

UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS  
ST. MARY'S COLLEGE

FREEDOM AND THE 'CREATIVE ACT'  
IN THE WRITINGS OF NIKOLAI BERDIAEV:  
AN EVALUATION IN LIGHT OF  
JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN'S THEOLOGY OF FREEDOM

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

PAUL A. SCARINGI

ST. ANDREWS, SCOTLAND  
SEPTEMBER, 2007

## DECLARATIONS

I, Paul A. Scaringi, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date:                      Signature of candidate:

I was admitted as a research student in September 2003 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in June 2004; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 2003 and 2007.

Date:                      Signature of candidate:

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date:                      Signature of supervisor:

Date:                      Signature of supervisor:

## COPYRIGHT

In submitting this thesis to the University of St. Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker, that my thesis will be electronically accessible for personal or research use, and that the library has the right to migrate my thesis into new electronic forms as required to ensure continued access to the thesis.

Date:

Signature of candidate:

To Eileen

*In Memoriam*

John H. Scaringi  
April 1929 – May 2006

Great authors keep repeating themselves. Something profound lies in this. They are working through a few big thoughts and intuitions. These come from the heart; they rise up; and one tries to sound the music in a thousand different ways. It is a thought, a set of thoughts, or one complex thought, that is lived through many years.

Jeremy Driscoll, O.S.B., *A Monk's Alphabet*

## CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	xi
List of Abbreviations	xii
Abstract	xiii
Chapter 1 – Context, Influences, and Ultimate Questions	1
§1 Introduction	1
§2 Nikolai Berdiaev	2
1. <i>A Biographical Sketch</i>	2
2. <i>Russian Philosophy</i>	3
3. <i>The Silver Age</i>	5
4. <i>Influences</i>	6
A. <i>Philosophy</i>	7
B. <i>Theology</i>	9
C. <i>The Arts</i>	11
5. <i>Personalism/Existentialism</i>	12
§3 Jürgen Moltmann	13
§4 Summary	15
Chapter 2 – A Vision of Freedom	16
§1 Introduction	16
1. <i>Orientation and Style</i>	18
2. <i>Intuition</i>	21
3. <i>‘Spiritual’ Experience</i>	23
§2 The Search for the Origins of Freedom	24
1. <i>The Mystical Approach</i>	26
2. <i>Integral Knowledge</i>	29
3. <i>Symbolism</i>	31
4. <i>German Mysticism</i>	35
§3 <i>The Ungrund</i>	36
§4 Summary	43
Chapter 3 – Motivations	45
§1 Introduction	45
§2 The Justification of God	46
1. <i>The Legend</i>	47
2. <i>The Justification of God</i>	49

§3 The Justification of the Person	53
1. <i>Personality</i>	54
2. <i>Personality, Incarnation, and Theandric Existence</i>	56
§4 Summary	59
Chapter 4 – Freedom within the Created Order	61
§1 Introduction	61
§2 Freedom	62
1. <i>Embodied Freedom</i>	64
2. <i>The Fall</i>	68
A. <i>Autonomy</i>	69
B. <i>Heteronomy</i>	73
C. <i>Slavery</i>	76
§3 The God-Man	77
1. <i>Grace</i>	78
2. <i>God-manhood and Theosis</i>	81
3. <i>Theandric Freedom</i>	84
A. <i>Interrelatedness</i>	84
B. <i>The Necessity of Autonomy</i>	85
C. <i>Love</i>	86
D. <i>Sobornost’</i>	87
§4 Spirit	90
§5 Summary	95
Chapter 5 – The Creative Act	97
§1 Introduction	97
§2 The Beginning Stages of Creativity	99
§3 Foundations of the Creative Act	102
1. <i>Meonic freedom</i>	102
2. <i>Imago Dei</i>	103
3. <i>Silent Expectation</i>	107
§4 The Creative Act in the Material World	109
1. <i>Inner Creativity</i>	110
A. <i>Imagination</i>	112
B. <i>Contemplation</i>	113
C. <i>Humility</i>	115
2. <i>Outer Creativity</i>	117
A. <i>Objectification</i>	117
B. <i>Transfiguration</i>	120
C. <i>Realization</i>	123
D. <i>Ethics</i>	128
3. <i>Interdependence</i>	129
§5 Summary	131



Chapter 6 – Jürgen Moltmann’s Theology of Freedom	133
§1 Introduction	133
1. <i>Berdiaev’s Theological Orientation</i>	133
2. <i>Moltmann</i>	135
§2 The Genesis of Freedom	138
1. <i>Creating Space for Creation</i>	139
A. <i>Zimzum</i>	139
B. <i>Love</i>	140
C. <i>The Question of Passibility</i>	142
2. <i>Trinity</i>	144
A. <i>The Triune God</i>	144
B. <i>Perichoresis</i>	145
(a) <i>Interpenetration</i>	146
(b) <i>The ‘Broad Place’ of the Trinity</i>	148
3. <i>The Passion of the Father</i>	149
4. <i>The Son</i>	151
A. <i>Bearer of Sin</i>	152
B. <i>Solidarity</i>	152
C. <i>The Crucified and Resurrected Liberator</i>	153
5. <i>The Holy Spirit</i>	155
A. <i>The Wellspring of Life and Relation</i>	156
B. <i>The Giver of Freedom</i>	157
6. <i>Summary</i>	159
§3 Freedom within the Created Order	159
1. <i>The Object of Liberation</i>	160
A. <i>The Human</i>	160
(a) <i>God’s Image</i>	160
(b) <i>The Imago Trinitatis</i>	163
(c) <i>The Person’s Relation to the Trinity</i>	163
B. <i>Nature</i>	164
2. <i>Freedom ‘From’</i>	166
A. <i>Freedom from Sin</i>	166
B. <i>Freedom from Oppression</i>	168
3. <i>Freedom ‘For’</i>	170
A. <i>Creativity</i>	170
B. <i>The ‘Project’ of Freedom</i>	173
4. <i>The Horizon of Freedom</i>	176
§4 Summary	177
Chapter 7 – A Critique of Berdiaev in Light of Moltmann	179
§1 Introduction	179
§2 Critique, Assessment, and Reconfiguration	180
1. <i>Methodological Assumptions</i>	180
2. <i>Bifurcation and the Mystical Approach</i>	182
3. <i>Spirit</i>	186
4. <i>Sobornost’</i>	188

5. <i>Justification of the Person</i>	192
6. <i>Justification of God</i>	196
7. <i>The Ungrund</i>	199
8. <i>Embodied Freedom</i>	203
A. <i>Modality of Existence</i>	207
B. <i>Subjective-relational</i>	209
C. <i>Tragedy</i>	211
9. <i>The ‘Creative Act’</i>	213
A. <i>Contributions</i>	214
(a) <i>Interdependence of Creativity and Freedom</i>	214
(b) <i>Theological Discourse</i>	215
(c) <i>Positive Freedom</i>	215
(d) <i>Love</i>	216
B. <i>The Equivocal Areas within Berdiaev’s ‘Creative Act’</i>	217
(a) <i>Materiality</i>	217
(b) <i>Genius</i>	220
(c) <i>Basileia</i>	221
C. <i>A Suggestion</i>	223
§3 Summary	225
Chapter 8 – Conclusion	226
Select Bibliography	230

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would not have been able to undertake and complete a project such as this without the support and prayers of family and friends, who, while being too numerous to list, have my sincere gratitude. There are, however, certain individuals I wish to acknowledge who have had a direct impact on this research:

Dr. Thomas Graves, Dr. John Kinney, Dr. Stephen Brachlow, and Prof. Jeremy Begbie have all, in rather different and yet important ways, provided guidance, challenge, and support in helping to frame and shape this research.

Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Pugh Mills and the community at Grace Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia provided encouragement and support, both in prayers, communications, and finances to send us overseas. The Very Rev. Robert Gilles and the community at St. Andrews Episcopal Church, St. Andrews made us part of their community and held us in their prayers and kindness. Mrs. Patti Guthrie flawlessly handled the logistics for us to live overseas for four years and made this process manageable.

Prof. Michael Partridge gave numerous hours to this project in expertise, productive dialogue, and enthusiastic support.

Eileen, my wife, who made this project possible, has been unwavering in her support, steadfast in her love, and the one person who never lost faith that this could be accomplished.

## ABBREVIATIONS

Berdiaev:

<i>BE</i>	The Beginning and the End: Essay on Eschatological Metaphysics
<i>BM</i>	The Bourgeois Mind and other Studies in Modern Life
<i>DM</i>	The Destiny of Man
<i>DH</i>	The Divine and the Human
<i>DR</i>	Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography
<i>DT</i>	Dostoevsky
<i>EOT</i>	The End of Our Time
<i>FMW</i>	The Fate of Man in the Modern World
<i>FS</i>	Freedom and the Spirit
<i>MCA</i>	The Meaning of the Creative Act
<i>MH</i>	The Meaning of History
<i>RI</i>	The Russian Idea
<i>RSRC</i>	The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar
<i>SF</i>	Slavery and Freedom
<i>SS</i>	Solitude and Society
<i>SR</i>	Spirit and Reality
<i>TNE</i>	Towards a New Epoch
<i>TR</i>	Truth and Revelation

Moltmann:

<i>CG</i>	The Crucified God
<i>ET</i>	Experiences in Theology
<i>GC</i>	God in Creation
<i>GSS</i>	God for a Secular Society
<i>HG</i>	Humanity in God
<i>MN</i>	Man
<i>RRF</i>	Religion, Revolution, and the Future
<i>SL</i>	The Spirit of Life
<i>TKG</i>	The Trinity and the Kingdom of God

## TRANSLITERATION

The Library of Congress system of transliteration has been used in the spelling of Russian names and words (hence Berdiaev instead of Berdyaev), except with names widely known by other spellings, e.g. Dostoevsky.

The New Revised Standard Version has been used for all Biblical quotations.

## ABSTRACT

This project revisits the work of Nikolai Berdiaev, one of the first Russian *Silver Age* religious philosophers to be widely read in the West. The focus of this research is his thought on freedom and the ‘creative act’. We will argue that Berdiaev’s vision of freedom contains two types of freedom – a freedom understood within the created order and a freedom ‘outside’ of creation. It will be shown that in the former type, the reader finds a nuanced and insightful multi-layered conception of human freedom, which offers intriguing possibilities for exploring freedom and its implications for humanity. It will also be demonstrated that this type of freedom is closely related to his innovative view of creativity. Berdiaev conceives of freedom and creativity as distinct concepts, and yet so integrally related that they are interdependent. In the latter type of freedom, the reader will encounter a highly speculative and original metaphysical view that attempts to explain freedom as non-determination and answer the challenges of theodicy, which, this research will maintain, fails to do.

This research will contend (contrary to Berdiaev’s own statements) that his thought is most comprehensible from a broadly theological perspective. This perspective will underscore the significant tension within his work that arises from his speculative metaphysics. Unlike earlier works on Berdiaev that glossed over this tension, we will attempt to ameliorate it by engaging Jürgen Moltmann’s theology of freedom. Moltmann’s theology will provide a number of ideas and concepts for an analysis, critique, and reconfiguration of Berdiaev’s vision. This reconfiguration will seek to remain faithful to Berdiaev’s core concerns, while providing a new interpretation of his thought that is relevant for a contemporary dialogue concerning the significance of freedom and creativity for the person and community in relation to God.

## Chapter 1 – Context, Influence, and Ultimate Questions

### §1 INTRODUCTION

Andrew Kirk observes that the “pursuit and defense of freedom in its many forms has been the dominant global movement of human societies world-wide over the last 300 years.”<sup>1</sup> Since theology is not only concerned with the knowledge of God but also with lives of people and communities – people and communities who are pursuing freedom – we see that freedom is as much a concern for the theologian as it is for the social scientist.<sup>2</sup> As Leander Keck states, “Freedom is the dominant motif in Christian theology today . . . .”<sup>3</sup>

Our project is concerned with the implications of freedom for theology, particularly the concept of freedom that is voiced in the writings of Nikolai Berdiaev. Berdiaev asserted that God desires the person to be ‘free’, and that the person who is free will be a person who brings forth ‘creative acts’. This research will explore and analyze Berdiaev’s unique understanding of freedom, of the ‘creative act’, and of what he believes to be the essential interdependence between the two concepts. We will argue, contrary to his own assertions, that his work on freedom is most comprehensible from a theological perspective. The specific theological perspective we will use to investigate and critique Berdiaev’s work will be the theology of Jürgen Moltmann – a theologian who has engaged with Berdiaev’s work and shares certain similarities in perspective and in life history.

Our objective is to show that Berdiaev’s thought on freedom and the ‘creative act’ offers a “fresh horizon”<sup>4</sup> for the theological discourse on freedom. We will provide a detailed critique of Berdiaev’s conception of freedom in which we will supplant the weaker lines of his thought with select ideas from Moltmann’s theology. Through this we will demonstrate the dialogical nature of Berdiaev’s work and will present a reconfigured conception of freedom that is not only theologically comprehensible but also significant for the exploration of what it means to be free in relation to God, others, and self.

