

## BERDYAEV'S METAPHYSICS OF FREEDOM

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One of the most important problems for Berdyaev was the problem of theodicy: how can the existence of evil be reconciled with the existence of an omnipotent and loving God? In Berdyaev's attempt to explain the problem, the pre-eminent position is ascribed to freedom, considered to be the greatest good (FS 160),<sup>1</sup> and as such, it is the center of all Berdyaev's philosophy.

### 1 God

Drawing heavily from German mystics, Berdyaev claims that everything started with the Divine Nothing, the Absolute. The Absolute cannot create because it is perfect, self-sufficient. Creation, on the other hand, is movement in God (DM 29). Therefore, from the Divine Nothing (Master Eckhart's Gottheit, Jacob Boehme's Ungrund) the Trinity, God the Creator, is born. Freedom is also

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<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations of Berdyaev's works will be used:

BE – *The beginning and the end*, New York: Harper & Row 1957.

DH – *The divine and the human*, London: Bles 1949.

DM – *The destiny of man*, New York: Harper & Row 1960.

DR – *Dream and reality; an essay in autobiography*, New York: Macmillan 1951.

FiSv – *Философия свободы*, in Н. Бердяев, *Судьба России*, Москва: ЭКСМО-Пресс 2000, 27-264.

FS – *Freedom and the spirit*, London: Bles 1948.

MCA – *The meaning of the creative act*, New York: Collier Books 1962.

RSRC – *The realm of spirit and the realm of Caesar*, New York: Harper 1952 [reprint, Westport: Greenwood Press 1975].

SF – *Slavery and freedom*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1944.

SR – *Spirit and reality*, London: Bles 1946.

SS – *Solitude and society*, London: Bles 1947.

TR – *Truth and revelation*, New York: Collier Books 1962.

rooted in the Nothing, in the Ungrund, which is primal and without beginning. Also, God created the world out of nothing (SR 127; FS 194; BE 106).

God and freedom are then two different entities. On the one hand, the difference between God the Creator and freedom is secondary – in the primal mystery, in the Divine Nothing, this difference is abolished since God reveals Himself from the Ungrund, and from the Ungrund also freedom reveals itself. On the other hand, freedom is independent of God. “God the Creator is all-powerful over being, over the created world, but He has no power over nonbeing, over the uncreated freedom which is impenetrable to Him” (DM 25; FS 160). In this way, God is not responsible for evil in the world because it is freedom that brings evil. Freedom consented to God’s creative act; nonbeing freely consented to being. But from here came the fall from God’s work, evil and pain appeared, and being mixed with nonbeing. This is a tragedy for the world and for God (DM 25).

First, it is the problem of the primal nothingness. It truly requires great faith to see that God not only created the world out of nothing, but God Himself also originates from nothingness. However, Berdyaev’s nothingness is not true nothingness. It is something, an entity that exceeds conceptual grasp, that is beyond being, but, still, is something rather rich in content if it can generate a God who creates the universe. Boehme also called the Ungrund the nothing (Nichts), but it is the nothing which is a desire (Sucht) for something (SR 130; BE 110). Outside the world there is nothingness, an ungrounded eye of eternity, the eye which also is the will, the longing (Sehnen) for revelation, the hunger (Hunger) for something, i.e., the Ungrund (BE 106). Boehme’s Nichts does not signify true nothingness, explains Berdyaev. It only signifies the fact that it is prior to being, that being is secondary (BE 108). Nothingness of the primal nothingness is not pure nothingness. It is nothingness because it cannot be expressed by concepts and grasped rationally; it is beyond philosophical categories of being and existence, but pure nothingness it is not. It is the prime, preexisting source of all and in that sense it certainly is something. Master Eckhart, who distinguishes Gottheit from Gott and roots God in Gottheit, also states in passing that God is nothingness and, at the same time, God understands and is the source of everything (*Sermon 23* (Quint)). Could pure nothingness understand and also be a source of all things? He also asserts that God’s being is like nothing: in it there is no image or form (*Sermon 6*; see also MCA 280-282); again, this cannot be taken to mean that God is pure nothingness. Rather, God is beyond human description. God is not literal nothingness in His reality. He is nothingness with regard to our reality and our cognitive abilities. Interestingly, in the opening sentence of *The divine and the human*, Berdyaev distances himself from Max Stirner’s statement that he, Stirner, bases his case on nothingness. Berdyaev explains that he, Berdyaev, bases his own

case on freedom, which is nothing. However, it is nothing only in the sense of a reality in the natural world (DH v). It does not appear to be pure nothingness in the supranatural world. Therefore, “to start from freedom of the spirit does not mean to start from vacuity, from nothing” (SF 11).

Deficiency of a human way of expressing the primal entity aside, it is clear that in Berdyaev’s universe, God is a secondary entity, engendered by something that precedes Him; that God has a source in the primal abyss, not unlike in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. God is still nonbeing, or above being, but not the only entity. The Divine Nothing engenders (not “creates” – only beings are created) another nonbeing also, namely freedom. This uncreated freedom is not divine (DM 34), which certainly distinguishes freedom from God. This metaphysical arrangement makes God a free agent, free to act – or not act, free to create the world of a freely chosen order. However, if God’s freedom depends on Freedom independent of Him, how does it make Him free? Freedom comes to God from the outside; it is an external ability and without it, God would act purely by necessity, in a predetermined fashion. Berdyaev’s God is thus not free. He happens to be free because the Divine Nothing set freedom as a resource from which God can draw, but by Himself and in Himself God is not free. His freedom is a gift of a higher power, the nothingness.

