namely its "holiness" and "spiritual universality," and thus, opened the gates to anarchy. Populists, Berdyaev says, "killed Russia in the name of Russian people."⁵³²

According to Berdyaev, another harmful element of the populist ideology was the irresponsible exploitation of the communal reflex in the Russian national character. Russians did not have a well-developed sense of, and respect for, private property. This was both a blessing and a curse. Private property draws limits and boundaries in the material world. It is a Western idea that achieved a sacred status in the West, and reflected the specific Western inclination to categorize, define, legislate, and order. In Orthodox Caesaro-Papist Russia, the idea of the sacredness of private property had no chance to develop. The national territory was ultimately a property of the Tsar⁵³³ and therefore a property of practically no one. In addition, the feudal organization of the country, with its large estates, served by hundreds and thousands of "souls," belonging to a small minority of nobles, made the Russian people inclined and used to communal life. The idea of the inviolability of private property in Russia never achieved the status it gained in the bourgeois West. Russian collectivism, Berdyaev says, both left and right, had always been an obstacle to self-discipline, to personal responsibility and autonomy.⁵³⁴ Many tended to confuse, he adds, collectivism with "spiritual unity," with *sobornost*, with a "higher type of brotherhood"

⁵³² ΦH, 39

⁵³³ The lack of private property is one of the key arguments of Richard Pipes' theory of the reasons for Russian despotism. Following Max Weber's conceptual framework, Pipes explains the authoritarian character of the Russian state with the rights of the Tsar to own the land of the kingdom. "Russia belongs par excellence to that category of states," he says, "which in the political and sociological literature it has become customary to refer as 'patrimonial.' In such states political authority is conceived and exercised as an extension of the rights of ownership, the ruler (or rulers) being both sovereigns of the realm and its proprietors." (Pipes, 1997. xii) Pipes explains the development of democratic institutions in the West with the historical existence of private property and the resulting from this contractual nature of state power.

⁵³⁴ ΦH, 40

between men. But collectivism is against personal rights. In collectivism, man is submerged in the whole of the community and, at the same time, released from the burden and duty of personal responsibility. Collectivism, used and adopted as an ideology by populism, was an enemy of human dignity and personalism—it destroyed human dignity, first, through making the person dependent on society, and second, through making man morally irresponsible.

All these tendencies in Russian history and character led to the formation of a specific type of Russian intelligentsia that brought a specific form of communist collectivism to life. Berdyaev describes the Russian radical intelligentsia as a "singular phenomenon"⁵³⁵ different from Western intellectual movements.⁵³⁶ It was more like a "monastic order or sect, with its own very intolerant ethics, its own obligatory outlook of life, with its own manners and customs."⁵³⁷ It was a community held together by ideas and not by some social or economic bonds. The Russian intelligentsia was composed of people from different social backgrounds—there were nobles among them, sons and daughters of clerics, workers, peasants, and bourgeois. One common trait was their lack of attachment to tradition and nationality. They were united by a shared political and social vision. They were idealists who considered themselves materialists. They were also cosmopolites like the members of the early Church. The Russian intelligentsia was denationalized, Berdyaev observes, without a sense of national belonging. When the intelligentsia discussed the condition and improvement of Russian people, it actually thought about the condition and improvement of all humanity. United around a social and political ideology, the intelligentsia was generally divorced from practical social work.⁵³⁸ Social reformers preached justice and equality, but did not practice them. To some extent, the political and social conditions of Tsarist Russia reinforced this bent since it did not permit them to engage actively in political life. As a result, the intelligentsia existed in a cloistered form, orientated to "social dreaming" rather than social action. The impossibility of effective political action, Berdyaev believes, led to a situation, in which politics

⁵³⁵ ORC, 19

⁵³⁶ See also M.G. Hamburg, "Russian Intelligentsias" in Leatherbarrow and Offord, 2010. *A History of Russian Thought* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 44-69.

⁵³⁷ ORC, 19

⁵³⁸ ORC, 20

was transferred from the challenges of real life to the imaginary world of thought and literature. This was, in fact, a paradoxical result, because Marxism valued action more than contemplation. If the Russian intelligentsia had the opportunity to participate in political life, the experience could have taught them that the practical realization of any social ideal is difficult to achieve and that every achievement comes with a host of new, unexpected and undesired, challenges and consequences.

But there was another problem that aggravated the consequences of the lack of political participation. This problem was state coercion. The Russian intelligentsia were not only excluded from the political process, but also persecuted.⁵³⁹ It is true, state coercion was not as violent as it became under the communist regime, and intellectual freedom under Tsarism was much greater than under the Soviets. Nevertheless, persecution fostered a form of radicalism that was fanatical. Berdyaev says that this fanaticism helped the intelligentsia to survive in the hostile world in which they lived. They were ready to suffer and die for their ideological convictions. Extreme dogmatism became one of the intelligentsia's main characteristics. It assimilated Western ideas, but what was considered a hypothesis in the West became for them a "dogma, a sort of religious revelation."⁵⁴⁰ This, Berdyaev says, led them to confusion of thought. The intelligentsia was composed of dogmatic believers. For example, Darwinism was not a biological theory for them, a subject to dispute, but a dogma, truth, and anyone who did not accept that dogma was considered morally corrupt.⁵⁴¹ "The greatest Russian philosopher of the nineteenth century, Solovyov" Berdyaev recalls, "said that the Russian intelligentsia professed a faith based upon strange syllogism: that man is descended from a monkey, therefore we ought to love one another."⁵⁴²

Berdyaev explains this dogmatism as an expression of the typical Russian desire for "wholeness." Dogmatism, basically, is a desire for unity. It does not permit dissent. The Russian spirit, he says, yearned for the "Absolute" and desired to subordinate everything to the

⁵³⁹ For an early (albeit not unbiased) account, see Alexander Herzen, "On the Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Russia" (1850) in Kethleen Parthé. ed. 2012. *A Herzen Reader*, Northwestern University Press.

⁵⁴⁰ ORC, 21

⁵⁴¹ ORC, 21

⁵⁴² ORC, 21

Absolute.⁵⁴³ In principle, there was nothing wrong with this desire; as we have said, the unity of the Western and Eastern elements in the Russian soul, the unity of "masculine freedom" (understood as self-discipline) and "feminine spontaneity" could bring Russia to a mature national self-consciousness and material flourishing. The problem was that the relative was taken as absolute and the partial as universal.⁵⁴⁴ In this way the "absolute" became a source of what Semyon Frank described as "idol-worship."

The desire for wholeness characterized both Russian conservative and radical ideological movements. The Slavophiles emphasized the difference between East and West through the idea of "unity." Kireevsky and Khomiakov, for example, considered the West fragmented. They attributed its weakness and inferiority to this fragmentation. On the other hand, in their eyes, Russia was an example of spiritual and political unity, a preserver of the Christian ideal of body and spirit united. The Slavophile ideal of the wholeness of Russia, Berdyaev says, became a "fundamental theme" "rooted in the depths of Russian character."⁵⁴⁵ Like the Orthodox Slavophiles, Russian communist atheists also believed in the supremacy of "wholeness." But their worldview was totalitarian and secular, finding its philosophical expression, not in the political theology of Russian Orthodoxy, but in Hegelianism. Berdyaev notes that for the Westernizers, Hegel's philosophy "was simply a totalitarian system."⁵⁴⁶ He reminds us that Bakunin and Belinsky, during the period when they were Hegelians, were precisely "that [totalitarian] sort of Hegelian."⁵⁴⁷

As we have seen, there was an emerging liberal tradition in Russia with liberal thinkers, such as Radishchev and Herzen, who discussed and defended the idea of the dignity of the individual person. But liberal ideology, perhaps because it was to a great extent teaching borrowed from the West, disappeared in the thick environment of Russian collectivism. "It is most important to note," Berdyaev says, "that the liberal tradition has always been weak in Russia and that we

⁵⁴³ ORC, 21

⁵⁴⁴ ORC, 21, cf. G.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*. (Batoche Books, p. 25)

⁵⁴⁵ ORC, 28

⁵⁴⁶ ORC, 28

⁵⁴⁷ ORC, 28

have never had a liberalism with moral authority or which gave any inspiration."⁵⁴⁸ Instead of liberalism there was a socialism developed in Russia that seemed more natural for Russian culture and character. Berdyaev discerns three stages in the development of Russian socialism: first was the stage of utopian socialism; then came the *narodnik* (populist) socialism; and finally the scientific or Marxist socialism. In all these stages, there was no real development of personalist ideology or philosophy. Personalism emerged, as we have said, from the milieu of the religious philosophers, and only at the beginning of the Silver Age. The most characteristic frame of mind of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia, Berdyaev says, was not the concrete person, but *humanity*, the universal man; it was not the love of one's neighbor, but of man far off.⁵⁴⁹ While in Christianity there was a strong personalist element, in the communist worldview there was only a social element. All the limitation and falsity of communist philosophy was due, Berdyaev says, to the failure to understand the problem of personality, and this turned communism into a dehumanizing power hostile to man. It made the community or the collectivity into an "idol" and denied and rejected the real concrete human being.⁵⁵⁰ In communism, Berdyaev says, man became a mere means to an end. Thus, for Lenin, everything was "moral" as far as it served the proletarian revolution.⁵⁵¹ The "end" for the sake of which every means was justified was not the human person, but the "new organization of society." The man was a "means for this new organization of society and not the new organization of society for man."⁵⁵²

In other words, for Berdyaev, Russian communism veered towards a totalitarianism that was antagonistic to any liberal humanist sympathies. This totalitarianism was expressed in the characters of the first two major leaders of the Soviet communist regime—Lenin and Stalin. Lenin, Berdyaev says, was the "typical Russian." In him there was "simplicity, wholeness [...] though of a practical kind, a disposition to nihilist cynicism on moral ground."⁵⁵³ Lenin, Berdyaev observes,

⁵⁴⁸ ORC, 35

⁵⁴⁹ ORC, 32

⁵⁵⁰ ORC, 178

⁵⁵¹ ORC, 183

⁵⁵² ORC, 183

⁵⁵³ ORC, 114

was "made of one piece; he was a monolith."⁵⁵⁴ He had a strong character, but he was incapable of Christian love. He was a fighter. In his personal relations, he was not cruel, Berdyaev notes. He was fond of animals, liked to joke and laugh and loved his wife.⁵⁵⁵ But as a politician and an intellectual, he was rigid and "preached a cruel policy."⁵⁵⁶ He adopted the dogmatism and sectarianism of the nineteenth-century intelligentsia. He combined the "revolutionary ideas of the extremist type and a totalitarian revolutionary outlook with flexibility and opportunism."⁵⁵⁷ His natural sturdiness did not permit anarchic elements in him. He was a man of action and discipline, not of freedom. Berdyaev says that Lenin was an imperialist and not an anarchist, and that he did not have a great intellectual culture.⁵⁵⁸ His political aim was to create a strong party, well-organized, led by a disciplined minority of professional militants and activists, the so-called "revolutionary vanguard." The party, in Lenin's vision, should have a doctrine, in which nothing whatever was to be changed, and should be capable of imposing a "dictatorship over life as a complete whole." "Every member of the party" should be, as it actually was, "subjugated to this dictatorship of the center."⁵⁵⁹ The organization and the structure of the Bolshevik party, according to Berdyaev, became the model and the pattern for the organization of the whole of Russia.⁵⁶⁰

"The whole of Russia," Berdyaev says, "the whole Russian people, was subjugated not only to the dictatorship of the communist party but also to the dictatorship of the communist dictator, in thought and conscience."⁵⁶¹ This was possible, Berdyaev argues, because Lenin's politics combined two traditions: the "tradition of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia in its most maximalist tendency, and the tradition of Russian Government in its most despotic aspect."⁵⁶² With his desire and will for action, Lenin was a different kind of Russian intellectual. But he was not a "new man," but a man of a "new epoch"—the wartime epoch of totalitarian regimes—anti-

⁵⁵⁴ ORC, 114

⁵⁵⁵ ORC, 116

⁵⁵⁶ ORC, 116

⁵⁵⁷ ORC, 115

⁵⁵⁸ ORC, 119

⁵⁵⁹ ORC, 120

⁵⁶⁰ ORC, 120

⁵⁶¹ ORC, 120

⁵⁶² ORC, 120

humanist and anti-democratic. For Berdyaev, Lenin was one of the first representatives of the fascism emerging in Europe, in which the leader, the Fuhrer, mustered and exploited the energies of the masses.

However, Leninism, Berdyaev clarifies, did not yet mirror the totalitarianism of fascism; it was Stalinism that most closely paralleled fascist movements. While Stalinism was not a widely discussed topic in Berdyaev's work, we can turn to Fedotov's criticism of the Stalinist regime in order to get a hint of Berdyaev's own views. In 1936, Berdyaev wrote a critical piece on Stalinism in *Novyi Grad*, the magazine edited by Fedotov, which indicates that he and Fedotov were largely in agreement in their judgment on the true character of state power in Russia. The piece that Berdyaev wrote was titled "The Aura of Communism." It was a relatively short article, directed against the Western intellectuals who supported the Stalinist regime, rather than a critique of Stalin himself.⁵⁶³ Fedotov, on the other hand, was concerned with exposing the evil of Stalinism. In one of his articles, he wrote that Stalin, like Lenin, was a man "deeply indifferent to Marxist mysticism." His attention was directed, above all, to the achievement of personal power.⁵⁶⁴ Revolution for Stalin, in contrast to Lenin, was about gaining personal power—the party and its vanguard had a secondary function. The Stalinist regime, Fedotov argued, could be described as "national-socialist," almost identical to German fascism. The difference between Stalinism and Nazism, according to Fedotov, was in the potential of Stalinism to survive for a longer period of time. If Lenin, Hitler, and Mussolini, he assumed, were engaged in a constant and exhausting battle for "educating" and "inspiring" the masses and in strengthening the party's organization, Stalin worked systematically on cooling down revolutionary fervour and transforming revolutionary energy into a technology for control and suppression of all internal and external opposition. The systematic terror of the totalitarian machine brought the "emancipated" masses to their natural, pre-revolutionary state of silence and passivity. With his actions, Fedotov believed, Stalin worked to destroy Bolshevism until there were no more Bolsheviks in Russia, only "Him."

⁵⁶³ Бердяев, "Аура коммунизма." [The Aura of Communism] *Новый Град*. — 1936. — № 11.

⁵⁶⁴ Георгий Федотов. 1992. *Судьба и грехи России: избранные статьи по философии русской истории и культуры*, [The Destiny and Sin of Russia: Selected Articles in Philosophy of Russian History and Culture] Издательство "София," С. 85

The dictator liquidated the "classical" Leninist type of communism. Stalin, Fedotov noted, adopted Lenin's strategic political opportunism, but he did not care for Marxist theory and metaphysics. Revolution for him was simply a means for achieving and increasing personal power. He, in Fedotov's opinion, was "pseudo-intelligent," supported by "pseudo-intelligentsia," with no knowledge of Marxism and disdainful of theory.⁵⁶⁵ In contrast to Lenin, Stalin was a "silent and tricky" leader. When he was speaking, Fedotov observed, it was not to make "candid outpours."⁵⁶⁶ Fedotov argued that Stalin modified and redefined Lenin's key formula, "Socialism: this is the power of the Soviets plus electrification." In this dictum of the new Soviet state, there wasn't a call for "equality," "destruction of classes," "workers" or "proletarian society." There was only "power and technology."⁵⁶⁷ Under Stalin, Lenin's formula was transformed into "Socialism: it's me." The process of industrialization, which placed millions under the yoke of state organized labor, merged with the absolute power of the dictator. Incapable of producing its own convincing and adequate ideology, the regime kept Marxism only as a "decoration" and a "cover." The paradox of the Stalinist regime and its cult of personality, Fedotov observed, was the "complete lack of personality of the dictator."⁵⁶⁸ Stalin was a faceless bureaucrat; he was a "secretary of the secretariat." He had no "ideas," no "personal gifts." Thus, Berdyaev was right to argue that communism and revolution created neither personalities nor "new men." The Russian revolution, with all of its hopes and dreams, finished as Stalinism—a soulless and merciless autocratic machine, led by an iron bureaucrat, the "General Secretary."

⁵⁶⁵ Федотов, 1992, 87. This, in my opinion, is not completely correct. Stalin, especially in his speeches, often employed the Marxist theory. He also wrote a number of short theoretical works that aimed to answer practical issues. See, for example, И.В. Сталин, "Марксизм и национальный вопрос" [Marxism and National Question] *Просвещение* –1913. – № 3-5. "О диалектическом и историческом материализме" [On Dialectical and Historical Materialism] *Правда*, 12 сентября 1938. and "Экономические проблемы социализма в СССР" [The Economic Problems of Socialism in USSR] *Правда*, 12 сентября 1938.

⁵⁶⁶ Федотов, 1992, 88

⁵⁶⁷ Федотов, 1992, 89

⁵⁶⁸ Федотов, 1992, 90

CHAPTER TWO. SOCIALISM AND ANARCHISM

1. SOCIALISM: DIONYSUS VERSUS THE CRUCIFIED

Stalinism represented the natural end of Russian communism and revolution. Under Stalin, Lenin's definition, "Socialism: this is the power of the Soviets plus electrification," became "Socialism: it is me." Socialism, however, as an idea, as a vision of political and social order, is neither the "power of the Soviets," nor simply a modern technology, nor an autocratic regime. According to Berdyaev, socialism is not a new phenomenon, but an idea and reality as old as the world.⁵⁶⁹ For that reason, it survived its Leninist and Stalinist forms. Socialism is an objective reality, and as such, it presents itself as a necessity. In all times there has been class warfare, Berdyaev says, namely a conflict between the *haves* and *have nots*, between poor and privileged. Jesus says, "You will always have the poor with you, but you won't always have me." (Matt. 26:11) Socialism is having the poor among us but without Christ. Christ *is* in the poor; but in socialism, Christ *is not*. Taking Christ's place is materialism, a reality devoid of spirituality. The poor were in socialism, the hope and will for change was there, but God was not. Berdyaev was trying to convince people like Lunacharsky and Plekhanov that the socialist project is doomed to failure if it is not seen as a "spiritual" project. He was trying to show them that materialism—even in its more "creative" form, the atheistic idealism of Lunacharsky, Feuerbach, and the God-builders—can only reflect a partial truth.

The Lord says, "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you took me in, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you visited me." (Matt. 25:34) The Christian sees Christ in the destitute, and Christ, the *Crucified*, is his Lord. The poor and suffering man, for a Christian, is not just a man; the poor and suffering man is God himself, and this should serve as an immense source of inspiration for social action and change. The Christian knows that if he lacks "bread," this is a physical problem, but if his neighbour lacks "bread," this is a moral and religious problem. Seeing in the poor the person of Christ, his Lord, and trying to help the

⁵⁶⁹ ΦΗ, 191

poor, his Lord, the Christian is searching for not *just* food or clothes or any other material good, but for the reign of the Kingdom of God. (Matt. 6:31-33) Marxist socialism has no such powerful source of inspiration. Its main moral motivations, as Berdyaev says, are anchored in a "scientific" explanation of the reasons for poverty and social conflict. With cold reason and revolutionary passion, equipped with statistics, observations, and "data," with "technology" and "methods," the social reformer sees in the wretched an "object" – a "pauper," a "patient," an "alien," a "prisoner." He does not see a person or an image of God behind the social category. The source of his inspiration is not so much the sense of the existence of the other, but the sense of empowerment and self-worth that he, the social reformer, is "good" and "just," that he would "triumph" with the practical success of his work. The sympathy for the suffering poor of the Marxist socialist, or of any other social technocrat that does not have an awareness of the divine character of his neighbour in need, would never be deep or sincere enough to make a real lasting change. Only the "catharsis" and the dread of the "suffering God" in the suffering man, could produce a will and desire capable of miraculous transformation. That's why Berdyaev felt such respect for Nietzsche. Nietzsche was able to see, full of terror, that God was dead, and to collapse, to die, under the vision and the perspective of the emerging, self-righteous "man-God," *Dionysus versus the Crucified*. The materialist socialism, the secularized humanism, for Berdyaev, was the historical rise of *Dionysus versus the Crucified*.⁵⁷⁰

The sources of the social question, Berdyaev says, are already present in the biblical curse: "by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread." (Gen. 3:19) The Bible knows about the hard realities of economic materialism. But the "economism" of our times has become all-penetrating, a

⁵⁷⁰ Cf. *Ecce Homo*, the last book of Nietzsche. (F. W. Nietzsche, D. Large, 2007. *Ecce homo: How To Become What You Are*. Ser. Oxford world's classics. Oxford University Press.) Here I also refer to the story of Nietzsche's collapse into madness and the lashed horse, a story that reveals the true meaning of his philosophy and especially of the words of his famous "Madman": "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?" (F Nietzsche. 2020. *The Gay Science* (Section 125) Dover Publications)

"mark" defining everything in our life. "There is no salvation from it," Berdyaev says.⁵⁷¹ Marx did not invent economic materialism. Modern socialism does reflect a dimension of reality. As a theory and teaching, it was not a fruit of a creative impulse, but a natural result of the liberal-capitalist order and theory. "Socialism is the flesh of the flesh and blood of the blood from the bourgeois-capitalist society."⁵⁷² Socialism is entirely defined by the capitalist society and for that reason it is a secondary phenomenon, a reflection of a deeper reality. That is why socialism cannot resolve the problems of capitalism. The consequence cannot resolve the cause. According to Berdyaev, spiritually, socialism is bourgeois teaching. Its imagination does not exceed the vision of the liberal-capitalist society; it strives to satisfy the material needs of man, it promotes the best of "bourgeois ideals of life."⁵⁷³

The ideologues of socialism are "slaves of necessity," Berdyaev argues. They do not know spiritual liberty. They always search for the material means, he says, and their aspirational ends are material as well. The proletariat is a child of capitalism. This is a key Marxist contention: that the proletariat is born from the actions of those who possess the means of production. Unfortunately, the only thing that this "child" wants is the possession of capital and the means of production, not freedom. The "expropriation" of capital and property is seen by the revolutionaries as their messianic mission and the ultimate solution to all human problems. But in fact, it is empty. Capital is a means to pursuing ends and property is a form of a social contract, based on labour and division of labour. Expropriation neither destroys the means nor abolishes the labour. From private hands, capital goes into public hands, managed by private persons partly accountable to the public will. In this expropriation, the division of labor is preserved and the class division is left intact. The proletariat should pursue a higher spirituality and a greater sense of social responsibility—but here, it fails miserably. The proletarian socialist, Berdyaev observes,

⁵⁷¹ ΦH, 192

⁵⁷² ΦH, 192

⁵⁷³ ΦH, 192

seeks no "high" spiritual life, but is tormented by envy, malice, and desire for revenge. The "proletarian type," Berdyaev is convinced, is a low human type lacking noble character.⁵⁷⁴

Some socialists repeat Christ's words "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24) But Christ, according to Berdyaev, is not speaking about material wealth, but rather about the soul of the rich man. It is not that the capitalist is in control of capital, but the capital is in control of the capitalist's soul. The rich man relies on material wealth, that is why he would not enter the Kingdom of God. Christ, Berdyaev says, does not want to take the wealth from the hands of the rich, but to liberate them spiritually. Christ came for all—rich and poor. In this parable, he does not defend the "material interests" of the poor but speaks about the "spiritual interest" of the rich. Christ cannot choose people according to their social condition.⁵⁷⁵ And, finally, Christ teaches us how to enrich others, not how to impoverish them, which is, basically, the practical result of socialist teaching. Berdyaev echoes John Locke's idea that private property is integrally related to personhood. "Property," he says, "has deep religious and spiritual fundaments."⁵⁷⁶ Socialism, Berdyaev argues, is right to act against the absolutism and tyranny of property, greed, and egoism, but this does not mean that property should be abolished completely. It rather should be "spiritualized from inside."

According to Berdyaev, the words "bourgeoisie" and "proletariat," the basic vocabulary of Marxist teaching, are a "fiction."⁵⁷⁷ Social classes, he argues, are fictions, abstractions. The only thing that is not an abstraction is the human person in front of us. These abstractions were not born in the mind of the "proletariat," but in the minds of concrete persons, having enough time and means for intellectual work—Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, Marx, Lassalle. If we apply the Marxist terminology to them, all these thinkers were actually "bourgeois," not "proletarians." And in them, one may find a higher aspiration and nobility. Whatever they preached—materialism, sociology, or economism,—everything that they promoted were "ideas," that is, abstractions.

⁵⁷⁴ ΦH, 193

⁵⁷⁵ ΦH, 212

⁵⁷⁶ ΦH, 217

⁵⁷⁷ ΦH, 193

The socialist workers, however, could not promote anything but "interests." In the "proletarians," Berdyaev says, the Christian sense of guilt was replaced by "non-Christian consciousness of proletarian offence (insult)." Their "class fight" was just an expression of "low instinct" and a simple fight for survival.⁵⁷⁸

2. THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH

Socialism has the ambition to create a new world. In this it resembles the religious hope for the kingdom of God. Berdyaev is a Christian realist and sees the danger in this secularization of messianic hopes. "The attempts to create a Kingdom of Christ on earth," he says, "in the old nature, without transformation of man and the world, have always been and will always be a creation of an earthly hell, not an earthly paradise, a terrible tyranny, a complete destruction of human nature."⁵⁷⁹ The improvement of the human condition, of human society, should never happen in a coercive, forceful way.

There is a fundamental difference between the Christian vision of the end of times and secular visions. The second coming of Christ is a complete change of creation; it does not happen in an "evolutionary" way. With the advent of Christ, according to Christianity, nothing of the old creation will be left. Clearly, the ultimate improvement of the world through science and politics cannot happen as described in the Bible. The transformation of the natural and social order is always evolutionary; the "new" always depends on the "old." For that very reason, there could not be a truly qualitative change in the objective world, marked by the corruption of sin. According to the Gospel, the true change happens through the miracle of love. Socialism is a result of capitalism, it is a materialistic ideology— love and freedom do not play a role in it. As such, socialism cannot overcome the burden of its origin. The "effect" cannot correct the errors in the "cause," or be liberated from it through its own power.