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Andrew Kirk, *The Meaning of Freedom: A Study of Secular, Muslim and Christian Views* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Moltmann: “For me, theology comes into being wherever men and women come to the knowledge of God and, in the praxis of their lives, their happiness and their suffering, perceive God’s presence with all their senses.” *ET*, xvi.

<sup>3</sup> Leander Keck, “The Son who creates Freedom,” in Edward Schillebeeckx and Bas van Iersel, eds., *Jesus Christ and Human Freedom* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1974), 71.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick C. Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev* (Kent, England: Search Press Ltd., 1986), 389.

## §2 NIKOLAI BERDIAEV

### 1. *A Biographical Sketch*

Nikolai Alexandrovitch Berdiaev (1874 – 1948) was born in the province of Kiev into a Russian aristocratic family.<sup>5</sup> Berdiaev had one brother, Serge, who was fifteen years older and thus Berdiaev basically grew up as an only child. His mother was half French and Berdiaev described her as being “more French than Russian.”<sup>6</sup> She was born into the Orthodox Church, but Berdiaev believed that “she felt herself to be more of a Roman Catholic.”<sup>7</sup> His father was descended from a long line of decorated military officers. Lowrie describes the father as a ‘free-thinker’ who “took pleasure in criticizing religion and the church”<sup>8</sup> – Voltaire appears to have been more significant for the father than the Orthodox Church. The other noteworthy adult in Berdiaev’s early life was his Russian nurse, who “made a most enduring impression” on him, and who he described as a ‘classical’ Russian nurse of “ardent Orthodox faith, of extraordinary kindness and tenderness . . . .”<sup>9</sup>

Berdiaev remembered his early years as a solitary experience. He recounts that he struggled to get along with other boys, finding them to be “very coarse, and their talk low and stupid.”<sup>10</sup> He did not follow in his father’s footsteps and rejected anything that had to do with the military. He cites the reason for this rejection as a rebellion against ‘regimentation.’<sup>11</sup>

In 1894 Berdiaev enrolled at the University of Kiev and this proved a critical juncture in his life, for this was when Berdiaev was exposed to Marxism and became a Marxist. He writes, “I soon became aware that something new and decisive had intervened in Russian life, and that I must meet the issues raised by the Marxist movement.”<sup>12</sup> Berdiaev committed himself to the Marxist cause to such a degree that by the end of his third year at university (1898) he was arrested, spent several months in prison with other dissidents, was released, and was then eventually exiled to Vologda in northern Russia for three years.

---

<sup>5</sup> Space forbids a detailed biography of Berdiaev. The reader wishing more information can turn to the three biographies of Berdiaev: Donald Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet: A Life of Nicolai Berdyayev*, Matthew Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyayev: Captive of Freedom*, Michel Alexander Vallon, *An Apostle of Freedom: Life and Teachings of Nicolas Berdyayev*, as well as Berdiaev’s autobiography, *Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography*.

<sup>6</sup> *DR*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Donald A. Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet: A Life of Nicolai Berdyayev* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1960), 16-17.

<sup>9</sup> *DR*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> *DR*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> *DR*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> *DR*, 116.

In exile Berdiaev began to question his commitment to Marxism as he came to believe that Marxist thought ignores the value of the person.<sup>13</sup> During this time (he returned from exile in 1902) Berdiaev underwent a “rapid evolution,”<sup>14</sup> in which he left the Marxist movement, became involved with the Neo-Idealists and eventually, along with others from the *intelligentsia* (most notably Sergei Bulgakov, Simeon Frank, and Piotr Struve),<sup>15</sup> turned towards Orthodox Christianity. Russian society by this time was going through tremendous upheavals with the failed revolution of 1905, World War I, and finally the Bolshevik Revolution. Berdiaev survived the Revolution and, through his former Marxist contacts, was able to teach in the “almost-official Free Academy of Spiritual Culture.”<sup>16</sup> But, this did not last and in 1922 he was exiled again moving first to Berlin and then, two years later, to Paris where he lived out the rest of his life as a teacher, an editor of *Put*, and an author.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Russian Philosophy

Early in Berdiaev’s life he came to understand himself as a philosopher: “There was never any question for me what I should choose in life and which path I should take; for, while still a boy, I was sure that my calling lay in philosophy.”<sup>18</sup> Berdiaev never wavered from this conviction; he always understood himself as a philosopher.<sup>19</sup> This commitment to ‘philosophy’ must be understood in its proper context.

The philosophy of Berdiaev’s Russia has little resemblance to contemporary philosophy as it is practiced in many Western academic circles.<sup>20</sup> For Berdiaev, philosophy

---

<sup>13</sup> Berdiaev: “At the moment the influence of Marx and Nietzsche is active in the direction of the dehumanization of society and culture. And this dehumanization is at the same time de-Christianization.” *FMW*, 25. The influence of Marx upon Berdiaev can be seen in his evaluation of economics, labor, and government.

<sup>14</sup> Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 65.

<sup>15</sup> See Nicolas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963), 131-164.

<sup>16</sup> Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 150.

<sup>17</sup> This extremely condensed sketch of Berdiaev’s life does not address the numerous conflicts Berdiaev faced, especially during his life in Russia. He was threatened with life-long exile to Siberia for an article published against the Church (*Quenchers of the Spirit*), but was spared by the outbreak of World War I. He was questioned by the authorities on a number of occasions (both by the Tsarist and Communist regimes) and he reports that once, while imprisoned in 1920 for political activity, he was brought before Dzerzhinsky in the middle of night for questioning and was then released. He states that when he was banished from Russia in 1922 he was told that if he attempted to return to the USSR he would be shot. *DR*, 237-239.

<sup>18</sup> *DR*, 37.

<sup>19</sup> *DR*, 86.

<sup>20</sup> An example of this dissonance between early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia philosophy and contemporary Western approaches can be seen in Andrzej Walicki’s comments in the foreword to *Problems of Idealism*. Walicki observed, after attending one of the first international conferences on philosophy to be held in Moscow after the fall of communism (March 1993), that the approach of Russian philosophy was problematic when



was the search for ultimate truths, and in this search for truth, philosophy leads to change. “My conception of this vocation was in some ways similar to that of Marx, who proclaimed in his famous Theses on Feuerbach that hitherto philosophy had been concerned with knowing life, but that the time has come for it to change life.”<sup>21</sup> Berdiaev’s understanding of himself as a philosopher was not as someone who was addressing a specific philosophical enquiry and developing a carefully constructed argument. Philosophy was meant to uncover truths that would overcome the disintegrated world. As his commitment to Christianity grew, his philosophy incorporated central themes and dogmas of the Christian faith. This development is not unique to Berdiaev.

N. O. Lossky writes, “Berdyaeu belongs to the group of thinkers who strive to develop a Christian world conception . . . .”<sup>22</sup> Philosophy for this ‘group of thinkers’ is an inherently philosophic *and* religious exercise – philosophy and religion for these thinkers cannot be separated. We thus end up with a ‘philosophy’ that is hard to classify using current Western lines of demarcation. Paul Tillich states that Berdiaev’s thought is not quite a philosophy of religion, nor is it a theology.<sup>23</sup> Donald Lowrie explains this approach by stating:

Whereas similar groups in western Europe tended toward separation of theology from philosophy, in Russia the two were joined in an original type of religious philosophy characterized by independence from scholastic traditions and church authority, and by great freedom of thought, with philosophy justifying religious faith and religious experience providing bases for philosophy.<sup>24</sup>

This highly synthetic approach was made possible not only because of the religious renaissance that was occurring in Russia at that time (of which Berdiaev was considered a leader), but also because of the innovative cultural developments of Russian society – what has come to be known as Russia’s *Silver Age*.

---

brought into dialogue with the current Western philosophic tradition. He writes, “To be sure, there is much of great interest and richness in this tradition, but its tendency to focus on Russian historical and spiritual experience must be resisted if professional philosophers are to listen.” Randall A. Poole, ed., *Problems of Idealism: Essays in Russian Social Philosophy*, trans. Randall A. Poole (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), ix.

<sup>21</sup> *DR*, 86.

<sup>22</sup> N. O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1952), 247.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Tillich, “Nicholas Berdyaeu,” *Religion in Life* 7:3 (Summer 1938), 408.

<sup>24</sup> Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 116. See also Robert Slesinski: “. . . it should be specifically noted that Russian religious philosophy as it was largely fashioned in the nineteenth century and subsequently developed in the twentieth is a conscious rejoinder to Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment western philosophy and, indeed, constitutes a rejection of the immanentist world view of modernity that would decisively cut man off from the transcendent order, be it in the sphere of knowledge or in the realms of being itself.” Robert F. Slesinski, “Believing Thought as a Category in Russian Religious Philosophy,” *Communio* 26 (Fall 1999), 572.

### 3. *The Silver Age*<sup>25</sup>

While the complexities of Russian culture are beyond the scope of this research, it is important to note the culture in which Berdiaev's thought developed. Although our research is concerned with Berdiaev's 'mature' writings, which commence with the closing of this period, the influences of this time made a lasting impression on his thought.<sup>26</sup>

The so-called *Silver Age* is a term that roughly denotes the time period of 1890 - 1920 in Russia. It was a time of intense intellectual, artistic, and religious activity. Catherine Evtuhov states that the designation has often been used in literary and art-historical studies, but she helpfully broadens the term to include "the complex of ideas, literature, art, philosophy, and politics that together constituted the cultural explosion of those years."<sup>27</sup> Within this period she detects "four general lines or orientations along which Russian culture evolved . . .,"<sup>28</sup> which are an "elaborate aestheticism," "so-called new idealism," "politics," and a "new religious consciousness."<sup>29</sup> These four general lines are not separate or individual developments, but rather co-existing developments that impact and influence each other.

The *Silver Age* was a time that stressed novelty, where ideas and concepts in philosophy, art, politics, and religion, were juxtaposed against each other in the search for new ideas. The blurring of the distinction between religion (theology) and philosophy in the Russian milieu was also true for other fields of study and praxis. In this context a dialogical approach was practiced that stretched across Russian culture. Hence they looked to Dostoevsky not only as Russia's great novelist, but also a philosopher who impacted religious thought. Vladimir Solov'ev's highly influential work not only provided the systematic approach to philosophy, but also the means to understand how the person works with God to

---

<sup>25</sup> This section is indebted to two outstanding accounts of the Russian *Silver Age*: Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), see especially chapter 1, "The Silver Age as History," and Christopher Read, *Religion, Revolution and the Russian Intelligentsia 1900-1912: The Vekhi Debate and its Intellectual Background* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1979).

<sup>26</sup> The beginning of Berdiaev's 'mature' phase follows the publication of *Sub specie aeternitatis* in 1907. Although he publishes *Philosophy of Freedom* in 1911 (a series of articles that appeared previously from 1908 onwards), the work that is normally attributed as the first 'mature' work is *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (1916). For the purposes of this research Berdiaev's mature work is considered to be *MCA* onward. See also Matthew Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev: Captive of Freedom* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), 44-45, and Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 106-107.

<sup>27</sup> Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle*, 3 fn.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-11.

change the world.<sup>30</sup> Even though the political fabric of Russia was being torn apart, there was a flowering of culture and thought that was remarkable in its scope and achievements.

With this context in mind we can now turn our attention to the specific influences on Berdiaev's thought.

#### 4. *Influences*

Berdiaev's varied influences can be seen in his description of his 'philosophic *Weltanschauung*':

In this, which touches upon past thinkers, particularly close to me were Heraclitus, Origen and St. Gregory of Nyssa among the Church Fathers, Jakob Boehme – who had enormous significance for my spiritual development, and to some extent also Kant. Regarding philosophers of our time, I have a point of contact with Bergson, Gentile, Max Scheler. Among the representatives of existential philosophy the closest to me is Jaspers. Dostoevsky, L. Tolstoy, Nietzsche, each in his own turn played a great role in the working out of my *Weltanschauung*, just as did Marx, Carlyle, Ibsen and Leon Bloy – in the formation of our social views.<sup>31</sup>

We can see that Berdiaev's influences were drawn from three different streams: philosophy, theology (dogmatic and mystical), and the arts. Berdiaev utilizes the concepts and ideas he finds within these three disciplines to formulate his view on the origin and embodiment of freedom. This results in an approach that is both distinctive and highly synthetic. Zenkovsky states that Berdiaev's "exceptional gift for synthesis" was seen in ". . . his constant and intent concern for other men's ideas and theories . . ." <sup>32</sup> In addition, as Lowrie points out, Berdiaev not only has the ability for synthesis but also for originality. Berdiaev engages diverse material and instills it with a distinctively "'Berdiaev' carom to clinch the thought as his own." <sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Vladimir Solov'ev (1853 – 1900) is considered by most to be Russia's first true systematic philosopher. V. V. Zenkovsky calls him "the most brilliant and influential philosopher of the 'period of systems'." V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, trans. George L. Kline (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1953), 472. The creative adaptation of various ideas is demonstrated in the ways in which different thinkers engaged Solov'ev's concept of 'Godmanhood'. Read states that for Christians 'Godmanhood' meant that the person "was intended to work jointly with God in the business of creation, transformation and salvation of the world." The socialists took the term and turned it into 'mangodhood' "in the Nietzschean sense that man was himself God and that he was himself the ruler of the universe." Read, *Russian Intelligentsia*, 58.