What is the nature of this freedom? It is an irrational entity that precedes being and so its nature cannot be conceptually described. Its nature can be rendered at least with the aid of analogies. Chance, Berdyaev says, is something irrational, unexplainable by any law (SR 95). Therefore, chance is much more connected with freedom than with the laws of nature (SS 113). Even in the natural world, claims Berdyaev, priority is given to chance since science leans toward statistical laws and recognizes the role of chance. Fate is determined by chance events, not by laws of nature (SS 110). The best picture of freedom is rendered by chance, randomness, a completely undetermined event. Computer science uses the concept of the random number generator. Berdyaev could state that freedom is the random thought generator; that true freedom lies in having an idea that has no connection with any preceding idea, is completely new and original, emerging from nothingness. To be truly free, a creative subject should attach itself to freedom and wait for freedom to submit to it some idea or configuration of ideas for actualization. In this, the subject becomes dependent on freedom, and to become truly free, the subject should not rely upon itself. Only when creating something by using the ideas of other subjects, or ideas from its own memory, or ideas stemming from what is perceived in nature – the subject becomes enslaved. The subject, by this logic, is free when enslaved by the outside freedom.

The subject of subjects is God Himself. When creating the world, God should rely on freedom. God's action should be determined by freedom over which God has no control. And what world does God create? This is up to what freedom randomly submits. When God says, "and it was good," did He simply agree on what He received from freedom to actualize? If acting freely is to be the most important attribute of God, God should create what is randomly generated. Berdyaev's world, then, is a chance creation which by incredible luck is what it is. It could have been much worse.

The situation does not change by much when Berdyaev calls on imagination. According to him, the faculty of imagination is the source of all creativity. "God created the world through imagination." His imagination has an absolute ontological power (DM 75). God created the world through images that emerged in God in eternity and which are at the same time their actualization (DM 143). Imagination emerges from the bosom of the unconscious, from the bottomless freedom (DM 75). For God, to imagine is to create. But what does God, and any spiritual subject, for that matter, imagine? If images truly arise in God, they have nothing to do with freedom as understood by Berdyaev, and thus creation is dictated purely by God's own nature, which apparently does not include freedom. Otherwise, if they originate outside of God and are submitted to Him, then God is at the mercy of the unconscious, of the abyss of freedom. If there is an image of the world to be created, the image stems from this abyss. God merely serves here as an empowering conduit of the indeterminacy, of the irrationality of freedom. What freedom propels to God's mind, is actualized, becomes reality. In the Platonic universe, the demiurge molded preexisting matter according to the models drawn from the eternal world of ideas. For Neoplatonists and Christian theologians, the world of ideas is inserted in the mind of God, the external world of paradigms is divinely internalized. In Berdyaev, the world of ideas is abolished altogether. God does not have any models. God actualizes what is injected into His mind by irrational freedom. If it happens to be an image of the best of all possible worlds, so much the better for the world. However, freedom, being truly undetermined, could infuse into God's imagination a hellish world, and God's role would be limited to creating it. It just happened that the image of the world freedom submitted to God's imagination was not too bad.

Berdyaev admits that "imagination may also be a source of evil; there can be bad [evil] imagination and phantasms" (DM 143; BE 175). Bad imagination became a fate of most of humans, and only a few at the moment of ecstasy can overcome it. Freedom submits bad, outright evil, images and thoughts, and people, directed by them, populate the world with evil results. It was just a lucky accident that God in His freedom created a good world. The world could have been

evil from its very inception. But because spiritual subjects rely on undetermined freedom, the world was doomed to become evil, it was impossible that freedom always inspired positively. The fate of the world was sealed; by its nature, freedom necessitated the fall.

## 2 Two freedoms

Does God really rely on irrational freedom alone? Or is God's freedom different than the irrational freedom?

If only existence of irrational freedom is assumed, then it appears that freedom, the most important good, is imparted on God from the outside. Strictly speaking, Berdyaev's God is not free because freedom is not God's; it stems from another entity, namely freedom. God's acts are free because of His reliance on freedom, but to act freely, God must rely on freedom, to act freely, it is necessary for God to use resources of Freedom. Berdyaev once wrote that the freedom of an unbelieving philosopher is his slavery (SS 10). In Berdyaev's universe, every spirit is a slave of freedom, which is not its own but stems from the depth of freedom. And the Creator of the universe is included in that number.

