

HANNA YEMELIANENKO

SERHII SHEVCHENKO

WORLDVIEW AND PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF
BERDYAEV'S "EXISTENTIAL CHRISTIANITY"

Hanna Yemelianenko

Donbas State Pedagogical University, Department of Philosophy, Socio-Political and Legal Disciplines SHEI, Ukraine

E-mail: Kerol-Anna@bigmir.net

Serhii Shevchenko

O. O. Bohomolets National Medical University, Department of Philosophy, Bioethics, and History of Medicine, Ukraine; National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, H. S.

Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy

E-mail: idei.filosofa@gmail.com

Abstract: The purpose of the study is to review the philosophical foundations of the religious doctrine by Berdyaev based on a comparative analysis of the epistemological, anthropological, and ontological backgrounds for his thinking. The study combines methods and theories from various cultural, religious, and historical-philosophical approaches, which made it possible to reveal the peculiarities of Berdyaev's rethinking of traditional Christianity in the context of the crisis of Western culture. The scientific novelty proves a fundamental break in his conception with classical metaphysics as the basis of Christian orthodoxy. Human freedom, spirituality as a system-forming principle of human existence, which humanize anthropologism and de-objectification as a priori of the general system of the world-understanding, form that new type of the religious-metaphysical basis of "modern Orthodoxy" that Berdyaev sought to establish as a new model of Christianity in the world. The conclusions emphasize that the specifics of "existential Christianity" by Berdyaev consisted in establishing a special commensurability between man and God, and in the thesis about the "eternal humanity" of God, beyond which, in his deep conviction, one can hardly understand and interpret the very possibility of Revelation.

Key words: philosophical foundations of Christianity, de-objectification of religious thinking, existential philosophy, personalism.

1. Introduction

1.1. The relevance of the subject of the study

It is very difficult to write on Berdyaev's heritage, but at the same time quite easy. On the one hand, it is difficult because Nikolai Berdyaev despite being a professor of Moscow University and for a year had been lecturing in it, and at the end of his life in 1947 received the title of Honorary Doctor in Theology from Cambridge University, did not have any philosophical or theological training, did not even have any completed university education (his learning was limited to only a few courses of St. Volodymyr Kyiv University at the natural sciences and juridical faculties), and that was why he ideologically and conceptually never "fit in" within the general structure of any of the known philosophical or theological systems. The explanation of the difficulty is in the fact that while studying the works by Berdyaev the authors of the article have been becoming more and more convinced that the lack of professional education really "played with the thinker a rather evil joke". Sometimes it has seemed that Berdyaev, sincerely trying to understand the history of theological and philosophical thought, in the end, simply suffers from the need and inability to "discover for himself" what had been uncovered for everybody long before him, to understand what could be understood only by having the professional training, to declare what had been proclaimed long before him by his predecessors.

On the other hand, it is quite easy, because he, frankly and in detail, described his ideological and "theoretical" route in the resulting work of "Self-Cognition", working-out of which gives the opportunity to "put all dots above" in the process of determining the content and sense of the main "conceptual provisions" of the philosophical-religious doctrine of the thinker.

1.2. State of scientific development of the problem.

In general, such provisions are quite known. In the encyclopedic literature, for example, Berdyaev is considered to be a publicist and religious philosopher, close to Emmanuel Mounier's personalism who in his writings covered and compared world philosophical and religious teachings and directions (Greek, Buddhist and Indian philosophy, Kabbalah, Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Mysticism, Cosmism, Anthroposophy, Theosophy, etc.), with the key role in his teaching of freedom and creativity (Vdovina 2009, 46; Serbinenko 2010, 241). Bodea (2019), Horban (2014; 2014a), Krymskyi (2003), Linde (2010),

Myslyvchenko (2003), Pattison (2020), Raida (1998; 2003; 2004; 2009), Shevchenko (2016), (Slaatte 1988; 1997), Stark (2009), Tytarenko (2006) and other researchers of the creative heritage by Berdyaev have been emphasized the ambiguity and complexity in the classification of his philosophical views.

Stark underlined that “analyzing Berdyaev’s creative output one can state that he cannot be considered to be a supporter of specific Russian Orthodox theology but rather as a philosopher representing a free and lay character of Russian religious thought. The synthesizing consciousness of the unity of Christianity induced him to say that his standpoint can be characterized as supra-denominational. All in all, Berdyaev proves to be an original and highly independent thinker, developing his views based on a balanced evaluation of the two types of Christian spirituality: the Eastern and the Western, both in the field of philosophy and religion” (Stark 2009, 217).