<sup>31</sup> Nikolai Berdiaev, "МОЕ ФИЛОСОФСКОЕ МИРОСОЗЕЦАНИЕ," in *N. A. Berdiaev: pro et contra*, ed. A. A. Ermichev, trans. mine (St. Petersburg: Russian Christian Humanities Institute, 1994), 23.

<sup>32</sup> Zenkovsky, 762.

<sup>33</sup> Lowrie, 187.

In what follows we will examine some of the more significant influences on Berdiaev, beginning with his philosophical influences.<sup>34</sup>

### A. Philosophy

Philosophy was the earliest influence in Berdiaev's life. He recalls, "I read Schopenhauer, Kant and Hegel when I was fourteen, having discovered Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Idea*, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* and the first part of the *Encyclopedia* in my father's library."<sup>35</sup> Although Berdiaev's discovery of philosophy was new for him, the material he read was not new to the Russia intelligentsia in the latter part of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia. German idealism had a significant impact on Russian thought. Zernov writes that the leaders of the religious renaissance (Berdiaev, Bulgakov, Frank, and Struve) were all influenced by similar thinkers.

They were nurtured in the school of German philosophy; Kant, Schelling, Hegel and the neo-Kantians were their recognized teachers. They were equally familiar with the western mystical tradition, for Solovyev introduced them to Jacob Boehme, Master Eckhart, Swedenborg, Erigena and Nicholas of Cusa.<sup>36</sup>

Hence, even though Berdiaev describes his education in solitary terms (encountering material as a teenager in his father's library, his solitary life in school<sup>37</sup>), the philosophy he was absorbing was a part of the contemporary intellectual tradition in Russia.

Within his reading of philosophy Berdiaev soon began to develop a hierarchy, with certain philosophers taking precedence. So, although Schopenhauer 'impressed' him more than the Bible at the time of his "spiritual awakening,"<sup>38</sup> it was Kant who, along with Plato, were the philosophers *par excellence*. He writes, "A fundamental discovery in philosophy was made by Plato and Kant who must be regarded as the greatest and most original philosopher [*sic*] in the history of human thought."<sup>39</sup>

Berdiaev holds Kant in such high esteem because he interprets Kant to be *the* philosopher of freedom. Berdiaev appropriated two central Kantian concepts, which became cornerstones for his thought. As James McLachlan observes, "From his reading of Kant,

---

<sup>34</sup> Space forbids a detailed examination of the wide range of influences on Berdiaev's thought. The following represents what we believe are the influences that form lasting impressions and guide his work. It is recognized that there are other important people and ideas to be considered (e.g., Hegel, Schelling, Romanticism, the Russian Symbolists, et al); however, in each case, while Berdiaev engages with these individuals and movements he has substantial disagreements with them as well.

<sup>35</sup> *DR*, 37.

<sup>36</sup> Zernov, *Religious Renaissance*, 295.

<sup>37</sup> *DR*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> *DR*, 41.

<sup>39</sup> *BE*, 5.

Berdiaev took a strong sense of the antinomic character of reality and of the radically unobjectifiable character of freedom.”<sup>40</sup> Berdiaev believes that it is in these doctrines where Kant’s “genius is most conspicuously displayed.”<sup>41</sup>

It is Kant’s antinomic thought, Berdiaev writes, which led to the discovery that reality exists in two parts, and “that what refers merely to appearances and phenomena must not be transferred to what is noumenal, to things-in-themselves.”<sup>42</sup> The idea of the reality as phenomenal and noumenal becomes foundational for Berdiaev’s understanding of freedom.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, Berdiaev concludes, “There is eternal truth in the distinction which Kant draws between the order of nature and the order of freedom. It is precisely Kant who makes existential metaphysics a possibility, the order of freedom is indeed *Existenz*.”<sup>44</sup>

From Platonic thought Berdiaev takes the idea of the *τό μή ὄν* (meon), which Berdiaev designates as a particular type of nothing that can be described as “one possessing a potentiality of being, a desire for realization.”<sup>45</sup> This ‘meonic’ nothing (distinguishable from *τό οὐκ ὄν*, which does not possess potentiality<sup>46</sup>) is crucial for Berdiaev’s thought when he appropriates and modifies Boehme’s *Ungrund*.

Berdiaev’s high regard for Kant<sup>47</sup> does not prevent Berdiaev from distancing himself from Kant early in his career, believing that Kantian thought is inimical to ‘personalism’. The initial move away from Kant and the Russian neo-idealists follows the publication of the 1902 collection of essays, *Problems of Idealism*, to which Berdiaev was a contributor.<sup>48</sup> Poole notes that following publication, Berdiaev “soon drew quite illiberal conclusions from idealism.”<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> James Morse McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God: Freedom and the Other in Sartre and Berdyaev* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1992), 148.

<sup>41</sup> *BE*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>43</sup> Berdiaev believes that his appropriation of a ‘Kantian’ conception of reality as phenomenal and noumenal does not negate the reality of the physical world. He writes, “It would be very inexact to say that the spiritual world is a thing in itself (*Ding an sich*) and that the natural world is a mere appearance. . . . The thing itself is not life nor is it given in the experience of life, it is a mere thing, an object. The spiritual life has nothing in common with the noumenon of metaphysicians and epistemologists.” *FS*, 56.

<sup>44</sup> *BE*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Michel Alexander Vallon, *An Apostle of Freedom: Life and Teachings of Nicolas Berdyaev* (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1960), 163. See also *DM*, 163.

<sup>46</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 120.

<sup>47</sup> Berdiaev writes, “My true master in philosophy was Kant, and I have devoted most of my studies to his thought: to Kant himself rather than to Kantianism or neo-Kantianism.” *DR*, 93.

<sup>48</sup> Berdiaev was part of a select group who contributed to the three major publications of the *Silver Age*: *Problems of Idealism* (1902), *Vekhi* (1909), and *Out of the Depths* (1918). The group, comprising Berdiaev, Bulgakov, Frank, and Struve, were all ex-Marxists who were moving towards Orthodoxy and would become the leaders of the religious renaissance. See Poole, *Problems of Idealism*, and Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>49</sup> Poole, *Problems of Idealism*, 45.

The move away from neo-idealism was precipitated by Berdiaev's realization that within Kantian thought there was no possibility to experience the noumenal. Without the ability for spiritual experience, Berdiaev believed that an individual could not develop into a person – what Spinka identifies as “antipersonalism.”<sup>50</sup> Berdiaev writes, “It was a fundamental mistake in Kant that he recognized sensuous experience, in which appearances are the data, but he did not recognize spiritual experience, of which the data are noumenal.”<sup>51</sup>

Berdiaev's move from neo-idealism led him to the position of ‘mystical realism’ – a belief that there is a more fundamental reality ‘behind’ what can be observed, which is accessible through ‘spiritual’ experience.<sup>52</sup> This position will become modified over the ensuing years – especially as he breaks ties with Merezhkovsky and his ‘neo-Christianity’ in favor of what many would consider a liberally interpreted Orthodox faith.<sup>53</sup> The turn to mystical realism, however, does not indicate a complete abandonment of Kant. Kant's philosophy made a deep impression on Berdiaev and his thought became an important element in Berdiaev's thought.

After his initial break with Marxism and the neo-idealists, Berdiaev re-affirms what he believes to be Kant's great contributions – the “dualism of two worlds” and “the antinomies involved in that dualism . . . .”<sup>54</sup> Lowrie writes, “In later years he [Berdiaev] altered this opinion [of his initial break with neo-idealism], feeling that in Kant's very insistence upon the ‘real,’ ‘phenomenal’ world, the philosopher had laid a foundation for Berdiaev's own type of thinking – which insists upon the primacy of the noumenal.”<sup>55</sup>

## B. *Theology*

Berdiaev's theological influences are not as clearly referred to in his writings. Part of the reason for this is that his religious commitment developed only after his identity as a philosopher was firmly established. The theological influences upon Berdiaev's philosophy of freedom develop from three primary sources: the Christian mystical tradition, patristic

---

<sup>50</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 97.

<sup>51</sup> *BE*, 14. See also *BE*, 85.

<sup>52</sup> For the discussion of ‘mystical realism’ see chapter 2. Also, Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 20.

<sup>53</sup> Berdiaev's ‘liberally interpreted Orthodox faith’ is most clearly seen in his reliance on Jacob Boehme's understanding of freedom. This will be examined in chapter 2.

<sup>54</sup> *BE*, 85.

<sup>55</sup> Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 254.

literature, and Russian religious philosophy.<sup>56</sup> The mystical tradition will be examined in Chapter 2, so we begin with patristic literature.

Although Berdiaev expressed apprehension about theology (he believed philosophy was better equipped to search for truth), his philosophy is significantly influenced by theology. In his autobiography Berdiaev writes,

I also read a great deal of Patristic literature, but this, I must admit, did not on the whole excite my enthusiasm. Among the Doctors of the Church I took especially to Origen and even more to Gregory of Nyssa; and of ascetic and mystical writers I was greatly impressed and moved by Isaac the Syrian.<sup>57</sup>

The importance of patristic literature for Berdiaev can be seen in the influence of Origen on his thought.<sup>58</sup> Also, Gregory of Nyssa receives a favorable commendation from Berdiaev, “Among patristic writers St. Gregory of Nyssa came nearest to it [a real Christian anthropology]. He was the greatest philosopher among the doctors of the Church and he endeavoured to raise the dignity of man.”<sup>59</sup>

Patristic literature provided Berdiaev with key elements that he could not find in Marxism or Neo-Idealism. His finds in Christianity an affirmation of the person based upon the *imago Dei*, the Incarnation, and God’s sacrificial love for the person. Originally Berdiaev’s religious impulse “was bound up with a bitter feeling of discontent with and dissent from the world with its evil and corruption.” As he began to understand that the existence of evil was not an obstacle to faith but “a proof of God’s existence, a challenge to turn towards that in which love triumphs over hatred, union over division and eternal life over death,”<sup>60</sup> his commitment to the Orthodox Church was secured. He writes,

When I became conscious of myself as a Christian, I came to confess a religion of God-manhood: that is to say, in becoming a believer in God I did not cease to believe in man and in man’s dignity and creative freedom. I became a Christian because I was seeking for a deeper and truer foundation for belief in man.<sup>61</sup>

His commitment to Christianity and his interpretation of its central doctrines did not detract from much that he had discovered to be ‘intuitively’ true – it reinforced his belief.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Zernov: “Russian Orthodoxy was however the source of their [the leaders of the religious renaissance] inspiration. Patristic theology, the writings of the Church Fathers and the works of the Slavophiles shaped their outlook.” Zernov, *Religious Renaissance*, 295-296.

<sup>57</sup> *DR*, 165.

<sup>58</sup> See Matthew Spinka, “Berdyaeve and Origen: A Comparison,” *Church History* 16 (March 1947): 3-21.

<sup>59</sup> *DH*, 23.

<sup>60</sup> *DR*, 174.

<sup>61</sup> *DR*, 180.

<sup>62</sup> Berdiaev’s view of intuition will be addressed in chapter 2.

Gregory of Nyssa, in particular, provided a theology that supported his initial intuitions regarding freedom and the person.

The primary significance of patristic literature for Berdiaev is the dogma the Church developed to define Christianity. Berdiaev places great importance on dogma stating that dogmas “possess absolute and indefectible truth. . . .”<sup>63</sup> Berdiaev’s understanding of God as creator, the Trinity, Incarnation, Resurrection, and eschatology all form central threads in his conception of freedom.<sup>64</sup> These doctrines were mediated to him, however, not only through his study of patristic literature, but also through the context of the *Silver Age*.

Consequently, despite his commitment to philosophy and his early philosophical influences, it is a combination of philosophical *and* theological influences from which he draws to build a framework for his synthesis of thought. Thus even though he states, “I am not a theologian, and my approach to and formulations of these problems are not theological,”<sup>65</sup> the importance of theology to Berdiaev’s work (as will be demonstrated) is such that without the above-mentioned dogmas his entire vision would collapse.

### C. *The Arts*

As with philosophy and theology, the arts, particularly literature, are an important influence upon Berdiaev.<sup>66</sup> The two main influences within this category are Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Berdiaev attests to the significance of these authors when he writes,

I have always been tormented less by theological, dogmatic and ecclesiastical questions, or by questions of academic philosophical interest, than by problems concerning the meaning of life, freedom, the destiny of man, eternity, suffering, and evil. The heroes in Tolstoy’s and Dostoevsky’s novels were of greater importance for me than philosophical and theological schools of thought, and it was at their hands that I received Christianity.<sup>67</sup>

These two authors not only influence Berdiaev but an entire cohort of thinkers and writers. Carnegie Calian writes, “The literary critics of the Russian Renaissance drew and received inspiration from both Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky . . . .”<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> *FS*, 75.

<sup>64</sup> For a helpful description of how Berdiaev interprets dogma, see Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 207-208. This aspect of Berdiaev’s thought will be addressed in chapter 2.