However, according to Berdyaev, there are two kinds of freedom, irrational freedom and reasonable (разумная) freedom.<sup>2</sup> Berdyaev mentions these two kinds in the context of discussion of the freedom of man.<sup>3</sup> Irrational freedom is an initial freedom that allows man to choose God's truth and goodness truly freely. It is freedom in relation to God, freedom in the acceptance of God (FS 127, 128). The second freedom is the final freedom, a goal, freedom in the truth and by the truth that has its source in God, divine freedom, freedom in God. This kind of freedom is the freedom of God (FS 125-128). From the first kind of freedom man hopefully reaches the second freedom. However, the first freedom may lead to evil; the second freedom inevitably leads to evil, at least within the confines of our world; it is a necessary freedom, freedom in necessity and from necessity (FS 134).

And God Himself? Berdyaev says that if the world and man were not needed by God, they would simply be chance events and, as such, devoid of any meaning (DH 47). The idea of the creation of the world is absurd and meaningless when the creation of the world and man would be a chance event serving no purpose to God (BE 159). Even Berdyaev's God does not rely only on His freedom. God

<sup>2</sup> The rational (рациональная) freedom is pronounced to be "an illusion of an abstract, self-sufficient thought," (FiSv 38) even though, linguistically, *ratio* = разум.

<sup>3</sup> FS 125; N. Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, New York: Meridian Books 1957, 68.

creates the world for a purpose, the act of creation is saturated with meaning. It could be stated that the purpose is also randomly generated, but this would not add anything new to the original possibility of creation as a purely random act; also, in that way, purpose would be freedom's, not God's. Even granted that ideas are submitted to God randomly, they are filtered through God's purpose, through God's idea of what the world should be, freedom "must be enlightened and transfigured by the divine light, the Logos" (DM 297). "Spirit is freedom, but freedom is fused with the Logos, illumined freedom assuring the triumph of purpose" (SR 115). In this way, Berdyaev's God would become determined by His vision, by Logos, which exists in Him independently of freedom, thereby curbing the latter's significance and influence.

It seems that Berdyaev implicitly tries to combine in God the two kinds of freedom – irrational and reasonable – although it is unclear why such freedoms should coexist, one outside God and one being immanent, and how such coexistence could be peacefully accomplished. Would not irrational freedom frequently clash with the reasonable freedom in God? If so, which would prevail? Presumably the latter, and if so, what would the metaphysical role of the former be? Because Berdyaev allows for movement in God, for God's development, it may well be that irrational freedom is a starting point and somehow the second freedom develops, but Berdyaev gives no indication whether such a possibility should even be considered in his theology.

God's creation is good and beautiful not because of a reliance of His freedom but because God is goodness and beauty. This goodness and beauty determine what the creation is. God creates freely, but not at all randomly. Freedom works in God in conjunction with goodness and beauty, or rather because God is goodness and beauty. That much even Berdyaev himself admits, which leads him to a startling statement that "freedom and the necessity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, are identified in Him" (FS 149), although he decries "Hegel's universal determinism in which freedom and necessity are identified" (BE 34). This effectively voids Berdyaev's desire to make freedom unconditional and brings him very close to the traditional theology.

Freedom should be considered God's own attribute that is also imparted on His creation. The fact that this freedom comes from God Himself does not make God any more responsible for the sins of His creation than it is in Berdyaev's universe. Also, it is more natural to say that freedom and necessity are identified in God, paradoxical as it sounds, when freedom is in God, not something from the outside. It may very well be that Berdyaev was not altogether reluctant to accept such a traditional theological solution since he repeatedly states that God is freedom: "God is freedom and he desires freedom" (BE 214); "God is freedom;

He is the liberator and not the master" (SF 82, 89; DR 177); God is Spirit, God is Freedom and Love (DH 7); "God is freedom, and not necessity, not authority over man and the world," not a supreme cause active in the world (RSRC 41); God is Spirit and the fundamental attribute of the Spirit is freedom, i.e., freedom is rooted in Spirit (RSRC 42).<sup>4</sup> God is freedom, i.e., freedom is God's attribute, and all freedom is rooted in God as its source; even more forcefully, "spirit is freedom and freedom is spirit,"<sup>5</sup> that is, spirit is simply identified with freedom.<sup>6</sup> In this way, there is a constant tension in the way Berdyaev treats God's freedom, as already mentioned, as both irrational freedom and reasonable freedom are applied to God, the former explicitly, the latter implicitly, and even side by side. In one paragraph we read that God created the world out of nothing, but it also can be said, out of freedom; "creation must be grounded on that limitless freedom" that existed in the nothing before the world was created, and in the very next paragraph Berdyaev states that in the beginning was Logos, but in the beginning was also freedom. Freedom is not opposed to the Logos because without freedom there is no Logos, no meaning of the world. Without darkness there is no light (FS 165-166). At the beginning, "the Logos was in freedom and freedom was in the Logos. That, however, is only one of the aspects of freedom. It has another aspect, one in which freedom is entirely external to the Logos and a clash between the Logos and Freedom takes place" (BE 105). Berdyaev at least indicates the existence of this clash – between irrational freedom and reasonable freedom – if only in passing, but does not really address the problem of reconciling this clash.