“Berdyaev’s heritage, as Horban claimed, cannot be considered without taking into account the specifics of his personality. As an individual of introvert type, Berdyaev generated all his ideas exclusively through the prism of his own “Self”. The difficulty is that the philosopher’s personality is too voluminous; if to put it in the language of postmodernism, it has no limits. Therefore, no concept generated by him fits into the Procrustean bed of the conceptual apparatus of academic science. This aspect cannot be ignored in the course of some research because the clear connection of Berdyaev’s ideas to philosophical or religious trends does not create an objective picture. After all, each such definition always shows a deeper layer that does not fit into the chosen phenomenon or concept” (Horban 2014a, 30). Krymskyi considered Berdyaev to be “the first European thinker who opposed the idea of Hell as an idea of the commensurability of human sins with eternal torment. ... There is no escaping the suspicion that the supporters of Hell are those who want Hell for others. However, such suspicion is enough to change the traditional interpretation of the Old Testament, to get a new impetus to the formulation of ethical canons of the spirituality of the 20th century. Berdyaev developed the perspective of such a formulation” (Krymskyi 2003, 6–7).

“Unlike atheist existentialism, Berdyaev insists on the possibility of spiritual experience and of freedom as a creative and not just an annihilating power. Personality is a positive power... While Berdyaev largely sees Heidegger and Sartre as representing an essentially nihilistic view of human life, he acknowledges that Kierkegaard testifies to genuine spiritual experience, although he dislikes what he sees as Kierkegaard’s emphasis on sin”, Pattison remarked (Pattison, 2020).

If the “existential” is understood as psycho-emotional and psychological, which indicates the presence of acts of spiritual activity (Raida 1998, 129–141), we can argue that the understanding of the

processes of cognition, epistemology, and, ultimately, the processes of Berdyaev's cognition was exclusively or predominantly existential in nature. They were existential typologically.

2. Personalistic revolution in reinterpreting of traditional Christianity. Berdyaev's "Existential Christianity"

2.1. Presentation of the main research material

The origins of his own philosophy Berdyaev describes in detail in the autobiographical work "Self-Cognition". "Although I have never been a 'man of the school'", the thinker wrote in his work, "but in philosophy, I am still most familiar with the ideas of Kant, and of Kant himself rather than of the Neo-Kantians. Although this does not mean that I was a "Kantian" in the strict sense of the word, "something" from him", the thinker recalled, "has remained for me for the rest of my life".

Berdyaev was initially very impressed with the Kantian distinction between the world of phenomena and the world of things in itself, the order of nature and the order of freedom, as well as the cognition of each person's purpose in himself/herself and the inadmissibility of turning him/her by another person in a means to achieve his/her goals. He also believed that the neo-Kantianism distorted Kant's ideas, and the development of German idealism after Kant went in the wrong direction, toward monism, eliminating things in themselves and ultimately replacing the transcendence of the Divine with evolution and "losing freedom in the need for a triumphant world Logos".

At the time, Berdyaev wrote of how much it seemed strange in Kant to him, that he always had a negative attitude to Kant's ethical formalism, to a categorical imperative, to closing things in themselves and impossibility of implementing spiritual experience into philosophy, to an attempt to define and represent religion only within the limits of reason, to the utmost exaggeration of the value of mathematical natural science, which, in his deep conviction, was relevant only within one epoch in the history of science. "Formalist moralism, with a categorical imperative, particularly pushed me away", the thinker wrote. "From the known moment of my route, I set myself with extreme acuity and experienced the problem of personality and individuality. It was not only a problem of my philosophy but also a problem in my life" (Berdyaev 1991, 47).

Never in his life, as Berdyaev wrote then, he in his philosophy wanted to submit to "the power of the general, the obligatory, which transforms the individual-private, unique in its own means and tools. I was always for the exception and against the rule", he asserted further, "and Dostoievsky's and Ibsen's similar problematics, was my moral problematics, as well as experienced by Belinskys the uprising against the

Hegelian world spirit, as some motives by Søren Kierkegaard (Berdyaev spelled his name as “Kirchehardt”, the insert is ours. – *H. Ye. & S. Sh.*), of whom, however, I learned very late and did not particularly like, as Shestov’s struggle against the necessary laws of logic and ethics...Therefore, I have always been hostile to monism, to rationalism, to suppression of the individual in general, to the domination of the universal spirit and mind, to a smooth and prosperous optimism. My philosophy has always been that of conflict. And I was always a personalist” (Berdyaev 1991, 47).