<sup>65</sup> *DR*, 177.

<sup>66</sup> As we will see in chapters 4 and 5, other forms of art will also impact Berdiaev’s thought, particularly from the Renaissance.

<sup>67</sup> *DR*, 80.

<sup>68</sup> Carnegie Samuel Calian, *The Significance of Eschatology in the Thoughts of Nicolas Berdiaev* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1965), 25.



Although Berdiaev frequently links Tolstoy with Dostoevsky, the two do not hold the same place within his thought. As Calian observes, Berdiaev “found Tolstoy’s religious philosophy weak, considering it unacceptable from the Christian point of view; nevertheless he saw value in Tolstoy’s spiritual striving for the perfect life.”<sup>69</sup> Tolstoy was clearly secondary to Dostoevsky, for in Dostoevsky’s writings Berdiaev finds the primary elements to build not only his faith but also his philosophic thought.<sup>70</sup>

The reliance upon Dostoevsky is not surprising. As Evtuhov observes, Dostoevsky was part of a group of writers who were “devoured” by the “makers of the Silver Age.”<sup>71</sup> Zenkovsky points out that Dostoevsky is considered more than a novelist; Dostoevsky “belongs as much to philosophy as to literature. This is to be seen most clearly in the fact that he continues to inspire philosophic thought to our own day.”<sup>72</sup> The influence of Dostoevsky on Berdiaev is well noted by commentators on Berdiaev, and by Berdiaev himself. As we shall see in chapter 3, Dostoevsky, in particular his *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, becomes central to Berdiaev’s thought. Berdiaev: “It might be said that taking my stand as a Christian I accepted the picture of Christ in the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* . . . .”<sup>73</sup>

Although Berdiaev describes his life in solitary terms, we see that his thought arises out of a vast web of influences that stretches across multiple disciplines. It is clear that even though Berdiaev might have felt alone in his convictions and ideas, how he formulates his thought is part of a complex intellectual, religious, and cultural context.

### 5. Personalism/Existentialism

Moltmann observes that “Berdyaeu was neither a professional theologian nor a professional philosopher, so he has often been apostrophized as a ‘thinker’. It is certainly true that his very originality makes it hard to fit him into any particular category.”<sup>74</sup> Part of the reason for this difficulty, as we have just seen, is the culture in which Berdiaev’s thought developed and matured. The need for categorization that is inherent in contemporary

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Berdiaev: “Dostoevsky has played a decisive part in my spiritual life. While I was still a youth a slip from him, so to say, was grafted upon me. He stirred and lifted up my soul more than any other writer or philosopher has done, and for me people are always divided into ‘dostoevskyites’ and those to whom his spirit is foreign.” *DT*, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle*, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Zenkovsky, 410.

<sup>73</sup> *SF*, 9. See also Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaeu*, 25.

<sup>74</sup> *TKG*, 42.

research was simply not a concern for Berdiaev and many in his context. Nonetheless, as we begin to examine his thought we need a starting point from which to consider his work. One of the simplest approaches is to begin with the classification that Berdiaev himself offers.

Early in Berdiaev's career he identified himself as a personalistic philosopher. Throughout much of his career Berdiaev favored the term 'personalism' over the term 'existentialism' believing that existentialism denied the integral image of the person.<sup>75</sup> Yet, in his later works there is a shift in his thought, so that by the end of his career he had fully embraced the term 'existentialism' (although with the qualifiers that his work was different to that of Sartre, Heidegger, and others who were regarded as existentialist at the time). He asserts that although the existentialism of the early to mid-twentieth century "has become something of a fashion,"<sup>76</sup> the origins of existentialism are actually very distant." Thus, by the time Berdiaev reaches the mature phase of his career, we can consider his work, in the broadest possible sense, as a Russian existentialism that relies significantly on Orthodox Christianity. This characterization is broad enough that it does not contradict our basic premise – that Berdiaev's work is most comprehensible from a theological perspective – and allows the reader to orient Berdiaev's thought within the vast discourse on freedom in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### §3 JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN

Copleston is correct when he writes, "Berdyayev regarded himself as, and indeed he was, a Christian philosopher."<sup>77</sup> Although, as have already seen, the term 'philosophy' requires qualification, understanding Berdiaev as a Christian 'philosopher' is clearly the majority opinion regarding Berdiaev and the basic orientation of his thought. This research certainly agrees with this assessment, but also maintains that it is not sufficient merely to consider him a 'Christian philosopher'. As we explore his 'philosophy' of freedom and his overall objectives we will see that Berdiaev's thought is much more comprehensible from a contemporary theological perspective, rather than a philosophical one.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, a theological framework is required to evaluate his thought and assess what relevance it has for

---

<sup>75</sup> See *FMW*, 30-32.

<sup>76</sup> *DR*, 102.

<sup>77</sup> Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, 388.

<sup>78</sup> This is position can be seen in James C. S. Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers: An Essay in Berdyayev and Shestov* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1968).

a contemporary audience. Jürgen Moltmann's theology of freedom provides such a framework to evaluate and critique Berdiaev's thought on freedom.

Moltmann is one of the best-known German Protestant theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>79</sup> His work has been widely translated and published throughout the world. There are four reasons why he has been chosen as a theological interlocutor for this research. First, Moltmann's understanding of theology is sufficiently broad so that his work can be brought into dialogue with Berdiaev's, and, equally importantly, Moltmann's understanding creates the space for us to consider Berdiaev's work from a theological perspective.<sup>80</sup> As a result of this broad understanding Moltmann is one of the few contemporary theologians (outside of those in the field of process theology) to actively engage Berdiaev's thought. For example, in his argument for passibility, Moltmann relies on Berdiaev to assert 'the tragedy of God'.

Points of coherence with the views of Berdiaev, as well as critical differences, provide a second reason for selecting Moltmann. We will see in Moltmann's thought a recurring emphasis on freedom and liberation, which mirrors Berdiaev. Moltmann's political theology, "with its face turned to the world,"<sup>81</sup> is conscious of the various ways the person and community can be enslaved and his theology seeks to address this problem.<sup>82</sup> We will also see important differences between Moltmann's thought and Berdiaev's, which will be used to critique Berdiaev's formulations. It will be shown that Moltmann's thought provides a stronger footing for particular ideas Berdiaev puts forward regarding freedom and creativity.

A third reason for choosing Moltmann is that there are important similarities in their life histories. While their adult lives barely overlap and they grew up in different countries, it is significant that they both grew up in tumultuous times and experienced first-hand the catastrophic events of war and displacement.<sup>83</sup> Both authors saw the savagery that humans can inflict upon one another, both were imprisoned and exiled from their home-land, and both clearly understood that suffering is not an abstract concept but a reality that must inform any discussion of God and freedom.

---

<sup>79</sup> Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 15. See also Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1995) and Arne Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

<sup>80</sup> Moltmann: "All Christians *who believe and who think about what they believe* are theologians, whether they are young or old, women or men." *ET*, 11 (Italics author). He will go on to state, "If the people who believe and think about what they believe are – all of them together – theologians, this *theology of all believers* is the foundation for every academic theology." *ET*, 14 (Italics author).

<sup>81</sup> *ET*, 114.

<sup>82</sup> Moltmann: "My image of theology is not 'A safe stronghold is our God'. It is the exodus of God's people, on the road to the promised land of liberty where God dwells." *ET*, xx.

<sup>83</sup> See *ET*, 3-9, for Moltmann's account of his history in the war and the years immediately following.

This shared experience of conflict leads to our final reason. It is the contention of this research that these experiences of conflict and suffering contribute to an overall approach that is evident in both writers – an approach that is focused in concrete ways on ‘ultimate’ questions.<sup>84</sup> In both writers (to varying degrees) we see a lack of concern for systematic presentations and finely detailed arguments. Rather each will cast a broad net across various disciplines in the attempt to search out God’s truth, wherever it may be found.<sup>85</sup> Within the writings of both, the reader detects this almost urgent focus at times on searching out an ‘ultimate’ solution that will bring relief to a suffering world – a solution that will be found in God and the kingdom that God will establish.

#### §4 SUMMARY

Berdiaev lived in a fascinating and tragic period for Russia and Europe. The reader will do well to bear in mind this context as we explore his understanding of freedom and the creative act, and then evaluate it in the light of Moltmann’s theology of freedom. As we move through this research we will follow a line of thinking attempted by Tillich. In addressing Berdiaev’s conception of ‘gnosis’ Tillich observes, “In both respects his ideas must be transformed in order to become acceptable for present Protestantism. But the substance of his philosophy of religion must be maintained . . . .”<sup>86</sup> While this project is not undertaken to ‘transform’ Berdiaev’s thought into a Protestant theology (although as the author is a Protestant this bias does exist), our objective is to examine Berdiaev’s thought in the light of the broad Christian tradition he was committed to, and to critique his thought in the light of that tradition. Throughout we will make every effort to maintain the ‘substance of this thought’, and when we challenge his thought, it will be done to strengthen his overall vision.

Our examination begins at the natural starting point in Berdiaev’s thought, with his ‘vision’ of freedom.

---

<sup>84</sup> Berdiaev: “. . . in Europe, and perhaps particularly in France, people are affected by a kind of spiritual weariness and have largely lost the capacity for asking *ultimate questions* and seeking *ultimate solutions*. For the Russians, on the contrary, these things are the only ones that matter.” *DR*, 165 (Italics mine).

<sup>85</sup> Thus Spinka will write concerning Berdiaev: “The same majestic sweep of imagination, the same unrestrained freedom of seeking truth wherever it may be found, is characteristic of the mind of Berdyaeu.” Spinka, “Berdyaeu and Origen,” 5. Moltmann will write concerning his own theological approach (regarding his series of ‘Contributions’): “Behind all this is the conviction that, humanly speaking, truth is to be found in unhindered dialogue. Fellowship and freedom are the human components for knowledge, the truth of God.” *TKG*, xiii.

<sup>86</sup> Tillich, “Berdyaeu,” 411.

## Chapter 2 – A Vision of Freedom

### §1 INTRODUCTION

. . . [Berdiaev] writes as a man who is deeply committed to the cause of freedom, not simply in the political sense but also in the sense that he is sharply opposed to any attempt to impose a system of ideas or beliefs, whether of a secular or religious nature, on people's minds.<sup>1</sup>

Copleston's phrase, "the cause of freedom," is apt. For Berdiaev, freedom is essential for existence as God intended, and therefore is a 'cause' that must be consistently defended and expounded. This conviction fuels Berdiaev's writings, resulting in an orientation and style that at times can range from philosophical and theological discourse to impassioned plea. Thus, in his autobiography Berdiaev writes,

When my critics accuse me of being a myth-maker or a 'prophet' who would do well with a drop of dullness and a little more precision in the tumultuous sea of his arbitrary assertions and intuitions, I can only repeat what I have said on other occasions, namely, *that my vocation is to proclaim not a doctrine but a vision*; that I work and desire to work by inspiration, fully conscious of being open to all the criticisms systematic philosophers, historians and scholars are likely to make, and in fact, have made.<sup>2</sup>

The clause, "not a doctrine but a vision," accurately summarizes Berdiaev's focus and approach. His interests are not philosophical precision or concise doctrine; his principal concern is "to proclaim" a vision that will assist the person in her "endeavour to comprehend reality."<sup>3</sup> As John Macquarrie observes when considering Berdiaev (and other 'philosophers of personal being'), ". . . possibly we should call them 'seers', men of vision."<sup>4</sup> The term 'vision', as we shall see in this chapter, refers to a specific framework from which Berdiaev formulates the key concepts of his thought (e.g., God, the person, freedom, et al.). In fact, it is not a singular vision, but better understood as a mosaic of 'visions' – a vision of God, of the person, of freedom, of creativity, etc. – that comprises his work.

It is indicative of Berdiaev's lack of concern for precise formulation, that his 'vision' of freedom is never concisely stated. Nevertheless, his prodigious writing career leaves us with considerable material from which we can postulate the basic content and shape of this vision: *Berdiaev's vision is that all individuals possess a rudimentary form of freedom. This*

---

<sup>1</sup> Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, 372.

<sup>2</sup> *DR*, 289 (Italics mine).

<sup>3</sup> *DR*, 290. We shall see in what follows that Berdiaev has a specific understanding of 'reality.'

<sup>4</sup> John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1988), 207.

*freedom will either develop through communion with God and others, resulting in personhood and creative acts, or it will deteriorate through egocentricity, resulting in objectification and slavery.*

This vision of freedom serves two important functions within Berdiaev's thought. First, throughout his corpus this vision guides and frames his manner of engagement with varied interests, be they philosophical, theological, anthropological, historical, or political. The vision also serves a second function; it is a base principle by which he critiques all investigation, whether philosophical or theological, into the nature of God and the person. Wherever he finds a view that opposes this vision of freedom, he judges it to be faulty. As our evaluation of Berdiaev is theological, our critique will focus primarily on the extent to which his vision can be defended from a theological perspective.