### 3 The fall

God created man in His image and likeness by making him a creator. But creativity is by nature creating out of nothing. Man, unlike God, needs matter for his creativity (DM 32). Yet the world God created was not the material world but the world of the spirit. Matter is the result of man's fall. That is, in paradise, which was a spiritual, immaterial place, man could not create. God created man in His image to be a creator, but this image was at best potential and could be actualized

<sup>4</sup> The statement, "God is freedom, not a cause" is not in SR 419, although it is in the Russian original.

<sup>5</sup> DR 56; N. Berdyaev, *The fate of man in the modern world*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1961, 48.

<sup>6</sup> The statement that Spirit is freedom (sometimes just: spirit is freedom) appears even more often in Berdyaev's writings than "God is freedom." At least once he points out that that may be just a *modus loquendi* when he says, that spirit is freedom, but freedom plunges into the depth of what was before being (SR 34).

only after the fall. To be truly like God, man needed to fall into sin. Berdyaev himself suggests that the paradisiacal condition of man was not quite complete and enviable since "ignorance was the condition of the life" in paradise. Man even lacked consciousness (DM 36) since consciousness presupposes the subject-object relation (DM 12) and there were no objects before the fall, only subjects. So man rejected paradise and chose the pain and tragedy of the world in order to experience his fate until the end, to the depth. Man preferred the bitterness of differentiation and death over the innocence and ignorance of paradisiacal life. And so emerged consciousness (DM 36). The picture Berdyaev presents shows Adam as an unconscious ignoramus living contentedly in paradise; but in spite of his lack of consciousness and knowledge, he is stirred by desire to probe his fate to the depth by choosing the bitterness of knowledge over the comfort and security of his current life. And instead of being commended by God for this striving for knowledge, he is expelled from the paradise.

Let's observe that when taking the biblical account at face value, Adam was not an ignoramus; he communicated with God and was able to name all animals. He was lacking knowledge of good and evil, not knowledge *tout court*. He was prevented from knowing good and evil and had to rely entirely on moral instinct (paradise is a kingdom of instinct, says Berdyaev, DM 38) and this was a commandment he violated. He was not an ignoramus and hardly devoid of consciousness. Even in Berdyaev's primal universe, where the subject and the object are blended together, man could be conscious of himself. Berdyaev himself defines consciousness as "an intuitive act of the human ego with regard to itself"; consciousness, which is different than knowledge, is the unity of the ego and its distinction from non-ego (DM 69).

By creating inferior humans, God made the fall inevitable if the fall was indeed an avenue for man to become like God – truly creative, truly in His image and likeness. God really did not create man in His image and likeness. He created a creature that could become His image after falling into sin. Not surprisingly, in Berdyaev's view, the myth of the fall elevates man and is a myth of man's greatness (DM 40); that is, the fall is something positive, something welcome. In this way, the fall is a good thing and its consequences are not really God's punishment for sin, but a way open for the development and spiritual ascendance of man. We must admit that "evil possesses a positive meaning" (FS 186). Freedom of evil is good and without freedom of evil there would be no freedom of the good, i.e., there would be no good (DM 41, 297; BE 247). Had there been no evil, Christ would not have come to earth and "the Love of heaven would not have been revealed." The good that conquers evil is greater than the good that existed before evil appeared (FS 185). In order to bring this greater good, the fall must

have occurred. The good is appreciated and valued when evil is tasted. The emptiness of evil must be experienced, its nonbeing must be unmasked (FS 184). In this way, the fall becomes a necessity, the freedom underlying the emergence of evil has a necessary result. Freedom constrains itself by allowing for evil. Truly, it is erroneous and damaging to create a halo for evil (FS 181).

The fall is only explainable by the uncreated freedom, states Berdyaev categorically, not by man's rebellion (DM 54). But if paradise is a kingdom of instincts, how could this freedom intervene? Man was an unreflective being, and instincts, by their nature, are the unreflective origins for exercising an action. Instincts are compulsive means of arriving at a decision. They are forces that induce an action, leaving no choice. The instinctive action by itself is not free. Man in paradise could not choose knowledge over ignorance since choosing implies reflection, evaluation. Therefore, man in paradise was not really free, and if he chose knowledge over ignorance, it was because it was done under a compulsion of an instinct that pushes an unconscious man toward knowledge. And it cannot be otherwise because man knows nothing about knowledge; man knows nothing about anything, for that matter. Therefore, the impulse to sin – to have chosen knowledge – was an instinctive, compulsive choice that had nothing to do with freedom. Man, in Berdyaev's universe, could become free because he was drawn by the necessity of his instincts. In this view, Berdyaev stands on the side of Marxists, for whom there is a jump from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom, an idea that Berdyaev derides.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4 A creative act

Man is God's image in his ability to create, in his ability to exercise his freedom. However, is creativity truly unencumbered? There are three components involved in human creativity: freedom, talent (ingeniousness, daemon), and matter (DM 127). First, there is a primary creative intuition, the creative plan of the artist (DM 128), inner knowledge. And then there comes actualization in matter. That is, if freedom is beyond good and evil, then the result of creation can be a masterpiece of goodness and beauty just as much as a masterwork of ugliness and evil. There are no guarantees, since the smallest measure of guarantee would limit freedom. And freedom must not be limited. "The freedom of the spirit knows nothing of guarantees" (BE 46). Creativity would give just as desired as undesired results. If creativity is based on freedom, then everything should be expected, but everything is not good, everything is not agreeable. However, Berdyaev avoids

<sup>7</sup> Н. Бердяев, *Философия неравенства*, in his *Судьба России*, Москва: ЭКСМО-Пресс 2000, 507, 653; МСА 264; RSRC 130, 137.

this problem of the unpalatable results of the creative process simply by definition.