Understanding Christianity as personalism (“Christianity is personalism”, maintained Berdyaev in “Self-Cognition”. “With this, the main spiritual struggle of my life is connected” (Berdyaev 1991, 144)). Berdyaev emphasized that he was “a representative of the individual who rebelled against the authority of an objectified “general”, and that this is exactly the pathos of his life. Berdyaev wrote in his works that it is necessary to radically distinguish between the general and the universal. Although he complained that his attempt to build a philosophy beyond the logical, ontological, and ethical power of the “general” over the personal was misunderstood and perplexing. “Maybe the reason here is my too weak ability to develop my thoughts and discursively prove them”, he emphasized. But he was convinced that all the fundamentals of philosophy required revision in this direction. “It has important social consequences, but even more religious and moral consequences. It would be completely mistaken to mix this type of philosophy with the philosophy of pragmatism or philosophy of life. The personalist revolution, which has not yet existed in the world, means the overthrow of the power of objectification, the destruction of natural necessity, the liberation of subjects-individuals, the breakthrough to another world, to the spiritual world”, emphasized the thinker (Berdyaev 1991, 145). And compared to such a revolution, he considered all the other revolutions that had already been taking place in the world to be insignificant.

Man, the subject, the subjectivity, the individual, were also the main elements of the “conceptual structure” of Berdyaev’s philosophy and outlook, to which all his reflections came together and then came out. “Philosophy has always been connected with my destiny, with my whole existence”, wrote Berdyaev. “I have always been present in it, foremost, as really existed. I have always wanted philosophy to be the philosophy of “not about something” but of “something”, that is, first and foremost, an expression of the primary reality of the subject of thinking. Along with the idea of uncreated freedom and objectification”, he noted in “Self-Cognition”, “I deepened my personalism, that is, the “idea of the central and supreme value of the individual. In the perspective of the conflict of the human personality with everything impersonal, or only striving to be super-personal, to be in conflict with the world, the society, I strongly stood on the side of the personality”, declared M. Berdyaev. In the history

of European thinking, this was also due to the long-standing, traditional problem of universals, the dispute between realists and nominalists. Berdyaev took his special position in this dispute. "I am determined, not only philosophically, but morally, vitally against the realism of concepts", he said in his work, "and in this sense, I am an anti-Platonist, although in other planes I value Plato very much. But I am not a nominalist either..." (Berdyaev 1991, 151). For consistent nominalism, in his opinion, there is no indivisible unity of personality, its eternal image. Coming out of traditional terminology, he referred himself to rather conceptualists who "do not deny the universal" but believe that "the universal is in the individual, not above it." In general, Berdyaev considered the very statement of the problem of realism and nominalism wrong. And the realism of concepts, which recognizes the primacy of the general over the individual and subordinates the personality to the general quasi-realities, is the source of human slavery. "The uprising against the power of the "general", which is the product of objectification, seems to me a just, holy, deeply Christian uprising" (Berdyaev 1991, 151).

Noting that he was never a "pure" philosopher, and never sought to alienate philosophy from life, and on the contrary, thought that philosophical cognition is a function of life, a symbol of the spiritual experience and spiritual route of man, Berdyaev argued that all the contradictions of life were reproduced in philosophy, and they did not need smoothing. Philosophy, in his opinion, is, rather, a struggle in which it is impossible to separate philosophical knowledge from the totality of the spiritual experience of man, from his religious faith, mystical contemplation, if the individual has got it. "A particular person philosophizes and cognizes, rather than an epistemological subject, a repulsive universal spirit," he wrote in his writings. "Both Plato and Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel were concrete people, and they invested human, existential in their philosophy, even if they did not want to admit it. When it happens that a philosopher as a person is a believing Christian, it is absolutely impossible for him to forget about this in his philosophy. The mystic will also be a mystic in his philosophy. A warlike atheist will be the same in his philosophy: philosophy, in fact, has always been religious, either in the positive or in the negative".