As we critically examine this thought, Berdiaev's innovation in asserting a clear interdependence between freedom and the creative act will be demonstrated. Also, the various philosophical and theological suppositions that support this view of freedom will be detailed. Because this is a *vision* of freedom, and not a systematic presentation, we will also encounter difficulties in trying to carefully analyze exactly what Berdiaev means at each juncture. Although we will attempt to clarify the ambiguous phrase or incomplete idea as it occurs, the overall objective is to evaluate the theological relevance of this vision of freedom and determine if it can be employed in at least some of the ways Berdiaev intended. As we shall see, Berdiaev's approach can be problematic at times. It will, however, be demonstrated that these difficulties do not vitiate the important contributions his thought can make to theological reflection.

Therefore, to allow Berdiaev to speak to a contemporary audience a certain generosity of spirit on the reader's behalf is essential. If one evaluates this Christian existentialist on the grounds of systematic unity or how concisely he explains each idea (a judgment Berdiaev himself would admit to failing) the reader will miss the benefit of what Berdiaev has to say regarding the importance of freedom and creativity for the person and for God.

As we proceed, we shall see that it is important to recognize three characteristics of Berdiaev's approach and framework that distinguish his thought from many contemporary philosophical and theological investigations of freedom. Chapters 2 through 4 will analyze each characteristic in depth.

- i. *Mysticism is an important contributor to Berdiaev's thought, especially to his vision of freedom.* Berdiaev believes he can create an unassailable theodicy, as well as a distinctive anthropology, by *positing the heterodox view that there is a primordial freedom that exists outside of God.* A significant resource for this

assertion comes from select strands of Christian mystical thought. The various degrees of freedom Berdiaev sees in the created order all relate to this primordial freedom in some measure. This position will be analyzed in this chapter, under the section, ‘The Search for the Origins of Freedom’.

- ii. *Freedom is a pivotal element for understanding the nature and character of God and humanity.* With regard to anthropology, Berdiaev argues that the individual’s freedom is a core determinant of personhood. With regard to the nature of God, Berdiaev narrowly focuses on theodicy. He argues that without an unequivocal theodicy, understanding the nature of God and how God exercises freedom is highly problematic. These concerns will be addressed in chapter 3: ‘Motivations’.
- iii. *Freedom exists in varying degrees, with each degree representing a specific modality.* Whenever Berdiaev uses the term ‘freedom’ it always refers to a specific type of freedom, which is influenced by variables internal and external to the agent. The various degrees of freedom will be examined in chapter 4: ‘Freedom in the Created Order’.

These three characteristics are basic to understanding what Berdiaev means by the term ‘freedom’ and how his concept of freedom is developed.

This chapter will survey the contours of Berdiaev’s account of freedom. We will detail the framework he establishes to propound his specific understanding of freedom – while giving special attention to his dependence upon certain strands of Christian mysticism – and analyze the approach and assumptions he employs in the development of this framework. We will conclude with a summary of the material we have investigated and highlight those areas that will become points of engagement with Moltmann’s theology of freedom. To begin with, we consider one of the more enigmatic aspects of his thought – his orientation and style.

### 1. *Orientation and Style*

Berdiaev’s style (i.e. how he communicates his thought) has garnered numerous comments, and the overwhelming consensus is that his style is problematic.<sup>5</sup> Berdiaev acknowledges this in his autobiography.

My thought has often been misunderstood and misinterpreted, and for this I am probably myself largely to blame: my thinking is antinomic; I incline too much to extremes and occasionally jump to conclusions without testing them by the accepted

---

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 111; Thomas Idinopulos, “Nicolas Berdyaev’s Ontology of Spirit,” *The Journal of Religion* 49 (1969), 84; Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 83; Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 245; George Seaver, *Nicolas Berdyaev: An Introduction to His Thought* (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1950), 10; James Wayne Dye, “Nikolai Berdyaev and His Ideas on the Fundamental Nature of All Entities,” *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 2:3 (1979), 112.

methods of cautious philosophical enquiry; and I express myself in an extravagantly aphoristic manner.<sup>6</sup>

This frank self-assessment, with terms and phrases such as ‘antinomic’, ‘extremes’, ‘jump to conclusions’, and ‘extravagantly aphoristic manner’, alerts the reader to the difficulties he may encounter when exploring Berdiaev’s thought. Consequently it is not surprising when Poole comments that Berdiaev’s style would “long irritate some professional philosophers (while engaging most other readers) . . . .”<sup>7</sup>

Although commentators give us several options for characterizing Berdiaev’s style (e.g., ‘generous’, ‘episodic’, ‘repetitive’, ‘inconsistent’, etc.), possibly the most useful term for classifying his style is ‘tentative’. By choosing the term ‘tentative’ we are not saying that Berdiaev’s thought is somehow hesitant or uncertain. Rather we are saying, as Berdiaev readily admits, he did not always exercise appropriate care when attempting to communicate his thought – which results in certain sections of his thought not being fully developed or integrated.

Yet despite the fact that Berdiaev’s work can be difficult due to his tentative style, as we shall see, his vision of freedom is constructed upon certain themes – which center on the relationship between freedom, the person, and God – that ground his thought. George Seaver observes that “. . . once the reader has grasped his [Berdiaev’s] central thought he will perceive that these are merely verbal inconsistencies. Logical inconsistencies are much rarer . . . .”<sup>8</sup> So, even though he communicates in a tentative style, his thought is still organized on markedly discernible and interrelated ideas. Because of this Miroslav Volf can rightfully observe, “. . . one can clearly see how Berdiaev’s thought, which strikes one as disjointed, in fact does display a basic ‘goodness of fit.’”<sup>9</sup>

Although Berdiaev admits that his style suffers from a lack of development, he is not willing to attribute the difficulties in style solely to his authorial tentativeness. In his introductory comments to *Slavery and Freedom* he argues that his problematic style is also a result of his orientation. That is, the subject matter he is exploring requires an ‘antinomic’ or ‘contradictory’ approach. He offers the following explanation:

My thought has always belonged to the existential type of philosophy. The inconsistencies and contradictions which are to be found in my thought are

---

<sup>6</sup> *DR*, 101.

<sup>7</sup> Poole, *Problems of Idealism*, 50.

<sup>8</sup> Seaver, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Miroslav Volf, review of *The Eighth Day of Creation*, by Ivan Devcic, *Books & Culture* 10:1 (January/February 2004): 24.



expressions of spiritual conflict, of contradictions which lie at the very heart of existence itself, and are not to be disguised by a façade of logical unity.<sup>10</sup>

Berdiaev believes that because his orientation is focused on the ‘spiritual conflict’ that lies at the ‘very heart of existence’ – the dilemma of freedom for God and the person – his own conflicted style is the inevitable result.

He goes on to assert that not only does his orientation result in a contradictory style, but also that all research into similar areas must eschew methodologies that are *primarily* logical or systematic in nature.<sup>11</sup> He is convinced that all queries into the essential questions of existence (e.g., God, freedom, personhood) cannot be examined through methods *based on* systematic unity. “Existence is synonymous with becoming. There may be a logical system behind it, but a *system* of existence is inconceivable.”<sup>12</sup> Berdiaev is committed to the idea that any philosophy or theology that is established on strictly logical or systematic unity could not truly investigate the issues concerning freedom for the person or God.

---

<sup>10</sup> *SF*, 8. Berdiaev’s orientation and style is certainly not without precedent; it is possible to see other authors who follow a similar line. For example, consider Søren Kierkegaard’s *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, where he devotes a section to the impossibility of an existential *system*. He writes, “An existential system cannot be formulated. . . . Reality itself is a system – for God; but it cannot be a system for any existing spirit.” Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 107. Vallon is partially correct when he states that Berdiaev “derives his primary insights into philosophy and religion mainly from Boehme, Khomyakov, and Dostoyevsky instead of Kierkegaard,” Vallon, *An Apostle of Freedom*, 292. Especially since Berdiaev himself states that he did not read Kierkegaard “until late in life,” and that Kierkegaard did not have “any particular influence” on his thought. *DR*, 103. Yet, Berdiaev will associate his thought with Kierkegaard’s, stating that he “took up the position of Kierkegaard” (*DR*, 95) and that he is “at one with Kierkegaard,” with regards to ‘personality’. *DR*, 93. Hence we see that while Berdiaev may not have been ‘influenced’ by Kierkegaard, he did see similarities with his own thought.

<sup>11</sup> Berdiaev’s repeated aversion to any approach that claims a ‘logical unity’ or ‘systematic coherence’ is based on the supposition that life is antinomic in character, i.e. human existence does not possess a logical unity. Berdiaev argues that to base existential reflection upon logical or systematic coherence is to place form (i.e. logical unity) over content. Berdiaev is convinced that a logically unified argument, or an emphasis on systemization, will necessitate the attempted resolutions of antinomies that cannot be resolved. See also *SF*, 8; *DT*, 18-19. This problematic position that views logic as a ‘closed’ system detracts from his overall premise. It is accepted that there are certain problems that appear to defy logical solutions (e.g. theodicy); however, a logically constructed argument, which is systematically presented, can also recognize antinomic problems in human existence.

<sup>12</sup> *SS*, 54 (Italics mine). Copleston notes, “The Christian dogmas express spiritual life. It is theology, according to Berdiaev, which has given them a ‘rationalistic character.’” Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, 375. Berdiaev’s aversion to any line of thought that displays a ‘rationalistic character’ is true to his intellectual/religious context, which is especially influenced by Khomiakov’s epistemological assumptions.

## 2. Intuition

Berdiaev's admitted anti-systematic bias does not mean that he is opposed to reason. In discussing several writers of the *Silver Age*, amongst whom Berdiaev is included, Copleston writes, "It would be more appropriate to describe them as 'anti-rationalists', if by rationalism we mean belief in the omniscience of reason in regard to knowledge of reality."<sup>13</sup> Although reason *is* important to Berdiaev's thought (as can be seen in the inner consistency of his work), at no point does reason assume a determinative status.<sup>14</sup> By treating reason as part of a larger cognitive matrix and not regarding reason as absolute, Berdiaev utilizes other forms of comprehension. Chief among these is intuition.

The reliance on intuition is congruous with Berdiaev's intellectual context.<sup>15</sup>

Copleston writes,

We have seen that a prominent feature of religiously oriented philosophical thought in Russia was criticism of 'western rationalism'. It was not a question of refusing to admit that reasoning has any role to play in human life. It was a question of rejecting the claim that in regard to the acquisition of knowledge reason is omniscient and of maintaining that other factors can be and are involved, *especially intuition*.<sup>16</sup>

For Berdiaev, who describes himself as a "... thinker *exclusively* of the intuitive-synthetic type,"<sup>17</sup> intuition is a governing principle that does not negate reason, but he views reason as subordinate to intuition. Reason is used to formulate what is known intuitively to be true – formulations are based on intuition. This questionable stance, of intuition assuming

---

<sup>13</sup> Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, 390. It is accepted that Copleston's definition of 'rationalism' – with reason being labeled as 'omniscient' – can be a rather limited understanding; however, this definition is consonant with certain thinkers of the *Silver Age*, including Berdiaev, who followed Aleksei Khomiakov's understanding of rationalism. Opposition to rationalism is a central feature to Khomiakov's thought. This opposition is to the idea of rationalism Khomiakov found in German Idealism. Andrzej Walicki observes: "In working out his epistemological views, Khomyakov took as his point of departure the critique of Western European rationalism or, strictly speaking, German idealist philosophy. Following Kireevsky, Khomyakov accused the idealists of attributing autonomy and absoluteness to the intellect (*Verstand*) and of identifying it erroneously with 'integral reason', the product of all cognitive faculties." Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 201. See also, Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, ed. Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (London: The Hogarth Press Ltd, 1978), 127. Therefore, although Copleston's equation of rationalism with reason being 'omniscient' may strike the contemporary reader as being too narrow a definition, it does accurately reflect Berdiaev's context. See also McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 120.

<sup>14</sup> The influence of Khomiakov is clearly evident at this point. Examining Khomiakov's approach to reason Berdiaev writes, "Logical thought does not grasp the object in its fullness. The reality of the existent is grasped before logical thought comes into play." *RI*, 161. Berdiaev's analysis of Khomiakov is supported by Zenkovsky: "Khomyakov – we must remember – opposes faith to rational cognition, not to *reason*: faith itself, for him, is a function of (integral) reason." Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 194.

<sup>15</sup> For a helpful discussion on the importance of intuition in the *Silver Age* see Catherine Evtuhov, "On Neo-Romanticism and Christianity: 'Spots of Time' in the Russian Silver Age," *Russian History* 20: 1-4 (1993): 197-212. See also *SS*, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, 389 (Italics mine).