The creative act, he says, always calls upon the image of something different, imagines something higher, better, and more beautiful than what is given. This emergence of "the image of something different, something better and more beautiful, is a mysterious power in man and it cannot be explained by the action of the world environment" (BE 174; DM 136, 142). All creativity is love (DM 141). By definition, then, the creative act is positive, not negative; by definition creativity guarantees that the result should be good and beautiful. That is, in spite of the statement to the contrary, there are guarantees in the world of freedom, in the world of nonbeing. Free action is always good, creative action always results in welcome results. The sphere of freedom is beyond good and evil and yet it guarantees that free actions are better than anything that can be found in our empirical world.

Berdyaev sees the possibility of an evil outcome of a creative act, the possibility of misusing the gift of creativity. This possibility stems from the fact that in the moment of creative rapture, man feels that he is possessed by a higher power, a daemon, and at the same time, he has a feeling of extraordinary freedom (BE 178). If Berdyaev means here only a daemon in the Greek sense (BE 177), like Socrates' inner guide (DM 127), then this is no explanation at all because, presumably, such a daemon is a beneficial entity. However, the statement may be taken to mean that man is never responsible for evil done through his creative actions since he is under the malevolent influence of demonic power,<sup>8</sup> which led to the misuse of otherwise beneficial results of creative acts. Man's creative action is good, but demonic powers force him to do evil with it. Such explanation would make man free of any responsibility for any evil deeds, which even Berdyaev would hardly accept, but it shifts the philosophical problem of the evil stemming from freedom to the demonic level instead of resolving it. How is it that the demonic powers force man to do evil? Are they spiritual and thus free beings as well, are they also free agents, how can their freedom lead to evil? Berdyaev is silent on the issue.

### 5 The world

God creates the world, says Berdyaev, but what is this world? The answer is encapsulated in his statement that "the subject is created by God," whereas the

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the mention of the evil demonic will to power, BE 221, and the possibility of deliverance from the hierarchy of cosmic spirits and demons, BE 242.

object is created by the subject. "The subject is noumenon, the object is phenomenon" (DR 98; BE 17; SR 13). Spirit is revealed in the subject, not in the object. Object is a product of the subject, of objectification. Subject is God's creation and thus it has primal existence (SR 10). "Subject does not create the world, but he is called upon to create in the world" (SR 13).

There is a distinction between the subject and the object. The spirit cannot be conceptually defined, but it is possible to grasp its attributes, which are freedom, meaning, creative activity, integrity, love, value, and an orientation toward the higher, divine world and union with it. "Through spirit man becomes a divine image and likeness. Spirit is the divine element in man" (SR 33). Spirit is from God and is directed toward God. It is not really created, but it emanates from God (SR 34). Freedom, creativity, and evil presuppose both being and nonbeing. But this nonbeing cannot become an object of thinking. We cannot say that nonbeing is or exists (SR 34). We can only say that it has existential significance. Logos belongs to spirit; it infuses everything with meaning. But the spirit is irrational (SR 34). Spirit can be embodied and symbolized, but it cannot become objective (SR 38).

On the other hand, there is the object, which does not belong to the spiritual world. The object is the result of objectification, and the latter is the result of the fall, of sin. "The fall could not have taken place in the natural world because this world itself is the result of the fall. The fall is an event in the spiritual world and in this sense it is anterior to the world" (FS 22). Space, time, and matter "are simply the result of the fall and of separation from God" (FS 17). The natural world of our daily life, the world with which science deals, is the objectified world, the world not created by God but by the fallen spirits created by Him. The material world was created by created spirits; the world is a second-hand creation and a side-effect of sin, and thus an ill-creation. The created spirits misused their freedom and turned their back to God, which resulted in the natural world we see today. A bad tree bears bad fruit, thus by its origin, the world is not good. The world is outright evil, and the desire of the world itself is for salvation, salvation that can come only from God Himself.

Not only are time, space, matter, and objectified spirits in the form of objects the result of the fall, not only is the natural world understood as a collection of objects, but so are natural laws, the order that exists in physical world. Berdyaev claims that God did not create any world order. He created only personalities (SF 81, 88). The world order is a product of objectification (SF 87) and so "it is a false aestheticism which sees a world harmony" (SF 88). "There are no laws of the whole, no laws of the cosmos." And the law of gravity is not a cosmic law; "it is partial and relates to the partial" (SF 99), although, incongruously, Berdyaev also

allows for this law to be an immutable truth, generally valid, unavoidable for the natural world (FiSv 73).