Therefore, "pushing away" from Kant, Berdyaev "came" to an original "theory of knowledge", and to a particular ontology, which he tried to improve all his life. His epistemological and ontological ideas were directed against rationalism, which was based on the belief in the ability to express being in the concept, the belief in the rationality of being itself. Berdyaev believed that being can look or appear rational only because it is itself pre-rationalized and transformed into a concept. According to his "improved" terminology, the being, which rationalistic epistemology and ontology deal with, is already a product of thinking. "At first, I understood it myself this way", Berdyaev wrote, "that there is a primordial existence

before the process of rationalization, and that in itself is a true being that cannot be reproduced by the concept. This approximately corresponded to the Kantian distinction between the thing in itself and the phenomenon. But I was struck by the fact that Kant did not explain why the world of phenomena was formed, as not a real, first-world world. It was also strange that the real, noumenal world (the thing in itself) is unknowable, while the world secondary and false (phenomenon) could be known, and scientific methodology and scientific knowledge could be applied to it." In this contradiction, Berdyaev also saw, for example, the difference between Kant and Plato.

Trying to develop and, at the same time, overcome Kant's position regarding the possibility of cognizing the primal reality before its rationalization, to process it with consciousness, Berdyaev also comes to the idea of distinguishing between "primary" and "secondary" consciousness, where secondary consciousness is connected with the delimitation of the subject and object, as a rule, objectifies what is known. And the primary consciousness, immersed in the subject as the primary reality, reproduced the identity of the subject and the object.

In the last years of his life, Berdyaev also formulates such a distinction as alienation in the process of objectification of the "only true subjective world". The objective world for him is now the product of objectification, a world of fallen, broken, and shrouded, in which the subject does not join the knowable. Thus, in his conception, there is a paradox of inverting the content of the categories of classical philosophy: the subjective turns into the objective, the objective into the subjective because the subject has to be thought of as a creation of God, an object instead, as the creation of the subject. The subject has become a noumenon, the object has become a phenomenon. "I think," Berdyaev noted in this connection, "that the peculiarity of my philosophy is, first of all, that I have a *different understanding of reality* (the italic type is ours. – H. Ye. & S. Sh.) than in most philosophical studies. The reality for me is not at all identical with the being and even less identical with the objectivity. The world subjective and personal is the only real thing" (Berdyaev 1991, 47).

It is unlikely that such an "ontology" can be called utterly existential, but that it has been reproduced in the specific form of subjective idealism is the fact for every expert philosopher. "There is still a significant difference between Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Jaspers," Berdyaev wrote in his work "I and the World of Objects". "Kierkegaard wants philosophy itself to be existence, not a philosophy of existence. Heidegger and Jaspers build a philosophy of existence. They still remain in the academic philosophical tradition, striving to develop philosophical categories of existence" (Berdyaev 1994, 151–152). Therefore, Heidegger's philosophy is not identical with Berdyaev's existential philosophy. "By existential philosophy," the Russian philosopher writes in his work "The Experience

of Christian Metaphysics”, “I do not mean the philosophy of Heidegger and Jaspers, whom I value but do not consider to be existential thinkers (Berdyayev 1995, 181).

3. Existential interpretation of faith, grace, and revelation by Berdyayev

In the 20th century, Berdyayev becomes “Kierkegaard for Orthodoxy”. He develops and applies existential dialectics as a method of reinterpreting the basic postulates of Christianity, stating, “I believe only in the method of existential-anthropocentric and spiritual-religious, if, however, it can be called a method” (Berdyayev 1993, 254).

Berdyayev did not actually use the concept of “existence” in his philosophy, but repeatedly emphasized that “spirit is not being, spirit is freedom, spirit is a creative act that takes place in depth, what is now called Existenz” (Berdyayev 1996, 74). Berdyayev associates the concept of “existence”, first, with spirituality and human freedom. This also shows that he adopts and develops to some extent Kierkegaard’s perception of existence. The Danish thinker, as is well known, sought to push the man in his self-consciousness to spiritual rebirth, to acquire an authentic human existence, by comprehending and depicting the negative and tragic states of human existence. Berdyayev (unlike Shestov), referring to Kierkegaard, insisted that “the experience of negativity is positive” (Berdyayev 1996, 51).