⁵⁷⁸ ΦH, 195

⁵⁷⁹ ΦH, 198

Berdyaev notes that Marx created a "Jewish apocalypticism" in the "atmosphere of an atheistic and materialistic age."⁵⁸⁰ In this argument, one should not suspect a covert anti-Semitism. Berdyaev was a fierce critic of anti-Semitism. His brother, the poet and publicist Sergey Alexandrovich Berdyaev, opposed and criticized D. Pihno's Black Hundreds movement in Ukraine, and his closest friends, S. Frank and Lev Shestov, were Jews. Berdyaev argues that Jewish apocalypticism was anti-Christian because it was "revolutionary and anti-historical." "On its soil, the revolt of the Zealots began."⁵⁸¹ This apocalyptic spirit was very different from the spirit of the prophets, which, according to Berdyaev, was non-revolutionary (i.e. non-rebellious) and imbued with "historicism." Berdyaev's conclusion is that although socialism was born from necessity, from real social and political conditions, it also had "a religious-Judaist source." One may find in it the same "origins" and "arguments," in the name of which Christ was rejected. "Jewish people," Berdyaev says, "inflamed by the apocalyptic atmosphere, expected not the Christian messiah, but a socialist messiah."⁵⁸² Thus, in the "problem of socialism" there was a "religious depth."⁵⁸³

Berdyaev was perhaps the first thinker to describe the features of a modern secular political movement as a "political religion." He put forward this concept well before the publication of Eric Voegelin's famous book *The Political Religions* (1938). "Socialism," Berdyaev writes, "pretends to be not only social reform, not simply organization of economic life, but also a new religion that comes to replace the religion of Christ."⁵⁸⁴ "The religion of socialism," he says, "accepts all three temptations that were rejected by Christ; and on them, it wants to build a kingdom. It wants to transform the stones into bread, wants salvation through a social miracle, and wants a world kingdom."⁵⁸⁵ Socialism, therefore, is "an arrangement of humanity on earth without God and against God."⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁰ FH, 198

⁵⁸¹ FH, 198

⁵⁸² FH, 198

⁵⁸³ FH, 199

⁵⁸⁴ FH, 199

⁵⁸⁵ FH, 199

⁵⁸⁶ FH, 199

Being a consequence of liberal-capitalism, socialism is also a consequence of democracy. Socialism, according to Berdyaev, "completes the task that democracy has begun, the task of the final rationalisation of human life. Socialism wants to control more and more deeply human life than democracy."⁵⁸⁷ It promises a complete rationalisation of society, complete mechanization of human life, along with a complete rejection of the mystical basis of personhood and communion. In this "coerced kingdom of God on earth," Berdyaev says, it is not Christ, but the anti-Christ who reigns.⁵⁸⁸

With its methods of governance, socialism is "imposed goodness (or virtue) and forced brotherhood." It rejects the Christian idea that "brotherhood is possible only on the basis of love." Socialism actually borrowed the idea of brotherhood from Christianity, but used it irresponsibly. "Brotherhood among men is possible only in Christ and through Christ," Berdyaev says. After the fall, brotherhood is not the "natural condition of people and human societies." In fact, Berdyaev believes, in nature "man is a wolf to man," as Hobbes famously observed (following the old Latin proverb). Darwinism reigns in the natural world, and socialism reflects it fully. Class war is the basis of Marxist theory. Marxism rests on the idea of conflict, not on a vision of peace and co-existence. It hopes to create brotherhood from the conflict; it expects to bring good from evil. Berdyaev directs our attention to the word "comrade." "Comrade" has an "ethically lower" significance than "brother." In the meaning of these terms lies the difference between socialism and Christianity, Berdyaev says. Brotherhood presupposes single fatherhood: brothers are united as "children of one father."⁵⁸⁹ Comradeship presupposes a single class; it is an economic category: the "comrade unites with the comrade according to common material interest."⁵⁹⁰ Material interest is rooted in necessity, but Christian brotherhood rests on common origin, freedom, and love. "I could be forced to respect the dignity and rights of every man," Berdyaev says, "I could be asked to admit the civil rights of every man [...] But nobody and nothing in the world, not even

⁵⁸⁷ ΦΗ, 199

⁵⁸⁸ ΦΗ, 200

⁵⁸⁹ ΦΗ, 201

⁵⁹⁰ ΦΗ, 201

God himself, could force me to be a brother of those whom I did not choose and love."⁵⁹¹ "In the political order," he declares, "I admit citizen rights; in the religious order, I admit brotherhood."⁵⁹² The socialist comradeship, however, is a "*perverse*" mixture and replacement of the religious with the political. Berdyaev concludes that socialism, and all other secular ideologies, create a "spiritually fake-*sobornost*" (fake-communion, *лжесоборность*), and for that reason they end in despair, not in hope.

3. THE ANARCHIC UTOPIA

Socialism had a sibling with whom it acted both in alliance and discord. This sibling was anarchism. It first appeared in Germany with Stirner. Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Tolstoy became its most popular Russian representatives. If socialism had a corrupted sense of brotherhood and friendship, and no meaningful concept of personhood, anarchism, with its exaltation of "individual ego," openly rejected the idea of brotherhood. Its greatest ideal and aim was the achievement of individual freedom. Anarchism was a leftist libertarian ideology. In it, the human person was replaced by the "individual," while friendship, or communion, was conceived as a mutually profitable "association" free from any binding responsibilities.

Berdyaev is sometimes described as an anarchist and radical since he is well-known as the "philosopher of freedom." But he was especially critical of anarchist philosophies and ideas. It is just misleading to label Berdyaev an "anarchist," as it is wrong to describe him as a "radical," a "conservative," or a "socialist." This section of our discussion will illustrate once again the difficulty of categorizing him politically within a defined movement of modern ideologies. Anarchist ideas seemed to converge with some aspects of Berdyaev's philosophy, but as with socialism and secular conservatism, the anti-Christian spirit of anarchism was completely alien to the fundamental principles of his thought.

Max Stirner (1806-1856) is one of the earliest ideologues of the anarchist movement. In *The False Principles of Our Education*, Stirner argued that "man's supreme role is neither

⁵⁹¹ ФН, 202

⁵⁹² ФН, 202

instruction nor civilization, but self-activity."⁵⁹³ He believed that knowledge and speculation must "perish" in order to be "resurrected" in man as "*will*" that "recreates" human being into a "free personality."⁵⁹⁴ One may find in this position some resemblances to Berdyaev's ideas, but these, we should immediately emphasize, are mere *resemblances*. Stirner does not have Berdyaev's vision of the human person as a creative spirit; he rather speaks about the self-sufficient individual, discussed in the previous sections, who has no connection to the world, no responsibilities to it, no sense of personal service. Stirner's "individual" is an "autarkic despot," incapable and unwilling to connect with others in order to share the burdens of life. This individual wants freedom and the first step towards this freedom is the awareness of his self-worth and absolute value; the second step is his revolt against the world order and the state. Stirner is convinced that man is educated in submission, and this education in slavery is enforced by the Church and the State independent of the individual's will. "Our societies and our States," he writes in *The Ego and His Own*, "exist without our having fashioned them: they are put together without our consent: they are pre-ordained [...] being against us individualists."⁵⁹⁵ "The independent existence of the State," he says, "is the foundation stone of my lack of independence."⁵⁹⁶ Therefore, he concludes, a *war* should be "declared on every existing order" and the "goal to be achieved is not another State" but rather "association, the ever-fluid, constantly renewed association of all that exists."⁵⁹⁷

The anarchic communion is called "association." It is significantly different from Berdyaev's vision of Christian communion. It does not rest on persons, but on "individualists," who have absolute interests and independent will. We may describe Stirner's "association" as an attempt at the formulation and creation of an un-objectified communion. This "communion" is ever fluid, non-contractual, non-binding, existing as long as the individual will and the common interest prescribe. The anarchic communion, according to Stirner, is not a society because

⁵⁹³ Daniel Guérin, ed. 2005. *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (AK Press, pp. 17-18)

⁵⁹⁴ Guérin, Stirner, 2005, 20

⁵⁹⁵ Guérin, Stirner, 2005, 21

⁵⁹⁶ Guérin, Stirner, 2005, 21

⁵⁹⁷ Guérin, Stirner, 2005, 21

"precisely" society targets "individuality" and wants man "subjected" to its power.⁵⁹⁸ In the anarchist association, the individual "guards jealously" his individuality and freedom. "I am told," Stirner says, "that I must be a man in the company of my peers. I ought to respect them as my peers. As far as I am concerned, no one is deserving of respect, not even my peer. He, like others, is merely an object in which I take or fail to take an interest."⁵⁹⁹ This shows the difference between the anarchist vision of man and the Christian one. In Christianity, the human person is conceived as a "subject"; in anarchism, the individual is taken as a mere "object."

What would be the ideal community, according to Stirner?

If he [the other individual] may be of use to me, then, of course, I am going to come to accommodation and enter into association with him, in order to bolster my power and, with the aid of our combined might, to accomplish more than either of us might in isolation. In such *communion* (italics added), I see nothing more than a multiplication of my strength and I afford it my consent only as long as that multiplication brings benefits. That is what association means.⁶⁰⁰

In other words, the anarchist association has nothing to do with Christian love, with sacrifice and service, or with the creative act of the Good Samaritan.⁶⁰¹ In the anarchic communion, the leading motive for the establishment of the human relationship was the individual interest, not natural sympathy or altruistic impulse.

Stirner had a very limited vision of what man is as a person and individual. In *Feuerbach's Abstract Man*, he attacked what we described as "abstractions" in socialism and humanism, but despite the overall adequacy of his criticism, he did not succeed in producing a really valuable anthropological theory. Stirner denounced Feuerbach for his "forgetfulness" that "man" does not

⁵⁹⁸ Guérin, Stirner, 2005, 22

⁵⁹⁹ Guérin, Stirner, 2005, 24

⁶⁰⁰ Guérin, Stirner, 2005, 24-25

⁶⁰¹ For Stirner shouldn't be "Good Samaritans" among the anarchists (although there were; Tolstoy, for example and to a certain degree, was one of them).

really exist, that "man" is, in fact, an "arbitrary abstraction" and an "ideal."⁶⁰² He proposed to substitute this "watchword [of Feuerbach], this phraseology of 'humanism,' with that of 'Egoism.'" Stirner said that man could say "I am a man," but the truth was that he was more than that. "I am," he wrote, "what I have become through my own efforts," not through the help and education of society, not through "God" or through "nature." "I am 'unique'," Stirner exclaimed, and then protested: "You do not want me to be a real man. You will not give a farthing for my uniqueness. [...] You want to make the 'plebeian egalitarian principle' the guiding light of my life. [...] I only want to be Me, I abhor nature..."⁶⁰³ An inattentive reader might conclude that in saying this Stirner has much in common with Berdyaev, but this would be wrong. In Stirner, as Berdyaev says, we find *nominalism* taken to its extreme.

Hostility to the state brought anarchists into conflict with the Marxists. Bakunin, for example, predicted the dangers implicit in the creation of a "people's state" long before the Bolshevik coup d'état. For the anarchists, the state was the root of all problems and they could not accept any plan for its gradual disappearance or for its temporary and utilitarian use in the achievement of individual freedom. Writing after the anarchist expulsion from the Marxist congress in The Hague in 1872, Bakunin said that the "sole and immediate object" of the "politics of proletariat" should be the outright destruction of the State. He was convinced that there could not be freedom of the proletariat "within the State and by the State."⁶⁰⁴ The Marxists had the intention to establish a "people's State," which according to them was nothing but the "proletariat organized as a ruling class."⁶⁰⁵ This, for Bakunin, was an "impossible ideal."⁶⁰⁶ He was convinced that the "State" was equal to "slavery." In the same way as religion was impossible without divinity (as Plekhanov argued), so the social evil of slavery was impossible without a state. "The phony people's State," Bakunin wrote in *Statism and Anarchy* (1873), "is going to be nothing more than despotic government of the proletarian masses by a new, very tiny aristocracy of actual or

⁶⁰² Guérin, Stirner, 2005, 34

⁶⁰³ Guérin, Stirner, 2005, 34

⁶⁰⁴ Guérin, Bakunin, 2005, 191

⁶⁰⁵ Guérin, Bakunin, 2005, 194

⁶⁰⁶ Guérin, Bakunin, 2005, 195

alleged savants."⁶⁰⁷ This government, he concluded, will be a "dictatorship." Lenin's "revolutionary vanguard," as envisioned in the program document *What Is to Be Done*,⁶⁰⁸ was the dictatorship that Bakunin predicted and feared.

In short, the anarchists wanted a complete "abolition of Church and State,"⁶⁰⁹ and their elimination would be the "essential precondition for the real liberation of society."⁶¹⁰ In place of the State and the Church there should be the establishment of a completely free and voluntary "federation of worker associations." The anarchists did not agree among themselves only on the question about the distribution of labor and goods. One group argued for the establishment of "collectivism," another supported the creation of a "communist" commune. The collectivists were less radical than the communists. They wanted common ownership of the means of production, redistribution of produced goods by special workers' associations, and remuneration according to the work performed, while the communists pleaded for common ownership of both the means of production and the consumer goods. They were against the distribution of goods according to the work of individual members and through the help of workers' associations. Everything should be free for all in conformity with the principle: "To each according to his needs."

It is clear that the anarchist political and social ideals were utopian. The anarchist communion was impossible to achieve because it was contradictory to the core. It did not have a clear understanding of human nature. The Egoism at the center of their philosophy could not produce liberty, collectivism, and communism. Moreover, true communion, according to the Christian view, cannot be achieved between person and person—there should always be a "third" between the two. We may call this third "love," "Spirit," "God" or "Christ," but it is never individual or even common interest. According to Berdyaev, the anarchist utopia was godless political idolatry, a delusion that, if put into practice, would end in despotism and bloodshed.

⁶⁰⁷ Guérin, Bakunin, 2005, 195

⁶⁰⁸ Lenin, Vladimir Ilich. 2012. *Essential Works of Lenin: What is to be Done? and Other Writings*, Courier Corp.

⁶⁰⁹ Guérin, Bakunin, 2005, 208

⁶¹⁰ Guérin, Bakunin, 2005, 208

Berdyaev attempted to highlight the principal faults of the anarchic illusion. There was an internal conflict, he observed, between socialism and anarchism, but also a subtle interchange between them.⁶¹¹ "If socialism goes to nothingness for equality," he writes in *The Philosophy of Inequality*, "anarchism, on the other hand, goes to nothingness in its thirst for liberty."⁶¹² The limit of socialism is empty equality, he says, the limit of anarchism is empty freedom.⁶¹³ Anarchism, Berdyaev observes, believes that the chaos of natural development could produce harmony; it puts its trust in man more than socialism does. In anarchism, the free individual is everything, while in socialism there is no faith in man at all.

Anarchism, according to Berdyaev, rejects the law and "historical hierarchism." Anarchism does not see any achievement in the historical path of human existence, it does not find anything providential in the historical process. It wants to liberate man from any historical consequence and memory. It wants to solve the fundamental problem of evolutionary socialism by cutting the cord that binds the present and future with the past, to liberate the "effect" of current history from the "cause" of the past. But this, Berdyaev argues, is impossible. The anarchists pursue material paradise like the Marxists and feel the same class-based enmity and hatred. According to Berdyaev, the internal contradiction of anarchism is that it wants to create a new world with old material and means, that is, through hatred and social conflict. Revolutionary anarchism is moved, Berdyaev observes, by a "rebellious feeling of insult," its passion is born "of enmity and desire for change."⁶¹⁴

The anarchist, Berdyaev notes, is not only "propertyless," but also "spiritless." For Berdyaev, Max Stirner's "only one," the "unique," is trapped in a "spiritual desert."⁶¹⁵ Anarchism, despite its communitarian ideal, is atomistic and destructive of social wholeness.⁶¹⁶ It is not the person, but the individual who is raised to an absolute. The world of the self-contained individual

⁶¹¹ ΦH, 221

⁶¹² ΦH, 221

⁶¹³ ΦH, 223

⁶¹⁴ ΦH, 223

⁶¹⁵ ΦH, 223

⁶¹⁶ ΦH, 223

is a "chaotic darkness"—this individual is concerned with himself and with nothing else. He cannot lift his head and see the other, he has no genuine feelings of friendship, he does not want to bear personal responsibility, and he has no desire for spiritual connection with others. Let us recall what Stirner says, "As far as I am concerned, no one is deserving of respect, not even my peer. He, like others, is merely an object in which I take or fail to take an interest." Everything for this individual is an "object." He is surrounded by "things," and not by persons. Flux and chaos are the ruling elements of his world because the anarchic individual despises and fears any form of order that puts a limitation on his "nothingness," or "emptiness." But the natural result of the flux and chaos is an infinite atomisation and destructive fragmentation. Anarchism, Berdyaev says, is the "ultimate nominalism"⁶¹⁷ that rebels against all expressions of wholeness—the state, cosmos, person, and God. Kirilov's passionate pursuit of "self-power" and "self-will" leads to nothing but suicide.

This ultimate nominalism, Berdyaev explains, leaves the individual alone with himself—man, becomes "empty," he becomes a "ghost."⁶¹⁸ Then, was it a coincidence that the *Communist Manifesto* began with the prophetic words: "A *spectre* is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism"? Libertarian communism was an ideology that unconsciously aimed at the destruction of personhood, not simply of the state, and through this, at the "decomposition" of the entire world rooted in the person. The destruction could be achieved in one way only—through cutting all *spiritual* ties and responsibilities of the unique and singular human being with his peers and the world, and replacing them with the promise of a rational communitarian utopia, through striving for total self-containment and assertion of self-will, and through the incitement of envy, hatred, insult, and revolt against all social and political establishments. The anarchist is a bitter angry man who loves himself in a perverse and confused way. Thus, "the anarchical way is the self-destruction of personhood," Berdyaev writes, and "an end of the human 'I'." The anarchist does not understand that man's function and greatest aim is to go beyond himself. On the contrary, he wants to enclose man totally within himself, to isolate him from everything, and so to

⁶¹⁷ ΦΗ, 224

⁶¹⁸ ΦΗ, 224

bring him to an imagined state of ghostly freedom. But, Berdyaev says, there is no "is," no reality, no personality, no freedom without God. God's Spirit is the connection between man and man, the world, and himself. Only Christ is a liberator, "freedom is where the Spirit of God is."⁶¹⁹ Anarchism, Berdyaev insists, does not liberate man; on the contrary, in the anarchic chaos man perishes.⁶²⁰

The Church, according to Berdyaev, with its hierarchical order, protects the human person from the "demons of nature." The state, on the other hand, protects man from the "demons" of other people. The law exposes man's sin and draws limits, making possible a "minimum of freedom" in the "sinful life of man."⁶²¹ Anarchism, however, rejects all these necessary limitations. It wants to make sinful man absolutely free. Anarchism does not go beyond freedom *from*," it does not have a clear concept of freedom *for*" (or *to*"). The anarchists, Berdyaev says, want liberty *from* Church, state, society, and other men, but they do not know what they would do with this liberty.⁶²² There is no aim in anarchism. Berdyaev observes that the whole "pathos" of the anarchical struggle for freedom is about the "means"—how to destroy the existing order—and rarely about the "goals." For that reason their "liberty" is "empty," and the "emptiness" is nothing but slavery and darkness. Berdyaev concludes that anarchism "does not know true liberty as socialism does not know [true] brotherhood."⁶²³

Anarchism, Berdyaev says, is anti-religious. It protests first against the Heavenly King and then against the earthly kings. This was the anarchism of Stirner and Bakunin. But there was another type of anarchic ideology that had religious elements and inspiration. It used the name of God to reject and deny all earthly power. This was the anarchism of Tolstoy, Muntzer, the Dukhobors, and the various religious sects. In this anarchism, there was no Christianity, or, if there was Christianity, it was an "abstract" one.⁶²⁴ This sectarian anarchism, Berdyaev argues,

⁶¹⁹ ΦΗ, 226

⁶²⁰ ΦΗ, 225

⁶²¹ ΦΗ, 226

⁶²² ΦΗ, 227

⁶²³ ΦΗ, 227

⁶²⁴ ΦΗ, 228

relates absolute individualism to "ultimate monism" and "indifference." The greatest fault of religious anarchism is that it does not want to hear about temporal responsibilities and duties. It denies the organic wholeness of cosmic life, where God becomes a *man* and dies on a cross *for the world*. It seeks to avoid the tragic fate of man, a fate connected with the sacrificial act of man for his neighbour *in the world*.

Berdyayev says that there is no anarchism in Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Yet he notes that one may detect anarchism in a latent form in the boundlessness and formlessness of Russian Orthodoxy. He observes that Russia is particularly exposed to the spirit of anarchism. Anarchism is a feminine, passive teaching that resonates with the feminine character of the Russian soul. This femininity comes, as it has been said, from the unwillingness to bear personal responsibility. The key feature of the anarchic association is its non-contractual, non-binding nature—the individuals are together as far as they have an interest, they never look at each other as subjects serving one another. In other words, anarchic "communism" and "collectivism" do not rest on a consciousness of the need for mutual sacrifice.

It is true that the anarchism of Kropotkin and Tolstoy seemed to propose a greater sense of moral responsibility than Stirner's. The idea of "mutual aid" in Kropotkin's social theory cannot be defended without a concept of responsibility. And the "natural goodness" of the Russian peasant in Tolstoy cannot be revealed without examples of altruist Samaritan action. But the problem with this altruism and responsibility is that it is unconscious. To support his argument, Kropotkin gives as an example *animals* that survive as species thanks to their "mutual aid," while Tolstoy speaks about uneducated peasants that are led by their naturally "good heart." The peasant Gerasim from Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*⁶²⁵ is a silent character. Neither we, the readers, nor he, the character, know the source of his compassionate behaviour. Gerasim is as innocent as a child. But a realist like Berdyayev would admit that in a sinful world the natural (and secularized) forms of "mutual aid" and "compassion" are impossible to practice consistently and effectively. To serve the other, one needs to be *conscious*; one needs to know, to be in control of himself, to have faith,

⁶²⁵ Tolstoy, Leo. 2013. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Confession*. Liveright

hope, and love that transcends the constraining realities of temporal life and goes beyond the "natural" self.⁶²⁶ No one could serve anyone, if he does not first learn how to control himself—because to serve, to judge rightly, to interact with your neighbour, is not an easy thing in a postlapsarian world; on the contrary, it is often painful, difficult, and requires patience; and patience is nothing but self-control, and above all, love. Self-control, patience, balance, reason, love and order are not the ethical values promoted by the anarchist teaching, but they are values preached by Christianity. Anarchism breaks with Christianity, and for that reason, we may conclude (following Berdyaev) that it does not promote either true personhood or true communion.

⁶²⁶ In Berdyaev's opinion, the goodness of man of the postlapsarian world, that is, the conscious goodness has more value than the natural goodness of prelapsarian state. As we will see in the last chapter, this view will be questioned by Lev Shestov (See Илестов, 1995).

CHAPTER THREE. LIBERALISM AND DEMOCRACY

1. LIBERAL CONTRADICTIONS

One of the greatest errors of anarchism is its failure to recognize that human masses do not trust freedom and do not advance their own interests through freedom.⁶²⁷ Freedom, as Berdyaev often says, is something noble, and not "democratic."⁶²⁸ Freedom, he explains, is highly valued and used properly only by a minority of people. For that reason, there is no "democratic" revolution that could bring freedom to victory. As it has been noted, revolutions are moved by the dark forces of the *demos*. And the true aspiration of the human multitude, Berdyaev says, is *equality*, not freedom. The greatest political revolutions were inspired by the desire for equality. A revolt could erupt in the name of freedom, but revolution, as something greater and deeper than mere revolt, is inspired by the common desire for justice and equality.

In this chapter we address Berdyaev's approach to liberalism. Liberalism is typically presented as a philosophy and ideology of freedom. But like other political ideologies, it is full of contradictions. According to Berdyaev, the "liberal spirit" is "not essentially a revolutionary spirit."⁶²⁹ The liberal spirit is moderate. The truth of liberalism, he says, is a formal truth because it does not assert something particular and positive. The only aim of liberalism is to guarantee that the individual may have the life that he prefers, as far as this life does not violate the life and interests of others. Liberalism cannot and does not want to be a political religion. It is very pragmatic and its pragmatism is both its greatest merit and weakness. Through their attempts to fill the emptiness of de-spiritualized human life with meaning, the democratic, socialist and anarchic ideologies easily transform into pseudo-religions. But pragmatic liberalism, Berdyaev notes, has no such ambition—it lacks particular content. Pragmatism is a form of opportunism,

⁶²⁷ The masses, Herzen believed, "are indifferent to individual liberty and freedom of speech. They love authority. They interpret equality as an equality of oppression... Individual liberty is the supreme good; on this basis alone the true will of the people can express itself... The subordination the individual to society, to the people, to humanity, to an idea, is a new form of human sacrifice, the crucifixion of the innocent for the sake of the guilty." (Kohn, 1955, 156-157)

⁶²⁸ ΦH, 154

⁶²⁹ ΦH, 155

and the "hard content" of an ideology does not help the success of opportunistic action. Thus, being pragmatic, liberalism is not essentially ideological, nor is it essentially revolutionary.

To the question of whether there is any ontological nucleus in liberalism Berdyaev responds that "liberal freedom" has a greater connection to the spiritual fundamentals of life than the democratic "voting rights" and the socialist "control of the means of production."⁶³⁰ It is so because freedom and rights of man are inalienable, that is, they are rooted in the depths of the human spirit. Insofar as liberalism endorses the inalienable human freedom and rights it serves an ontological and personalist vision of human existence. In other words, liberalism can have an ontological nucleus only if it respects the freedom and rights of the human person as a "*spiritual reality*." For that reason, Berdyaev adds, the core principles of liberalism cannot be meaningfully defended positivistically, but only metaphysically. But this is a difficult, almost impossible task given liberalism's pragmatic political nature. It is difficult to justify a commitment to personalism and human dignity on the basis of pragmatism. Berdyaev is convinced that modern liberalism needs to be defended and advanced from a religious point of view. Yet, he understands that this is a challenging task since the history and development of liberalism do not facilitate a defense of the liberal idea on religious grounds. Historically, classical liberalism has been secularized and now it is difficult to bring the liberal idea back to its Christian origins and inspiration.

Berdyaev argues that the "spiritual source of freedom and human rights is the freedom and right of religious conscience."⁶³¹ It is often forgotten that the rights of man and citizen are *spiritual*, not just positive, and based on the freedom of thought and conscience. However, modern proponents of liberalism do not recognize that the deeper source of rights and freedoms originates in the Christian Church's defense of man from both government and society.⁶³² Berdyaev says that the proof that personal freedom is a uniquely Christian idea is in the fact that antiquity does not have a concept of personal freedom. The only concept of human freedom that the ancient Greeks

⁶³⁰ ΦΗ, 156

⁶³¹ ΦΗ, 157

⁶³² ΦΗ, 157

knew was the idea of public freedom, that is, political freedom. The Greco-Roman world did not have a concept of the dignity and freedom of the individual human person.⁶³³

For that very reason, Berdyaev notes, one of the "patron saints" of liberalism, Rousseau, should be regarded as having "pagan consciousness." Rousseau, according to Berdyaev, did *not* know about "personal freedom" and about "human nature independent from society."⁶³⁴ In him, freedom of conscience was transferred to the social—the sovereign will of the people is elevated above personal freedom and will. The "god" of Rousseau was the "sovereign people" and so, in his political philosophy, the dignity of the individual human person was violated. Rousseau, properly speaking, was not a true liberal. He could be better described as a "democrat," and his "democratic" principle reduced his "liberalism" to a pagan ideology.

One of the main problems of liberalism is its conformism. Liberal conformism is a result of liberal "democratism" and opportunism. Liberal moderation cannot effectively oppose radical ideas and interests.⁶³⁵ It easily retreats under the pressure of revolutionary fever and does not survive in an environment of challenging political circumstances. The word "liberal" is synonymous to "moderate," to "compromise" and "opportunism." The weakness of liberalism is due to its lack of moral truth. How could the pragmatic liberal oppose the moral truth of the passionate radical? This was a question that Reinhold Niebuhr, a contemporary of Berdyaev, asked in his critique of liberalism as a "soft utopia" that was incapable of combating the evil of communism and National Socialism.⁶³⁶ Christianity proclaims, "Know the truth and the truth will

⁶³³ ΦH, 157

⁶³⁴ ΦH, 158. As a matter of fact, Rousseau was critical to society and "civilization" as well. In his *First Discourse*, for example, he wrote "Incessantly we obey rituals, never our own intuition. We no longer dare to appear as we really are, and under this perpetual restraint, people who form the herd known as society, finding themselves in these same circumstances, will all behave in exactly the same ways, unless more powerful motives prevent them from doing so. We never know therefore with whom we are dealing: in order to know one's friend, one must wait for some critical occasion, that is, wait until it is too late, for it is precisely on those occasions that knowledge of that friend would have been essential..." ("The First Discourse" in Rousseau, 2012. 50)

⁶³⁵ ΦH, 159

⁶³⁶ See, for example, "Two Forms of Utopianism" and "Faith and History" in Reinhold Niebuhr. 1960. *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics: His Political Philosophy and Its Application to Our Age as Expressed in His Writings*, ed. Harry D. Davis and Robert C. Good, (Charles Scribner's Sons).

make you free" (John 8:32) and "Where the Spirit of Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Cor. 3:17) But what is the truth for the liberals? Liberalism has no "content," its rallying cry "*Laissez-faire!*" means nothing concretely and fails to offer definite and concrete moral vision as a backbone for political order.