A mechanism of objectification is impossible to fathom. Did the entire universe with all its galaxies materialize at the moment of sin? Why would sin lead to the emergence of objects in distant corners of the universe? The laws of nature are also the result of the fall; but why such laws and not others? Why are the laws of gravity, of electromagnetism, hydrodynamics, etc. the way they are? How could such laws, which hold not only in the solar system but also in distant galaxies, result from sin? Man in paradise was an unconscious simpleton, and when he opted for self-assurance and separation from God, it is difficult to see how this man thought out the world that resulted from his sin, or that any world would result at all. From where, then, did a ready-made universe spring when sin occurred? From freedom, randomly generated and yet strangely harmonious? We can easily agree with the statement that "constitutive for the object is primarily the transcendental will of the subject,"<sup>9</sup> but this offers little insight into why the world exists at all and why it is what it is. When a claim is made that "objectification is literally what the terms implies – the mental creation of an object,"<sup>10</sup> we may ask, whose mind is meant as the origin of creation? According to Berdyaev, God did not have anything to do with the creation of the natural world, but it is hard to imagine that there would be the orderliness we observe without His participation in creating the fallen world. And Berdyaev states that, after all, God did create the world (SS 33; FS 165; BE 174) even that He created nature (RSRC 50).

The contradiction between God's creating and not creating the world may be somewhat eased by the reference to the distinction between the world and the cosmos. Very often the two terms are used interchangeably. However, sometimes, Berdyaev distinguishes between them when he writes that the world "is not the same as divine creation, the cosmos" (FS 42), that the world is servitude and should be distinguished from the cosmos (SF 95), that "there is no cosmos in the object world of phenomena" (BE 40). It appears that the spiritual world created by God was the cosmos, i.e., the ordered and harmonious world. After the fall, the cosmos turned, through objectification, into the world, into our world. However, there are physical laws in the world that can be considered absent from the cosmos, from the spiritual world. What would be the relevance of the law of gravity in the spiritual world? The law would at best be redundant but also incongru-

<sup>9</sup> Roman Rössler, *Das Weltbild Nikolai Berdjajews*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1956, 129, 134.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev: captive of freedom*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1950, 192.

ous with the cosmos and thus marring the harmony of the cosmos. Therefore, it may be surmised that the order of the world, the fallen world, is original, newly established along with the fall. And that is where God intervened by creating this order, by creating natural laws and establishing a measure of harmony in the world. This is not the world God wanted, this is not the order He originally intended, but, nevertheless, the order is His work. In this, we could use as the analogy God's opposition to having a king in Israel and yet sending Samuel to anoint Saul and then David for the royal post when the people of Israel insisted upon a king, in spite of God's wishes. If somehow objects emerged after the fall, they could have been organized by the laws created by God. This would make Berdyaev's theodicy more difficult because a case could be made that the laws could have been so created that sin could not have abounded as it did and continues to do. So, it hardly seems that "man reconfigured the world [= the cosmos] created by God in that he changed the divine order into 'natural'" through the fall.<sup>11</sup> It is hardly imaginable how such a reconfiguration could be accomplished by unconscious subjects devoid of knowledge.

## 6 Humans and nonhumans

It is clear, then, that for Berdyaev, there are two worlds, the world of the spirit and the natural world of phenomena, which is an objectified world. The former is the true and authentic world, the latter is inauthentic, secondary, a distorted image of the spiritual world. The natural world has a symbolic character; it is full of signs of another world, a symptom of division and alienation in the spiritual world. The objective world is the fallen world (BE 59). Everything material is a symbol of the spiritual, "anything in this world is merely the symbol of another world" (SR 64). "Matter itself is only the symbolization of the inner states of the spiritual world, that is, of its hatred and its divisibility, and not a substance existing by itself" (FS 18). The world, at best can be treated as a symbol of the spiritual world. But it is not always clear what symbolizes what, if anything. Man is spirit, soul, and body, spirit being in the spiritual world, soul and body – in the natural world. Different corporeal events in the life of a man symbolize acts of the spirit. But what about the world of plants and inanimate nature, what do they symbolize? A spiritual life of animals and plants? Berdyaev says that an animal with the attribute of beauty, mind,<sup>12</sup> tenderness, and charm has clear individuality. This is not a personality in the human sense, but, still, a second level personality (DH

<sup>11</sup> As suggested by Rössler, *op. cit.*, 134.

<sup>12</sup> The integral mind of man is spirit, says Berdyaev (SR 18). Would that not mean that the mind of an animal is also a spirit?

151) in which personality involves spiritual life, the level of the spirit. He also says that all living beings suffer pain, perhaps even plants (SF 28). Would plants have, say, a third level personality? They could even be second level personalities with their spiritual life numbed to a greater extent than in the case of animals, all of it being the result of the fall. And the inanimate world? We read that “the entire nature is an organic hierarchy of living beings. Everything, everything, stones and pieces of earth are living entities” (FiSv 155). Also, nature is an organic hierarchy of living beings. Materiality is just embodiment, objectification of living beings, of spirits of different hierarchical levels (MCA 68). And although Berdyaev says that God *could* not “reveal Himself to a piece of stone or a tree,” he also adds: “but no, even a stone or a tree reacts in an elementary way to the action of higher forces” (DH 3).<sup>13</sup> Almost certainly, a physical type of reaction is not meant here. This all would indicate that the spiritual world God created was populated not only with angelic and human spirits, but also with the lesser spirits of animals, plants, and elements of inanimate nature. The spirits of nonhumans can be simply lesser, but they could have been affected by the fall more than the other spirits and thus they appear to be on a lower level in this world: endowed with life only, as plants, or devoid of life altogether, as stones. In this, Berdyaev’s original world is very similar to what Solovyov envisioned.