In the essay “Fundamentals of Religious Philosophy” Berdyayev analyzes such concepts as knowledge, faith, freedom, man, creativity, etc. In his philosophy, they are central to determining man’s place in the world. The thinker’s thoughts are not of academic, scientific character, but existential one. Thus, addressing the problem of cognition, Berdyayev presents his own understanding of the definition of philosophy. For him, “philosophy is an independent sphere of spiritual culture, and it should be compared not with other sciences, but with science as another sphere of culture, with religion, with art, with morality. Philosophy is philosophy, it has its own original nature. And it remains a function of the spirit forever, it will never be replaced by science” (Berdyayev 2007, 169).

Berdyayev interprets the Christian world as a spiritual brotherhood that communicates in the spiritually united contemplation of Christ the Savior. With this in mind, he views philosophy in inseparable connection with religion. “Philosophy has an original nature, but this does not mean that it is detached from the sources of spiritual life. Philosophy has always had religious origins. Philosophy is not a servant of theology, it is free. But it goes freely to religious sources of life. It is knowledge based on spiritual experience. Spiritual life precedes philosophy. Philosophical knowledge is

co-existence in the very spiritual life, it is within life, life does not oppose it, it is life itself” (Berdyaev 2007, 170).

For the thinker, cognition is a creative act due to which being is creatively transformed. As he proves, “cognition has a creative meaning because its source is not in me as an individual psychological being, but in man as an ontological being, in the Logos Man, which I can reveal in myself. Man cognizes, and it cannot get rid of man, become inhuman. But not a psychological person cognizes and not only a logical one but an ontological person cognizes. Man cognizes through his depth, immersed in the depths of divine life. There is no absolute line that separates man from this divine depth. True cognition is divine-human. Cognition is a creative way in which being comes to self-consciousness, comes out of the darkness. There is an irrational beginning in being, a dark abyss. The way of cognition is the way of enlightening this dark abyss, overcoming the irrational principle not by rationalism, but by the light of Logos” (Berdyaev 2007, 172).

Thus, it is the ontological man, whose roots reach the depths of divine existence has the right to creative cognition, Berdyaev emphasizes. “But this ontological, spiritual, not natural man can be revealed by purification, by asceticism and sacrifice, by overcoming the lower nature and achieving spiritual freedom. Human freedom must turn from the world of ideas, to the world of meaning. It is not given easily and directly. This world is closed for a natural, psychological man” (Berdyaev 2007, 173). Therefore, according to Berdyaev, a true philosopher must awaken a spiritual person in himself, so that creative cognition becomes possible for him. The thinker insisted that the structure of human consciousness could not be understood statically, the theory of cognition must be dynamic. Such dynamism is connected by Berdyaev, first, with religious faith, its spiritual potential. That is, he like Paul Tillich, writes about the “dynamics of faith” (Tillich 1995, 132–215).

Faith, according to Berdyaev, is a phenomenon in the spiritual life of man, which changes the structure of consciousness. “Faith and knowledge are not opposite to each other and do not exclude each other – they indicate only different moments of a spiritual path. Faith is a revolution in the spiritual life, after which the consciousness turns to another world. The mystery of freedom is at the heart of faith. God reveals himself only to the free, there is no compulsion or necessity in His revelation. Faith is the direction of the spirit that clears the way to the object of higher knowledge. In the free act of faith, the veil that separates us from other worlds is torn. A cognitive breakthrough from the nonsense of the visible world to the meaning hidden in the invisible world is possible only through an act of faith. There is no evolutionary continuity in the levels of consciousness. The transition to higher levels of consciousness occurs through catastrophe, rebirth” (Berdyaev 2007, 174–175). A representative of modern existential theology, Howard Slatte following Berdyaev also

has written about faith, not as a denial of knowledge, but its addition (Slaatte 1968; Slaatte 1971). Slaatte also personifies the orthodox wing of modern Christianity, while emphasizing originally the existential dialectics of Berdyaev in our time.

Along with faith, Berdyaev existentially interprets the religious concepts of grace and revelation. Traditionally defining grace as the action of a religious object on a religious subject, Berdyaev clarifies, “grace is not the opposite of human freedom, it is not coercion, it is a mysterious rebirth from within freedom itself, which itself can cause evil and condemn men for eternal wandering and impassability. Religion, first, is a revelation, a revelation of the Deity. But the Deity is not only revealed, it is also hidden. There is always the inexhaustible mystery of the divine world. And we join this mystery to varying degrees. Hence, there is the inevitable difference between the esoteric and the exoteric” (Berdyaev 2007, 176).