Christianity aims to liberate man from sin and spiritual slavery. Liberalism, like socialism and anarchism, opposes external forms of slavery. However, these modern ideologies do not understand the fundamental truth that any liberation starts with man, or more exactly, with man's conscience and the liberation from his "inner sin."⁶³⁷ Liberalism started from the religiously inspired desire for freedom of conscience. Freedom of conscience is not the freedom from material need; it is rather the inner, spiritual freedom from the burden of sin imposed by some temporal principle and power. But over time, liberalism betrayed its spiritual basis. It produced, Berdyaev says, a "declaration of the rights of man" torn off from the "declaration of the rights of God."⁶³⁸ Thus the conscience of original sin was replaced by the sin of the autonomous conscience.⁶³⁹ This, according to Berdyaev, was "the original sin" of liberalism that put it on the wrong historical track.

Because liberalism forgets the rights of God, it also forgets the responsibilities of man.⁶⁴⁰ Above autonomy, Berdyaev says, there is "theonomy." This was well understood by early nineteenth century French Catholic thought (Ballanche, De Maistre, De Lamennais, Bonald, and others). Rights separated from duties do not lead to anything good, Berdyaev is convinced, but this, exactly, was the historical development of liberalism. The rights of man, the French Catholics argued, required *responsibilities and duties*. A right cannot be practically realized if men have a strong consciousness about their own individual rights, but have no respect for the rights of God and other persons.

⁶³⁷ ΦH, 159

⁶³⁸ ΦH, 160

⁶³⁹ cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Part Three. Section One. Ch. 1. The Dignity of Human Person. Article 6, Moral Conscience.

⁶⁴⁰ ΦH, 160

All human rights and duties, Berdyaev explains, are rooted in man's God-like nature.⁶⁴¹ If man is simply a product of external material conditions, or of nature, then man has no "divine rights" and "divine duties," but only practical interests. If one truly believes in the rights of man, then one should also believe in the existence of the rights of God: "The rights of man require the rights of God."⁶⁴² God bestows rights in man that make man "God-like" and a "son of God." Through God and through his God-like image, man is entitled to unlimited rights because he has unlimited spirit.⁶⁴³ It is not possible, Berdyaev argues, to proclaim the "divine rights" of man if man is just conceived as a "refined and disciplined beast" or as a "piece of dust." Berdyaev concludes that the divine nature of man is forgotten by the liberals, and for that reason, godless liberalism is incapable of realizing its humanistic ideal. Instead of the divine rights of man, modern liberalism prefers to speculate and utilize the so-called "natural right" concept. But the natural right idea is a poor and feeble substitute for the divine right.⁶⁴⁴ Man has inalienable and divine rights not because he is a natural being, ideal in its "natural state" as Rousseau and Kant imagined, but because he is a spiritual being, ideal in his divine state. The rights of man should not be sought in nature, Berdyaev says, but in the Church of Christ.

The liberal idea, Berdyaev reminds, appeared in the intellectual atmosphere of the eighteenth century. Its ideology rested on faith in the natural harmony between freedom and equality. But the French revolutionaries, according to Berdyaev, completely confused the relationship between freedom and equality. They merged them into one liberal-democratic idea. The nineteenth century, however, destroyed their revolutionary illusions and revealed the antagonisms and irreconcilable contradictions of liberal-democratic ideology. It became clear that equality easily transforms into tyranny and that freedom cannot prevent economic inequality and slavery. The "abstract principles of freedom and equality," Berdyaev says, do not create a perfect society, nor do they guarantee the rights and dignity of man.⁶⁴⁵ Between freedom and equality

⁶⁴¹ ΦH, 160

⁶⁴² ΦH, 160

⁶⁴³ ΦH, 161

⁶⁴⁴ ΦH, 167-168

⁶⁴⁵ ΦH, 161

there exists, he says, an irreconcilable antagonism, a conflict proven by history and practice. In this conflict, abstract liberalism succumbs to the power of abstract socialism and democratism, because the "lust for equality" is always greater than the desire for freedom. The will for equality, Berdyaev is convinced, will always revolt against the rights of man and God; it will always combat freedom, and the thin freedom of secular liberalism will always lose the moral argument against the just demands of people.

Berdyaev's logic is that the desire for equality naturally limits positive freedom and that secular freedom is intrinsically limited by its own imperfections. Democratism in secular liberalism will always combat the true freedom of man and the actual realization of his rights. Freedom as a "living being," Berdyaev says, is not an abstract "mathematical quality." Here, he echoes Tocqueville's observation that despotism is more natural to a society of social equality and that there is an inner despotism in the democratic system of the liberal state. Liberalism creates democracy and transforms into "democratism." The paradox in this process is that democracy, in its turn, undermines the very foundations of liberalism, that is, freedom. Constitutionalism and parliamentarianism, which are the backbone of liberal democracy, cannot cure all social and political evils. As Reinhold Niebuhr and other twentieth century theologians argued, the democratic institutions were useful but not capable of creating a "perfect society." Berdyaev was a life-long witness of the crisis of Western parliamentarianism that eventually brought fascism and national-socialism to power. This experience led him to the conclusion that "the people of the new age cannot believe anymore in the salvation that comes from political and social forms," that "they [should] know all their relativity."⁶⁴⁶ Should we consider this conclusion too optimistic, or, on the contrary, too pessimistic? Did Berdyaev believe in the prospective maturation of common wisdom that will make people suspicious of all political forms? The answer is—no. Berdyaev was neither a political optimist nor pessimist. To recall the discussion in part one, Semyon Frank expressed a view similar to Berdyaev's, when he spoke to students in Berlin about the "debacle of political idols" just a few years before Hitler's seizure of power and the beginning of the Second World War. Frank's lecture was motivated not by optimism but by concern for the impending political

⁶⁴⁶ ΦΗ, 169

catastrophe. Berdyaev's and Frank's political experiences made them Christian realists—perhaps more thoroughgoing realists than Niebuhr, the pragmatic defender of democracy, and more akin to Barth who rejected all human orders.⁶⁴⁷ They were convinced, like Augustine, centuries ago,⁶⁴⁸ of the absolute relativity of all political projects and ideologies and for that reason prophetically pleaded for (but hardly believed in) the maturation of public opinion and expectations.

The contradiction between freedom and equality, freedom and inequality, Berdyaev concludes, can be resolved only in the life of the Church. In the Christian spiritual communion, the contradiction between person and society is removed, and in it freedom becomes "brotherhood."

⁶⁴⁷ See Philip Boobbyer, "A Russian Version of Christian Realism: Spiritual Wisdom and Politics in the thought of S.L. Frank (1877-1950), *The International History Review*, 38: 1. As we will see in the next section, the difference between Berdyaev's and Niebuhr's Christian realism is in this emphasis. If Niebuhr emphasizes the limitation and balance of power that the democratic system conveys, Berdyaev focuses on criticism of the principle of majoritarianism. Niebuhr believes that democracy has its roots in the Protestant theologies and, at the same time, his defense of democracy is more akin to the medieval Catholic "synthesis" which he finds best expressed in Anglicanism, or more specifically, in Thomas Hooker's political theology. Berdyaev's (and Barth's) political views are more "radically" Christian than Niebuhr's. Radicalism is what Niebuhr rejects in the "prophetic" Christian political theologies. In *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, he says that the radical Christian "sects" appreciate the "perils of government", but not its "necessity." "Usually the failure to appreciate the necessity of government," he explains, "is derived from perfectionist illusions in regard to human nature. Sometimes government is appreciated; but the libertarian emphasis is so strong that all coercive acts of government are morally repudiated." For Niebuhr, such an emphasis does not help the real situation in society. He says that, for example, Barth's contribution to "the problem of justice in the state" was "very minimal." And while we may agree with such an opinion, this does not mean that Barth, and especially Berdyaev, were "pessimistic" in contrast to the state "perfectionists." It is rather the opposite. Berdyaev cannot unconditionally agree with Niebuhr's argument that the "highest achievement of democratic societies" is that they "embody the principle of resistance to government within the principle of government itself." In this particular case, Niebuhr is the "optimist" and Berdyaev the "realist." Niebuhr is convinced that the "citizen" is "armed" with "constitutional power" to "resist the unjust exactions of government." The citizen, he argues, "can do this without creating anarchy within the community, if government has been so conceived that criticism of the ruler becomes an instrument of better government and not a treat to [the principle of] government itself." In order to understand Niebuhr's position, we should keep in mind his key observation which he tries to supply as a solution: that all political orders oscillate between tyranny and anarchy and that democracy alone smoothes, as it were, this process, making the dynamic less extreme or lethal. Only democracy, he believes, can soften the effects of the "twin perils of tyranny and anarchy." "These perils are expressions of the sinful elements of conflict and dominion, standing in contradiction to the ideal of brotherhood on every level of communal organization." Democracy, being a low-level conflict, makes the "sin" of the will-to-power less devastating for society in general than any alternative autocratic order or anarchy. (See Reinhold Niebuhr. 1964 (1934) *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. Vol. II. Charles Scribner's, pp. 268-284)

⁶⁴⁸ For a good analysis of Augustine's political realism and the *City of God*, see Ernest L Fortin and J. Brian Benestad. 1996. Collected Essays. Vol. 2, *Classical Christianity and the Political Order: Reflections on the Theologico-Political Problem*. Rowman & Littlefield

Freedom in Christ, Berdyaev says, "is brotherhood in Christ."⁶⁴⁹ This is a "spiritual *sobornost*," in which there is no conflict between right and duty, equality and freedom, love and justice, person and society.

2. THE POVERTY OF DEMOCRACY

What is the problem with democracy, according to Berdyaev? The problem is that there is "poverty" in it, the same "poverty" and "emptiness" that one finds in socialism, anarchism, and liberalism. Democracy, according to Berdyaev, is poor of content. It has entropic energy, an energy that disperses into nothingness because of the lack of spiritual aim and direction.

Like socialism, democracy is an old phenomenon. And like socialism, this phenomenon was transformed in the modern age from a political question into a spiritual problem. In a democracy, the will of the people is deified.⁶⁵⁰ According to Berdyaev, the deification of the people's will was achieved through emptying the democratic ideal of meaning. Berdyaev does not see anything concrete in the phrase "general will of the people." For him, this is an abstract, formal principle.⁶⁵¹ Will without an aim is nothing. However, if the will is an aim *in itself* and *for itself*, it becomes something. Such is the will in the democratic principle. It is deified; it becomes an idol of worship.

If the common will of the people is concrete and non-abstract, Berdyaev assumes, it would be either directed to the greatest evil, the "crucifixion" of the innocent, or to the greatest good, which is God. But in the modern democratic principle, there is neither great evil nor great good. In a modern democracy, mechanism or political technology dominates over the aim of politics and political action. According to Berdyaev, democracy is a technology without a particular aim. This means that democracy is not about *what* people *will*, but about *whether* they *will* at all, whether they exercise their voting rights and express their individual political preferences and interests. Therefore, it is not more important *what* or *whom* people choose when they put their vote in the ballot box, but *whether* they have the chance to vote. In this way, voting *rights* become more

⁶⁴⁹ ΦH, 163

⁶⁵⁰ ΦH, 172

⁶⁵¹ ΦH, 173

important than the quality of election *results* or the quality of the political "market" on which the result ultimately depends.

The main argument of democratic ideology is that the general will is sovereign, and, for that reason, right and good. But this argument does not stand up to even the weakest criticism. Every skillful autocrat or populist, who comes to power by democratic election, can defend his subsequent political actions with the argument that he just follows the "sovereign will of the people." Thus, the general will could be used as an excuse for the greatest crime and evil—the crucifixion of the Innocent—and the democratic principle cannot oppose it.⁶⁵² Such possibilities are real because the democratic principle—universal suffrage and majority rule— as it has been said, has no other value than itself, and so it distracts man's attention from the true meaning and goal of human life and politics.

Berdyaev is convinced that faith in democracy is a result of the lost faith in rightness and truth.⁶⁵³ If there is faith in the objective being of right and truth, then right and truth would reign over the common will and there will not be a need for the principle of majority rule. In a democracy, what is right and true is what the temporal preference of the people dictates. And not all people, but only the majority of them, and only the majority of those who had been mobilized and willing to vote. This is how poor democracy is: that its criteria for truth and justice are based on election results, in which, in many cases, the actual majority is indifferent or silently opposed to all major contenders for power, while the minority of votes that wins the election is presented as the legitimate voice of the majority.

There is "atheism" at the foundation of democratic ideology, Berdyaev concludes. It is so, because all democratic "truth" is derived from social-political technology, where quantity and not quality is the final arbiter. The truth and right, however, have "a divine source"⁶⁵⁴ that has nothing to do with human arbitrariness. Democracy, in Berdyaev's view, is a sign of moral resignation. It is a result of political skepticism, of insoluble social divisions, and moral weakness.

⁶⁵² ΦΗ, 173

⁶⁵³ ΦΗ, 173

⁶⁵⁴ ΦΗ, 173

When all parties are exhausted in their fight for power, when, at the same time, there is no trust in the unifying potential of autocracy, when there is no vision and genuine desire for political and spiritual communion, the only solution for the achievement of relative peace and order is the simple, mechanical process of agreement and compromise based on "number." Only skeptics resort to the rule of the majority. Only relativism, doubt, and division lead to the verdict of the number. Shared responsibility and free agreement are not fundamental principles of democracy. Trust in the human ability to unite for the achievement of the common good was completely lost, and for that reason, the will and dictate of the majority was invented as a lesser evil compared to open conflict and war. The democratic revolution in the world, Berdyaev says, "testifies about the spiritual decline of humankind."⁶⁵⁵ Democracy, he says, "is a skeptical social gnoseology." As a form of collectivism (but not "*sobornost*"), this "gnoseology" cannot create values, because the values are a result of excellence. Democracy does not respect excellence and does not aim at it. The pessimism and political cynicism in liberal democracy prefers mediocrity to excellence. Democracy, Berdyaev observes, is not "interested in educating and producing a higher human type."⁶⁵⁶

Democratic ideology describes the "people" as something, but like socialist humanism, the "people" in a democracy are just an abstraction. Both socialism and social democracy reject the idea of the people as a "real unit," and decompose the nation into classes and groups with conflicting and opposing psychology and interests. While speaking about peace and happiness, both socialism and democracy make conflict a central feature of their ideology and system. The two systems rely on a social and political peace produced either mechanically through elections, or coercively through state compulsion. In both cases, the result is achieved through the legitimization of one competing power and through external force. Socialism and democracy do not view the people as a "mystical organism" that unites every class and group, every man, dead or alive.⁶⁵⁷ Democracy, Berdyaev says, is not concerned with the absolute, mystical nature of national unity and belonging. It is a political technology completely indifferent to the organic

⁶⁵⁵ ΦH, 174

⁶⁵⁶ ΦH, 174

⁶⁵⁷ ΦH, 176

spiritual character of the nation. In a democracy, the organic whole of the nation is disintegrated into arithmetic units and atoms only to be recomposed into a "mechanical collectivity."⁶⁵⁸ In this mechanical collectivity not only is the organic unity of the nation dissolved, but also the personhood of individual people. The mechanism breaks the organic connection between people within the national community; it increases the importance of private and group interest at the expense of the natural sense of brotherhood and service. Thus, the democratic parliament becomes an arena for the fight of interests and power, in which it is difficult to hear the "voice of the unified nation."⁶⁵⁹

According to Berdyaev, democratic ideology is also a form of radical rationalism. The very principle of a mechanical solution to all issues and problems is rational and abstract-logical. Mechanics allied with rationality does not require "values." Calculation and statistics dominate over persons and values. The complete victory of mechanical rationalism, on which democracy depends, is the "victory of quantity over quality," of number over essence. But Berdyaev does not believe that this victory will achieve a complete triumph in history. It will not triumph because it does not reflect the truth and reality.

Democracy subjects man to the power of human masses, Berdyaev says. It does not require spiritual submission. The democratic principle is practically unconcerned with the truth or value of human beliefs. Its aim is external obedience under the authority of the majority. All is justified insofar as the verdict of the general will is respected. In other words, democracy requires personal obedience under a depersonalized will. The depersonalized will of the majority, Berdyaev says, inevitably encroaches the rights and freedoms of the human person.⁶⁶⁰

Christianity, Berdyaev is convinced, has nothing to do with democracy and cannot be invoked to offer justification for its universal validity.⁶⁶¹ The unconditional Christian support for

⁶⁵⁸ ΦH, 177

⁶⁵⁹ ΦH, 179

⁶⁶⁰ ΦH, 187

⁶⁶¹ ΦH, 187

democracy would be the promotion of a lie. "Christianity is hierarchical,"⁶⁶² he argues. Christian brotherhood is not democratic, it respects difference and hierarchy. But people, Berdyaev adds, should historically experience democracy in order to see, understand, and become convinced of its fundamental emptiness. Democracy, according to him, is a temporal, transitional political system. The democratic experience, like the socialist experience, will reveal that man cannot establish himself through his own power, that he cannot completely rationalize the social and political life and manage it according to the calculations of his limited mind.⁶⁶³

Berdyaev leaves his readers with a painful question: If democracy does not work, then, what could work? Is the achievement of righteous political order possible at all? It is hard to believe in such an achievement, Berdyaev admits. Christianity, he reminds, does not teach faith in the realization of a "heavenly kingdom" on earth.⁶⁶⁴ The crisis of democracy, he argues, is not political, but spiritual. For that reason, it cannot be resolved through political means. Attempts to offer a "theocratic defense" of democratic order are, in his view, a greater lie and temptation than the "defense and justification of Caesarism."⁶⁶⁵ In a sense, Caesaro-Papism, according to Berdyaev, is a better system and order than democracy. God's anointing, he argues, cannot be given to a faceless mass of people. Only a person, and not an abstract majority or group, could be anointed by God.

Berdyaev's conclusion is that democracy should strive towards spiritual life.⁶⁶⁶ The spiritual enlightenment of all people should be the inner task of the democratic process. Only the terror of life, the loss of hope, can force a self-satisfied democracy, as well as self-satisfied monarchies and aristocracies, to turn to the salvation of "spiritual life." Disappointments from democratic experience, Berdyaev believes, should teach humanity how to trust God, and not technology, and in this will be the great value of democracy.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶² ΦH, 187

⁶⁶³ ΦH, 189

⁶⁶⁴ ΦH, 189

⁶⁶⁵ ΦH, 196

⁶⁶⁶ EOT, 202

⁶⁶⁷ ΦH, 191

CHAPTER FOUR. ARISTOCRATISM AND CONSERVATISM

1. THE ARISTOCRATIC RACE

Berdyaev's political scepticism is often described as "nihilistic," "anarchic," or "radical." But in this and the next sections, in which we discuss his views on aristocratism, conservatism, state, and nation, we will challenge these characterizations. Berdyaev's views are rather typically Christian. The Christian cannot defend any political order unconditionally and in a partisan way; that would mean that he is "of this world" completely. A modern political scientist could reject Berdyaev's criticism of political ideologies as too sweeping, passionate, and impractical but there should be a reminder that namely some of the greatest political realists of the twentieth century—H. Morgenthau, R. Aron, George Kennan, and Kenneth Waltz—studied the so-called "Christian realist tradition," to which Berdyaev belonged, and were, in one or another way, influenced by it. There is a healthy dose of political realism in the Christian intellectual treasure that should not be ignored.

One may speculate and suggest that Berdyaev actually had political preferences. Obviously, these preferences should not have been expressed in a clear and coherent (systematic) way. But if we discover traces of them, this would help us locate Berdyaev's proper place in the history of the Russian *political* and religious thought. As it was noted numerous times, it is difficult to classify him as a thinker since the scope and the themes of his thought reflect the synthetic whole of the Russian intellectual tradition. Yet, he should be situated in a definite school of thought, at least for the goals of analysis. There is a fairly wide consensus that Berdyaev can be viewed as belonging to the group of religious philosophers from the so-called "Silver Age." However, this classification does not help us in the classification and interpretation of his political theology. If we speak about political theology, he certainly does not belong to the stream of the Russian socialists or social-democrats. Berdyaev has been described as a "socialist," and sometimes he described himself as a "Christian socialist,"⁶⁶⁸ but the evidence suggests something else. Berdyaev often appears to be more a defender of aristocracy and conservatism, than of socialism. He clearly did not support

⁶⁶⁸ EOT, 204

oligarchy or absolute monarchy. As we have seen in the previous chapters and sections, he was a critic of all kinds of autocracy. Yet, the body of his work suggests that he might have preferred constitutional monarchy⁶⁶⁹ as the best political regime to socialist or democratic alternatives, and he might have defended the right to the existence of the aristocratic class. Again, this is somewhat speculative given the paucity of information available. But there is a case to be made in classifying Berdyaev as one of the last and best representatives of *classical* Slavophilism;⁶⁷⁰ his background and main political concerns point in this direction. Berdyaev himself was of noble origin, like Khomiakov and Kireevsky. He had a well-developed "aristocratic mentality," he was a "conservative" lover of freedom, like Dostoyevsky. He opposed Petrine secular reformism and

⁶⁶⁹ It is worth noting that Russia has never had a constitutional monarchy. The attempt of the last monarch Nicolas II to institute a constitutional government was too late and too short-lived to be considered as a Russian example of constitutional monarchy. R. Pipes attributes the lack of success of this kind of regime in Russia to the "patrimonial model" (the realm as "property" of the Tsar) of Russian monarchism. "Nicolas II, Russia's last tsar, was by temperament ideally suited to serve as a constitutional monarch," Pipes writes. "Yet he could not bring himself to grant a constitution, or, after having been forced to do so, to respect it, because he conceived absolute authority as some kind of a property trust which he was duty-bound to pass intact to his heir. The patrimonial mentality constitutes the intellectual and psychological basis of that authoritarianism, common to most of Russia's rulers, whose essence lies in the refusal to grant the 'land,' the patrimony, the right to exist apart from its owner, the ruler and his 'state.'" (Pipes, 1997, 53) Berdyaev was an open supporter of constitutional monarchy in the period 1901-1903, but later grew critical to constitutionalism in general as was evident, for example, from books such as *The New Middle Ages*. (See К. Ширко. 2002. *Н. А. Бердяев о природе российской цивилизации*. Диссертация ВАК РФ 07.00.09. [N.A. Berdyaev on the Nature of Russian Civilization. PhD Dissertation]. In the 1922 decree for the deportation of anti-Soviet intellectuals, the Bolshevik Politbureau qualified Berdyaev as a "monarchist," "rightist cadet," and a religious "counter-revolutionary." These charges were sufficient reason for his forced exile. It is clear that the Bolsheviks were not objective in their characterizations of Berdyaev's political preferences, but this does not make them completely wrong. The curious thing here is that this particular decree fails to cite his early socialist sympathies. (See Постановление Политбюро ЦК РКП(б) об утверждении списка высылаемых из России интеллигентов, 10 августа 1922 г. [Degree of Politbureau of the Central Committee of Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on the approval of the list of deported from Russia intellectuals. August 10, 1922] "Отечественные архивы" [Domestic Archives] № 1, 2003)

⁶⁷⁰ This does not mean that Berdyaev was not aware of the dangers of classical Slavophilism. In his article *The Fate of Russian Conservatism*, he called Slavophilism Russia's "true conservative ideology." But the failure of Slavophilism, according to him, was in its attempt to combine "two contradictory principles—power, authority, and—freedom." "The principle of power," Berdyaev argued, "eventually swallowed up the principle of freedom." Berdyaev's personalism is against the conservative idea that the Tsar is capable, from his position of authority, to teach the people how to live in freedom, as it also against the revolutionary idea according to which the "collective freedom" dominates the freedom of the individual person. (Бердяев, "Судьба русского консерватизма" in А. Я. Кожурина, 2016. *Консерватизм: pro et contra – антология*, Русский Путь, С. 531-514)

conservatism (discussed in part one) that destroyed, according to him, the organic whole and development of the Russian nation. Finally, Berdyaev was a great promoter of the Slavophile idea of *sobornost*, although his personalism had prevented him from falling under the spell of the nationalistic chauvinism of the late or second generation Slavophilism.

Let us begin with Berdyaev's sympathies with aristocracy. For Berdyaev, aristocracy, and not democracy, has a real ontological basis.⁶⁷¹ Aristocracy, he argues, with its respect for merit and excellence, is a high principle of social life.⁶⁷² Democracy is of a lesser order because of its innate tendency to mediocrity. Aristocracy revolves around the principle of excellence—excellence not of this or that norm or in a particular sphere of life, but in everything. The aristocratic principle is "ontological, organic, and qualitative," Berdyaev says, while the democratic, socialist, and anarchical principle is "formal, mechanical, and quantitative."⁶⁷³

Democracy is not necessarily against aristocracy, merit, and virtue, Berdyaev notes. It could serve as a "condition" and means for "qualitative selection." Yet, it is not effective enough in this task because it turns into a "formal means of the organization of interests." In a democracy, the desire for having the best often degenerates into a desire for promoting a particular constellation of interests. Thus, the choice and selection fall not on those who are truly the best, but on those who are better fitted for the promotion of particular policies and interests.

Another problematic feature of democracy, according to Berdyaev, is its fictitious nature. There is no such thing, he believes, as the "rule of the majority." "There is one rule from the creation of the world: the active power has been and will be the minority, and not the majority."⁶⁷⁴ This is valid for every form and type of government—for the monarchy as well as for democracy, for periods of reaction and of revolution. "There is no way out of the rule of the minority."⁶⁷⁵ Every act of the majority, Berdyaev observes, creates a new minority that will dominate and rule

⁶⁷¹ ΦH, 135

⁶⁷² ΦH, 135

⁶⁷³ ΦH, 136

⁶⁷⁴ ΦH, 137

⁶⁷⁵ ΦH, 137

the masses. Political demagogues and populists know this well, and for that reason exploit the "mass instinct" that believes in the fiction of democracy. It is clear that the "rule of all" means nothing.⁶⁷⁶ All this leads Berdyaev to the conclusion that the destruction of the historical aristocracy is not a destruction of the "natural" aristocratic *principle*. There will always emerge an aristocratic group from every mass of people, and the social and political order will always take the form of hierarchy. Every "living order," Berdyaev says, is "hierarchical and has its own aristocracy."⁶⁷⁷ That is why the destruction of hierarchy leads to a period of false hierarchy, which is not yet aristocracy and may never become. The plebeian spirit, Berdyaev says, envies and hates hierarchy, but cannot overcome it. Accordingly, the recognition of the aristocratic principle within human polities reflects a critical form of political realism.

Aristocracy, Berdyaev says, is "a race" that has its own independent features.⁶⁷⁸ It is created by God, he believes, and from God, it receives its qualities. All classes pretend to be aristocratic, that is, the best; however, every desire to enter "aristocracy" by will and personal choice is, in essence, a low and plebeian passion. The aristocrat is born, not self-made. Aristocratism is a natural condition, a condition of human character, a gift from God. The earthly mission of a true and genuine aristocracy is not to ascend to dominance, but to descend from the high to the low. The quality of aristocratism is generosity, not lust.⁶⁷⁹ It is service, not rule and dominance. True aristocracy is noble because it serves others and does not seek self-glorification. It is self-sacrificing and in self-sacrifice is the eternal value of the aristocratic principle. Human society, Berdyaev says, needs people willing to serve, who are free from the vice of pride and self-glorification. The aristocratic race is composed of such people, and this is the race that possesses the "first-born right."