The spirituality of nonhumans is stated, more or less explicitly, many times by Berdyaev. Spiritual unity between people occurs through the communion of subjects, the ego and the thou. Society is a connection of people, more or less permanent and stable, in the fallen objectified world (SS 136). There are different levels of connection, but it can never become communion. Communion of the ego and the thou becomes the we. Communion of the ego and an object becomes the it – in family, society, etc. (SS 139). A dog can become the thou for the ego. Something new can be discovered here. A change of relations of man to man, man to God, man to an animal or a flower, is always an activity, a greater activity than in industry. Interpenetration of the ego and the thou takes place in God (SS 141). So, communion is not limited to humans. It is possible to have communion with the animate world, even with plants and minerals, which have their own inner existence. Friendship is possible with nature, with the ocean, with a mountain, with a forest, with a field, with a river. Such was the case with St. Francis. Such is man’s friendship with a dog. Man meets here not an object, but a subject (SS 84).

<sup>13</sup> He says that God *cannot* reveal himself to impenetrable matter or to a stone because revelation is a bilateral process (FS 94). However, he also states that revelation is not something falling on man from the outside with man being passive. In such a case, man should be considered like a piece of stone or tree. A piece of stone or tree cannot truly receive revelation, but even in them we should assume some kind of reaction proper to their nature (TR 49-50).

If the spiritual character of animals, plants, mountains, etc. is recognized, it should not be surprising that in the new world – the world renewed by God – plants, animals, etc. can also be expected.

Berdyaev strongly expresses his personal desire for the inclusion of animals in eternal life (DR 28), and he cannot imagine the Kingdom of God without his beloved cat. He may even direct his spiritual power to resurrect his beloved tree (DH 151). As he states it, salvation consists of the union of man with man and man with the cosmos through the union with God. Crucifixion will continue in the world until general salvation, illumination and transformation of all of humankind and all of cosmos is accomplished. If that cannot be accomplished in our world zone, it will be accomplished in new world zones. Individual salvation is connected with the salvation and transformation of animals, plants, minerals and each blade of grass, with bringing them to the Kingdom of God. And all of it depends on individual creative efforts (DM 294). “We ought to make superhuman efforts to secure that those whom we love – not only people but animals too – should inherit eternal life” (DH 164).<sup>14</sup> However, it is not quite clear what should be the nature of this superhuman effort. It should be a creative effort, but what this creation should be? Berdyaev states that man feeds and spiritualizes nature through his creative freedom, but he hastens to add that this freedom also causes nature’s deadness (MCA 68). Pure freedom is no cure. Whatever it is, in this process man should give the stone back its soul, reveal the living essence of the stone (MCA 69-70). This process eventually enables the entire animate and inanimate cosmos to inherit the Kingdom of God in which the spiritual dimension of the cosmos and everything in it will be restored.

However, the coming Kingdom is the spiritual realm, there is no room for objectification in it, no room for objects, for material entities. What about the body of men – and not only men? Berdyaev insists that materiality and corporeality are different things. The other world is also corporeal in the sense of eternal form, eternal countenances, and the eternal expression of countenances. “The quality of the body depends upon the state of spirit and soul. Spirit-soul creates its own body.” In resurrection, there takes place disembodiment (развоплощение) and transformation (трансевоплощение) not only of man but of the entire world. “The process can be experienced as death, but this death is not final” (BE 242). There is room in the spiritual world for the body, but what is the nature of this new body?

<sup>14</sup> In one place, such effort is not even mentioned; only the certainty that all individual existences in nature, including animals and plants, will inherit eternity is expressed (SF 88).

Man is spirit, soul, and body; a spiritual being filled with spiritual energy and psychic and corporeal substance. This means that the soul and body can enter the higher, spiritual existence. The human body can be spiritualized (SR 11). The form of the body belongs to spiritual personality (BE 104). "The form of the body is certainly not matter, it is certainly not a phenomenon of the physical world." It is not only of psychic nature, but also spiritual (SF 31). The human body understood as the form of the body inherits eternity, since that "the form of the body is indissolubly linked with the image of human personality does not mean an indissoluble link with the material of the body," which by nature is mortal. After all, "the resurrection of the body is the resurrection of the spiritual body" (DH 165). The body should not be identified with matter. The human body is primarily the form, not matter. The form of the body is not determined by material makeup. The beauty of the body is in its form, not matter; the form inherits eternal life (DR 175). By referring to Aristotelian categories, Berdyaev saves the spiritual dimension of the body. The renewed body is simply the existing body minus matter. Presumably, there will be a similar process with everything else in the cosmos. There will be animals, plants, etc. restored in bodily form, i.e., as forms devoid of matter. It is unclear, however, how form, whose spatial aspect is so very important in the material world, can exist beyond space. Its spatial aspect has to be removed. Probably, because the spiritual world is beyond all rational categories, we should not probe into the way the pure corporeal forms are going to exist. This will be beyond spatial and temporal realm; therefore, forms of the body can be considered bodies – renewed, resurrected, spiritual bodies.