<sup>17</sup> Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 243 (Italics mine).

a priority over reason, is a hallmark of Berdiaev's approach, as it was for many *Silver Age* writers.<sup>18</sup>

When Berdiaev discusses the foundations of his thought he frequently turns to a vague conceptualization of intuition. He writes, "Intuition is the *sine qua non* of philosophy. Every true philosopher has an original intuition of his own."<sup>19</sup> Although he does not provide a precise definition for intuition, as a starting point for our examination at the very least we can say that, for Berdiaev, *intuition is an insight into the nature of the phenomenal or noumenal realms, which is particular to the agent and not dependent upon rational processes.*<sup>20</sup> Lowrie describes Berdiaev's view of intuition as "a sort of psychological virgin birth."<sup>21</sup>

We can make the following observations regarding Berdiaev's understanding of intuition:

- i. Intuition is essential for philosophy, and, therefore is essential in the search for truth. "Philosophical intuition cannot be deduced from anything else; it is primary, and secretes in itself the light which will illuminate every act of knowledge. Neither religious nor scientific truths are adequate substitutes for intuition."<sup>22</sup>
- ii. Intuition does not negate reason, intuition does not overturn 'objective' knowledge (knowledge that can be deduced through rational processes), but, reason is never allowed to supersede what the agent intuitively knows to be true.
- iii. Intuition occurs when the agent interacts with the natural world (phenomenal realm) and with deeper realities (noumenal realm). Thus, even though intuition is particular to the agent, there are two external variables – human experience (which, as we shall see, incorporates a vast range of engagements) and the interaction with God – that modulate intuition.

Hence Berdiaev's understanding of intuition is a multi-layered concept, which integrates different factors. Intuition is not only a particular insight, but an insight that is influenced by the agent's experience. As the agent participates in various experiences, and as those experiences are assimilated into the person's existence, there is potential for intuition. "Philosophical knowledge depends on the range of experience, and it also supposes an essentially tragic experience of all the contradictions of human existence. *Philosophy is*

---

<sup>18</sup> Although there were contemporaries of Berdiaev, e.g., Dimitri Merezhkovsky, who would reject any use of reason to communicate that which is known intuitively. See James P. Scanlan, "The New Religious Consciousness: Merezhkovsky and Berdiaev," *Canadian Slavic Studies* 4:1 (Spring 1970): 17-35.

<sup>19</sup> SS, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Even though intuition is particular to the agent, this does not mean that it cannot be communicated to others who share a similar outlook or experience.

<sup>21</sup> Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 243.

<sup>22</sup> SS, 17.

therefore based upon the maximum experience of human existence.”<sup>23</sup> Intuition, then, is dependent on the agent’s ability to integrate a variety of external experiences into his own unique perspective.<sup>24</sup>

Even though Berdiaev emphasizes intuition as an act particular to the agent, he also recognizes that there are multiple factors (from experience to scholarship to culture) that modulate the person’s intuition.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, we can further clarify Berdiaev’s understanding of intuition as an *insight into the nature of the phenomenal or noumenal realms that is particular to the agent, is not solely dependent upon rational processes, and is modulated by internal and external variables.*<sup>26</sup>

### 3. ‘Spiritual’ Experience

Scanlan observes that Berdiaev sought “to ‘confirm’ his mystical conditions metaphysically,”<sup>27</sup> i.e., to apply reason to his intuitions. Scanlan’s comment brings to light one of the reasons Berdiaev’s concept of intuition is opaque – the most valued experience for

---

<sup>23</sup> SS, 17 (Italics author).

<sup>24</sup> Berdiaev’s view of intuition as integrating a variety of experiences bears similarity to conceptions of imagination that can be traced back to Kant, and can also be seen in contemporary scholars such as Trevor Hart (’99 & ’00), Mark Johnson (’87), and Mary Warnock (’76). Johnson observes that, for Kant, imagination is “the act of putting different representations together, and of grasping what is manifold in them in one act of knowledge.” Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 148. Warnock offers a similar reading of Kant’s imagination when she writes, “Without imagination, we could never apply concepts to our sense experiences. Whereas a wholly sensory life would be without any regularity or organization, a purely intellectual life would be without any real content.” Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 30. Johnson, building on Kant’s concept of imagination, argues for a constitutive and a creative form of imagination, “We are imaginatively creative every time we recognize a schema in a new situation we have never experienced before and every time we make metaphorical connections among various preconceptual and conceptual structures.” Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 170. Hart develops the concept of imagination even further, “Imagination, then, enables us to call to mind sets of circumstances other than the actual. These may be things which we (or others) have known in the past but which we are not perceiving or otherwise experiencing in the present (in which case we are dealing either with some form of memory or historical reconstruction). Or, drawing again inevitably on our knowledge and experience of what has been and what is, we may think about the future, about what is yet to be.” Trevor Hart, “Imagination for the Kingdom of God?” in Richard Bauckham, ed., *God Will Be All In All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1999), 54. Berdiaev’s concept of intuition integrating the agent’s experience obviously has close parallels with this line of thought on the imagination. Intuition as integration, however, is not the only facet of his thought; he also incorporates the ‘mystical’ or ‘spiritual’ experience of the agent into his paradigm of intuition. In this phase of intuition ‘sudden insight’ or ‘illumination’ becomes a primary factor. Integration is not negated, intuition still possesses an integrating function, but intuition is also regarded as a sudden insight experienced by the agent from her interaction with the noumenal realm. For Berdiaev’s understanding of the imagination, see chapter 5.

<sup>25</sup> Lowrie: “Despite far-ranging reading Nicolai Alexandrovitch insisted that his thoughts did not arise from books, but rather ‘were fed by intuitions of life.’ Some psychology student could have a field day exploring how Berdiaev’s ‘intuition’ was affected by his reading of different books at the various stages of his development.” Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 243.

<sup>26</sup> The discussion on intuition will continue below under the sections, ‘The Mystical Approach’ and ‘Integral Knowledge’.

<sup>27</sup> Scanlan, “The New Religious Consciousness,” 32.

intuition is a ‘spiritual’ experience, of which mysticism is a critical element. ‘Spiritual experience’, for Berdiaev, is the person’s experience of noumenal (spiritual) reality. He writes, “Philosophy is the science concerning the spirit . . . . In this sense philosophy of the self is not objective. It is based upon spiritual experience.”<sup>28</sup> Without spiritual experience, philosophy would be impossible for Berdiaev, since his thought is “born of spiritual experience, rather than deduced from ascertained and assured premises. Indeed, I cannot even begin to think philosophically in the absence of that inner, spiritual experience.”<sup>29</sup>

Berdiaev believed that the elements central to his thought: freedom, the Triune God, the person, the *Basileia*, et al., are ‘subjective’,<sup>30</sup> i.e. they can only be truly known through the subject’s spiritual experience. Any attempt to establish objective truths (i.e. knowledge or truth that is formulated solely through rational processes) concerning these elements will only obfuscate the truth about them.<sup>31</sup>

Our examination of Berdiaev’s freedom begins where our discussion of his orientation and style ends – his focus on the spiritual. It is from this focus that Berdiaev argues for an origination of freedom.

## §2 THE SEARCH FOR THE ORIGINS OF FREEDOM

McLachlan observes that “The major component of Berdiaev’s thought is his insistence on the metaphysical priority of freedom.”<sup>32</sup> He states that the ‘metaphysical priority of freedom’ is Berdiaev’s fundamental insight in which

. . . freedom is primarily, ultimately real, and as such its essence lies outside any kind of external determination. It cannot be derived from any more fundamental kind of reality. It cannot be subordinated to Being qua Being, because freedom refuses all determination.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Berdiaev, “МИРОСОЗЕЦАНИЕ,” 23.

<sup>29</sup> *DR*, 302.

<sup>30</sup> The term ‘subjective’ is used to indicate the centrality of the person in the cognitive process – Berdiaev regards the person as the ‘knowing subject’. See *SR*, 13 and *SS*, 27. His thought in this regard is closely related to the distinction Martin Buber makes between how the *Thou* and the *It* are known. A subjective approach is concerned with the subject, not only the existential *I*, but also with the *Thou*, while an objective approach is concerned with a thing, which is analogous to Buber’s *It*. Berdiaev: “Objectively we treat of *things*, but subjectively our concern is the *subject*; and even our preoccupation with objective truth is essentially *subjective*. This is, indeed, the very core of Kierkegaard’s thought, which may be summed up as the *identification of the knowing subject with the existential subject*: the primary purpose of subjective thought is to manifest its existential nature.” *SS*, 55 (Italics author).

<sup>31</sup> Berdiaev: “The very contrary is true: objective and impersonal modes of thought are the greatest obstacle to the individual’s emergence from his self-confinement and to his communion with the universe.” *SS*, 28.

<sup>32</sup> McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 121.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

Berdiaev believes that the only recourse to support this radical claim (freedom ‘cannot be derived from any more fundamental kind of reality’, i.e. freedom is a primordial reality that is non-determined) is to argue for an origination of freedom independent of God. In essence, Berdiaev is proposing that freedom be considered as a primary reality; a reality that is *not* attributable to God. To assert this heterodox proposition, which he intuitively believes to be true, he relies on particular streams of thought within the tradition of Christian mysticism.

Despite the difficulty of supporting Reinhold Niebuhr’s observation that Berdiaev is “the most brilliant modern exponent of Greek Orthodox mysticism . . . ,”<sup>34</sup> it does at least indicate the prominence of mysticism within Berdiaev’s thought. Spinka observes that it is with the publication of *Sub specie aeternitatis* (a 1907 collection of previously published articles) that Berdiaev “turned from idealism to what he called ‘mystical realism.’”<sup>35</sup> This concept, for Berdiaev, is understood as a framework where priority is given to mystically apprehended intuition, and it reflects a decisive stage in his thought.

Mystical realism is the position that the mystical experience of the agent reveals a reality greater than the reality of the phenomenal realm. Referring to Russian iconography, Zenkovsky captures well the basic understanding of mystical realism.

Here one grasps intuitively what may be expressed discursively as follows: All material things serve as means for expressing a higher truth, a higher beauty. In philosophic terms, this is a *mystical realism*, which recognizes empirical reality, but sees *behind* it another reality; both spheres of being are real, but they are of hierarchically different value; empirical being is sustained only through ‘participation’ in a mystical reality. The theocratic idea of Christianity amounts to asserting the need to illuminate all that is visible, all that is empirical, by relating it to a mystical sphere; the whole of history, the whole life of the individual, must be sanctified through the transforming activity of divine power in the empirical sphere.<sup>36</sup>

Mystical realism does not deny the reality of the phenomenal realm, but claims that there is a reality more significant than the phenomenal, a reality which ‘sustains’ the phenomenal.

Berdiaev fully utilizes this concept as he comes to believe that existent matter always impinges upon freedom. Mystical realism allows him to ‘see’ beyond the ‘empirical’ (to use Zenkovsky’s terms) to investigate freedom from a perspective that is purportedly beyond the limitations of human existence – the perspective of a ‘mystical reality’. Berdiaev believes

---

<sup>34</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 1, *Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1964), 172.

<sup>35</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 20. Lowrie observes that Berdiaev’s appropriation of the term ‘mystical realism’ indicated his turn towards religion. Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 106.

<sup>36</sup> Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 27 (Italics author).

that mystical realism provides a position from which he can proclaim a basic tenet of his vision: freedom in its primal form is non-determined.

Since Berdiaev believes 'existence' impinges upon freedom, he seeks to establish a theory of freedom that is independent of 'existence'. The development of this thought coincides with the development of his Christian faith; a faith wherein he discovers a long-standing tradition (i.e. mysticism) that becomes a vital resource for his vision of freedom.

Thus, Christian mysticism is an important element for Berdiaev as he seeks to give an account of freedom's origination and nature.

### 1. *The Mystical Approach*

Berdiaev's conception of mysticism is unequivocally situated in the Russian milieu in which he is located.<sup>37</sup> Solov'ev, considered one of the "four giants" who preceded the *Silver Age*<sup>38</sup> and an important influence on Berdiaev, was schooled in German idealism and the German mystics.<sup>39</sup> Louis Shein observes, "According to Solov'ev, the only principle *which can give us true knowledge is mystical intuition.*"<sup>40</sup> Considering the impress of Solov'ev's

---

<sup>37</sup> The *Silver Age* contained multiple avenues of thought concerning mysticism, from Christian to the occult. True to his nature, Berdiaev investigated the spectrum of thought from 'the new religious consciousness' of the Merezhkovskys, to 'the gnostic sectarianism of the anthroposophists', to 'the mystagogical Orthodoxy of Pavel Florensky', and in the end rejected them all because he could not find congruence with his interpretation of Orthodoxy. He writes, "My reaction against the Merezhkovsky atmosphere speeded me on my way to the Orthodox Church, and other phenomena with which I met and which I was bound to oppose in Petersburg at the time, helped in the process." *DR*, 146. From this eclectic background Berdiaev develops a broad view of mysticism, about which we can say the following: (1) the mystical experience is a highly specialized form of spiritual experience. Mysticism is one of the 'qualities' of a spiritual experience. *FS*, 240. Mysticism "may be regarded as a peculiarly differentiated form of the spiritual life and as its crowning glory." *FS*, 250. (2) Mystical experience is not experienced by all, it is an 'esoteric' experience, as opposed to religion, which is an 'exoteric' experience. *FS*, 249. (3) Berdiaev does not go into any substantial detail how the mystical experience occurs, except to mention that at the heart of Orthodox mysticism is the recitation of the 'Jesus Prayer'. *FS*, 256. Thus even though he envisages mysticism as "life at its deepest, as a form of consciousness which includes the whole universe; it pervades everything," he is unclear as to how this significant experience comes about. *FS*, 251. In *SR* (pp. 72-99) Berdiaev devotes an entire section to the ascetic way of life, but this is, in large part, distinct from mysticism. Asceticism, in Berdiaev's view, is a human attempt to reach God, whereas mysticism is God's gift to the human. Cf. *FS* 239-269. Berdiaev is conversant with the writings of mystical theology, regularly referencing various mystics from St. Isaac the Syrian to St. John of the Cross to Meister Eckhardt and especially Jacob Boehme, but he only engages their thought at very specific points, and therefore his view of mysticism, like theology, remains selective.