An individual who strives for the achievement of his rights with incessant toil, who improves his living conditions through sacrifices of spirit and body, is not a man free of negative intentions, Berdyaev observes. In the language of Scripture, he is rather a man of "bitterness" and

⁶⁷⁶ ΦH, 138

⁶⁷⁷ ΦH, 138

⁶⁷⁸ ΦH, 139

⁶⁷⁹ ΦH, 139

"resent[ment]." The most hated aspect of aristocratism is the gift of "election." The aristocrat is "elected" by birth. He has "birth privilege" that does not rely on personal merits. In his excellence, the aristocrat is exceptional, but this exceptionality is not due only to his individual actions and work, but, above all, due to God's grace and election. However, as discussed in the chapter on creativity, every person, without exception, is an "aristocrat" and is elected in a particular and unique way. Every person is a "genius," having some natural talent and skill, a purpose, but not everyone is ready to practice and accept his genius, and not everyone chooses service instead of domination. The plebeian spirit prevents the genius in each one of us to reveal and bring the fruit of divine creativity. For Berdyaev, the nobility is a gift. The persons who discover this gift in themselves, and who use it in practice, are those who are truly blessed.

The noble person does not feel resentment and envy.⁶⁸⁰ The aristocrat knows that he lives in a hierarchical world, and that there is always someone above him. This, however, does not destroy his sense of personal dignity and worth. Atheists and nihilists cannot be noble persons. Christians, however, can and are. They believe in a hierarchy of being but do not confuse their minds with feelings of pride and self-exaltation. Berdyaev says that those who think of themselves as "sons," who remember and respect their origin, are aristocrats. There is aristocratism of the "divine-sonship" of the sons of God. Christianity is an "aristocratic religion," a religion of "free sons" and divine grace.

Aristocratic psychology is not condescending or pretentious. "It is typical for the aristocrat to feel guilt rather than offence."⁶⁸¹ The aristocrat feels that everything that exalts him is a gift from God, and everything that humiliates him is a result of personal guilt. Nietzsche and Mill were wrong to see in Christianity a religion of slavery and submission. Christianity, in Berdyaev's view, is pervaded by an aristocratic psychology. This psychology is completely the opposite of the plebeian character that always finds in the other the source of his problems and predicaments, the bearer of guilt. The aristocrat and the plebeian, Berdyaev says, are two "different spiritual

⁶⁸⁰ ΦΗ, 140

⁶⁸¹ ΦΗ, 141

racess⁶⁸² that constitute two different worlds. Finally, according to Berdyaev, aristocracy is the primary expression of personalism.⁶⁸³ In nobility, the person emerges from the darkness and the chaos of the masses and creates a new community, the community of free and creative persons.

2. CONSERVATIVE ETERNITY

Berdyaev's conservatism is not about the support of a particular conservative regime, but about conservative values and principles. Conservatism is the natural antithesis to radical and mechanical egalitarianism and democracy. As a political and philosophical principle, conservatism was of great value for Berdyaev, but this does not mean that he was a supporter of the Tsarist regime. On the contrary, he always opposed monarchical absolutism. In a sense, the conservative elements of his political theology served as an interpretative frame to assess critically the failings of conservative political regimes and ideologies.

Berdyaev was critical of the popular conservative idea of Russia as the "Third Rome," expressed in monk Filofei's letter to the Grand Prince Basil III Ivanovich. According to Berdyaev, the "Third Rome" ideology became the basic idea on which the Muscovite state was formed.⁶⁸⁴ In his "epistle," Filofei wrote,

The Apollinarian heresy caused the downfall of old Rome. The Turks used their axes to shatter the doors of all churches of the Second Rome, the city of Constantinople. Now [in Moscow], the new Third Rome, the Holy Ecumenical Apostolic Church of your sovereign state shines brighter than the sun in the universal Orthodox Christian faith throughout the world. Pious Tsar! Let [people of] your state know that all states of the Orthodox faith

⁶⁸² ФН, 142

⁶⁸³ ФН, 152

⁶⁸⁴ ORC, 10. For a good analysis of Berdyaev's interpretation of the Third Rome idea, his belief in the Russian messianic destiny and his influence on the Russian and Western historical scholarship see Ana Siljak, "Nikolai Berdyaev and the Origin of Russian Messianism", *The Journal of Modern History*—2016— 88:4. Also E. Н. Трубецкой, "Старый и новый национальный мессианизм" [Old and New National Messianism] in *Православие Pro Et Contra: Осмысление роли Православия в судьбе России деятелями русской культуры и Церкви* (Издательство Русского Христианского гуманитарного института Санкт-Петербург, 2001)

have now merged into one, your state. You are the only true Christian ruler under the sky!"⁶⁸⁵

The Orthodox Tsardom as a "Third Rome" was a messianic idea with a secular character. Through this idea, Berdyaev argued, the "nationalisation" of the Russian Orthodox Church began.⁶⁸⁶ "Religion and nationality in the Muscovite kingdom grew up together, as they did also in the consciousness of the ancient Hebrew people,"⁶⁸⁷ he says. The problem in this development was that the Orthodox Church of Russia lost its universal character and fell under the sway of Caesar and temporal interests. With the submission of the Church to temporal power, the Orthodox Moscow kingdom became a "totalitarian state." "Ivan the Terrible, who was a remarkable theoretician of absolute monarchy," Berdyaev wrote, "taught that a Tsar must not only govern the state but also have souls."⁶⁸⁸ The Tsar encroached into the domain of the Church. This trend toward the secularisation of the national community and absolutization of temporal power was continued and deepened by Peter the Great. For that reason, the emperor was blamed by the early Slavophiles for his "betrayal" of the "original national basis of Russian life." While Peter's reform was inevitable, in the sense that there was a need for Russia to overcome its cultural isolation, it nevertheless was achieved in a way that, according to Berdyaev, "did terrible violence to the soul of the people and to their beliefs."⁶⁸⁹ That is why Peter was described by his critics as an "Anti-Christ."⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁵ Basil Dmytryshyn, ed. 1991. *Medieval Russia: A Source Book, 850-1700* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, p.260) See also *Библиотека литературы Древней Руси*. [Ancient Rus Literature. Vol. 9] Т. 9. Конец XV – первая половина XVI века. (СПб. Наука, 2006.)

⁶⁸⁶ On this point, Berdyaev is in agreement with Vladimir Solovyov, who argued that after the fall of Byzantium, the Russians decided that they were "the only Christian kingdom" and thus "Christianity lost its universal significance in the mind of Muscovite Russia and became the religious element of the Russian nationality." "The Church," Solovyov continued, "ceased to be an independent social group and became merged with the state." (Kohn. 1955, 228)

⁶⁸⁷ ORC, 10

⁶⁸⁸ ORC, 10

⁶⁸⁹ ORC, 13

⁶⁹⁰ Vladimir Solovyov challenged this opinion. He believed that Peter actually brought Russia back to the "universal Christianity." He said that "in spite of appearances, the reform of Peter the Great had a profoundly Christian character." He pointed out that "the cruel persecutions of schismatics at the end of the Moscow period were stopped by Peter, who declared that 'Christ alone reigns over human conscience.'" Solovyov believed that Peter's reforms

Peter, whose reform gave direction to the modern Russian conservatism, the conservatism of Pobedonostsev and Karamzin, "was revolutionary from above," and for that reason, Berdyaev says, could be considered a "Bolshevik in type."⁶⁹¹ His actions against the Church and the religious tradition of Russia very much resembled the anti-religious activities of the godless leadership in the Soviet Union. Peter founded, Berdyaev says, a synodal regime to a large extent copied from the German Protestant form, and, in doing so, brought about the final subjection of the Church to the state.⁶⁹² "A comparison might be made," Berdyaev argues, "between Peter and Lenin, between the Petrine and the Bolshevik revolutions. They display [...] the same rupture of organic development, and repudiation of tradition..."⁶⁹³ In other words, for Berdyaev, Petrine conservatism, the conservatism of the Romanovs, was not genuinely conservative. The true conservatism, in Berdyaev's vision, should be both religious and organic; it should contain true liberties and true responsibilities, and should preserve and develop the tradition of the nation. The conservative empire, founded by Peter, grew outwardly and became the largest in the world, but inwardly it was broken into fragments.⁶⁹⁴ The autocratic, external conservatism of Russian absolutism did not seek to promote the organic, spiritual development of the nation, contained in the freedoms of Orthodox faith and the Church.

In short, Berdyaev's conservatism is not the autocratic conservatism of the Russian emperors. It is rather Slavophile conservatism but purified from the Slavophile idealization of the Russian past. Berdyaev's conservative views are best expressed in *The Philosophy of Inequality*, where he discusses conservatism, not as a political movement and party, but as a political principle that contains the "eternal religious and ontological origins of human society."⁶⁹⁵

permitted the expansion of liberties under the rule of his successors. "Peter's successors," he says, "were to follow and broaden that path. The suppression of capital punishment under Elizabeth, the abolition of tortures under Catherine, the liberation of the serfs under Alexander II—these were the essential results of that Christian orientation which Peter the Great, whom many Russian nationalists called the anti-Christ, gave to Russian domestic policy." (Kohn, 1995, 229-230)

⁶⁹¹ ORC, 13

⁶⁹² ORC, 13

⁶⁹³ ORC, 10

⁶⁹⁴ ORC, 15

⁶⁹⁵ ΦH, 118

Berdyayev was a defender of conservatism, and he believed, as we mentioned above, that conservatism could be a source of progress, creativity, and development. While conservative parties and ideologies could be corrupt and reactionary, Berdyayev argues that there is no normal and healthy existence and development without conservative powers.⁶⁹⁶ Conservatism, for Berdyayev, is the communion of times. It relates the future with the past.⁶⁹⁷ Revolutionism is "superficial." Conservatism, on the contrary, possesses a "spiritual depth." It is turned towards the "old sources of life." Conservatism has faith and a sense of the existence of an "eternal and ineradicable depth."⁶⁹⁸ Great talents and artists, Berdyayev observes, with their exceptional sensitivity appreciate and respect the reality of the past. The great geniuses, who are also great revolutionaries, were, in fact, conservatives and synthesisers because they did not want to limit their creative passion to the spirit of the contemporary age. The conservative environment and the sense of eternal depth, Berdyayev says, were behind the creative individualism of Goethe, Hegel, Wagner, Maistre, Pushkin, and Dostoyevsky. The spirit in these people moved history and civilization because it was enlightened and inspired by the origins of history and civilization. The revolutionary spirit "deifies the future" and forgets that "the past has no lesser rights than the future."⁶⁹⁹ Conservatism, on the other hand, knows that the generations of the past are as much alive as the generations of the present and the future. This knowledge of conservatism—the knowledge of the simultaneous existence of past, present, and future, of the *communion of time*—is an expression of the conservative sense of eternity.

"The charm of a ruin," Berdyayev notes, "consists in the victory of the past over the temporal." The beauty of the ancient times and its artefacts—temples, books, memoirs, clothes, etc.—is in the preservation of the past worlds and the signs of eternity contained within them. It is true that the artefacts of old age are empty "shells" and "traces" of the living Spirit and that they should not be deified as idols, because the Spirit alone is divine, but their value and beauty must be recognized and respected. The signs of the living Spirit, impressed on classical art and

⁶⁹⁶ ΦΗ, 119

⁶⁹⁷ ΦΗ, 119

⁶⁹⁸ ΦΗ, 119

⁶⁹⁹ ΦΗ, 120

antiquities, are beautiful precisely because they overcome the corrosion of time. Their survival testifies to the presence of eternity. There is hope in them. Through them, the communion of time happens *in time*. The artefacts of old age and civilization are symbols through which the living read and anticipate the historical movements of the divine Spirit.

Revolutionary radicalism does not know the secrets and the "battle of the eternal with the temporal."⁷⁰⁰ True conservatism, Berdyaev says, is not an idealization of the past. True conservatism is not only "conserving," but it is also "transforming." The past signifies the direction of the Spirit; through the past, we read the present and have prophetic insight into the future. Socialists and anarchists want to destroy the past, to expunge the liberating work of "memory,"⁷⁰¹ and re-create a world with a new and pure conscience and consciousness. This, however, is not only impossible, but, for Berdyaev, a dangerous "insanity."⁷⁰² For Berdyaev a "religion of revolution" that promotes historical amnesia and rejects the value of "origins" is a "religion of death."⁷⁰³ It is so because it is "completely absorbed by the contemporary and future life on earth."⁷⁰⁴ But the "religion of Christ," he says, is not concerned only with the living, it also cares for the dead. In fact, there are no "dead" in Christ. Christianity is conservative, as much as it is revolutionary because it contains the principle of eternity; it unites within itself the existence of past, present, and future. Genuine conservatism is always Christian, because it cares for the past while living in the present. Conservatism does not have the self-alienating character of socialist, anarchist, and liberal ideologies. The revolutionary mind is suspicious of the idea of eternal life; it does not believe in or care for eternity. It does not want to resurrect anything and anyone. In its confusion, it destroys, and from destruction it expects to give birth. Conservatism is concerned with resurrection; it does not want death at all. Berdyaev was perhaps influenced by Fedorov who argued against ideologies of "political patricide." Revolutionary progressivism, concerned only

⁷⁰⁰ ΦH, 120; TMH, 67

⁷⁰¹ "Memory," Berdyaev writes, "is the principle which conducts a constant battle against the mortal principle of time. It battles in the name of eternity against the mortal dominion of time [...] Memory is [...] the eternal ontological basis of all history." (TMH, 72)

⁷⁰² TMH, 72

⁷⁰³ ΦH, 121

⁷⁰⁴ ΦH, 122

with the future, was about the elimination of the old, the "father," in favoring the new, the "son."⁷⁰⁵ But the son will become a father. In this circle of generations, if the father is always forgotten, or sacrificed for the son, all fathers and sons are bound to perish. "Progress," Fedorov wrote, and Berdyaev agreed, "makes fathers and ancestors into the accused and the sons and descendants into judges."⁷⁰⁶ This is immoral. "Only the union of sons in the name of fathers, as a contra weight to union for the sake of progress and comfort at the expense of the fathers, exposes the immorality of socialism."⁷⁰⁷

There is "death" in revolutionary progress, which the true conservatism tries to prevent. Revolution, Berdyaev argues, sanctifies the Son without the Father; it cuts the connection between Son and Father. But the opposite is also possible. Inauthentic monarchical conservatism, the ideology and the rule of Romanovs, sanctifies the Father without the Son. True conservatism is "Trinitarian" and communitarian; it respects all—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. True conservatism is also *creative*; it is positive and progressive. It is progressive because it has memory and life in itself, because it is genuinely religious. Conservatism reflects the true religion. "True religion," turning again to Fedorov, "is the cult of ancestors, the cult of all the fathers as one father inseparable from the Triune God, yet not merged with him [...] God himself confirms the truth that religion is the cult of ancestors by calling Himself the God of the fathers."⁷⁰⁸

The value of conservatism is that it does not permit forgetfulness, as it does not permit disorder and chaos.⁷⁰⁹ Conservatism puts order into the primal chaos and creates, through its "continuity," a historical movement that is not empty of meaning. The revolutionary movement is a "ghostly" empty movement.⁷¹⁰ It is a movement in darkness towards darkness. In Berdyaev's vision, the fight between revolutionary ideologies and his vision of conservatism is a reflection of

⁷⁰⁵ TMH, 73

⁷⁰⁶ N.F. Fedorov. 1990. *What Was Man Created For? The Philosophy of the Common Task*. (Honeyglen Publishing/L'age d'Homme, p. 54)

⁷⁰⁷ Fedorov, 1990, 61

⁷⁰⁸ Fedorov, 1990, 65-66

⁷⁰⁹ ΦH, 130

⁷¹⁰ ΦH, 130

the battle between the cosmic and chaotic origins.⁷¹¹ True conservatism feels responsible to "enlighten" the abysmal darkness of the chaotic present and the unfulfilled future. But it does not do its work through coercion, but through constant reminders and reintroductions of the treasures of time.

Finally, Berdyaev says, conservatism cannot and should not exist only in the ruling class and powers. It is contained also and above all in the memory and the will of the people. Healthy conservatism is found in the *nation* as a whole, not simply in the political elites and the social and cultural establishment. A conservatism that is *exclusively* present in the elites is ingenious, corrupted, uncreative, coercive, and motivated by temporal and particular interests. When people begin to see in conservatism an enemy of life and creativity, a barrier to freedom and national fulfilment, then, Berdyaev says, conservatism becomes a reason for revolt and revolution. True conservatism is communitarian in principle; it rests on agreement.

⁷¹¹ ΦΗ, 130

CHAPTER FIVE. NATION AND STATE

1. NATION AND NATIONALISM

With the previous chapter, we concluded the discussion of Berdyaev's views on modern political and social ideologies. In this chapter, we turn our attention to his understanding of nation and state. Berdyaev's approach to the question of nation and state is complex because it does not provide us with a simple, straightforward defence or rejection of these two, fundamental political phenomena. For him, the nation and the state—like socialism, liberalism, and conservatism—have a double meaning, two antinomic aspects and qualities.

It was argued at the beginning of the thesis (see the section "Religious Philosophers") that Berdyaev succeeds to balance, synthesize, and reconcile the contradicting and partially true perspectives of the different political and intellectual streams in Russia. Approaching the final part of this discussion, one may object that Berdyaev did not actually "reconcile" anything, but only offered critiques. The response to this objection would be that Berdyaev did balance, synthesize, and reconcile different worldviews, but through the very specific "method" of political-theological criticism, that is, through the *synthetic* approach of Christian personalism and communitarianism.

Personalism and communitarianism are present in every political idea. In fact, they are the *raison d'être* of political ideas. Communism and socialism, for example, are unthinkable without communitarianism, but fail to advance meaningful communion because of their lack of positive spiritual content. Thus, one may argue that Berdyaev was a socialist, insofar as socialism contained the communitarian idea, and, at the same time, anti-socialist, since socialism was destroying the spiritual categories of personhood and brotherhood. Liberalism is another example. Berdyaev has been widely acclaimed as the "philosopher of freedom," a fierce critic of all forms of authoritarianism and autocracy. In Berdyaev's view liberalism was a positive political philosophy and order, but only if it respected the "rights of God," which, in Christian language, were the personal liberties *in* God. Thus, in a highly qualified way one could argue that Berdyaev was a "liberal," as much as he was a socialist. Was he a democrat? He was a democrat so far as democracy reflected the truth in society, so far as democracy did not violate the rights of

minorities and did not serve as a facade for oligarchic, political, and economic interests. For him, democracy had value so far as it served the common good and was a transformative political system that taught people, through their participation in the political process, that the "mechanical" principle of majority (or any other "mechanical principle") was not the best solution to social and political problems and conflicts. Was Berdyaev an anarchist? Anarchism is marked by a true passion for individual freedom. So far as this passion does not destroy communion, and so far as this passion does not look at the human person as an "object" or "individual," it is, for Berdyaev, of great value. And what about conservatism and the aristocratic political orders? As we have seen, while opposing the evil of autocracy, Berdyaev can be viewed as the last great representative of "classical" Slavophilism—the conservative ideology of (part of) the nineteenth-century Russian aristocracy.⁷¹²

What conclusion can we make from all this? The most plausible conclusion that we can draw is that all systems, ideologies, and orders are good, containing some perennial truth. However, they are of value only insofar as they do not deviate from the Christian communitarian and personalistic ideal espoused by Berdyaev. The same conclusion could be made about the phenomena of nation and state. These two political and social structures, in Berdyaev's view, have two antinomic aspects—one that is positive and another that is negative. The absolutization of one of these two aspects, that is, the unbalanced support or rejection of the nation and the state, would be an expression of dogmatism and ideological falsification. In his criticism of temporal orders, Berdyaev positioned himself as a thinker genuinely concerned with the discovery of truth—no matter how "unpleasant" this truth might be to his political and intellectual friends or opponents. This placed him in the role of Solovyov's Socrates, a "living insult of both poor guardians [of

⁷¹² This claim is also "conditional," because in the classical Slavophile conservatism Berdyaev found neither personalism nor a genuine aristocratism. In his book on Konstantin Leontiev, the nineteenth-century Russian diplomat and author of *Byzantism and Slavism*, Berdyaev argues that Leontiev was an "aristocrat by nature," but his nobility (of spirit) was not a "typical" "Russian trait." Aristocratism, Berdyaev believed, was a "Western phenomenon." Russians, he said in the same book, were "democrats" (in the negative sense of the word) who "did not love aristocratism." In the Slavophile's "brotherhood," he argued, "there was nothing aristocratic." (Н.А. Бердяев, "Константин Леонтьев: Очерк из истории русской религиозной мысли" (1926) in *Константин Леонтьев: Pro et Contra, Антология* (РХГА, 1995) [Konstantin Leontiev, *Anthology*]) С.3

tradition] and poor critics." As a "Socratic thinker," Berdyaev recognized the antinomic nature of state and nation and avoided the more dogmatic stances of the nineteenth and twentieth-century anarchists, socialists, or conservative authoritarians. The paradoxical result of all this was that he was deemed by his political interlocutors as either too "radical" or too "conservative."

In his typical manner, he approaches the question of the "nation" by engaging and challenging the perspectives of the dominant political ideologies. He says that socialists and liberals are interested in "national independence, but they have never been concerned with the 'problem of nationality.'" ⁷¹³ Socialists and liberals proclaim the "right of independent self-determination," but, at the same time, they do not have understanding and genuine interest in the idea and reality of "nation" and "nationality." ⁷¹⁴ For them, the "right of self-determination" is simply a slogan used as a means for advancing their particular interests and ideals. National independence and the flourishing of the nation have never been their goals. That is why, Berdyaev says, liberals and socialists see the national question in an abstract way. Berdyaev observes that the liberals and the socialists speak more often about the abstract and general "equality and freedom of the nations" than about the concrete rights of the particular nation. They have no sense of the "mystical character" of each individual nation, and for that reason, they cannot understand or admit that the national community has a different, perhaps greater, value than their business or trade interests, or than the "international proletariat."

In Berdyaev's view ideological abstractions naturally make every subject an object. They treat the subject with the "cold eye" of a "judge" whose verdict depends on abstract categories applied to "facts." But the nation, like a human person, has a much deeper meaning and character than the superficial categories and facts through which it is often understood. Every nation, even the enemy nation, Berdyaev says, deserves sympathy and should be treated with sympathy. ⁷¹⁵ This is so because the existence of every nation goes beyond the materialistic and abstract interpretations of its character and meaning, and because, as it is with persons, there can be no

⁷¹³ ΦΗ, 99

⁷¹⁴ ΦΗ, 99

⁷¹⁵ ΦΗ, 100

qualitative hierarchy between nations. Berdyaev believes that the nation, but not the state, has a spiritual nature and depth. Like personhood, nationhood has a deep intimate character, a soul that is unique and exceptional. For that reason, every discussion of the problem of national self-determination and rights should take into account the existing inner nature of the national phenomenon. The nation should be interpreted as something greater and more complex than the simple collectivity of people sharing one language, territory, and culture. If one "personalises" the national community, rather than viewing it as a state or political "unit," then the "rights" of the nation become something more than abstract-juridical entities, but concrete and existential. For Berdyaev the question of "national self-determination" is a question of "organic" and "mystical-biological" existence.⁷¹⁶ The nation, according to him, has an "irrational living foundation."

The nation is also a "historical category"⁷¹⁷ that cannot be defined rationally. Berdyaev is convinced that there is no adequate "definition" that can fully describe the "*being*" of a nation. Like personhood, every nation has a mystical depth and meaning that waits to be revealed. He argues that the existence of the nation cannot be limited to the simple categories of race, language, religion, territory, sovereignty, or anything of this order. These categories cannot capture the existence of the nation. The *being* of the nation is best revealed through the "unity of national fate."⁷¹⁸ The nation is a historical We, intrinsically related to the I and Thou in the communion of We discussed earlier. This means that I may speak a different language and have a different religion from my neighbour's language and religion, I might be of a different race, but I and Thou are together in the We of our shared spiritual and living experience. I and Thou, in the nation, form a "unity in consciousness." The national consciousness that arises in history is what makes the community of people and families a nation. Berdyaev supports this argument with the example of the Jewish nation. For two thousand years, he says, the Jewish people were without a state, territory, and even without a common language, they lost almost all of the common

⁷¹⁶ ΦΗ, 100

⁷¹⁷ ΦΗ, 102

⁷¹⁸ ΦΗ, 102

characteristics of national existence. Yet, they have never ceased to be a nation. The reason for this was that they did not lose the sense of the "mystical unity" of their historical fate.⁷¹⁹

There is no "pure blood" and "pure race" in the "biological" or "organic foundation" of historical nationhood. National unity does not depend on race or blood. As we have noted in the first chapter, discussing Uvarov, Berdyaev believed in the organic development of national character and being. A nation could grow, it could change its external features and include or assimilate new and different peoples and tribes, but its essence would always be the same. It would be so because of its common, unchangeable national character, because of the unfading sense of "togetherness," of *belonging*. The creation of historical nationhood is the "formation of historical individuality from natural racial chaos."⁷²⁰ The nation, Berdyaev says, is born from "primordial chaotic darkness." The nation is a process of communion, of an expanding bonding and self-differentiation. Its form is shaped in the historical process, drawing on the mix of different elements and materials—once dispersed, and now united. The nation reveals its unique meaning and character in time. For Berdyaev, the historical formation of a nation is, above all, a work of Providence, and not of human design. Every attempt at the conscious creation or destruction of a nation is also an intrusion into the "cosmic" order and a return to the primordial chaos.⁷²¹ Berdyaev believes that every nation exists for a reason or an aim that goes beyond any rational human project or imagination. It is beyond human power to create or destroy a nation. Providence is involved in the process of national birth or death.

The nation is a natural expression of the conservative principle. It is so because it is related to eternity. The national spirit unites past, present, and future. The nation is fighting mortality, and in its vitality we discover its religious nature.⁷²² The healthy national spirit is life-giving, and not destructive. It is also naturally conservative, not because it is hostile to creativity, but because it preserves the "fundaments of life" from the creative destruction of every new generation. The generation of the past, in national conservatism, becomes a co-creator with the generation of the

⁷¹⁹ ΦΗ, 102

⁷²⁰ ΦΗ, 103

⁷²¹ ΦΗ, 104

⁷²² ΦΗ, 105

present. The destruction of national memory, according to Berdyaev, is a destruction of the future, done in the present through the loss of the past. That is why, he says, a revolutionary internationalism that wants to erase all national boundaries and identities and replace them with an abstract idea, is an enemy of life and nationhood.⁷²³ "In nationhood," Berdyaev believes, "life opposes the death of internationalism, which threatens [with destruction] all peoples."⁷²⁴

It is natural for the nation to strive for power and growth, Berdyaev adds. The desire for power and expansion reveals the vitality of the nation. "Every nation, in its healthy instinct," he explains, "strives to maximal power and flourishing, to revelation in history."⁷²⁵ This vitality is the "creative side of nationalism," which internationalism aims to destroy. Internationalism wants to "quench the will for existence." It purports to produce Solovyov's all-unity,⁷²⁶ but does not comprehend that all-unity could be achieved only in the Universal Church, and not in the universal federation of mundane collectivities. All-unity is not a process of national weakening and dissolution through internationalization and loss of national identity. On the contrary, the all-unity must be a victory and fulfilment of each individual nation. All-unity requires diversity and can only be conceived religiously.⁷²⁷ In the secular or atheistic forms of internationalism, spiritual unity and brotherhood are replaced by abstractions and legal fictions. In authentic all-unity, there is no contradiction between nationhood and humankind.⁷²⁸

Concurring with Solovyov's argument, expressed in the work mentioned above, *The National Question in Russia*, Berdyaev says that in the all-unity of humankind, all nations find

⁷²³ ФН, 105

⁷²⁴ ФН, 105

⁷²⁵ ФН, 106

⁷²⁶ All-unity (*всеединство*) is one of the key concepts of Solovyov's philosophy that gave rise to the metaphysical thought of the Silver Age thinkers. It sees the world through the prism of divine *organic* unity (integrality) of all existent and of knowledge, where the parts are not dissolved in the whole. We have touched on this explaining the Slavophile idea of the unity of Spirit. The integrality, according to the Russian tradition, could be perceived not so much through rational thinking but rather through intuition (spirit). The central feature of all-unity is the unity of Truth, Good, and Beauty corresponding to the three hypostases of the Holy Trinity. The main expounders of Solovyov's all-unity are the Princes Evgenii and Sergei Trubetskoy, Semyon Frank, Bulgakov, L. Karsavin, and P. Florensky.