Berdyaev says that "immortality can only be integral; it can only be the immortality of a whole personality" in which the spirit controls the soul and the body. In fact, personality is the only thing that is immortal (SF 54). The entire human person must be immortal – or none of it. The body survives as its own form. But the soul? Berdyaev is not quite consistent here. On the one hand he dogmatically states, in which he follows Origen, that the preexistence of the soul is an absolute metaphysical truth (MCA 120; BE 240; DM 61). On the other hand, he says that the soul is always fragmentary (SR 39) and that the soul is of a natural order just as much as the body (FS 7). Quite obviously, Berdyaev means here two different states of the soul, natural and supranatural. The two states differ, although Berdyaev gives little guidance in where the difference lies. He mentions approvingly a statement by one Karl Carus that "the soul is found not in the brain, but in the form" (SF 31; DR 175-176). The form again. It seems, therefore, that if the soul does not have its own form, it is somehow fused to the form of the body that makes it eternal.

A man appears to be a trinity of the spirit, soul, and body, existing from eternity and existing in the renewed state after the dissipation of the natural world. The natural world is the result of the fall, of sin of the separation from God that led to breaking the unity of the spirit, soul, and body in human personality. The latter two became alienated by an act of objectification in which the form of the soul and of the body became forms of physical entities. This was possible by the emergence of the matter that filled the corporeal form of each entity in the world, not only of humans, but also animals, plants, etc. The physicality, the materiality of the world is its scourge, a disastrous aspect of the world which was somehow generated by sin. Human efforts should now direct themselves toward bringing closer the end of this physical world, although the final act is God's, not human's. The physical world is a nightmarish transitory state between two spiritual worlds, between paradisiacal imperfect bliss – the bliss of the unconscious ignorant – to the world of higher consciousness, where materiality does not exist and the spirit reigns supreme.

In conclusion, Berdyaev creates a metaphysics in which God is derived from something that comes before Him and whose freedom is not entirely under His control. The original cosmos is over-spiritualized, populated not only with spiritual humans, but also with spiritual predecessors of what will be in the animate and inanimate nature. The natural world is just an unfortunate side-effect of sin, not God's creation, which emerges to allow unconscious and unknowing human spirits to ascend to a higher spiritual level.<sup>15</sup> And with all this cumbersome metaphysics, Berdyaev did not succeed in what he sought to accomplish. Is Berdyaev's proposal "the only way to understand [the origin of] evil without making God responsible for it," as he claims (DM 29)? Since God has all the power over His creation, he could so create the world that the fall would not be possible. One way would be to deny His creation the access to freedom, making their decisions determined. Another way would be to endow His creation with the predictive power to see all consequences of their freely derived decisions so that, presumably, they would avoid the ones which they knew would be harmful, if their moral sense would also be sufficiently strong. Another solution would be to create nothing at all: no cosmos, no evil.<sup>16</sup> As observed by Shestov, Berdyaev should show

<sup>15</sup> In a different context, a hypothesis was made that man became a conscious being only ca. 1000 BC. People were able to speak and reason without being conscious, which did not make them responsible for their actions, Julian Jaynes, *The origin of consciousness in the breakdown of the bicameral mind*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1982, 47, 201; Tor Nørretranders, *The user illusion*, New York: Viking 1998, 310-319.

<sup>16</sup> God can be blamed because He created beings "knowing that they receive freedom to do evil from somewhere outside," Сергей И. Четвериков, *О мировом зле и спасающей церкви*

“that it is impossible for God to intervene and ... that this impossibility is good.”<sup>17</sup>

Berdyayev does not accomplish what he hoped for, namely he does not avoid the possibility to make God responsible, if not for the origin of evil, then certainly for spreading it into the world. It is possible to cast this aspersion on God even in the theological framework he created. He does it at the cost of undermining God’s omnipotence and ends up with a faltering theodicy and a mutable God whose power is not quite divine.<sup>18</sup> It is hardly a theological vision that is superior to traditional theologies that are frequently, and sometimes harshly, criticized by Berdyayev.

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<sup>17</sup> Lev Shestov, Nikolai Berdyayev: gnosis and existential philosophy [1938], in his *Speculation and revelation*, Athens: Ohio University Press 1982, 245; Ольга Д. Волкогонова, *Н.А. Бердяев: интеллектуальная биография*, Москва: Издательство Московского Университета 2001, 32.

<sup>18</sup> To Berdyayev himself can be applied his own words used in describing Boehme, who “was ready to sacrifice omnipotence and omniscience of God and admit that God did not predict consequences of liberty,” *Études sur Jacob Böhme*, in Jakob Böhme, *Mysterium magnum*, Paris: Aubier 1945, v. 1, 23. In fact, it is not quite clear whether knowledge of Berdyayev’s God suffered from the same inadequacy as Boehme’s.