Revelation, according to the philosopher, cannot be understood naively and realistically, although at certain levels of religious consciousness it is understood so. Revelation, in his opinion, “is a catastrophic change of consciousness, the destruction of the boundaries that compress consciousness in a limited world. Revelation is not carried out on the surface of the objective-subjective world, it occurs in the depths of the spirit, it comes from the deepest depths of existence. Revelation has a spiritual nature. It takes place in the spiritual world, and therefore it takes place not only in the human soul but also in the soul of the world, in space. That is because there is no separation and being outside consciousness in the spiritual world, which exists in the mental and physical world. Revelation presupposes not only transcendence but also immanence. The transcendent God could not be revealed to man if man did not have an inherent divine origin. He could not be revealed to a stone or a bush. But the spirit that connects man with the depths of divine life was as if removed from man and projected from outside, into the transcendent distance. The man fell away from his own spirit. He was left with only soul and body. And as a psychophysical being, he turned out to be a closed monad isolated from the spiritual life that belongs to him by birthright, by godlikeness” (Berdyaev 2007, 176–177).

4. Freedom and spirit as fundamental concepts of Berdyaev's “Existential Christianity”

The effort to deepen his philosophical knowledge subsequently led Berdyaev to the concept, or idea of objectification, which he also considered as one of the main ideas in his conception. “I do not believe in the solidity and strength of the so-called “objective” world, the world of nature and history”, wrote Berdyaev. There was no objective reality for

him, he considered it only an illusion of consciousness, claiming that there was only objectification of reality, generated by the known orientation of the spirit. "The objectified world is not the real world; it is only the state of the real true world that can be changed. An object is the product of a subject. Only the subject is existential, only in the subject, the reality is cognized" (Berdyayev 1991, 151). And in this case, Berdyayev argued that such is his position – it is not a manifestation of subjective idealism, providing for its further evaluation and classification by researchers. According to Dilthey's classification, in his opinion, this is naturalism, objective idealism and idealism of freedom, "my opinion belongs to the type of idealism of freedom. The world does exist in an objectified subject. Already, the category of being that plays such a role in the history of philosophy, starting with Greece, is a product of the objectification of thinking. Using Kant's terminology, one can say that being is a transcendental illusion. Primary living is not what it is the being (essence, "all"). Primary living is a creative act, freedom, a carrier of the primary living is the personality, subject, spirit, not "nature", not object" (Berdyayev 1991, 151).

Objectivity, according to Berdyayev, is the enslavement of the spirit, the origination of severity, disconnection and enmity of subjects, personalities, "spirits-beings". And cognition, in turn, depends on the degrees of spirituality, spiritual unity and, as we would, in this case, continues the thought of the thinker, the nature of using spiritual experience. Berdyayev considered this position extremely important for epistemology and sociology of cognition, which had received little attention before him. Science recognizes the objective world and enables man to master "nature", he claimed in his work. And the evil of objectification, that is, of necessity, alienation, impersonality, is not laid down in science and is not generated by science. The "objective" science, a person needs, reproduces the Logos in a fallen world. Objectivity or the origination of objectification is nothingness. A person cognizes from the outside the reality given to him by that which is generated by himself – by the enslavement of the subject. "“Object” does not mean to me what I cognize, the subject of cognition, but a kind of relation in the existential sphere" (Berdyayev 1991, 151).

At the same time, Berdyayev claimed that his philosophy did not belong to the ontological type, to the type of philosophy of Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Thomas Aquinas, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hegel, Schelling, Solovyov, though this did not prevent him from appreciating all these philosophers. "The most hostile," he noted, "I am to any naturalistic metaphysics that objectifies and hypostases processes of thinking, throwing them out and accepting them as "objective realities", applying to the spirit of the category of substance, naturalizing the spirit." The phenomenon of the spirit is, perhaps, the second after freedom the most important element of the "conceptual construction" of Berdyayev's