⁷²⁷ ФН, 107

⁷²⁸ ФН, 107

their special fulfilment, not their extinction. Nations and humankind are integral parts of the cosmic order and hierarchy. In Berdyaev's view, a Christian vision of political order can have no place for the "abstract monism" of secular internationalism. On the contrary, it supports the "wealth of existence," the multiplicity and diversity of nations and people. For Christianity, Berdyaev says, there is a "human soul, a national soul, and a soul of humankind"; but in abstract internationalism there is neither knowledge nor interest in the existence and reality of the "soul."⁷²⁹ The Socialist International aims to establish a "united proletariat," and not "united humankind." The liberal order establishes "united capital" and "common market," but not "united nations." The brotherhood between nations, and the peace between them, presupposes respect for national diversity and independence. If we follow Berdyaev's logic, we may say that the federation of nations or the community of nations is impossible without sympathy for every foreign nation and an understanding of its unique spiritual and providential reality and meaning. The federation or community of nations cannot rest on the suppression of national feeling and identity. Every attempt at the conscious weakening and destruction of a nation, either for the goals of supra-national interest or for the aims of an imperial policy, is an attempt to oppose the enigmatic workings of a providential process in which human reason and particular interests play a secondary role.

What is the place of the state in this discussion? According to Berdyaev, the state is not determinative for the existence of a nation.⁷³⁰ There are nations without states. But every nation naturally strives to create its own state. Berdyaev thinks that this reveals the healthy instinct of the nation. When a nation loses its state, this, according to him, is a great misfortune. It is so because the state permits the nation to reveal its full potential.⁷³¹ Every state, Berdyaev says, should have a national nucleus, no matter how complex the tribal composition of the nation is. This view is again an echo of Uvarov's theory of the state. A state without a national core cannot

⁷²⁹ ΦH, 108

⁷³⁰ ΦH, 112

⁷³¹ ΦH, 112

have a creative life. Austro-Hungary, Berdyaev says, was an exception, but it was defined by external historical conditions.⁷³²

Major nations like Russia, Germany, or the United States, that have consciousness of their world mission, naturally strive to become imperial states and to expand their influence beyond their natural limits. These nations want to rule and dominate. On the other hand, small nations naturally strive for liberation and independence. But the "messianic role" has nothing to do with aggressive nationalism and predatory imperialism. Similarly to Solovyov, Berdyaev argues that true messianism is about national sacrifice and service, and not about world domination. The messianic nation is a *servant*, in service for the "salvation of the world." Every messianic consciousness, Berdyaev says, has for its source the "messianic consciousness of the Jewish people." This consciousness is foreign to the "Arian" people.⁷³³ "The Jewish consciousness is neither nationalistic nor imperialistic, it is messianic," he says. It hopes for the Messiah and for the salvation of the nation and the world. Messianism is always irrational and otherworldly in character. There is a kind of "madness" in it. It is so, Berdyaev says, because the Messiah has already appeared and because the achievement of the messianic end is not possible within the limits of history. In the Christian consciousness, salvation is in the end, the eschaton, and not in the process, in the *saeculum* or the world. The realization of the messianic call is "a victory of the free spirit that goes beyond, not only nature but also history."⁷³⁴ In other words, the realization of the messianic hope is not a historical event. Christian messianism is always apocalyptic and supra-historical. So, Berdyaev warns, Christian messianism should not be confused with the worldly messianism that hopes for the achievement of world dominance and secular peace.

Because of its mystical and irrational elements, nationalism is very much related to secular messianism. In this form of nationalism, there is a feeling of an election, an election not for sacrifice, but rather for glory and self-power. Nationalism is the dark side of the national

⁷³² ΦΗ, 112

⁷³³ ΦΗ, 114

⁷³⁴ ΦΗ, 115

phenomenon. Berdyaev calls this dark side the "lure of nationalism."⁷³⁵ As we have said, in Berdyaev's political theology, every political and social phenomenon has an antinomic nature, and the antinomy arises from the level of correspondence between the social and political reality and the Christian personalistic and communitarian ideal. The nation, as a non-ecclesial community, is vulnerable to the temptations of totalitarianism. The nation could sacrifice the individual person for the realisation of an idea or fantasy. And the national idea could easily degrade into a daemonic, animalistic idea as happened with German national-socialism. In the corrupted national feeling, "pure blood" and "supreme race" dominate over the shared sense of togetherness and belonging.

Nationalism poses a constant threat to the realisation of personhood and communion. Through its mystical nature, nationalism exerts greater power over the feelings of the masses than the power of democratic or socialist ideals. Historical experience confirms that liberalism and democracy cannot resist the pressures of nationalistic "madness." Berdyaev understands the dangers that come from corrupted national feeling. He warns that nationalism could be a deeper form of slavery and dependence than the state.⁷³⁶ This is so, because the state controls people through external force, while nationalism is a corruption of the soul. Nationalism does not come through coercion, Berdyaev says. It is an evil spirit, a "voluntary decision of man, an emotional decision, in which he subjects himself under some 'whole.'" In this subjection there is personal and group egoism that requires self-sacrifice and that abuses the language of duty. "Egoism, self-seeking, self-conceit, pride, the will to power, hatred of others, violence, all become virtues when transferred from personality to the nation as a whole."⁷³⁷ Personality, Berdyaev says, is not a part of the nation, as it is not a part of society or the world. On the contrary, the sense of nationality is a part of the personality. The nation is not greater than the individual person. The nation is part of the person. The evil of nationalism is exposed or revealed when the nation acquires a value greater than the value of the individual person.

⁷³⁵ FS, 164

⁷³⁶ FS, 164

⁷³⁷ FS, 164

Finally, in nationalism, the nation becomes an abstraction. Nationalism uses the state to triumph over man, and from nationalism emerges the totalitarian state. It is inevitable, Berdyaev argues, that "with the triumph of nationalism the strong state dominates over personality and the rich classes dominate over the poor." Nationalism and patriotism, however, are two different things. Berdyaev's final conclusion to the question of nation and nationalism is that "Christianity is a personalist and universal religion, but not a national, not a racial religion. Every time that nationalism proclaims Germany for the Germans, France for the French, Russia for the Russians, it reveals its pagan and non-human nature."⁷³⁸

2. KINGDOM OF CAESAR

The state is closely related to nationhood, and nationhood needs a state in order to flourish and reveal its full potential. The modern state appeared after the French Revolution with the appearance of the modern nation.⁷³⁹ Both the state and the nation have a positive function as far as they reflect the true spirit of community and togetherness, and a negative effect on society and individual when they destroy the life of communities, families, and persons. Like the nation, the state, according to Berdyaev, has a mystical character, but in a different sense.⁷⁴⁰ The source of the state's *mysterium tremendum*, to use Rudolf Otto's terminology,⁷⁴¹ is its power. Power evokes awe, and where awe is, there is the divine.

Before we turn to Berdyaev's treatment of the state, we should make a short digression and explain in the language of political theology what the stakes in the abuse of state power are. The state organizes social life, and the ordering principle of state power produces peace. The question is what kind of peace. Is it the peace of coercion and totalitarian control, or the peace of justice and right? Coercion and justice are almost impossible to divide in practice. For that reason, the idea of the "just republic" envisioned by Plato and Cicero, in which the wisdom of the ruler coincides with the virtue of the citizen, cannot be practically realized. The state is, metaphorically

⁷³⁸ FS, 171

⁷³⁹ Hans Kohn and Craig J Calhoun. 2017 (1944). *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background*. Routledge.

⁷⁴⁰ ΦH, 75-78

⁷⁴¹ cf. Rudolf Otto. 1923. *The Idea of the Holy*. Oxford University Press

speaking, a "beast," a Hobbesian Leviathan, an "earthly god." It can wipe off, "in the blink of an eye," the life of a person and of an entire generation. Everyone is vulnerable when state power falls into the corrupted hands of corrupted souls. Who has not suffered the injustice of the state? Socrates, Cicero, Plato, and Aristotle? The ancient prophets? Jesus? But the aim of the state is not injustice. On the contrary, the state's aim is justice. For that reason, the fundamental function of state power should be always emphasized: It is defence of the vulnerable. Yet, is there a generation that could pride itself that it has not suffered the plague of corrupted power? The state crucifies the innocent, including the God of Christianity, and will continue to do so until the end of time.

State ideology, as Marx observed, is a "super-structure," but not of "material conditions." It is the specific super-structure of state power. For that reason, all ideologies have no real worth, if they, once in service to power, permit the "crucifixion" of the "innocent" through the means of state apparatus. But, like ideology, the state itself has no worth as well if it does not defend the life and the right of the innocent. The central function of the state is not punishment and coercion; it is not the "monopoly of legitimate violence," a standard definition in modern political theory. The state's chief function is the defence of the human person. To start with the presumption that the central role of the state is bringing order through punishment and coercion heads in the wrong direction. The thirst for punishment and reprisal limits the capacity for right judgment and makes the state authority forget *whom* it punishes and *for what*. The starting point for each state action or inaction should be the defence of the innocent. That is why the principle "Innocent until proven guilty," present in a wide variety of legal codes from the pandects of Roman law to the UDHR articles, has such high importance. The focus of state power should be the vulnerable, the person who needs protection against human sin and crime. Therefore, coercion is a secondary function, and state benefits bestowed on servants and citizens are of even less importance.

If the state's primary role is the defence of the individual person from the attacks of the "robbers," (Luke 10:25-37) then this defence should happen through prevention. The state should guarantee through *its very presence* that the life of the innocent is safe. According to Church doctrine, the state power is responsible to God, the Son of Man. As such, and only as such, it may

evoke "awe,"⁷⁴² the "awe" that comes from the *splendor of justice and right*. Through its actions, the government should foster respect and trust in the divine function of state power. The state should not evoke fear, contempt, suspicion, or hatred. As Augustine observed in the *City of God*, it should neither act as a robber, nor should it be an instrument in the hands of robbers.⁷⁴³ God's wrath falls on a state (or government) that "crucifies" the innocent.

From a political-theological point of view, no power is safe against the wrath of God. Even David, the "anointed," was not spared from punishment when he abused his authority trying to impose taxes and fines on the people. The biblical story is clear: "Satan rose up against Israel and caused David to take a census of the people of Israel [...] God was very displeased with the census, and he punished Israel for it." Even when David showed remorse for his wicked action, he was not forgiven by the Lord. David said to God, "I have sinned greatly by taking this census. Please forgive my guilt for doing this foolish thing." And the Lord's answer was,

I will give you three choices. Choose one of these punishments, and I will inflict it on you [...] You may choose three years of famine, three months of destruction by the sword of your enemies, or three days of severe plague as the angel of the Lord brings devastation throughout the land of Israel. (1 Chronicles 21:1-17)

David did not really choose anything but rather hoped in God's mercy. But God did not have mercy for the abuse of power. Thus, "the Lord sent a plague upon Israel, and 70,000 people died as a result. And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But just as the angel was preparing to destroy it, the Lord relented."

⁷⁴² cf. T.Hobbes. 1985. *Leviathan*, Ch. 13 (Penguin Books). "Hereby it is manifest, that during the time when men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called War; and such a War as is of every man, against every man." (p.185)

⁷⁴³ "In the absence of justice, what is sovereignty but organized brigandage? For, what are bands of brigands but petty kingdoms? They also are groups of men, under the rule of a leader, bound together by a common agreement, dividing their booty according to a settled principle. If this band of criminals, by recruiting more criminals, acquires enough power to occupy regions, to capture cities, and to subdue whole populations, then it can with fuller right assume the title of kingdom, which in the public estimation is conferred upon it, not by the renunciation of greed, but by the increase of impunity." (Augustine, Demetrius B. Zema, Gerald Groveland Walsh, and Gilson Étienne. 2008. *The City of God*. Vol. Books I-Vii /. The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, V. 8. Catholic University of America Press. Book IV, Ch. 4, p. 195)

The story does not end here, there is a further clarification:

David looked up and saw the angel of the Lord standing between heaven and earth with his sword drawn, reaching out over Jerusalem. So David and the leaders of Israel put on burlap to show their deep distress and fell face down on the ground. (1 Chronicles 21:1-17)

In awe and despair, David, the anointed one, finally showed mercy to the Lord's people, the innocent, and took the responsibility on himself. He said to God,

I am the one who called for the census! I am the one who has sinned and done wrong! But these people are as innocent as sheep—what have they done? O Lord my God, let your anger fall against me and my family, but do not destroy your people. (1 Chronicles 21:1-17)

In response, God asked David to build an altar on the property of some Araunah, and David proved again that he was conscious of justice and truth. Refusing to receive the land for the altar as a gift from his subject Araunah, he said: “No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the Lord what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing.” David, the Caesar, grew in his awareness of the responsibilities of leadership and the Lord had mercy on him and later blessed his son, Solomon, telling him,

Because your greatest desire is to help your people, and you did not ask for wealth, riches, fame, or even the death of your enemies or a long life, but rather you asked for wisdom and knowledge to properly govern my people— I will certainly give you the wisdom and knowledge you requested. But I will also give you wealth, riches, and fame such as no other king has had before you or will ever have in the future! (2 Chronicles 1:11-12)

In short, the state is just (and truly prosperous) only if it serves the will of God. This is Berdyaev's view of the state. There is no state, or nation, or community, or corporation that crucifies the Truth and survives unpunished. Rome, the most magnificent and powerful state in history, has fallen, and each "new (or Third) Rome" will fall repeatedly every time an innocent man is crucified for the fictions of the wicked.

There is another aspect of state power that should be noted. As we have seen, for Berdyaev, and for the Slavophiles in general, Caesar has neither the duty nor the authority to care for the Church. The Church is the realm of the Spirit, the Spirit is free, and its freedom cannot be tamed or destroyed, or even insulted. It is written, "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." (Matt. 12:32) No one can violate the Spirit of Truth, therefore, no state is necessary for the defence of the Spirit.

To repeat, the only function of the state is to defend the innocent. And according to the Bible, it is a great and unpardonable evil when the state is wicked, behaving as a robber. The wicked Caesar and his servants will be judged in the court of God (cf. Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 25:32). Caesar should stay in awe of the power of God. In the punishment of Caesar, the God of Hosts is a "jealous God," (Ex. 34:14) and a God of wrath (Rom. 1:18). This "wrath" has always been the expectation of Christianity, and of the Church. In the hierarchy of life, man should "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's," (Matt. 22:21) not because this world is Caesar's, but because it is God's, and Caesar is a man. "For there is no authority except from God and those which exist are established by God." (Rom. 13:1) Prophets who spoke against the injustice of the state were persecuted or killed by the state.⁷⁴⁴ But all, not

⁷⁴⁴ In *The Idea of Nationalism*, Hans Kohn explains the appearance of the ancient Jewish prophets as a unique event in history. Soon after the creation of the monarchical Jewish state, the struggle of the prophets against the kingdom began. "This struggle," Kohn says, "was unique in history. On the one side were the 'realists,' the kings and their advisers who desired a state like other states, powerful and prosperous, with rich and poor, the work of human instincts and human inadequacies [...] neither better nor worse than all other states. [...] Some of the kings were wise, some of them were fools, but generally, the ups and downs of normal state life were not different in Israel and Judah from those in any other state. Into this 'normal' life sounded the voices of the men who come down to us as Prophets. They rejected this state because it was a state like other states. In strange paradoxes they opposed popular beliefs. The will of God was emphasized in contradistinction to natural and national instincts. [...] The extraordinary thing is not that they were persecuted during their lifetime as traitors and cranks, but that after their death their words were reverently preserved, and that those whom the people once acclaimed, the wise and noble advisers of the throne, were then called false prophets. Within the Jewish people and within humanity the Prophets had started a revaluation of all accepted values. This new valuation has not been accepted [...] but it has acted as a powerful leaven and restraint in history. The Prophets from Amos to Jeremiah discovered earlier than Greek philosophers the idea of man and humanity, and dug deeper into its meaning than any Greek philosophers before the Stoic period. The dignity of man

just the prophets, should take notice and have a sense of the character and function of the state, especially those who are state servants, and the one who is elected, by the will of Providence, as the nation's highest servant. The prophetic spirit of the Christian faith, which was present in Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Frank and other Christian thinkers expelled or killed by the communist regime, has continually urged that severe judgment is prepared for public officials who abuse their office, and a great reward is awaiting martyrs who unjustly suffer from the violence of organized power.

The task of the state, according to Berdyaev, is to "oppose the sinful chaos," to prevent the "complete destruction of the sinful world."⁷⁴⁵ It is the mystical *katechon*, of which Paul spoke (2 Thess. 2:7) and Bonhoeffer interpreted.⁷⁴⁶ But as *katechon* the state is a temporal, not eternal, remedy. Despite its sanctification, the state has nothing to do with eternity, nor does it exist to make the earthly life a paradise.⁷⁴⁷ The state has no positive function. It is a false hope to expect the state to become the Kingdom of God on earth. "Sinful humanity cannot live without a state," Berdyaev says, because the "annulment of the state law for a humanity defeated by sin is a return to the bestial state."⁷⁴⁸ So, the coercive element in the nature of the state is not "evil" in itself, but rather necessary. Yet, "legitimate coercion" is still a secondary function, a consequence of sin. The

as such, regardless his class, his ancestry, his abilities, was discovered. Something characteristic of all men revealed itself and was summed up in the concept of humanity." (Kohn, Calhoun. 2017, 40)

⁷⁴⁵ ΦH, 79

⁷⁴⁶ "For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way." (2 Thess. 2:7) There is a political-theological debate on the meaning of this verse and especially on the meaning of the "restrainer" (*katechon*) of lawlessness. "Two things alone have still power," says Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "to avert the final plunge into the void. One is the miracle of a new awakening of faith, and the other is that force which the Bible calls the 'restrainer,' *katechon* (2 Thess. 2:7), that is to say the force of order, equipped with great physical strength, which effectively blocks the way of those who are about to plunge into the abyss. The miracle is the saving act of God, which intervenes from above, from beyond whatever is historically attainable or probable, and creates new life out of the void. It is a raising of the dead. And the 'restrainer' is the force which takes effect within history through God's governance of the world, and which sets due limits to evil. The 'restrainer' itself is not God; it is not without guilt; but God makes use of it in order to preserve the world from destruction. The place where the miracle of God is proclaimed is the Church. The 'restrainer' is the power of the state to establish and maintain order." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Eberhard Bethge. 1955. *Ethics*. SCM Press Ltd. p.87; see also Jürgen Moltmann. 2012. *Ethics of Hope*, Ch. 1 "Apocalyptic Eschatology," Fortress Press, pp. 9-18)

⁷⁴⁷ ΦH, 79

⁷⁴⁸ ΦH, 79

state has no intrinsic positive nature and positive function. The existence of evil is what makes the state necessary. If there were no evil, there would not be a state as an organizing principle. If there were no wicked, there would not be laws. In the state, Berdyaev says, there is an "iron necessity"⁷⁴⁹— a necessity not for the creation of an earthly paradise, but a necessity that comes from the sin of the "old Adam."⁷⁵⁰

The deification of the state is the worst corruption of power. When the state is transformed from a temporal utility into an idol and absolute, it becomes a great evil. Berdyaev believes that Christianity put limits to the expansion of the state towards state monism and idolatry.⁷⁵¹ The pagan state was an absolute state precisely because it was not Christian. The temporal power of the pagan kingdom was not balanced or limited by spiritual truth, and the cult to the Roman emperor was a demonization of state power. The limits of the state, Berdyaev says, were drawn when the first Christians accepted a martyr's death in refusing to bestow divine honors to Caesar.⁷⁵² "Upon the blood of the martyrs," he argues, "was raised the Church of Christ and was formed the spiritual kingdom, in opposition to the pagan kingdom of Caesar and its boundless pretentions."⁷⁵³ State power faced its limits through Christianity. Berdyaev believes that when Christ said, "bestow unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's," the state entered into a new historical era.⁷⁵⁴ Christianity drew a limit to human arbitrariness and to every claim for earthly sovereignty. This limit did not have a material form, that is, the limiting power of the "Sword," but rather a spiritual limit, that is, the power of the "Word."

Berdyaev says that "the greatest temptation of human history is the temptation to exercise sovereignty." In this temptation, he argues, there is "concealed a most powerful enslaving force."⁷⁵⁵ The source of the idea of sovereignty, according to Berdyaev, is the natural disposition of

⁷⁴⁹ ΦH, 80

⁷⁵⁰ ΦH, 80

⁷⁵¹ ΦH, 91

⁷⁵² ΦH, 92

⁷⁵³ ΦH, 92

⁷⁵⁴ ΦH, 92

⁷⁵⁵ SF, 139

man to dominate others.⁷⁵⁶ Berdyaev's discussion of the God-like sovereignty of the human person has been explored earlier in this thesis. However, there is a difference between Berdyaev's concept of the "person as a center of a universe" and his conception of "man as a despot of the universe." The person as a center of a universe is a servant and light to the world, bringing life to creation through the life of the Spirit. On the contrary, a "despot" of the universe brings death to creation through the emptiness of his spiritual darkness. The idea of sovereignty and the quest for its achievement, Berdyaev says, is basically an idea and an ambition for universality and unity pursued in a false way.⁷⁵⁷ Jesus rejected the "temptation of sovereignty" and the will for earthly domination. Like Solovyov, Berdyaev reminds us of the story of Jesus in the desert. From a high mountain, the devil showed Christ "'all the kingdoms of the world and the glory in them' and proposed that He shall fall down and worship them."⁷⁵⁸ Christ refused to obey. With this final act against the schemes of temptation, Christ rejected once and for all the sovereignty of earthly kingdoms. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's" is commonly interpreted as a reconciliation of the temporal and spiritual power, as an abolition of the conflict between the will to power in man and the power of God. But, Berdyaev says, the "life of Christ was precisely this conflict carried to the utmost limit of intensity."⁷⁵⁹ The very truth was that the state "in fact never agreed to recognize the Kingdom of God as an autonomous region."⁷⁶⁰

In the last century, after the fall of the totalitarian regimes, the idea of the deification of state power lost its popular lure and legitimacy, and the attention of governments and politicians turned to the idea of neutrality of the state. State neutrality became a key principle in the ideology of the modern secular state. State neutrality has a double function—first, this principle suggests that the state guarantees the rule of law, and second, it implies that the state has no alternative as a source of justice and right. This, however, is a troubling idea because it reveals that the temporal

⁷⁵⁶ SF, 139

⁷⁵⁷ SF, 139

⁷⁵⁸ SF, 139

⁷⁵⁹ SF, 140

⁷⁶⁰ SF, 140

power neither abandoned its ambition for absolute sovereignty nor did it lose its "daemonic" temptation to play God's role on earth. State neutrality is a dangerous principle as far as this principle serves as a cover for special interests having at their disposal the instruments of power. If state neutrality was possible to achieve, it would be good. But if it is not, then it becomes a tool for domination. Berdyaev was aware of this danger, arguing that the "neutral state" was a fiction. He was convinced that the "Prince of this world" always rules, that he always places himself at the head of empires and states and that he, in his pride, cannot be a "neutral figure." On the contrary, he was a "figure in the highest degree aggressive," "always encroaching upon the freedom of the Spirit and upon the Kingdom of God."⁷⁶¹

According to Berdyaev, there is always a radical divide between personal morality and "state morality."⁷⁶² That which is considered immoral for the person is considered entirely moral for the state.⁷⁶³ The state has always used "espionage, falsehood, violence, murder." These, Berdyaev notes, are evil means "for the supposed achievement of good; yet the good has never been realized." The usage of these means becomes self-serving sooner or later, and the "good" reason for their application is often forgotten. It is a grave error, Berdyaev says, to accept an evil means as something good or even useful. The ethics of the state, he argues, cannot be justified on metaphysical and religious grounds; it could be defended only on a pragmatic basis. So, Christianity should not endeavour to make the state "ethical." The Kingdom of God cannot "benefit" from "organized espionage, from executions, from predatory wars, the seizure of foreign lands and brutality to their people, from the growth of national egoism and national hatred, from monstrous social inequalities and from the power of money."⁷⁶⁴

And here we face the core question at the heart of this discussion of state power. Berdyaev asks,

[Is it permissible] to execute a single innocent person for the sake of the safety and wellbeing of the state? In the Gospel this question was put in the words of Caiaphas: 'It is

⁷⁶¹ SF, 141

⁷⁶² SF, 142

⁷⁶³ SF, 142

⁷⁶⁴ SF, 142

better for us that one man should die for the people than that the whole nation should perish' [...] The state always repeats the words of Caiaphas; it is the state's confession of faith.⁷⁶⁵

And he concludes, the "death of one man, of even the most insignificant of men, is of greater importance and is more tragic than the death of states and empires."⁷⁶⁶ This conclusion is not a form of anarchic perfectionism. Berdyaev's political theology is not against the existence of the state, it does not want the destruction of the earthly city, and it is not a kind of Tolstoyan pacifism. It is rather a criticism, in the tradition of Judeo-Christian prophetism that insists on the state's function as a defender of the weak against the terror of sin and pride. There is a need for protection against sin, Berdyaev says, and this need makes the "elimination" of the state impossible. In his typical, aphoristic way, he concludes: "The state exists for man and not man for the state."⁷⁶⁷ "Power, government," he says, "is only the servant, simply the defender and guarantor of the rights of man and nothing more." There is no such thing as a "right to power," only a "burdensome obligation to power."⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁵ SF, 144

⁷⁶⁶ SF, 144

⁷⁶⁷ SF, 150

⁷⁶⁸ SF, 150

CHAPTER SIX. SOBORNOST AND ESCHATOLOGY

1. SBORNOST AND SOBORNOST

In Berdyaev's philosophy, the state is not an incarnation of the Spirit. It could be a sign or a trace of the workings of the Spirit, but it is not the Spirit incarnated. The late Hegel would not agree with such an interpretation. In Hegel's view, "the state is the Divine Idea as it exists on earth."⁷⁶⁹ These words would be blasphemy for Berdyaev. Hegel expressed another thought that would inflame Berdyaev's opposition. In his lectures on the philosophy of history, he said that under the influence of Christianity only the German nations were first able to "attain consciousness that man, as man, is free: that is the freedom of Spirit, which constitutes its existence." These assertions reflected Hegel's philosophical understanding of the "Unity of Spirit" in history. The Spirit for Hegel was a "totality," the totality of freedom that tends towards itself. The state was also a kind of totality, composed of different and reconciled "wills." "Truth," Hegel believed, "is the Unity of the universal and subjective will; and the Universal is to be found in the State, in its laws, its universal and rational arrangements." He argued that the state is the "reality of freedom": the "objective unity" of the "idea of freedom," that is the Universal Spirit, and the "means" for its realization, that is, subjective wills. Hegel believed that freedom is historically realized in society and the state. Berdyaev did not. For Berdyaev, the "state" and "society" were not, to use Hegel's words, "the very conditions" for the realization of freedom. Berdyaev had great respect for the Hegelian philosophy of history, but he did not accept most of its conclusions.