<sup>38</sup> Evtuhov, "On Neo-Romanticism and Christianity," 7. See also Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance*, 55, 88.

<sup>39</sup> Shein: "But the most important influence on Solov'ev was German Idealism, especially Kant, Schopenhauer, and, most importantly, Schelling. Solov'ev was interested in Schopenhauer's theory of knowledge which distinguishes between phenomena and noumena." Louis J. Shein, "V. S. Solov'ev's Epistemology: A Re-examination," *Canadian Slavic Studies* 4:1 (Spring 1970), 3. And, "Solov'ev's mysticism is derived from Franz Baader, Boehme, and the cabala, which greatly influenced his metaphysics and anthropology." *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 (Italics mine).

thought upon the Russian intelligentsia and Berdiaev, it is not surprising that Berdiaev classifies himself as a ‘*homo mysticus*’ over against a ‘*homo religiosus*’ – a person who places greater emphasis on mysticism than on religion. When Berdiaev uses the term ‘mysticism’ he is frequently referring to an experience where there is an “immediate communion with God, the contemplation of God and union with Him.”<sup>41</sup> It is important to note that even though Berdiaev classifies himself as a ‘*homo mysticus*’ and thereby understands himself as a ‘mystic’ philosopher, he does *not* consider himself to be a mystic. He understands himself as a philosopher who engages mystical thought and practice. Hence the function of mysticism within Berdiaev’s thought is a methodological one, as he attempts to utilize specific mystical concepts (e.g. Boehme’s *Ungrund*), along with certain characteristics paradigmatic of mysticism (i.e. the mystical experience as a cognitive apparatus) to expound what he believes to be a philosophic vision of freedom. Berdiaev’s use of mysticism can be understood as a tool that serves his vision, as opposed to an attempt to establish either a mystical doctrine or himself as a mystic. As we shall see when examining German mysticism, Berdiaev does have certain parameters when considering mysticism, but overall his understanding is quite broad.

Mystical experience as cognition is pivotal to Berdiaev’s thought as he argues that mysticism provides a way of experiencing fundamental reality, the noumenal. In the mystical experience, union with God results in a state where the ‘objective’ realities of the phenomenal realm are no longer primary. This is because within the mystical experience the “intellectual, affective, and volitional life”<sup>42</sup> of the person is being expanded – the person has a greater sense of reality as a result of his noumenal experience.

---

<sup>41</sup> *FS*, 301. Although this definition may appear broad it actually represents a delimitation on Berdiaev’s part. During the *Silver Age* the occult was a prominent topic among the intelligentsia. See Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). By stating that mysticism is communion with God, Berdiaev is seeking to distinguish between a Christian mystical experience and an occultic practice. *FS*, 301. Cf. how Moltmann understands one phase of mysticism: “By ‘mysticism’ here we mean, in the narrower sense, the *unio mystica*; the moment of fulfilment, the ecstasy of union, the submerging of the soul in the ‘endless sea of the Godhead’, as the mystics describe it.” Jürgen Moltmann, “Theology of Mystical Experience,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 32, trans. Alasdair Heron (1979): 511.

<sup>42</sup> *SS*, 17. Berdiaev places a great emphasis on the ‘affective’ life of the person as being a prominent part of the person’s spiritual life. *BE*, 37. By linking the person’s emotional life with her spiritual life Berdiaev does not believe he is reducing knowledge of God to some sort of relativism. “It is an error to think that emotion can only be subjective, whereas thought is objective; that the knowing subject can only apprehend Being intellectually, whereas emotion confines him to the subjective world. Indeed, that is the conception of Thomism and of rationalist philosophy in general, that of almost all the Greek philosophers who endeavoured to pass from the *δόξα* to the *ἐπιστήμη*, from opinion to science, in fact, that of the majority of philosophers. It is based upon an old philosophical prejudice which we are only just beginning to discard to-day.” *SS*, 14.



Within this context, mystical experience is a “mode of knowledge rather than a finished product . . .,”<sup>43</sup> and due to its open-ended nature (i.e. it yields a non-finished product) *precise* explanations as to either how the mystical experience functions as a cognitive process, or, the truths that are made known within the experience, are not possible. “Where mysticism begins, dogmatic precision and valid generalizations end.”<sup>44</sup>

Berdiaev regards the person’s knowledge of God gained through mystical experience as superior to the capacity to know God through discursive thought. His position here has a strong affinity with the following statement by Gregory of Nyssa, a theologian Berdiaev held in high regard. Gregory: “Every concept formed by the intellect in an attempt to comprehend and circumscribe the divine nature can succeed only in fashioning an idol, not in making God known.”<sup>45</sup>

This elevation of mystically acquired knowledge, which is greater than discursive thought, is an important step for Berdiaev’s vision of freedom. This step results from Berdiaev grounding his vision of freedom on the concept of ‘non-determination’. In order to understand freedom as ‘non-determination’, according to Berdiaev, one must comprehend freedom as being ‘non-created’, and, he believes, a mystical approach is the *only* means to propound such an assertion.

Clearly, anything that is non-created (even if it is to be considered ‘no-thing’, as he will classify non-created freedom) intimates God-like status. For a Christian philosopher, such as Berdiaev, a method of discourse must be engaged that can maintain the core beliefs of Christianity (e.g., there is only one Triune God) while providing the latitude to argue for such an unorthodox position. Berdiaev believes that his use of mystical realism enables this necessary latitude, a latitude he does not think exists within theological paradigms.

As mystical realism opens unique insights into the noumenal realm, it is the mystic philosopher and not the theologian, Berdiaev propounds, who is equipped to understand the relationship between God and freedom. “Official theology, strong by reason of its social sanction, regarded its dogma as objective truth which must be opposed to the subjective statements of mysticism.”<sup>46</sup> ‘Objective truth’ (i.e. truth deduced through rational processes)

---

<sup>43</sup> *DR*, 83.

<sup>44</sup> *FS*, 249. “What is called, sometimes in a depreciatory sense, ‘illumination’ is precisely this faith in the possibility of a sudden flash of inner illumination. The human intellect is certainly cognizant of two spheres of operation. There is the sphere of normal, ordinary, thinking, and there is another sphere where the mind receives special illuminations and intuitions.” *FS*, 259.

<sup>45</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, (PG 44,377), as quoted in Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Text and commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Theodore Berkeley, O.C.S.O., revised by Jeremy Hummerstone (London: New City, 1994), 27.

<sup>46</sup> *SR*, 131.

limits the theologian in understanding existential truths, and therefore, theology is always secondary to philosophy.

So, when Andrew Louth asks, “Can there, indeed, be such a thing as Christian mystical theology?”<sup>47</sup> Berdiaev would most likely reply in the negative to Louth’s question. The reason there cannot be a Christian mystical theology is due to the ‘objective’ nature of theology, which cannot incorporate the experiential knowledge gained through the mystical experience.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, within a theological paradigm, investigation of ‘non-created’ freedom is not possible.

Seaver explains why Berdiaev’s thought is so suspicious of theology, “The difference between philosophical mysticism and rationalistic theology is this: that the former is based upon spiritual experience, the latter on the discursive reason.”<sup>49</sup> Despite the fact that this narrow view of theology is highly contestable, Seaver does accurately represent Berdiaev’s view of ‘rationalistic theology’, a theology Berdiaev viewed as impotent when “confronted with the mystery of Divine-human relations as revealed in mystical experience.”<sup>50</sup>

His reliance on mystical experience as a form of cognition, combined with the influence of Khomiakov and Solov’ev, lead Berdiaev to argue that the ‘knowledge’ of God, freedom, and existence must be ‘integral’ knowledge.

## 2. *Integral knowledge*

Berdiaev’s incorporation of ‘spiritual’ experience as a form of cognition superior to reason raises the epistemological concern of how the agent comes to ‘know’. Shein observes that Solov’ev was cognizant of this dilemma, “It should be pointed out that Solov’ev was

---

<sup>47</sup> Louth, *Origins of Christian Mysticism*, xiv. Louth follows this question with the observation, “There are many – particularly Protestants – who say not; yet the phenomenon [a Christian mystical theology] seems persistent, however impossible.” Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Theology receives a decidedly negative appraisal from Berdiaev, since for him theology is consistently concerned with being rational. He argues that the “idiom of theology strives to be rational, to avoid contradiction – though in this it is not always successful.” *SR*, 132. He goes on to argue that “the formulas elaborated by theology exclude paradox.” *SR*, 144. Since, according to Berdiaev, theology is rational and excludes paradox, the mystical experience and the experiential knowledge gained by it are negated by theological formulations. *FS*, 243. This highly prejudicial view of theology is unfortunate as it creates unnecessary division between theology and his philosophic observations and between theology and wider human experience. Although he is skeptical of ‘rationalistic theology’ he is receptive to apophatic theology. “So-called apophatic theology has been upheld by the greatest thinkers, and it is founded on an eternal truth. This eternal truth is the acknowledgment of the Divine mystery inherent in the innermost depths of being. . . . Apophatic theology is mystical rather than agnostic. It affirms another truth: the spiritual interpretation of the Divine mystery, the Unknowable, that which positive concepts are unable to express.” *SR*, 137-138.

<sup>49</sup> Seaver, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 14-15.

<sup>50</sup> *SR*, 144.

fully aware of the difficulties inherent in this principle, since it [mystical intuition] must satisfy objective conditions if it is to be of universal value.”<sup>51</sup>

Space forbids a detailed examination of Berdiaev’s highly speculative understanding of cognition. At the heart of his understanding, and what is essential for our present discussion, is his conception of ‘integral knowledge’.<sup>52</sup> Integral knowledge is the means by which a person is able to ‘know’ truths that originate in the spiritual (noumenal) realm.<sup>53</sup>

The proponents of integral knowledge rely on an alternative paradigm wherein rational thought is not considered to be ‘omnicompetent’ (Copleston) but becomes part of a larger cognitive framework. Berdiaev argues, “We must not seek the criteria of truth in reason or the intellect, but rather in the integral spirit. The heart and the conscience remain the supreme agents of value as well as of knowledge.”<sup>54</sup> Cognition that uses an ‘integral’ approach, as Berdiaev uses the term, is a type of knowing that incorporates the experience of the person’s intellectual, affective,<sup>55</sup> volitional, and spiritual life. Berdiaev:

Purely intellectual discursive knowledge constructs an objectified world out of touch with [noumenal] reality. What is decisively important in knowledge is not the logical process of thought, which ranks as an instrument, and which takes control only in the centre of the path, but the emotional and volitional tension is attributable to the spirit as a whole.<sup>56</sup>

The importance of integral knowledge, for Berdiaev, is based on the premise that integral knowledge is the only means by which the agent may apprehend knowledge of the ‘spiritual’, which is ‘Truth’.<sup>57</sup> Since ‘spiritual’ knowledge is knowledge of the ‘noumenal’, it is an experientially based knowledge. As such, knowledge of the spiritual realm requires a method that allows for cognition beyond discursive thought, a method that integrates all of the cognitive capabilities of the person. Integral knowledge, which seeks to incorporate the varied capabilities of the person, including experience, into the cognitive process and thereby

---

<sup>51</sup> Shein, “Solov’ev’s Epistemology”, 3.

<sup>52</sup> The concept of ‘integral knowledge’ can be traced from Ivan Kireevsky to Khomiakov and then to Solov’ev. It is Solov’ev’s treatment of the concept that makes its imprint upon Berdiaev and indeed upon many within the *Silver Age*. See Shein, “Solov’ev’s Epistemology,” 7.

<sup>53</sup> As Berdiaev understands freedom as originating within the spiritual realm his thought on freedom can only be understood as an attempt to understand freedom from a ‘spiritual’ perspective, which, for Berdiaev, is the definitive understanding of freedom. *FS*, 108.

<sup>54</sup> *SS*, 16.

<sup>55</sup> *SS*, 15.

<sup>56</sup> *BE*, 38. See also Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 102.