philosophy. “The spirit for me,” claimed the Russian thinker, “is freedom, creative act, personality, communication of love.” He asserted the dominant, the primacy of freedom over existence, considering certain thoughts of Duns Scott, and most of all Böhme and Kant, partly by Maine de Biran and, of course, Dostoevsky as a metaphysician, precursors to his thinking and his philosophy of freedom. “The Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, who feel orthodox,” said Berdyaev, “usually actively attacked my idea of unrealized freedom, seeing in it non-Christian dualism, Gnosticism, the restriction of the omnipotence of the Deity. But I always had the impression that I was not understood.” And he explained this, probably not only by lack of attention but also by his tendency to think antinomically, paradoxically, and irrationally, more precisely, to reduce everything in his thinking to the irrational one. “All theological and metaphysical teachings that oppose my “dualism” are, in their essence, forms of rationalism that destroy the mystery and do not correctly describe the spiritual experience, do not want to know about tragedy, contradiction, irrationality. Traditional theological and metaphysical teachings must inevitably lead to the idea of doom, which is most antipathic to me” (Berdyaev, 1991, 151).

Thus, we can agree with Bodea’s opinion that “His notion of freedom points to a continuous dialectic between theology and philosophy which seems to break the borders between them. In this sense, Berdyaev reaches a notion of spiritual freedom that is theologically relevant at an existential level. His notion of freedom is also philosophically articulated, but in an existentialist philosophical key where freedom is accounted as a fundamental reality of existence” (Bodea 2019, 307).

5. Apophatic theology versus cataphatic theology: God is freedom

Berdyaev's greatest criticism was caused by the traditional doctrine of Providence, which he regarded as “hidden pantheism in its least acceptable form.” If one assumes that the God Pantocrator is present in all evil and suffering, in war and in torture, in plague and cholera, then one cannot believe in God, and rebellion against him is justified. But God, said Berdyaev, acts in the order of freedom, not in the order of objective necessity. He works spiritually, not magically. God is the Spirit. And God’s providence can only be understood spiritually and not naturally. “God is present not in the name of God, not in magical action, not in the power of this world, but in all truth, in verity, beauty, love, freedom, heroic act” (Berdyaev 1991, 85). And for that reason, the most unacceptable thing for the thinker was the feeling and understanding of God as a certain power, as some omnipotence and power. God, according to Berdyaev, has no

power. He has less power than a police officer. The category of power and might the thinker attributed to the sociological categories, which, in his opinion, can be attributed to religion as a social rather than a spiritual phenomenon, and, in general, is a product of social suggestions. Claiming that it is impossible to apply to God the concepts that have a social origin, Berdyaev made the example of the famous Kantian distinction, not only in the sphere of logical thinking and the world but concerning the sphere of the spirit and the world. "For God and the divine life relations of dominion are intolerable. In true spiritual experience, there is no relationship between a master and a slave. And the truth here is quite apophatic in theology" (Berdyaev 1991, 85).

Instead, he regarded cataphatic theology as it was absolutely in the power of social suggestions. Purification and liberation of Christian consciousness from socio-morphism the thinker proclaimed "an important task of Christian philosophy." Theology is predominantly in the power of socio-morphism (assessing the present state of Christianity for him, Berdyaev wrote about the existence of two crises in it: the crisis of the "world of external Christianity" and the crisis within Christianity itself, claiming in the same way as once Kierkegaard wrote about it, that everything that happens in the world and makes a corresponding impression on us, first of all, has its source of change in the inner, in the spiritual world. For both Kierkegaard and Berdyaev, in assessing the historical fate and current state of Christianity, there was nothing "more sad than its fate", for the fate in which, according to the Russian thinker, "the very idea of God and the Divine Providence was distorted, the slave idea of God triumphed, and they worshiped the idol instead of God; they misunderstood the relationship between God and human freedom; the relations between Christianity and the kingdom of Caesar were poorly implemented, between church and state; judicial understanding of Christianity and redemption celebrated the humiliating for God and man" (Berdyaev, 1993 256). The crisis of the "outside Christian world" in this case was associated by the thinker with "exacerbation to the utmost limit of all contradictions," "the expectation of a world social catastrophe, which is only one strand separated from the catastrophe of religious", "socialism and anarchism, decadence, and mysticism", "disillusionment with science and the emptiness of modern philosophy", "the painful exacerbation of gender issues" – all those that, according to Berdyaev, led European culture to the limit of human self-enrichment" (Berdyaev 1997, 183), wrote the thinker, "it thinks of God in the categories of social power relations." And this is especially true of such theological concepts as the concept of God the Father, God as Creator of the world, etc. "I have always felt more strongly about God the Son, the Christ-God-man, the God of human, than God the Power, God the Creator," he asserted in his writings. "It meant that the thought of God the Father, the Creator of the world, seemed to me to be the most infected and distorted by cosmomorphism