To summarize in bold strokes, Hegel believed in the existence of a World Spirit, who was essentially a result of its own activity, and who constantly overcomes and transcends "unreflected existence" (or the unconscious). The Spirit constantly actualized the potency of everything still partial—individuals, nations, civilizations—into a "self-comprehending totality." We do not have any positive idea of totality in Berdyaev, we rather have *sobornost*, communion, and in this communion, self-comprehension is just the inexpressible and deep awareness of the existence of

⁷⁶⁹ G.F. Hegel. 1956. *The Philosophy of History* (Dover Publications), see for this and for the quotations that follow the *Introduction*, pp.1-103.

the "other" (Thou) in the very self of the "I." Here, we should recall that in Berdyaev's philosophy the "other" as a person is not dissolved into the I, but fulfilled in the We that contains the I and the Thou in their individual uniqueness and worth. For Berdyaev, the Spirit is a Person and Energy. For Hegel, the Spirit is Energy, but not a person. Personalism does not play a role in Hegel's thought, but "individualism" does. The individual "ego," for Hegel, is just "self-centered" action, or will, that blindly and unconsciously follows the higher purpose of Providence. The individual ego is dialectically reconciled with other individual egos within the Freedom of the Spirit. The ought of the individual ego does not really matter for the ought of the Spirit, because only the ought of the Spirit represents the "is" of all "oughts." The individual ego finds its fulfilment in the ideal state, and the ideal state, on the other hand, finds its ideal constitution in the realization of the individual ego within the state. This is so because, as Hegel optimistically believes, the "state is well constituted and internally powerful when the private interest of its citizens is one with the common interest of the state; when the one finds its gratification and realization with the other."⁷⁷⁰ In Berdyaev's thought there is no state that could ever "gratify" the needs, the wills, and the dreams of all of its citizens. Berdyaev is much more of a realist than the late Hegel, and in his philosophy, often described as "idealism," the state could not represent a positive example and reflection of the unity of the Spirit. In his political theology, in his philosophy of history, and his eschatology, all having the elements of unity (*sobornost*) and personhood, the Hegelian idea of the state as a possible analogy and expression of the unity of the Spirit is non-existent.

⁷⁷⁰ In Hegel's philosophy of religion, it is not only the coincidence of the universal with the individual that represents the fulfilment of freedom in the state. There should be also a degree of correspondence between people's concept of God and the actuality of God. For example, in his lectures on the relationship of religion to the state, Hegel says that "A people which has a bad concept of God also has a bad state, a bad government, and bad laws." This is so because the state is an "actualization" of the spirit. A national conscience that has not reached a sufficient understanding of the divine freedom is practically incapable of creating a just and well-ordered state. "The state is the true mode of actuality," Hegel argues, "in it, the true ethical will attains actuality and the spirit lives in its true form [...] The laws are the development of the concept of freedom, and this concept, which thereby reflects itself in existence, has its foundation and truth in the concept of freedom as understood in religion." Hegel's and Berdyaev's political theologies have some common characteristics, especially in relation to the correspondence between political regimes and ideologies and the Christian communitarian and personalistic ideals. But the most obvious difference between them is in Hegel's rather optimistic treatment of the state. The state for Hegel seems to take the form of an "embodied" divinity. This view naturally leads to totalitarian, "pagan" conclusions and Berdyaev understood this. (G.W. Hegel. 2004. *Political Writings*. "The Relationship of Religion to the State" (1831), Cambridge University Press, pp. 225-226)

We conclude our discourse with two final aspects of Berdyaev's political theology: first, we will discuss his understanding of the idea of communion, or more concretely, we will try to answer the question of how Berdyaev's idea of *sobornost* (communion) differs from forms of social unity discussed above; and second, we will try to explain how communion, in Berdyaev's philosophy, is an end of history, the final fulfilment of personhood in the divine-human all-unity.

In *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, Berdyaev says that "collectivism is not *sobornost* (соборность), but simply being together (*sbornost*; сборность)."⁷⁷¹ Collectivism has a "mechanical-rational character."⁷⁷² Secular ideologies and regimes aimed at and created collectivism, but none of them fully reflected the ideal of Christian personalistic communitarianism. They created mechanical gatherings of men and not true communities. The reason for this was that in them the individual person did not actually matter. *Сбор* (*sbor*) in Russian and the Slavonic languages means "collection," a mechanical accumulation. The word is used for the goals of arithmetic, taxation, financing, etc. The *sbor* between one and one is always two. The word "sbor" has for its root the Old Church Slavonic term *собор* (*съборъ*, *subor*), which means "meeting," "council," "assembly." Meeting, council, assembly is a gathering of persons, and not of numbers or quantities. The *personal* element has a primary function in the word *sobor*, while in *sbor* it may have only secondary meaning. Only persons could come together in a council; the result of the persons' council is never the mechanical quantity, it is rather the qualitative change. So, in contrast to the *sbor*, in the *sobor* one plus one equals three, and not two. The *sobor* of two persons is not "two," but "we,"⁷⁷³ and it is so because this *sobor* is not something abstract,

⁷⁷¹ RSRC, 122. In the original Russian, the quote is as follows, "Коллективизм не соборность, а сборность. Он носит механически-рациональный характер." in Н.А.Бердяев. 1995. *Царство Духа и Царство Кесаря*. М.: Республика, С.332

⁷⁷² RSRC, 122, Бердяев, 1995, 332

⁷⁷³ cf. В.В. Колесов. 1999. "Жизнь происходит от слова..." [Life Originates from the Word...] ("Златоуст") "Sobornost," the historian of Russian language V. Kolesov writes, "is not at all 'collection (*sbornost*) of elements,' but namely this wholeness that defines all particularities of the Russian character. 'This is the secret life of the Spirit. 'We' in the *sobornost* is not a collectivity. Collectivism is not *sobornost*, but *sbornost*..." cf. Н. А. Бердяев. 1997. *Алексей Степанович Хомяков. Мирозерцание Достоевского. Константин Леонтьев*. (Собрание сочинений) [Alexei Stepanovich Khomiakov. Dostoyevsky's Wordview. Konstantin Leontiev. Collected Works] (YMCA-Press., С.165): "По учению славянофилов, голос земли Русской не может быть услышан и узан по арифметическому подсчету голосов, это — голос соборный, а не сборный, органический, а не механический." Or, in English, "According to

it is not a collection of things, it is not arithmetical, it is not even "naturally necessary."⁷⁷⁴ It would be interesting to inquire how, in history, the word *sobor*, which signified the gathering of *persons* (that resulted in a "We") was drained of its spiritual meaning and transformed into the word *sbor*, used for expressing the mechanical collection of numbers and things. If one asked what the difference between *sbor* and *sobor* is, one of the possible answers could be: in the former (*sbor*) one plus one is two, while in the latter (*sobor*) One plus One is Three. Or, if one asked what the difference between collectivity and communion is, the possible answer could be: the former is mechanical-rational, the latter is free-spiritual. In the *sbor*, we have the solitude of the dead abstraction, in *sobornost*, we have the "communion" of the living experience.

"The problem of personality in relation to society," Berdyaev says, "is essentially a problem of metaphysics and existential philosophy."⁷⁷⁵ "Intuition," he adds, "is the foundation of communion, the faculty of being able to identify oneself with all things."⁷⁷⁶ This intuitive and living (existential) identification makes the *sobornost* something very different from the mechanical collectivity of human *sbor*. Communion, Berdyaev argues, cannot be described just as a society. In society and the state, we have a *sbor* of individuals. The person is secondary. In communion, the "community becomes a part of the personality and endows it with a special quality." In society, "personality is merely a part of the community." If the whole dominates over the part, and if the part is just a fragment of the whole, and not the opposite—i.e. the very center and reason for the existence of the whole—the part finds itself violated, alienated and abandoned. Berdyaev reminds us that all populist ideologies—Fascism, Nazism, Communism, and Eurasianism—looked at the person as a part of a whole. But we belong and feel together, according to Berdyaev, only so far as this world, this country, this family, this person, this Christ, is part of us. They (this world, country, family, person, and Christ) are, because I am, if I am not, they are

the Slavophil teaching, the voice of the Russian land cannot be heard or known from an arithmetical adding up of voices, this—is a *sobornyi* voice of community, not some *sbornyi* voice of an assembly roll-call, it is organic, and not something mechanical." (ASK, 141-142)

⁷⁷⁴ "Formalism and juridical guarantees are necessary only in relationships of conquerors and conquered, but are unnecessary there where the state—is organic, is of the people as regarding its source." (ASK, 131)

⁷⁷⁵ SS, 180

⁷⁷⁶ SS, 180

not too. They have no meaning at all if I do not exist. It is I who has the God-like freedom to give them meaning. I "name" them according to the meaning I find in them. And, on the other hand, I, myself, have no meaning at all, if I do not have them in me. If I reject them, I reject myself. If they reject me, or kill me, they reject and kill part of themselves, a part so significant to make them nothing (every time when a man dies a whole universe dies with him). There is no communion in a "society" of individuals indifferent or aggressive to each other, in a gathering of strangers having their own survival and gratification as the sole reason for existence. In the communion, the person affirms its "supreme value,"⁷⁷⁷ while affirming the value of all that are in him. Thus, "the only way to abolish the exploitation of man by man," Berdyaev writes, "is to confront the Ego with the Thou"⁷⁷⁸—a confrontation that happens in the person itself.

Society, for Berdyaev, is always an "association," the association that we have found in the anarcho-individualistic logic of Stirner. Yet, it is the state, not society, that is the very anti-thesis of communion. Stirner was against the state, but he failed to comprehend the meaning of communion. Society relies on communication, the state not necessarily. However, communication is not yet a communion. Communion is something more than communication and social interaction, it is *participation*. "The significance of communion as a goal of human life," Berdyaev says, "is essentially religious. Communion involves participation, interpenetration."⁷⁷⁹ "The interpenetration of the Ego and the Thou is consummated in God."⁷⁸⁰ In communion, the "antitheses" of "the one and the multiple" are resolved; the division between the particular and universal is eliminated.

The problem with all forms of collectivism, of *sbornost*, is that they try to transfer the "moral and existential center" of existence from the concrete person towards a "quasi-reality, which is above and beyond man."⁷⁸¹ But this, in fact, is impossible. There is no "above" and "beyond" the concrete man. Above and beyond is a lack of suffering, of feeling, of love. "The

⁷⁷⁷ SS, 181

⁷⁷⁸ SS, 184

⁷⁷⁹ SS, 188

⁷⁸⁰ SS, 188

⁷⁸¹ RSRC, 118

capacity of suffering," Berdyaev says, perhaps following Dostoyevsky, "is the mark of truly primary reality."

Finally, Berdyaev believes, full communion, which is also the absolute of reality, is possible only through God.⁷⁸² Christ in us, and we in him, and with him, the entire world, and life. *Sobornost*, he concludes, is "the mysterious life of the Spirit."

2. THE COMMUNION OF LIFE

"Death," Berdyaev says, "is the most profound and significant fact of life... Life in this world has meaning just because there is death... the meaning is bound up with the end."⁷⁸³ This argument brings us to the end of our discourse and to the meaning of the idea of personhood and communion. Berdyaev is sometimes described as a Christian "universalist," that is, a believer in "universal salvation."⁷⁸⁴ According to some authors, the idea of universal salvation is not supported by Scripture, it is rather a new phenomenon,⁷⁸⁵ and, as Berdyaev argued, a specific feature of the Russian religious soul and thought. The idea of universal salvation had a particular resonance with Russian thinkers. But, although tolerated, it never became a part of the official teaching of the Russian Orthodox Church.

⁷⁸² RSRC, 120

⁷⁸³ DM, 317

⁷⁸⁴ On the history of the idea of universal salvation, see the excellent study of Michael McClymond *The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism*. In this book, McClymond rightly points Berdyaev's influence on the early Hans Urs von Balthasar. His interpretation of Berdyaev's universalism is correct, especially his emphasis on Berdyaev's criticism of fear of hell and punishment as a means for control of man's free will. McClymond quotes Berdyaev's perhaps most important claim concerning hell, which will be discussed here as well, that "in a certain sense man has a moral right to hell—the right freely to prefer hell to heaven." He also observes that Berdyaev was less concerned with the justification of universalism than Bulgakov, having a specific "yes-no" (or "dialectical") position on hell. As he says, "Berdyaev neither strightfully affirm nor decisively deny the doctrine of hell." (Michael McClymond. 2018. *The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism*. (Baker Academic pp.705-712)

⁷⁸⁵ Or an old-new phenomenon as David Bentley Hart recently argued in a much-discussed book. According to Hart, the early Christians were universalists. Only after the 4th century, the idea of universal salvation became more "exotic," mostly because of the growing influence of the Western (Latin) interpretation of Scripture. Universalism, Hart says, gained currency once again in the nineteenth century, and that's why it could be now described as a "new-old" idea. (See David Bentley Hart. 2019. *Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation*. Yale University Press)

Berdyaev's personalism and communitarianism naturally lead to the idea of universal salvation. But it would be hasty to classify him, without qualification, as a "universalist."⁷⁸⁶ Here we face a persistent problem regarding Berdyaev's philosophy—that it does not easily fit into positive descriptions, that it has an "apophatic" quality. So, it is perhaps more accurate to describe him as "anti-particularist" (or, if I use D.B. Hart's term, anti-"infernalist") rather than a universalist. Berdyaev's personalism and communitarianism do not support the idea of personal election or of final damnation. But as we will see, they also do not comply with the logic of a "mechanical" universal salvation. And the reason for this last observation is his concept of freedom, of *Ungrund* (non-being), which puts some limits, not so much on God, but on man. For Berdyaev, as we have noted above, man *participates* in his salvation. Man was not created to fall and wait for God's mercy and grace. The idea of *Ungrund*, of *abysmal freedom and darkness*, does not permit us to believe with certainty and comfort that man is willing and capable of receiving the gift of salvation. It is so because, according to Berdyaev, neither God nor man knows what man will do with the salvation at hand. In Berdyaev's thought (not in Böhme's), abysmal darkness is not in God, as it is not fully in man. Man, the first Adam, chose death (nothingness), and now, in his sin, he still prefers death. But in Christ, the God-man chooses life. "For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead." (1 Cor. 15:21) "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive." (1 Cor. 15:21) Does this "all" mean "all" literally, or *only* those who are "in Christ"? And what does it mean to be *in* Christ? Berdyaev would not accept the simple, "partisan" answer to these questions. In fact, he would not give an answer at all. He would leave us with the hope that man will wish life in Christ, that man will prefer the "passion" of Christ, and will become a "life-giving spirit," (1 Cor. 15:45) a person, not just a "living soul" (1 Cor. 15:45) or individual. Thus, Berdyaev brings to our attention not only death, but also the resurrection of man as a creative spirit, as a person that by its *own* will, faith, and confession, is "steadfast, immovable, abounding in the work of the Lord," "knowing" that his "toil is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. 15:58)

⁷⁸⁶ As Michael McClymond actually implies. For him, Bulgakov is the only one among the influential Silver Age Russian philosophers who "affirmed 'universalism' in a more or less straightforward way." (McClymond, 2018, 743-744)

In Berdyaev, we do not have a "divine comedy." On the contrary, he very often speaks about the "tragedy" of man. This "tragedy" is caused by the gift of freedom; it means that man should suffer his salvation, that man should bear the cross like Christ, his Lord, that he is destined to exclaim, before his resurrection, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") (Matt. 27:46) It is so because Christ himself has said "You will indeed drink My cup." (Matt. 20:22) Freedom, Berdyaev says, is in "its essence the principle of tragedy, of tragic dualism, and of the antithesis inherent in primal freedom which alone makes possible such a tragic destiny."⁷⁸⁷

Berdyaev directs our attention to the fact of death in our life. He says that "our existence is full of death and dying. Life is perpetual dying, experiencing the end of everything."⁷⁸⁸ Consciousness about the existence of death is consciousness about the existence of life, but also a temptation. Our life is constantly torn off, it is full of separations and severances, and we are blinded by the darkness of the perpetual end of communion. Death and dying is separation. Sin is separation. Death is evil because it makes life look temporal; it tempts us to believe that there is no God, no eternity, no communion. It gives us only one perspective—the perspective of space and time, of the temporal and material. In such a perspective there is no place for "I am who I am" or for "I am who I will be." It is nothingness. And it is a great defeat for the human spirit to succumb under the temptation of the perpetual end and lose the memory of the single beginning.⁷⁸⁹ But death, Berdyaev believes, is self-defeating. Through the death of Christ, we came to believe that there is no death, that the eternal communion of life is real, and the darkness of nothingness is truly nothingness. Eternity, Berdyaev is convinced, is reached "only by passing through death." Only through the death of Christ was life asserted and glorified. The old Adam broke communion with God, and continues to break it through "every evil passion"⁷⁹⁰—through his pride, greed, ambition, fear, envy, and hatred. Death as sin tends to non-being, it is a denial of eternity—it is a great temptation to believe that everything is ultimately *nothing* since everything ends in

⁷⁸⁷ TMH, 77

⁷⁸⁸ DM, 319

⁷⁸⁹ Or "principle." See Solovyov, Zouboff. 1948. *Lectures on Godmanhood*. D. Dobson.

⁷⁹⁰ DM, 320

nothingness and perdition. Death tries to reject everything but itself. The negation of everything negates everything but itself. But this is our sinful interpretation of death. The "comedy" in all this "tragedy" is in the simple fact that the absolute negation is a negation of absolute negation as well. Again, death is self-defeating. Death puts an end to sin, to negation, and with the end of sin life begins. Death also heals. Who would truly prefer the hell of the sinful nature, of constant disunion and pain, the bitterness, the torture of anger and war, the weakness of a perishable body? No one in their "right mind"; no one who knows what he is "doing" (Luke 23:34). But still many keep their faith in the senseless crucifixion of life and with the thief they say, "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But others say, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same judgment? We are punished justly, for we are receiving what our actions deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." They may not believe in the Messiah, but they believe in justice, in life, even on the cross they know that the innocent should not die; they assert life over death. These people, while still on the cross, will hear the voice of the Son of Man, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:39-43) This is the "comedy of death": just confess the right of the innocent and the drama ends, you enter the realm of God. "The moral paradox of life and death," Berdyaev says, "can be expressed by a moral imperative: treat the living as though they were dying and the dead as though they are alive."⁷⁹¹ This paradox asks from you one thing only: have mercy for the sake of Truth and Life. (James 2:13)

There is confusion in the idea that life conquers death through constant birth. This is the "naturalistic view," Berdyaev notes.⁷⁹² Birth as a kind of "savior" from death is an illusion. Birth saves the "race," the human "generation," but not the *person*. It is the person who should be saved, not the generation. If the person is sacrificed for the sake of the generation, then, there is no hope for anyone in this generation, nor does its existence have any meaning. The naturalistic view, Berdyaev argues, is very close to Hegelian idealism. In Hegel, as we have said, or in German metaphysics in general, there is "no place for personality."⁷⁹³ The person in it is merely a function

⁷⁹¹ DM, 321. Cf. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIII, Ch. 10. Of the Life of Mortals, Which is Rather to Be Called Death Than Life.

⁷⁹² DM, 323

⁷⁹³ DM, 324

of the world-spirit or idea.⁷⁹⁴ In Hegel, Berdyaev says, there is no sense of the tragedy of death; there is no genuine sense for human drama. The abstractions of logic and metaphysics are "cold," indifferent. "Death is a tragedy only when there is acute awareness of personality."⁷⁹⁵ The human person is born for eternal life, and it is a scandal and drama to face in cold blood the reality of death. Naturalism regards man as born from a father and mother, and does not accept or care for the person born in God for the communion of life. "Fichte and Hegel," Berdyaev says, "have nothing to say about personal human immortality." Personality is sacrificed for the Idea. Without personalism, true communion is impossible; from this it follows that the self-realizing Unity of the World-Spirit is a self-serving Leviathan. No part should be lost in the freedom of Spirit. Man is not "means," he is a center and part of everything.⁷⁹⁶ There is no self-contained Spirit as there is no self-contained person. The person is united in life "with God, with other persons, and with the cosmos."⁷⁹⁷ Any general idea of progress or evolution is absolutely impersonal, and for that reason "natural" and "mechanical." For Berdyaev Christianity has discovered the value of personality, of the uniqueness of each human being, and the possibility of its preservation. The Greeks, he argues, did not believe in the immortality of man and the Jews were conscious of the immortality of their race but not of persons.⁷⁹⁸

"Having lost the sense of immortal and eternal life," Berdyaev says, "man has freed himself from the painful problem of hell and thrown off the burden of responsibility."⁷⁹⁹ On the one hand, the belief in hell enslaves man, keeping him in the grip of fear; on the other, it imposes on him a sense of responsibility. But neither the slavery of fear, nor the responsible action that comes from fear is good. Berdyaev does not defend the conventional idea of the existence of hell, but he also does not approve the lack of responsibility found in modern hedonism and atheism. He thinks that the idea of hell has Persian and Manichean roots and that later interpretations of the gospel disregarded the context and metaphoric meaning of "Sheol." He notes that the idea of hell is

⁷⁹⁴ DM, 324

⁷⁹⁵ DM, 324

⁷⁹⁶ DM, 325

⁷⁹⁷ DM, 325

⁷⁹⁸ DM, 326

⁷⁹⁹ DM, 338

ontologically connected with freedom and personality, and not with justice and retribution.⁸⁰⁰ He says that hell is "admissible" in the sense that man, in his freedom, may want it and prefer it to paradise. Perhaps, he says, a man may feel better in hell than in heaven.⁸⁰¹ Berdyaev understands hell as the lack of communion, as total isolation. "Eternal perdition," he says, "means that personality remains self-contained, indissoluble and absolutely isolated."⁸⁰² God, according to him, does not send a man to hell; man puts himself there. "From the point of view of God, there cannot be any hell." The experience of hell is a human experience—it means "complete self-centredness" and "self-absorption."⁸⁰³ In hell are those, he says, who remain in time, those who prefer their sin even on the cross of life. These are the people who "do not want to pass into eternity."⁸⁰⁴ "When Origen said that Christ will remain on the cross," Berdyaev says, "so long as a single creature remains in hell, he expressed an eternal truth."⁸⁰⁵ The thief prefers to sleep in the phantasm of death. He does not care for the innocent, he wants salvation, but by his free will he desires union neither with man nor with God. This is a tragedy and drama.

There is another scandal. It is a scandal to stay cold to the fate of those who do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34). Who actually knows what he is doing in this earthly, sinful life, in which everything is seen through a "mirror dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12)? Who is this person who knows everything, even the heart of man and its "story"? "I may experience the torments of hell and believe that I deserve them," Berdyaev says, "But it is impossible to admit hell for others or be reconciled to it... It is hard to understand the psychology of pious Christians who calmly accept the fact that their neighbours, friends, and relatives will perhaps be doomed."⁸⁰⁶

This lack of "understanding" may sound familiar. Many people today would say that they feel the same way as Berdyaev when thinking about eternal damnation. But we should not forget that Berdyaev expressed these views in a time of great crimes, of poverty, war, and hatred, that he

⁸⁰⁰ DM, 239

⁸⁰¹ DM, 340

⁸⁰² DM, 340

⁸⁰³ DM, 341

⁸⁰⁴ DM, 342

⁸⁰⁵ DM, 347

⁸⁰⁶ DM, 350

lost friends in concentration camps and prisons, and was forced to leave his homeland, which he loved so much. In such a context, only a Christian with a great heart would have the power to say that there is no eternal damnation, seeing the evil that surrounds him. Or, perhaps, this experience of an *excess* of evil led him to unconditional love and mercy. Why should I desire a greater evil, hell, even for the sake of justice? Who would be saved in a world full of sinners? Should one constantly struggle to seek the salvation of others, instead of raising the scepter of judgement and condemnation? This, indeed, is what Berdyaev proposes: "If people were morally more sensitive, they would direct the whole of their moral will and spirit towards delivering from the torments of hell every being they have ever met in life."⁸⁰⁷ And he continues, "The true moral change is a change of attitude towards the 'wicked' and the doomed [...] This implies that I cannot seek salvation individually, by my solitary self, and make my way into the Kingdom of God relying on my own merits."⁸⁰⁸ Solitary salvation is also a break of communion. In the Great Commandment, we are three, not two: God, I, and my neighbour. I do not join a clique of the "elect," as we often do here, in the earthly life, and leave my poor brethren alone, in the pain of his crimes. I would rather stay here with him, on the cross, and wait for him to join me. Christ did not leave us. Neither would I leave him.

Berdyaev is convinced that there is no "personal paradise," that there is no bliss in isolation. He imagines that finally, Cain will join Abel, not in spite of his sin, but because of God.⁸⁰⁹ Berdyaev understands that hell is "the state of the soul powerless to come out of itself," that is in a state of absolute self-centeredness, incapable of love.⁸¹⁰ "Hell creates and organizes the separation of the soul from God, from God's world and from other men." It is the "absence of any action of God upon the soul." It is I who does this hell to me. The truth is, Berdyaev says, that the "coming of Christ is the salvation from the hell which man prepares for himself."⁸¹¹

⁸⁰⁷ DM, 351

⁸⁰⁸ DM, 351

⁸⁰⁹ DM, 351

⁸¹⁰ DM, 351

⁸¹¹ DM, 352

Hell is an illusion, a non-being, and as such, it is the kingdom of the Devil, "the realm of dark meonic freedom." Here we return to the perplexing idea of *Ungrund*, the "meonic freedom." Berdyaev argues that "victory over meonic freedom is impossible for God" because this freedom was not created by Him and because it is "rooted in non-being." He says that it is impossible also for man, "since man has become the slave of that dark freedom and is not free in his freedom." But this victory is still possible, and it is possible through the "God-man Christ Who descends into the abysmal darkness of meonic freedom and in Whom there is perfect union and interaction between human and divine." Thus, "Christ alone can conquer the horror of hell as a manifestation of the creature's freedom [...] The salvation from hell is open to all in Christ the Savior."⁸¹² For Berdyaev, this is a personal task, and here is a hope and faith that can be described as hope for "universal salvation." In this salvation the "prince of this world" is left behind as an illusion, and the communion of all persons is fully achieved. He writes, "Not only must all the dead be saved from death and raised for life again, but all must be saved and liberated from hell." This is a task of now, for this moment; and this is "the last and final demand of ethics." This ethical demand proclaims: "Direct all the power of your spirit to freeing everyone from hell. Do not build up hell with your will and actions, but do your utmost to destroy it."⁸¹³ The moral will, not moral theory, must be directed in the first place towards universal salvation.⁸¹⁴

Salvation is not the return to an original paradisiacal state. The paradise of the "end" is different from the paradise of the "beginning." The final paradise includes conscious freedom and knowledge about divine Humanity. The old paradise did not have such knowledge. "Once man has entered the path of discriminating between good and evil, knowledge as such is not evil," Berdyaev says. "Knowledge has evil for its object, but itself is not evil. And through knowledge man's creative vocation is realized." Paradise is not the triumph of good and justice. Justice and good are already triumphant. It is rather "theosis, a deification of the creature."⁸¹⁵ It is also the fullness of communion. "True heavenly bliss is impossible for me if I isolate myself from the world-whole

⁸¹² DM, 356

⁸¹³ DM, 357

⁸¹⁴ DM, 357

⁸¹⁵ DM, 364

and care about myself only. [...] The separation of man from man and of man from cosmos is the result of Original sin." Man separates from God and man falls into isolation from the communion of life. Salvation, however, is the "return of man with man and with the cosmos through reunion with God."⁸¹⁶ "Hence, there can be no individual salvation or salvation of the elect." "My salvation," Berdyaev says, "is bound up with that not only of other men but also of animals, plants, minerals, of every blade of grass—all must be transfigured and brought into the Kingdom of God. And this depends upon my creative efforts."⁸¹⁷ Man, as we have said, is a center of a universe: "To affirm the supreme value of personality does not mean to be concerned with personal salvation; it means to recognize that man has the highest creative vocation in the life of the world." There are two kinds of good: one that distinguishes right from wrong, the knowledge that we received from the forbidden fruit, and the other that "does not judge or make valuations but *radiates light*." The second kind of good is *Love*, it is above good itself. Love is not to judge "evil," but to suffer it, to experience it, and to overcome it in the communion of life.⁸¹⁸

What are the political-theological implications of Berdyaev's eschatology? How can we interpret the idea of universal salvation through the lens of the political? There are a few simple answers to these questions: First, here we speak about spirituality, about the centrality of faith. Second, we speak not just about some general idea of faith or religion, but about an actual personal engagement and responsibility that transforms the world through the real deeds of the individual person: "Direct all the power of your spirit to freeing everyone from hell." And third, we speak about communion and *wholeness* now, not in the distant future. Berdyaev's eschatology as a political theology is a theology, to use Hannah Arendt's expression, of the *Amor Mundi*,⁸¹⁹ of the *Love for the World*. Berdyaev's eschatology transferred to politics is simply the will—a will within and beyond all political ideologies and colors—that moves man to participate in this world making it according to the image of God. This is a political theology of Solovyiovian

⁸¹⁶ DM, 372

⁸¹⁷ DM, 373

⁸¹⁸ DM, 374

⁸¹⁹ See Hannah Arendt and Margaret Canovan. 1998. *The Human Condition*. 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press) and Hannah Arendt, Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott, and Judith Chelius Stark. 1996. *Love and Saint Augustine*. (University of Chicago Press)

"deification"⁸²⁰ of the world that despises nothing *existing*, that wastes nothing *given*, for the aim of the Kingdom of God. This is also, and above all, a Pauline theology that is not concerned with political labels and loyalties—socialism, liberalism, conservatism, etc.—but that says:

Though I am free of obligation to anyone, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), to win those under the law. To those without the law I became like one without the law (though I am not outside the law of God but am under the law of Christ), to win those without the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

I do all this for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. (1 Cor. 9:19-23)

⁸²⁰ See Solovyov, Vladimir Sergeyevich, and Peter Peter Zouboff. 1948. *Lectures on Godmanhood*. D. Dobson. As Peter Zouboff observes Solovyov's work was "essentially a philosophy of Christian pragmatism," or of what I call "Christian realism." This is the realism we find in the political-theological views of Berdyaev and Semyon Frank. The Christian pragmatism is a kind of super-realism that is more often described as "idealism." It is not impossible to call one and the same approach "realistic" ("pragmatic") and "idealistic." Berdyaev, Solovyov, and Frank see the social and political relations through the prism of the Christian ideal, which makes them pragmatic super-realists. Here is what Zouboff says about Solovyov that is valid for Berdyaev as well: "If the empirical Pragmatists fought against the divorce of the ideal from the practical, Solovyov fought with as much force and with a greater enthusiasm against the separation of the practical from the ideal—from the *Christian* ideal—which in itself means the integration of that polarity, first in the God-man Christ, and then in the man-godhood of Christianized humanity. Thus the deification of mankind, for him, is the purpose of history [but, for Berdyaev as for Niebuhr and the *late* Solovyov, the *full* realization of deification happens outside history, after the apocalyptic transfiguration]; in the gradual penetration of the created world by the divine beginning [principle], the changes and variations in the forms of social organization—as well as the evolution and variations in religious conceptions—represent but different stages of the nascent man-Goodhood preparatory to the final realization of the universal God-manhood." (Solovyov, Zouboff. 1948,15)

CHAPTER SEVEN. BERDYAEV: PRO ET CONTRA

The title of this last chapter is borrowed from a book published by the Russian Christian Humanitarian Academy anthology of critical texts on Berdyaev's work.⁸²¹ As the title suggests in this final part of our discourse, we will engage in critical assessment of some of the most controversial aspects of Berdyaev's philosophy and political theology.

The task of this dissertation is not to make an apology of Berdyaev's work. It is rather to explain some of Berdyaev's political-theological views and to deliver them to the judgment of the reader. Since this is not an apologetic work, some of Berdyaev's arguments (in fact, all of his arguments) can be questioned or directly challenged, and for that reason, they are still open for interpretation. Reviewing the evolving body of scholarship on Berdyaev, as well as responses of readers to early drafts of this work, I believe there are two aspects of Berdyaev's work that merit further critical discussion. First, there are concerns raised about Berdyaev's negative treatment of democracy, which can be seen as the most unsatisfactory aspect of his political theology. Second, Berdyaev's concept of "uncreated freedom" probably remains the most controversial aspect of his religious philosophy. In this chapter, I will briefly explain where I see the limits of Berdyaev's view on democracy, and then I will cover in greater detail the idea of uncreated freedom, addressing the critiques of Lev Shestov, Nikolai Lossky, and a few Catholic and Protestant thinkers discussed in Fabian Linde's study *The Spirit of Revolt: Nikolai Berdyaev's Existential Gnosticism*.⁸²²

1. BERDYAEV'S SUSPICION OF DEMOCRACY

Berdyaev's "suspicion" of democracy is not unusual for a Christian thinker. Modern democracy has always had its Christian detractors and supporters. Arguably, the democratic system is to a great extent a result of the long history of Christian political and cultural development, of years of conflicts and negotiations between different centers of power in Western

⁸²¹ А.А. Ермичев. 1994. *Н. А. Бердяев: pro et contra* (ПХГА)

⁸²² Fabian Linde. 2010. *The Spirit of Revolt. Nikolai Berdiaev's Existential Gnosticism* (Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis)

societies, including, and perhaps most notably, between State and Church authorities.⁸²³ Modern democracy is a Western idea and system of organization. It developed over time organically rather than by conscious design, and it continues to evolve under the influence and interplay of different economic, political, cultural, technological, social and historical factors. Democracy is also the political system most closely reflecting the Christian idea of freedom of conscience (cf. 1 Cor. 10:29),⁸²⁴ and in this, perhaps, is its greatest value. There is no other system of governance where freedom of conscience is established as a fundamental principle: only democracy offers formal guarantees for freedom of thought and expression (e.g., *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, sec. 2). It is too much to expect that the democratic ideal is or will become an absolute reality, but nevertheless, it should be admitted that there is no other political system that openly expresses allegiance to freedom of conscience.

Berdyayev was aware of the positive qualities of the democratic system and he was far from rejecting democracy completely. But his main concern was the danger of idolization and

⁸²³ Edward Gibbon argued that the "persecuted sects" of Christianity became the "secret enemies" of Rome that finally led the empire to profound change and demise. It is questionable what changed what and who saved (or destroyed) whom: the empire Christianity or Christianity the empire. For Augustine, for example, Christianity saved the empire and the best of the Graeco-Roman culture (civilization) from (and for) the barbarians. One is clear, however, that after Constantine, Christianity and empire fused in the "Caesaro-Papist" East and in the Western *respublica Christiana*. The Western *respublica Christiana* (and the *populus Christianus*) that survived Byzantium, as Carl Schmitt explains, existed for centuries in a condition of legal and political unity, in one "total order," which had for its "visible agents" the *imperium* (the empire) and the *sacerdotium* (the priesthood), the emperor and the pope, whose ordering principles were vested in the concepts of *potestas* (power) for the secular ruler and of *auctoritas* (authority) for the spiritual. The natural balance between these two centers of unity, despite the occasional, or rather consistent, historical deviations when the emperor claimed *auctoritas* and the pope *potestas*, was kept relatively intact until the 16th century when, according to Schmitt, the state began to neutralize the Church. For Schmitt, the unity of the *respublica Christiana* was possible as far as the concept of *katechon* (mentioned above) was respected, i.e., as far as the emperor (or the monarch) stayed within the limits of its *potestas*, supported by the Church, and the pope in its *auctoritas*, respected by the emperor: the one restraining the chaos below, the other pointing at the order above. When the medieval *katechonic* order, if I may call it so, was completely disturbed by the confusion and break up of the natural limits of the centers of authority and power, then the "people" (the foundation of democracy) as an ordering (*katechonic*) principle appeared, not so much to restore the old unity of medieval Christendom, but rather to restrain the chaos and idolatry coming from the old centers of order, through which the people themselves were kept restrained for centuries. (See Edward Gibbon. 1854. *The History of the Decline and Fall of Rome*, Vol. 4, Henry Bohn; Augustine, *City of God*, Book I; Carl Schmitt. 2006. *The Nomos of the Earth*, Telos Press Publishing)

⁸²⁴ See Robert Louis Wilken. 2019. *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom*. (Yale University Press)

dogmatization of the democratic idea and order. In his urgent effort to oppose the illusions of radical intellectuals and populist movements that saw in democracy the universal solution to social conflict and inequality, Berdyaev did not seem to have the time or patience to assess impartially the positive aspects of the democratic system. His greatest concern, especially after the revolution in 1905, was that democracy was becoming a false and powerful ideology that could never live up to the expectations of its supporters and promoters, and that its typical factionalism would be vulnerable to the evils of political radicalism. Being a Russian and finding in Russian political life a confirmation of his concerns, Berdyaev did not have the best context for weighing the positive effects of political centrism—effects rather natural for the democratic process and politics. He had no experience of witnessing the capacity of the conflicting factions to negotiate with each other, peacefully and effectively in the Parliament. Nor did he trust the tenacity of the democratic system to keep the excesses of radical groups or centers of power limited, constantly pushing them away from complete dominance. Berdyaev had some justification for arguing that democracy is engaged with the external—that it is a pragmatic, utilitarian system that could undermine genuine respect for the value of the human person.⁸²⁵ At the same time he was not sufficiently inclined to admit that the habit of "tolerance" that democratic societies encouraged was making "human dignity" more than just a noble idea. Tolerance is not only a spiritual quality. It is also a pragmatic, utilitarian, and rational position that permits the preservation of social peace, balance of power, and the development of all kinds of human creativity and diversity. As Mark Haas argues, following Niebuhr, a "spirit of toleration not only impels man to avoid fanatical policies but also helps to create a spirit of compromise because no position is granted an absolute claim on the truth." As a result, because of toleration, political relations are made both more "stable and more moderate."⁸²⁶

Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian Realist treatment of democracy may provide a better alternative to Berdyaev's analysis. Both Niebuhr and Berdyaev were Christian realists who were

⁸²⁵ See, for example, Berdyaev, "Democracy and the Person" in *The Fate of Russia* (frsj Publications, 2016)

⁸²⁶ See Mark L Haas, "Reinhold Niebuhr's 'Christian Pragmatism': A Principled Alternative to Consequentialism." *The Review of Politics* 61, no. 4 (1999): 605-36. On the so-called "test of tolerance," see Dennis McCann. 1981. *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology: Practical Theologies in Creative Conflict*. Orbis Books.

convinced that there is one righteous and just kingdom, namely, the Kingdom of God, and that this kingdom was impossible to achieve here, on earth, in history. However, as an American having the experience of living in American democracy, Niebuhr was able to discern both the advantages and the deficiencies of the democratic order. His political judgment was far more balanced than Berdyaev's. Like Berdyaev, Niebuhr repeatedly argued that democracy should not be confused with liberty, that "democracy can never mean merely freedom."⁸²⁷ He was convinced that freedom was more related to "justice, to community, and to equality as the regulative principle of justice."⁸²⁸ But he was equally insistent that only democracy was capable of limiting the excesses of radicalism, that it was a "limited war," in the words of Herbert Butterfield, that preserved the community from committing the crime of total annihilation of part of its members for the political and economic interests of another part. He also observed that in democracy political enemies did not expect complete victory nor did they expect complete defeat, and for that very reason, they took changes in the configuration of power as temporary and never as final and fatally crucial. In other words, there was no "zero-sum game" in the democratic process. The stakes from the loss of political power in democracy were more manageable than in any other political regime. The success of the democratic system (or procedure), Niebuhr wrote in an article entitled "Democracy and the Party Spirit," depended on the "constant willingness of the defeated minority to trust both itself and the nation to the victorious majority."⁸²⁹ In a democracy, the defeated took their defeat not as "the end of the world" but as the beginning of a new cycle of competition, in which the improvement of community life received a new chance for the achievement of new heights of success. And finally, as mentioned in a footnote, Niebuhr was well-aware that the prophetic spirit of Christian political theologians such as Berdyaev and Barth, while sounding an alarm against democratic idolatry, failed to offer any realistic alternative to the democratic regime.

⁸²⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Idolatry of America" in *Love and Justice*, ed. D.B. Robertson (Meridian Books, 1967) p.95

⁸²⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Idolatry of America" in *Love and Justice*, ed. D.B. Robertson (Meridian Books, 1967) p.95

⁸²⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, "Democracy and the Party Spirit" in *Love and Justice*, ed. D.B. Robertson (Meridian Books, 1967) pp.66-6

2. THAT PUZZLING UNGRUND

Turning our attention to the concept of *Ungrund*, uncreated freedom, remains one of the most difficult and controversial elements in Berdyaev's philosophical theology. Before examining Shestov's serious and very original criticism of Berdyaev's approach to freedom, I will consider more conventional critiques coming from the Catholic and Protestant milieus. This will introduce us to the topic and will help us place this discussion in a wider context. For this short introduction, I rely on Fabian Linde's research.⁸³⁰ The authors in question—Fr. Paul Kennedy, Vernon Bourke, and Eugene Porret—do not advance a particularly complex point of view and stay within the limits of the usual confessional polemics.

In order to appreciate Berdyaev and his critics, however, we need to revisit briefly his concept of the "two freedoms": the *primary* (irrational) *freedom*, the freedom to choose between good and evil, the uncreated freedom, and the *secondary freedom*, the truest freedom, the freedom in which the "high[er] nature in man" triumphs over his "lower nature" and that is revealed in the Gospel words, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). This freedom is not primary, it is not the freedom through which man arrives at the Truth, but it is the *Truth itself* that makes man truly free.⁸³¹

⁸³⁰ Linde, 2010

⁸³¹ Here one may see some resemblance of Berdyaev's view with Rousseau's, who opened his *Social Contract* with the now-famous words, "Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains." But a closer look would prove that Berdyaev is equally far (and close) from Rousseau's dictum and from the interpretations of the Gospel's words "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" that speak of an absolutely unfree man. As one may notice, Berdyaev, like Rousseau, believes that the present state of man, because of the Fall (for Berdyaev, and because of society for Rousseau), is unfree, but that man at the same time (again like in Rousseau) is entitled to some original freedom (that includes the "right" to Fall as well). Man, because of the original sin, is born in "chains." But in contrast to Rousseau, man, for Berdyaev, even in his desperate state, and thanks to his divine origin and intrinsic freedom, is also really free, i.e., capable to receive the Truth, to achieve absolute freedom in the freedom of Christ. An interesting characteristic of Berdyaev's theological approach is his tendency to read and interpret the Bible literally *and* creatively. Certainly, it is possible, even natural to read Scripture both literally *and* creatively. Namely from here arises Berdyaev's "mysticism": the literal and creative reading of the Bible, and not just or only the influence of German idealism and Catholic mysticism, is the basis of his intuitive "gnosticism"—Berdyaev seems unwilling to adopt late rationalizations of Scripture or to borrow uncritically ready-made interpretations. In John 8:32, one would rightly point that the "Truth" is also "Freedom," a *Primary Freedom*, but in Berdyaev's "literalistic" view, Truth, in this precise verse, is what it is said first to be, namely "Truth" *that makes man free*. Or, it is the *is*, the very act of freedom,

Though no Augustine scholar in the usual sense of the term (and for the moment we are not concerned with the correctness of Berdyaev's interpretation of Augustine), Berdyaev agrees with Augustine that freedom should be understood "dynamically" and not "statically."⁸³² He says that Augustine speaks of two freedoms—"libertas minor" and the "libertas major"—and that he teaches about the three conditions of Adam concerning freedom: *posse non peccare* (able to not sin), *non posse non peccare* (not able not to sin), and *non posse peccare* (not able to sin).⁸³³ From Augustine, Berdyaev believes, comes the teaching about the freedom of man to do evil,⁸³⁴ and the

not the freedom as potentia (*not yet*) for the act. If the knowledge of Truth makes man free, if the Truth is *man free*, then, according to Berdyaev, man is both *free* in his metaphysical origin, nature, and *destiny* (including free to sin), and *unfree*, in his present, temporal, "*not yet*" state of existence (because of sin and, paradoxically, because of his "primary, meonic freedom").

⁸³² A. Ignatow and E. M. "Swiderski, The Dialectic of Freedom in Nikolai Berdjaev", *Studies in Soviet Thought*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Nov., 1989), pp. 273-289

⁸³³ Here Berdyaev doesn't indicate the exact work of Augustine, but he is probably dealing with the last book of *De Civitate Dei*. To help the reader understand this discussion better, and especially to make him recall the precise Augustinian argument, I think a quote from the *City of God* would be useful: "For the first freedom of will [in Berdyaev's terms, the *libertas minor*] which man received," Augustine says, "when he was created upright consisted in ability not to sin, but also in an ability to sin [i.e., *posse non peccare*, *posse peccare*]; whereas this last freedom of will [i.e. the *libertas major*] shall be superior, inasmuch, as it shall not be able to sin [*non posse peccare*]. This, indeed, shall not be a natural ability [i.e. no "freedom of will"], but the gift of God [grace]. For it is one thing to be God [i.e. unable to do evil, see the footnote below], another thing to be a partaker of God. God by nature cannot sin [i.e., do evil], but the partaker receives this ability [to not sin] from God. And in this divine gift there was to be observed this gradation, that man should first receive a free will [*libertas minor*] by which he was able not to sin [*posse non peccare*], and at last a free will [*libertas major*] by which he was not able to sin [*non posse peccare*]—the former being adapted to the acquiring of merit, the latter to the enjoying of the reward. But the nature thus constituted, having sinned when it had the ability to do so [*posse peccare*], it is by more abundant grace that it is delivered so as to reach that [*major*] freedom in which it cannot sin [*non posse peccare*]. For as the first immortality, which Adam lost by sinning consisted in his being able not to die, while the last shall consist in his not being able to die; so the first free will [*libertas minor*] consisted in his being able not to sin [*posse non peccare*], the last [*libertas major*] in his not being able to sin [*non posse peccare*]." (See Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, Book XXII, Ch. 30 Of the Eternal Felicity of the City of God, and of the Perpetual Sabbath)

⁸³⁴ According to Augustine, there are two kinds of evil: 1) to do evil and 2) to suffer evil. God doesn't do evil, He rather punishes the evil, while man can do evil (through not following God's commandments) and man can suffer evil. The first evil is "nothing but [the act of] turning away from teaching" and the second evil is nothing but suffering the consequences of this act of rejection. Therefore, for Augustine, evil is the lack of understanding of the Eternal law, which is the "law according to which all things to be completely in order." For him, the source of evil is nothing but human "lust" (for temporal goods) that prevents man to follow the Divine order and so turns him from the blessing (happiness) of life according to *the goodness of will*, that is, according to man's desire to live *rightly* and attain wisdom. (See Augustine. 2010. *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, ed. Peter King, Cambridge University Press, On the Free Choice of the Will, pp. 3-127)

view that man is incapable of doing good (because of his sin) by himself. Berdyaev argues that only with Christianity did this first type of freedom, irrational freedom, become known. The Greeks, he says, did not have a concept of such freedom; they were limited to the idea of secondary freedom, expressed in the freedom of Reason. The idea and the concept of original sin, Berdyaev says, gave the world understanding that in the fundament of the world process lies a meonic, irrational freedom. This primary freedom does not give us any guarantee that man will choose good instead of evil. That is why this primary freedom, according to Berdyaev, was rejected by Augustine, and qualified by Aquinas as "deficiency." And here, Berdyaev says, comes the first issue related to freedom and its understanding. If the first (uncreated) freedom leads to "anarchy," the second leads to "theocratic or communist despotism." It is so because the second freedom rejects freedom of choice and conscience. It becomes a "divine necessity" (in a theocracy) and a "social necessity" (in communism). In other words, the second freedom is the freedom of God, and not of man. The problem here lies in the paradox that final freedom can be received only from the Truth, but Truth cannot be imposed on us or coerce us—the recognition and adoption of Truth presupposes the existence of personal freedom and the individual free movement towards the Truth. Freedom is not only an aim, Berdyaev says, it is also a journey. This, he reminds us, was grasped by nineteenth-century German idealism (Fichte and Hegel), but insufficiently understood because "freedom" in German idealism was "monistic;" that is, freedom of the Spirit, and not of man.

In these paradoxes, he argues, is rooted the "tragedy of freedom": that it always results either in anarchy or in necessity (grace). But for Berdyaev, the most difficult problem was not the relationship between freedom and necessity, freedom and grace, but between the *freedom of man* and the *omnipotence of God*. Thus, he finds a kind of solution to the paradoxes of freedom in adopting the idea of uncreated freedom. Freedom, Berdyaev argues, is found neither in being nor in substance (or nature); it is rather rooted in the "nothing" from which God creates the world. This means that freedom is groundless, the so-called *Ungrund* of which Jacob Böhme spoke. This also means that freedom is potency, and potency precedes being. According to Christian theology, God created the world *ex nihilo*, which means (for Berdyaev), from freedom. Thus, freedom and

nothing-ness, for him, are the same. The primary, irrational freedom is pure potency, while secondary freedom is an act. Freedom as potency, Berdyaev concludes, becomes the groundless ground for creativity, for the act, and, in this order, potency is always greater than the act—it is so because potency is limitless while the act is always limited. He says that the second freedom becomes true, high and final freedom only if it does not reject the first freedom. From this it follows that the most difficult problem of Christian metaphysics is the reconciliation of human freedom with the omnipotence of God, and this problem, according to Berdyaev, caused great difficulty for Augustine. After all, he says, this freedom is present in God's plan for the world and man. Freedom creates evil, but without freedom, there is no good as well. Finally, metaphysical freedom has practical consequences in social life. Some argue that it is expressed in inalienable human rights, but it is more than this. This freedom is not just rights, it is a *duty*. Man has the duty to be spiritually free because God needs human freedom more than He needs man.⁸³⁵

Obviously, most of these interpretations conflict with Catholic teaching and tradition. Thus, it is not surprising that in his doctoral dissertation, *A Philosophical Appraisal of the Modernist Gnosticism of Nikolai Berdyaev*, the Jesuit priest Paul V. Kennedy argues that Berdyaev was a "Gnostic," who should be "charged with defending of a kind of Manicheism—a modified, diluted kind which is, however, no more acceptable than the original form of that heresy."⁸³⁶ After refuting Berdyaev's philosophy "point by point on the basis of its divergence from Catholic theology," Fr. Kennedy concludes with the "warning" that "it would be most agreeable to interpret Berdyaev as a pilgrim struggling towards the truth, misled perhaps on some points but still essentially sound and wholesome."⁸³⁷

I am convinced that a Catholic verdict on Berdyaev's work would always resemble Kennedy's judgment and that there is no reason for this verdict to be corrected or rejected. Kennedy was right, at least because the same conclusion could be applied to any individual

⁸³⁵ See Бердяев, "Метафизическая проблема свободы" [Metaphysical Problem of Freedom] *Путь*. — 1928. — № 9.

⁸³⁶ Linde, 16

⁸³⁷ Linde, 15-16

Christian author no matter his or her denomination or tradition. The truth has always been in Christ, in his Church, and never completely in the individual member of His Body.

The other critic of Berdyaev, quoted by Linde, is Vernon J. Bourke. In an article entitled "The Gnosticism of N. Berdyaev," Bourke points out the divergence of Berdyaev's thought from Neo-Scholasticism (something quite obvious) and warns his Catholic readers of the "Gnostic" tendencies in Berdyaev's ideas on freedom and the spirit. Berdyaev is not the "simple Christian," he says, "that he appears on first glance... [T]he very intense zeal with which he [Berdyaev] thinks and writes is a fertile source of error."⁸³⁸

In this observation there is nothing unusual and it is generally correct. As it was argued in the chapter on freedom, Berdyaev himself insisted that Christianity is not a religion of "simple" people. As Bourke rightly notes, Berdyaev's mystical insights have the potential to lead into error and for that reason should not be interpreted dogmatically or followed blindly. In relation to this, Bourke also notes the possible contradiction between Berdyaev's "aristocratism of spirit" and the "egalitarian" character of Christianity. According to Bourke, namely the pretention for "aristocratism" makes Berdyaev's Christian philosophy akin to "Gnosticism." Again, Bourke is right, but we must also recall that Berdyaev himself argued against the "pride" and "otherworldliness" of the ancient Gnostics, which was very different from the exceptional humility, spiritual nobility, and worldly service of the true Christians.

Bourke concludes that Berdyaev had "wonderfully profound and wise views on the problems of human life, human society, and human history," but his "metaphysics" was "warped by his anti-intellectualism." "It would be more correct to say," he adds, "that he [Berdyaev] has no metaphysics. His valuable contributions to practical philosophy are vitiated by his lack of system, his excessive dependence on intuition, his misunderstanding of Christian Aristotelianism."⁸³⁹ These arguments are both right and wrong. Berdyaev has a "metaphysics," which is certainly not Aristotelian. He also has a "system," which, again, is not Aristotelian. His practical philosophy is

⁸³⁸ Linde, 17

⁸³⁹ Linde, 17

mixed with metaphysical insights and his supposed lack of understanding of Aristotelian legalism is rather a conscious decision in defence of his own views. This, of course, does not make his arguments superior to the elegant structures of Aristotelian or Thomistic metaphysics.