and sociomorphism” (Berdyayev 1991, 85). In his belief, God can only be trusted if there is God the Son, the Saviour, and the Liberator, God of sacrifice and love. The atoning suffering of God the Son is not the reconciliation of God with man, but the reconciliation of man with God. Only the suffering God reconciles with the suffering of creation. Therefore, “pure monotheism” was not acceptable to Berdyayev, and it was regarded as “the last form of idolatry”. “In contrast to Schleiermacher,” Berdyayev wrote, “and many others I think that religion is not a sense of human dependence, but a sense of human independence. Man is a creature totally dependent on nature and society, on the world and the state, if there is no God. If there is a God, then man is a being spiritually independent. And the relation to God is defined not as a dependence of man, but as his freedom. God is my freedom, my dignity of spiritual being. The false doctrine of humility, however, distorted Christianity and humiliated man as a godly spiritual being” (Berdyayev 1991, 85).

In this last quote, one also understands that the Russian thinker in the anthropological dimensions of his philosophical-religious concept has an idea completely incompatible with traditional Christianity. In essence, his idea implies the denial of the expediency of the continued use of many births of socio-morphism in Christianity, such as the doctrine of the Fall, the ethical tenets of “disobedience to the faithful to the supreme power”, as disobedience to a higher power, etc. All this is regarded by Berdyayev as the inheritance of the original beliefs. And the Fall is even as a loss of will, or as a test of will. And all this, N. Berdyayev considered as “not a product of abstract thought”, but the creation of spiritual experience, acquired during his life journey. Hence his logical conclusion and confession were that “he could accept and survive Christianity only as a religion of God-manhood” (Berdyayev 1991, 85).

It is from this acceptance arises the high humanistic pathos of Berdyayev’s teaching, which he certainly introduced into Christianity of the twentieth century, the humanistic meaning of his anthropological concept, which had inevitably both existential and personalistic character.

6. Final thoughts

The analysis of philosophical (ontological, epistemological, and anthropological) principles of Berdyayev’s doctrine makes it possible to conclude that it was formed and perfected during the whole period of activity, and was conditioned, first of all, by a specific personal worldview position, by a psychological and psycho-emotional mood of the author to the cardinal resistance and absence of any compromise with the facts of injustice, enslavement, social oppression, disenfranchisement, and abstract theorizing that hides space-morphism and socio-morphism of

traditional Christianity behind the rationalist pseudoscientific philosophical theories of cognition and cataphatic theology. This mood subsequently contributed to the peculiar feeling and perception of Christianity by Berdyaev, which took place outside theoretical theological influence only in a personal way. His attitude toward Christianity began to take shape as the spiritual-internal, and inherently free from the established understanding of traditional Christian dogma, as “the primary internal spiritual revelation in the spirit of the emergence of Christ-God-manhood”.

The rejection of cataphatic theology as that which is “in the power of social impulses”, considering God in the categories of social relations of domination was carried out by Berdyaev because of his belief that the representatives of this theology provoke “the distorted experience of believers of the ideas of God and God's “Providence”, affirm the triumph of the slave idea of God, the domination of idols; misunderstanding of the relationship between God and human freedom; the anti-human organization of relations between Christianity and the kingdom of Caesar, between church and state; the domination of humiliating “judicial understanding of Christianity and redemption” for God and man.

Trying to overcome such a situation, and “pushing away” from the philosophy by Kant as a kind of model of religious-philosophical Protestantism, Berdyaev “came” to creating his own kind of “theory of knowledge”, a kind of ontology and anthropology which were based on: the resistance of rationalism, the denial of being able to express being in the concept, the disregard for the rationality of being itself, the irrational, synthetic and intuitive “grasping of reality” through thinking that exists outside the rationalist discourse and is grounded on the spiritual experience (“the holistic life of the spirit”), the de-objectification of the process of cognition and reality, freedom and creativity as the main priorities of the subject of cognition and self-realization of the human being in real life.

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