Eugene Porret is the "Protestant" critic of Berdyaev's work discussed in Linde's study. Porret rightly observes that the "most peculiar" and "least understood" aspect of Berdyaev's philosophy is the "Gnostic nature of his system."⁸⁴⁰ In this short observation, Porret notes two important things with which I am in complete agreement—first, that Berdyaev has a "system," and second, that the "most peculiar" and "less understood" aspect of this system is his "Gnosticism," or, more concretely, his operational (functional) concept of "uncreated freedom," underlying the entire system. Porret expresses another opinion that I share—that Berdyaev "wanted to create a Christian gnosis in opposition to modern materialist and scientific philosophy." Here, I would replace the word "gnosis" with "alternative:" that is, a Christian alternative. According to Linde, the stumbling block for Porret was Berdyaev's reliance on mystical knowledge and intuition. Porret, for example, mentioned approvingly Karl Barth's indignation at Berdyaev's mysticism, who after hearing a lecture of Berdyaev at a conference in Bonn exclaimed: "From where do you know all that?"⁸⁴¹ Porret's warning was that a Protestant would "without doubt" discover in Berdyaev's metaphysics the "constant peril of 'gnosis,' this treacherous liberty that the mind indulges, in order to explore the least accessible domains in contravention of biblical Revelation; and he would recognize the menace that mystical and gnostic thought has always succumbed to throughout the entire history of the Church, namely of being more Neoplatonic than Evangelical."⁸⁴²

And now we come to Shestov, who, in contrast to all these rational and doctrinal doubts, questions Berdyaev's religious philosophy from a completely fideist position. Shestov's critique is paradoxical because he criticizes Berdyaev not for the excesses of his intuition and mysticism, but for their insufficiencies. In other words, Shestov sees in Berdyaev the rationalist, the "common

⁸⁴⁰ Linde, 17

⁸⁴¹ See Ольга Волкогонова. 2000. *Бердяев. (Молодая гвардия)* Гл. 16

⁸⁴² Linde, 18

sense" thinker, the political theologian whose desire for practical involvement in the vicissitudes of *this* world is revealed not just in his metaphysical system, but, and most clearly, in his consistent engagement with political and social questions. In contrast to Bulgakov, who, after entering the priesthood, abandoned for a very long time the problems of politics and society and focused his entire attention on theology, Berdyaev had never ceased to wrestle intellectually with his political and ideological enemies. The most important aspect of Shestov's criticism is that he discovers Berdyaev's rationalism in his mystical insights and, more concretely, in the unintended (and undesirable) paradoxes of the concept of "uncreated freedom."

Here we will discuss two of Shestov's critiques of Berdyaev—the first is an early article,⁸⁴³ published in 1907, in response to Berdyaev's first collection of texts, *Sub Specie Aeternitatis*⁸⁴⁴ (which contained a critical essay on Shestov's "philosophy of tragedy"), and the second is one of the latest works of Shestov, published in 1938 (the year of his death) that discusses the problems of Berdyaev's metaphysics in general.⁸⁴⁵ As we will see, the essence of Shestov's criticism does not significantly change despite the twenty years between the publications. It seems that during these two decades neither Shestov's opinion nor Berdyaev's views changed considerably. The first essay, entitled *In Praise of Folly* (a title borrowed from Erasmus), reveals Shestov's "suspicions," which are then thoroughly confirmed and explained in the second essay, entitled *Nikolai Berdyaev: Gnosis and Existential Philosophy*.

In *In Praise of Folly*, which, as I have said, was a commentary on a collection of essays written by Berdyaev between 1900 and 1906, Shestov argues that he had noticed a development in Berdyaev's thinking over these six years.⁸⁴⁶ He says that between the first and the last essay in the

⁸⁴³ Лев Шестов, "Похвала глупости. По повод Николая Бердяева 'Sub specie aeternitatis'" [In Praise of Folly. Concerning Nikolai Berdyaev's 'Sub specie aeternitatis'] *Факелы*. [Torches] СПб. – 1907 - № 2. С. 139 -161.

⁸⁴⁴ See Berdyaev. 2019. *Sub Specie Aeternitatis* (frsj Publications)

⁸⁴⁵ Л. И. Шестов, "Николай Бердяев. Гнозис и экзистенциальная философия," [Nikolai Berdyaev: Gnosis and Existential Philosophy] *Современные записки*. [Contemporary Notes] - 1938 - № 67

⁸⁴⁶ Bulgakov, who wrote a short review on the book as well, had the same impression on Berdyaev's "development" as Shestov's. See Модест Колеров. 1998. *Исследования по истории русской мысли. Ежегодник за 1998 год*. [Research on History of Russian Thought] Неизвестные рецензии Булгакова и Бердяева в журнале *Книга* (1906-1907). [Unknown Reviews of Bulgakov and Berdyaev in the Journal "Book" (1906-1907)] с.285-293

anthology, Berdyaev's ideas evolved—starting as a Kantian rationalist, he finished as an enemy of "common sense," opposing it not to "Foolishness" but the "Great Reason." Of course, Shestov notes, "Foolishness" could be called "Great Reason," because the insights of the great reason always border on foolishness, and because great reason is always beyond mere "common sense." Then, Shestov says that Berdyaev's greatest quality as an author is his "audaciousness," that his philosophical and literary "talent" is in his capacity to challenge common wisdom. Shestov also notes that during these six years, Berdyaev's philosophical ideas changed, but not his political views. He, according to Shestov, continued to be the same old "democrat," "even socialist." True, Berdyaev was the same "democrat" as far as he was sympathetic to the democratic reform of the Tsarist regime and the same "socialist" as far as socialism could be kept separated from materialism. According to Shestov, Bulgakov was far more inconsistent in his political views and preferences than Berdyaev, but nevertheless both Berdyaev and Bulgakov, for him, continued to be "democrats" and "socialists."

Shestov notes that during these six years Berdyaev experienced a conversion to Christianity. He also argues, correctly in my opinion, that this change left Berdyaev in a kind of "speechlessness" (this is my expression, not Shestov's). In other words, according to Shestov, Berdyaev, after his evolution towards Christianity, experienced difficulties in applying the "holy word," the angelic language of theology, to his philosophy. He compared Berdyaev and Merezhkovsky to persons who began to study a new language in old age: no matter how well they mastered this new language, their "tone" would always reveal their foreignness. And this was valid not only for Berdyaev and Merezhkovsky but also for Bulgakov. Bulgakov, Shestov observes, pronounced "Christ" with the same "tone" as he pronounced "Marx."

Here Shestov's suspicions seem to surface more clearly. Berdyaev, he seems to suggest, despite his change of heart and soul, was incapable of overcoming his worldly past. He was still stuck in the orbit of common sense. His "Great Reason" was not yet "Foolishness." He was incapable of embracing Foolishness, as it were, to the point of death. The newly converted Berdyaev, Shestov suspects, tried to mix common sense with foolishness. For him, Shestov argues, the laws of nature existed and did not exist. They did not exist, because Christ resurrected not

according to the law of nature. Influenced by Merezhkovsky, Berdyaev believed that the exit from the antinomies of the two "abysses"—the "abyss of Heaven" and the "abyss of Earth," of the Spirit and the Flesh, of the "pagan beauty of the world" and the "Christian rejection of the world"—was not an exit from one of them, a choice of one possible direction, but (a lukewarm?) discovery of a "third" one: the exit in the "Three."⁸⁴⁷

At the same time, Shestov recognizes in Berdyaev the "granite faith" of the newly converted. As it was already demonstrated in this dissertation, Berdyaev had no doubts—his faith was unshakable, dogmatic, absolute. This was not the faith of one Dostoyevsky—tortured, asking questions, insecure, suffering. There was no place for Ivan Karamazov in Berdyaev's thought; there was only Alyosha and Zosima. Berdyaev was convinced, Shestov says, in the victory of good. But despite his great faith, he was still entangled in the temporal, attached to the common wisdom, often repeating, as Shestov argues, the typical and common "follies," never reaching the authentic foolishness (and freedom) of the true believer.

I think that Shestov's intuition was right. But I do not judge Berdyaev for being too "worldly." Shestov actually confirms my understanding of Berdyaev's worldview and philosophy. To call someone a "political theologian" is to find in him a healthy dose of common sense. The political theologian is not a hermit. He can be a prophet, but not necessarily a monk. Perhaps the late Bulgakov was a spiritual hermit. His disengagement with politics makes him an "authentic" believer. But in Shestov's perspective, which I share, the believer must not be a hermit as well; he should not even believe dogmatically, his faith should not be as strong as "granite." On the contrary, first, he has to doubt. He might not be engaged with the vicissitudes of mundane life, but in his heart, he must wage a spiritual battle, a battle of burning doubt and ecstatic trust, a battle that must *necessarily* end in total resignation: a resignation that would tell this believing (but not necessarily righteous!) man that there is no "third exit" from the antinomies of life, but only one exit—either Earth or Heaven—and that Heaven and Earth want a sacrifice. Such a man was Abraham, leading his son to the altar; such a man was Job, resigning under God's will; and such a man was the God-man, Christ, praying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not

⁸⁴⁷ Шестов, 1907

my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)—then giving up his life, bringing this "Foolishness" to its end.

This leads us to the second text, in which Shestov's doubts concerning the character of Berdyaev's religious sense are openly expressed and explained. Shestov begins *Gnosis and Existential Philosophy* informing the reader that Berdyaev achieved great popularity in the West, greater than the popularity of Solovyov, for example. He notes (this was written in 1938) that it was through Berdyaev's "face" (image) that Russian philosophical thought was for the first time presented to the "court" of Europe and the world. And yet, Berdyaev was not widely read and discussed among the Russians. Almost none in the Russian émigré literary circles engaged with Berdyaev's thought seriously and Berdyaev, on the other hand, seldomly published in Russian journals other than his own *Put*. Shestov admits that he does not understand the reasons for that, and now tackles the task of commenting on the work of his old friend as sincerely as any good friend would do.

Shestov begins with Berdyaev's treatment of Kierkegaard. As we have said in a footnote, he notes that Berdyaev had high esteem for the Danish existentialist, but rarely quoted him in his works and sometimes was even critical of him. Berdyaev had a similar attitude toward Nietzsche—he praised his genius, his nobility of spirit, but described his philosophy with the phrase "unenlightened prophetism." According to Shestov, Berdyaev's existentialism was influenced by Kant. His approach was Kantian: he found the center of existence not in the object, but in the subject. The secret of reality, for Berdyaev (as for Schopenhauer),⁸⁴⁸ was in the subject. According to Shestov, this was the way through which Berdyaev tried to liberate human reason from the bondage of Aristotelian intellectualism. But in this attempt, Shestov argues, Berdyaev achieved little.

⁸⁴⁸ "That which knows all things and is known by none is the subject" writes Schopenhauer, "Thus it is the supporter of the world, that condition of all phenomena, of all objects which is always presupposed throughout experience; for all that exists, exists only for the subject. Everyone finds himself to be subject, yet only in so far as he knows, not in so far as he is an object of knowledge. But his body is object and therefore from this point of view we call it idea." (Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Idea* (1818) in Commins S. and Linscott R. 1974. *Man and Spirit: The Speculative Philosophers*, Random House, p. 447)

Shestov observes another important evolution in Berdyaev's thought related to his Christianity. He says that at the beginning Berdyaev described his philosophy as "theocentric," then "Christocentric," and now, in the 1930s, he started to speak more and more about "Christian pneumo-centrism." As a matter of fact, according to Evgenia Rapp (Berdyaev's sister-in-law), Berdyaev's last great, but unfinished, project was writing a book on the Spirit. Shestov also observed another evolution in Berdyaev's Christianity, namely that his emphasis on "God-manhood" began to tilt towards "manhood." Yet, it is questionable how real or significant this evolution was. In my view, Berdyaev's Christianity had always been "pneumo-centric" and "anthropocentric." From the very beginning, after his conversion to Christianity, he showed himself as a "Christian humanist." Shestov, in fact, notes that the importance of the human person was not something new in Berdyaev's philosophy, but he brings to our attention a process in Berdyaev's intellectual development, in which the image of man grows more and more magnified, while the image of God "fades".

On this last point, one could challenge Shestov. Berdyaev's anthropocentrism does not attempt to "elevate" man and "lower" God, but to put man and God in the right, if not the perfect, balance. The dignity of man was not simply the image of God in him; the dignity of man was also the stake, as it were, that God had in man. Berdyaev's personalism, drawing from the paradoxes of Catholic mysticism, required faith in man as an active spirit. The concept of the person as the image of God does not suggest a passive human being. On the contrary, it needs an active person, in the image of its Creator. So, the evolution in the emphasis, which Shestov discovered in Berdyaev's thought, was there, but it did not entail a "fading" of God from his theological stance. Man's image in Berdyaev's thought was, indeed, "magnified," while God's image left unchanged. The concern Shevtov raised, and I think correctly, was that this emphasis on the manhood of God could eventually result in "man-god." It is difficult to argue that such a concern is unwarranted. Historically, secular humanism was the indirect result of Christian humanism. This means that every magnification of importance of human existence is inevitably exposed to the danger of human self-centeredness, which may destroy not only the religious foundations of human

civilization but also the natural foundation of the world. Here, we must take Shestov's concern seriously, and not read or embrace Berdyaev's work uncritically or dogmatically.

Shestov explains the development of Berdyaev's anthropocentrism and pneumatism through the lingering influence of Kant in his thought, with the persistence of "common sense" in it, with the insufficiency of "Foolishness" and the effort to find a "third," in the Spirit, who can bring together the "abyss of Creation" and the "abyss of Heaven" without losing either one of them. Yet, Shestov discovers another evolution in Berdyaev's philosophical worldview—an evolution that, in my opinion, could shake his entire system of thought. This is the evolution in his understanding of freedom. According to Shestov, Berdyaev's thought shifted away from a concept of freedom as freedom of the Spirit. There is another freedom that appears and whose influence on Berdyaev grows and becomes more and more operational. This is the idea of "uncreated freedom." Shestov says that Böhme, from whom Berdyaev borrowed the idea, believed that freedom is given to God as it was given to man. In other words, freedom was not created. It was *given*. But, as Shestov rightly notes, in the Holy Scripture there is not a word about "uncreated freedom," nor was there any focus on the freedom to choose between good and evil. There is knowledge of good and evil, but not freedom of choice. We may take this freedom of choice by implication, but there is no direct description of the existence of such a condition. Obviously, this is how Berdyaev and Böhme interpreted Scripture. The problem is that any individual interpretation might prove wrong. For that reason, Shestov decides to call Berdyaev's interpretation not a "revelation," but rather a "gnosis." Berdyaev *knows*, through his reading and interpretation of the Bible, through his personal experience and intuition, that there must be "uncreated freedom." Shestov calls Berdyaev's interpretation a "gnosis" also because it divides the world into two parts—good and evil. Moreover, he notes that Berdyaev cannot imagine, and does not believe in an "absolutely good world." Behind this disbelief lurks, again, the common sense instinct, Berdyaev's rationalism. For Berdyaev, in the "absolutely good world" there must be no freedom. Freedom is the dialectic of existence. Freedom as "good" needs "evil"—an evil that is always defeated through Christ, but nevertheless is necessary for freedom in the world.

According to Shestov, for Berdyaev an absolutely good world would be an absolutely evil one. Such a conclusion is typical for a "political theologian." The Christian realist, engaged with the world, cannot imagine a perfect state, for example. The ambition for the achievement of a perfect world is a godless illusion that leads to apocalypse. (cf. 1 Thess. 5:1-4; Rev. 16:15) From an anthropological point of view, the ambition to achieve a perfect man leads to the creation of a perfect monster. Berdyaev does not seem able to imagine a perfect world nor can he see a corruption in God's creative act. So he resorts to the convenient idea of uncreated freedom that in essence was neither "good" nor "evil." This idea seems to give him a tool for resolving all difficulties of the paradoxes of existence. Its vagueness is warranted by its mystical nature. Sometimes it is "nothingness," sometimes "freedom." Its "irrational" nature can be equally useful for resolving the problems of metaphysics and for explaining the madness of human behavior (especially collective behaviour) in politics and history. In short, "uncreated freedom" is a useful idea, with Gnostic elements, that might be applied every time when we face the unknown and incomprehensible. And the greatest unknown and incomprehensible is the mystery of evil.

Berdyaev, as quoted by Shestov, states that the "problem of theodicy is solved only through freedom. The secret of evil is the secret of freedom... Freedom creates both good and evil." As noted by Shestov, God for Berdyaev is omnipotent in existence but has no power over "nothingness," which is also "freedom." In other words, God is free to create but has no power over freedom and over that which is not yet. This does not make God a "servant" of nothingness. Man can be a slave of nothingness through the power of his illusions, but God as God has no illusions, but power. Divine power is not limited by nothingness or freedom but rather revealed in it. Nothingness, itself, is revealed through God's act.

According to Shestov, Berdyaev relies on Böhme and Schelling in explaining reality as composed by being and non-being,⁸⁴⁹ where "nothing" is not absolute, namely because of its

⁸⁴⁹ "[...] the concept of becoming is the only one appropriate to the nature of things," says Schelling. "All birth is birth from darkness into light, the seed kernel must be sunk into the earth and die in darkness so that the more beautiful shape of light may lift and unfold itself in the radiance of the sun [...]" In man there is the whole power of the dark principle and at the same time the whole strength of the light. In him, there is the deepest abyss and the loftiest sky or

"nothingness." Shestov says that if you asked Berdyaev from where he knows all this, as Barth supposedly demanded, he would calmly inform you—from "gnosis," from "mystical" experience. But this does not answer the most pressing question, the question of the *necessity* of evil. The necessity of non-being is perplexing and can overturn the entire system of Berdyaev's thought.

Who needs such a necessity? God certainly does not need it. If God as God needs something this means that he is not any more "God." One of the possible answers that Berdyaev provides (quoted again by Shestov) is that "good that defeats evil is a greater good than the good that existed before evil." There is common sense in this proposition, but it does not resolve the problem. If good comes to fullness through evil then evil becomes a necessity for good. And so, we return again to the ethics of the law, which Berdyaev placed at a lower level compared to the ethics of creativity. Namely, the ethics of the law needed evil and for that reason was less sublime. If I interpret Berdyaev accurately, the necessity of evil as freedom, for the fullness of good, becomes a great challenge for his system. For the existence of good and creativity, there must be no necessity. The possible existence of necessity, at the very heart of Berdyaev's metaphysics, confirms Shestov's suspicions, hinted in *In Praise of Folly*, that he, Berdyaev, did not completely abandon his rationalism and Kantianism.

The paradox of necessary evil in Berdyaev's philosophy is hidden behind his attractive power to write relentlessly, as Shestov observes, and give answers to all questions he poses, and not to stay on one question alone for long. Berdyaev, as a Socratic thinker, challenges the common wisdom of his opponents, is at the same time an intellectual on the move, giving his views on truth, his answers, and solutions. As a writer and polemicist, Berdyaev was a man who set the tone and led the conversation. His "audaciousness" in asking questions and supplying them immediately with answers was perhaps due to his "granite faith," to his strong convictions. Berdyaev is an optimist. He believes in the creative power of man, he waits with God for man to reveal his creative talent that will overcome the abyss of nothingness. But Shestov asks the simple question: If God has no power over the abyss, then how can man have the power to overcome it?

both *centra*. [...] Only in man the word is fully proclaimed which in all other things is held back and incomplete." (Schelling, 2006, 28-32)

How can one expect and wait for man to do what God cannot do? Berdyaev's answer, as we have already discussed, is that what is impossible for God and man, is possible for Christ, the God-man. And yet, this does not resolve the issue of necessary evil and the paradox of the "powerless God."

Shestov's verdict is that Berdyaev's gnosis leads to theodicy: the knowing man, the self-conscious man, becomes convinced that the most important thing in life is the "vindication of God." This means that every evil comes to the world despite the will of God. This also means that God is not omnipotent. For Shestov, Berdyaev's theodicy is a Leibnizian theodicy, in which this world is the *best* possible of all worlds (but not absolutely good).⁸⁵⁰ It is the best namely because God is not omnipotent. For Shestov, this is a defeat; it is not a liberation of the spirit, it is not a resignation, but a "submission to the inevitable." And he does not find in Scripture such an overwhelming necessity. He gives as an example the story of Job. Job's friends tried to convince him to submit under the inevitable evil, but God confirmed the rightness of Job's stance and restored his blessings, showing that there is no inevitable evil, and that Job was right to believe in an omnipotent God who loves justice and does not permit evil. Job, Shestov says, was good before and after evil, his goodness did not come to fullness because of the temptations of the "accuser." In this the difference between Kierkegaard's and Berdyaev's existentialism is revealed. Kierkegaard, Shestov says, takes the side of Job, and not of his friends. Job is fighting the "foolish" war against the inevitable, against the "necessity" of abysmal darkness. And God accepts his foolishness as righteousness. But Berdyaev (and Kant), according to Shestov, do not stay with Job. Their faith is "granite," but not "Foolishness." Faith begins with despair. In despair, the believing man asks God for the impossible, in his resignation the true believer trusts himself eventually to the power of God. And here we reach the main objection against Berdyaev's gnosis: that it is not man, but God

⁸⁵⁰ In his *Essay on Theodicy*, Leibniz writes, "[T]he best plan is not that which seeks to avoid evil, since it may happen that the evil is accompanied by a greater good. [...] [A]n imperfection in the part may be required for a greater perfection of the whole. In this I have followed the opinion of Saint Augustine, who has said a hundred times, that God has permitted evil in order to bring about good; and that of Thomas Aquinas that the permitting of evil tends to the good of the universe. [...] [A] world with evil may be better than a world without evil; but I have gone even farther [...] and have even proved that this universe must be in reality better than every other possible universe." (G.W. Leibniz. 1951. *Selections*. ed. Philip P. Wiener, Charles Scribner's Sons, p. 510)

who saves man from evil. For Kierkegaard, Shestov reminds, theodicy is the worst idea that human reasoning has produced.⁸⁵¹

Shestov does not see the "Absurd" (another name for "Foolishness") in Berdyaev's thought. The lack of the "absurd" makes his philosophy mundane. "Faith is freedom," he writes. "But not the uncreated freedom that is in joyful harmony with 'holy necessity'." The freedom of faith has nothing to do with common sense, with the human point of view. "For God nothing is impossible," he concludes.⁸⁵²

Nikolai Lossky is another critic of Berdyaev's concept of "divine nothing." His criticism is far more direct and uncomplicated. In an essay on Berdyaev's book *The Destiny of Man*,⁸⁵³ Lossky notes that Berdyaev's "divine nothing" is not like the one we find in Dionysius the Areopagite. In Dionysius, "nothingness" is not a "non-defined meon," but a divine "super-abundance" that cannot be grasped by the human mind. He explains that the meaning of "out of nothing," of creation *ex nihilo*, does not point out to something used by God to create the world. It is much simpler—that God creates without anything, neither from himself nor out of himself. He creates something ontologically and completely new in comparison to Him. God also creates the human person equipped with creative powers that can be used freely by the person through its free will. Lossky argues that the "teaching of *Ungrund*" and the "uncreated" will of the "created man" cannot be considered a genuine Christian philosophy. But from this, he says, it does not follow that the entire "system" of Berdyaev's thought is flawed and must be rejected.

Lossky rightly notes that Berdyaev's philosophy defends the truth that Christianity is a religion of love, and therefore of tolerance, freedom, and "universal salvation." He says that the merits of Berdyaev are in his critiques of socialism, communism, and the bourgeois spirit, and in his fight against all forms of absolutism. Berdyaev, he concludes, was a Christian defender of the

⁸⁵¹ Шестов, 1938

⁸⁵² Шестов, 1938

⁸⁵³ Н. О. Лосский, "Мысли Н. А. Бердяева о назначении человека" *Новый журнал* [New Journal] - 1956. - № 44. С. 208-218.

"traditions of Western and Russian humanism," of the absolute value and dignity of the human person.

Lossky's final conclusion shows the need for a renewed and better exploration of Berdyaev's political-theological thought not only for the goals of scholarly research but also for the needs of our age, in which the problems of human dignity, the common good, and community are by no means solved. Berdyaev, after all, was a publicist, and not an academic in the strict sense of the word; he wanted a change of life beyond the academy, a change in the actual condition of the human person and society. As a publicist, he offered, if not practical solutions, at least principles and visions that could be followed not only by his contemporaries but also by us, the next generations. This means that his emphasis on the importance of freedom, creativity, personhood, and communion still could serve as a "landmark" in our quest for a better world. I use the word "landmark" intentionally, referring to the *Vekhi* volume, which turned out to be a book of prophetic visions. I am convinced that Berdyaev's political theology could help us navigate the turbulent "waters" of our own historical period and give us a better understanding of the realities of social and political life.

There are signs of renewed interest in the relevance of Berdyaev's thought for present times. An example of this are the scholars and intellectuals who convened in 2018 at the colloquium, organized by ACER-MJO in Clamart, France, marking the 70th anniversary of Berdyaev's death—Fr. Philippe Dautais, the anthropologist Michel Fromaget, the sociologist Jean-Marie Gouvril, the historian Igor Sollogoub, the president of ACER-MJO Cyrill Sollogoub, the Catholic essayist and researcher Franck Damour, the political scientist and translator Céline Marangé, the historian and writer of *The Way, Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and Their Journal, 1925–1940* Antoine Arjakovsky, the Catholic scholar Gérard Lurol, the Ukrainian scholars Maria Savelieva and Tatiana Soukhodoub, and professor Bertrand Vergely from Saint Serge Institute in Paris.⁸⁵⁴ In an interview for radio Notre Dame one of the colloquium's participants, Jean-Marie Gouvril, discussed the *Gilets Jaunes* movement through the

⁸⁵⁴ The presentations read at the colloquium were collected and published in a book *Nicoals Berdyaev (1874-1948) Un Philosophe russe à Clamart*, (Éditions Le Mercure Dauphinois, 2019).

prism of Berdyaev's political philosophy.⁸⁵⁵ Another example of the renewed interest in Berdyaev's thought is the conference, planned in Krakow, Poland in 2021, *Nikolai Berdyaev–A Russian in Paris or the Meaning of History*. This conference is a part of the annual Krakow Conferences on Russian Philosophy, organized by Teresa Obolevitch, Alexander Tsygankov, and Karolina Fyutak. In Russia, we must add, there is an emerging generation of young scholars strongly influenced by Berdyaev's thought. After the fall of communism, Berdyaev's name could be often heard (and read) in the Russian mass media, at academic forums and conferences, and this could be interpreted as a sign for the growing influence of his political theology. It should be noted that in 2014, the *Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies* (ISEPR Foundation) established the "N.A. Berdyaev Prize in Russian Thought Heritage" and organized the forum "Berdyaev Lectures" in Moscow (2014) and Paris (2016). The presentations and the discussions from this venue later appeared in the almanac "Notebooks on Conservatism."⁸⁵⁶ In North America, the historian Ana Siljak from Queen's University has recently presented at conferences and through scholarly articles the personalistic *and* communitarian philosophy of Berdyaev, the precise aspect of his thought thoroughly discussed here.

While interest is obviously growing, Paul Gavrilyuk observed at a forum at Volos Academy⁸⁵⁷ that there is still a need for a greater appreciation of the importance of Berdyaev's and Russian political theology in general, especially in the West, where the overall engagement with Berdyaev's thought, specifically, has diminished in recent decades.⁸⁵⁸ My hope with this dissertation is that it would contribute positively to these developments and needs and will be

⁸⁵⁵ Le Grand Témoin, Émission du 22 novembre 2018, Radio Notre Dame, https://radionotredame.net/emissions/legrandtemoin_court/22-11-2018/#

⁸⁵⁶ *Тетради по консерватизму: Альманах Фонда ИСЭПИ. Форум «Бердяевские чтения», 16 мая 2014 г. 2014. Стенограмма. – М.: Некоммерческий фонд – Институт социально-экономических и политических исследований (Фонд ИСЭПИ), № 2 (1-2); Les lectures Berdiaïev. Valeurs vs. Mondialisation. La crise de la civilisation européenne et les axes de son redressement. – Cahiers du conservatism. 2017. Fondation à but non lucratif – Institut d'études sociales, économiques et politiques (Fondation ISEPR), Paris*

⁸⁵⁷ Paul Gavrilyuk, "Russian Political Theology: Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and the Eurasians," paper delivered at the "Political Orthodoxy and Totalitarianism in a Post-Communist Era" Conference, Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Helsinki, Finland, 28-31 May 2015.

⁸⁵⁸ Louth, Andrew. 2015. *Modern Orthodox thinkers: from the Philokalia to the present day*. p.158

useful for future explorations of what was left unexplored here—e.g., Berdyaev's philosophy of history, his writings on war, technology, and civilization, his criticism of utilitarianism and his numerous articles, published in the Russian press and periodicals before his exile in Europe.

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