<sup>57</sup> Knowledge of ‘Truth’ is, for Berdiaev, knowledge concerned with the noumenal realm. It is an understanding of the reality ‘behind’ (Zenkovsky) the phenomenal realm.

makes knowledge of the ‘spiritual’ possible, is therefore the highest form of cognition for Berdiaev.<sup>58</sup>

Where knowledge is not ‘integral’, Berdiaev believes reason becomes the sole element in cognition; the understanding of ‘Truth’ is no longer possible and the result is ‘ratiocination’.<sup>59</sup>

To summarize this section thus far, we have found:

- i. Berdiaev began his career as a philosopher in a context where mysticism was considered a valid and important means of cognition.
- ii. As Berdiaev turns away from neo-idealism and towards Christianity – while at the same time still holding onto certain central tenets of neo-idealism (just as he did in his turn from Marxism towards neo-idealism) – he incorporates a mystical approach into his own work, what he terms ‘mystical realism’.
- iii. Mystical realism is, for Berdiaev, built around the belief that ‘behind’ the reality of the phenomenal (material) world there is the deeper, or truer, reality of the noumenal (spiritual) world.
- iv. By de-emphasizing reason and valuing other forms of cognition (e.g. mystical apprehension), Berdiaev employs the concept of ‘integral knowledge’, which is the means for comprehending his vision of freedom.

### 3. Symbolism

The problem then arises: how does one communicate integral knowledge, since it relies on data that has been apprehended through spiritual experience? Since integral knowledge is experientially based on a spiritual encounter, Berdiaev argues, it cannot be expressed objectively, i.e., it cannot be communicated by discursive methods. Thus, within Berdiaev’s thought the use of symbol and ‘myth’ will become the primary means of communicating ‘Truth’. McLachlan observes, “The mystical experience that Berdyaeu describes does give its subject knowledge. But it is a pure experience that can be expressed only in the form of symbols.”<sup>60</sup> Berdiaev:

Etymologically speaking the word “symbol” conveys the sense of something intermediary which has the function of a sign, and at the same time it suggests a relationship between the sign and the thing signified. Symbols presuppose the existence of two worlds and two orders of being and they would not exist were there only one order. A symbol shows us that the meaning of one world is to be found in

---

<sup>58</sup> Berdiaev’s conception of ‘integral knowledge’ has strong resonance with Martin Buber’s view of knowledge in *I and Thou*. We can compare Buber’s famous passage on the contemplation of a tree with Berdiaev’s work in *Solitude and Society*. Buber: “But it can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It.” Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 58. Berdiaev: “Communion with men, animals, plants or minerals is an extra-natural phenomenon revealing potential ways of knowing.” *SS*, 51-52.

<sup>59</sup> Seaver, *Nicolas Berdyaeu*, 19.

<sup>60</sup> McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 147.

another, and that this meaning itself is revealed to us in the latter. Plotinus understood by a symbol the union of two things in one. A symbol constitutes a bridge which links together two worlds.<sup>61</sup>

Berdiaev uses symbol and myth as the central means to communicate his mystically based vision of freedom. Within this thought, ‘symbol’ functions as the ‘intermediary which has the function of a sign’. ‘Myth’ is the representation of what the symbol directs our attention towards; myth is the only way to speak of noumenal realities. Berdiaev: “The foundation of mystical and symbolic knowledge is not formal philosophical statement but mythological representation. Concepts are the basis of philosophical statement, while symbols give rise to mythological representation.”<sup>62</sup> Evgueny Lampert describes Berdiaev’s conception of myth as that which “represents within this world the realities which transcend the world; it brings two worlds together in images and symbols.”<sup>63</sup>

The use of symbolism and mythology to express truth does not in any way, for Berdiaev, vitiate the truth being communicated. “Myth is a reality immeasurably greater than concept. It is high time we stopped identifying myth with invention, with the illusions of primitive mentality, and with anything, in fact, which is essentially opposed to reality.”<sup>64</sup> Because the truth expressed cannot be rationally explained or objectively verified does not mean that it is any less true. The use of symbolism does not negate the truth being detailed. Actually the opposite is the case; symbols preserve the truthfulness of the claim by differentiating between spiritual and natural realities. McLachlan explains why symbols are essential to Berdiaev’s thought:

The key to reading Berdyaeu is to see that he, like Schelling, regards the phenomenal world as real, but symbolically so. Objectification is to see the symbol not as a symbol but as the ultimate reality, reifying the symbol. *The phenomenal world is a symbol of a spiritual reality that is deeper than objectification. The problem comes when human beings see the phenomenal world as the only reality.*<sup>65</sup>

McLachlan’s observation is apt; the symbol must not be mistaken for a ‘final’ reality. As Berdiaev writes, “When the mere symbol is taken for the final reality the spiritual world is subordinated to the natural.”<sup>66</sup> To avoid this subordination, symbolism is the necessary device for disclosing the truth that has been apprehended through integral knowledge of

---

<sup>61</sup> *FS*, 52.

<sup>62</sup> *FS*, 69. See also *SS*, 7.

<sup>63</sup> Evgueny Lampert, *Nicolas Berdyaeu and the New Middle Ages* (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1945), 42 fn.

<sup>64</sup> *FS*, 70.

<sup>65</sup> McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 145-146 (Italics mine).

<sup>66</sup> *FS*, 75.

noumenal reality. Symbol and mythology are the only forms Berdiaev will acknowledge as being valid means for communicating noumenal truth. As N. O. Lossky writes,

This interpretation of the symbolism of religious truths must not be confounded with modernism according to which symbols are merely subjective expressions of the inmost reality. In Berdiaev's view symbols are the actual natural reality taken in connection with its supernatural significance. Therefore, the birth of the God-man from the Virgin Mary, His life in Palestine and His death on the cross are actual historical facts, and at the same time they are symbols. Thus, Berdiaev's symbolism is not Docetism; it does not lead to iconoclasm or undermine Christianity. It is a *real symbolism*.<sup>67</sup>

Lossky's comments point to a further instance of how Berdiaev uses symbol and myth; not only are they essential for expressing the mystically apprehended knowledge of the agent, they are also the means by which individuals can understand the collected truths of Christianity. As such, Christian dogma provides an example of how symbol and myth operate within Berdiaev's thought.

Berdiaev understands Christian dogma as an exemplary form of symbol and myth. He explains, ". . . dogma is not doctrine but symbol and myth giving expression to events in the spiritual world of absolute and fundamental importance. Dogma symbolises [*sic*] spiritual experience and life by mythological representations and not by concepts."<sup>68</sup> Hence, dogmas "express the principle which underlies the spiritual life."<sup>69</sup> According to Berdiaev, the 'symbol' of the Trinity gives rise to the mythological representation, as those who have encountered the Triune God attempt to communicate that experience to others. "Dogmas are not theological doctrines, but mystical facts belonging to spiritual life and experience which refer to real religious contacts with the divine world."<sup>70</sup>

For Berdiaev, the symbolic character of the dogma concerning the Trinity does not negate the historical actuality of the Incarnation or the reality of the Triune God. He is unusually direct on this point:

What is essential to me for my own resurrection to eternal life is not the *doctrine* of Christ's Resurrection, but rather the *fact* that this event has actually taken place. I cannot be indifferent as to whether this mystical fact did or did not occur, whereas I can be quite indifferent with regard to the theological or metaphysical doctrine of the

---

<sup>67</sup> Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 235 (Italics author). See also Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, 375, and Tillich, who states that for Berdiaev, "'Symbol' is the expression for the fact, that the natural world has no meaning in itself." Tillich, "Berdiaev," 410.

<sup>68</sup> *FS*, 76.

<sup>69</sup> *FS*, 75. The central dogmas for Berdiaev are, "The dogmas of the divine Trinity, of the dual nature of the God-Man Christ, and of Redemption through the mystery of the Cross. . . ." *FS*, 78.

<sup>70</sup> *FS*, 76. See also *FS*, 78-79.

Resurrection. The denial of the mystical fact of Christ's Resurrection is for me a denial of eternal life, and that is not something which I can calmly admit.<sup>71</sup>

This reliance on integral knowledge, and its expression through symbolism and myth, leads to an approach where the 'knowing subject' plays an important role in evaluating truth and establishing meaning. For Berdiaev, the person's spiritual experiences reveal what is true, and while theology may point to ontic truths, it is only by 'experiencing' them in communion with God through the Spirit that they can be existentially validated.

Berdiaev recognizes that operating from this position – the understanding of truth originating within the person's mystical experience – may result in the person being led astray. Hence, "Mysticism is deeper and more fundamental than theology, though it obviously has its dangers."<sup>72</sup> Berdiaev accepts that the mystical path can be 'illusory'. He writes, "There is, moreover, a danger which besets every attempt to follow the mystical way. Phantasy in this sphere of life may easily be mistaken for reality. Eastern mysticism has recognized and described this condition of being 'charmed'."<sup>73</sup>

Dangers notwithstanding, Berdiaev is convinced that the only way to understand the "mystery" of freedom is through a Christian mystical perspective. In responding to the uncertainty that this mystical approach presents he writes,

But it must be remembered that the spiritual life, generally speaking, is full of danger, for the absence of any spiritual life is in itself a source of security; an ordinary existence and a religion which is merely traditional and external offers the maximum of peace and quietness.<sup>74</sup>

We have considered Berdiaev's approach to mysticism and integral knowledge in broad terms. We see that he considers 'spiritual' knowledge to be of a higher value than 'objective' knowledge and that 'symbols' and 'myth' are essential in communicating 'spiritual' knowledge. As our investigation of Berdiaev's vision of freedom proceeds, we now consider the specific branch of German mysticism that became foundational to his vision of freedom.

---

<sup>71</sup> *FS*, 76 (Italics author).

<sup>72</sup> *FS*, 247. See also *DR*, 182.

<sup>73</sup> *FS*, 260.

<sup>74</sup> *FS*, 260. See also Donald G. M. MacKay, "The Relation of God and Man in the Writings of Nicolas Berdiaev," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 3:1 (March 1950), 385.

#### 4. *German mysticism*<sup>75</sup>

It is the German mystics, Berdiaev contends, where the best of the Eastern and Western Christian mystic traditions reach unparalleled synthesis. “German mysticism is one of the greatest manifestations of spiritual history.”<sup>76</sup> German mysticism, for Berdiaev, is best exemplified in the writing of Meister Eckhardt (1260-1327/8), Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), and Angelus Silesius (1624-1677). Space forbids a detailed analysis of Eckhardt and Silesius and their influence upon Berdiaev. As it is the work of Boehme that plays the most significant role in Berdiaev’s vision of freedom, we will concentrate our attention on his thought.

While the details of Boehme’s personal history are lacking, his influence on European thought, and Berdiaev in particular, is significant and indisputable.<sup>77</sup> Berdiaev discovers in Boehme’s voluntaristic writings a mystical paradigm by which he can take his Kantian influenced notion of freedom and locate it within a myth that expresses “a fundamental truth about existence that is incapable of being expressed in an objective conceptual arrangement.”<sup>78</sup> The myth that addresses this ‘fundamental truth’ is the myth of the *Ungrund*. Berdiaev:

I am thinking of Boehme, who is not only a great German mystic, but also one of the greatest mystics of all time; and particularly of his *The Dark Nature of God*. Boehme’s doctrine is closely connected to what I have been saying, and offers a concrete illustration of the fundamental hypothesis of the metaphysics of history. In fact, I believe it to be one of the most important discoveries of the German spirit. . . . Somewhere, in immeasurably greater depths, there exists a state which may be called *Ungrund* or ‘groundlessness’ to which neither human words nor the categories of good and evil nor those of being or non-being are applicable.<sup>79</sup>

The reason Berdiaev finds Boehme’s mystical theory so compelling is that Berdiaev believes that in order to demonstrate a non-determined freedom, the origination of freedom must be established and it must be proved to originate outside of Being.

This questionable position (freedom originating outside of Being) is based on the idea that “if freedom is real and if its essence lies in the absence of external determination, it

---

<sup>75</sup> For this, and the following section on the *Ungrund*, I am indebted to McLachlan’s detailed analysis in *The Desire to Be God: Freedom and the Other in Sartre and Berdiaev*, 1992.

<sup>76</sup> *SR*, 140.

<sup>77</sup> For a history of Boehme see Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), as well as McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 124 fn., 132-133 fn.

<sup>78</sup> McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 122.

<sup>79</sup> *MH*, 54-55.



cannot be derivative from any more fundamental kind of reality, as any such derivation would be a form of determination.”<sup>80</sup> Berdiaev is convinced that Boehme’s *Ungrund* provides the necessary context to be able to argue for a freedom that can avoid external determination. Consequently, Boehme’s mysticism, in particular his concept of the *Ungrund*, becomes a central component in Berdiaev’s vision of freedom.

### §3 THE UNGRUND

Boehme’s *Ungrund* permeates Berdiaev’s work. Spinka writes, “Henceforth, this doctrine became fundamental to all his later thinking, and he expounded it repeatedly and almost *ad nauseam* in his later writings.”<sup>81</sup> The premise is that before existence, before God, there is an abyss, or void, from which all existence, *including* God, proceeds.<sup>82</sup> Berdiaev interprets the *Ungrund* as “. . . nothingness, the groundless eye of eternity; and at the same time it is will, not grounded upon anything, bottomless, indeterminate will. But this is a nothingness which is ‘*Ein Hunger zum Etwas*’. At the same time, the *Ungrund* is freedom.”<sup>83</sup>

This speculative thought immediately confronts the reader with anomalies that make comprehending this concept problematic. Berdiaev acknowledges this when he writes, “There is no rational, conceptional way of interpreting Eckhart’s *Gottheit* or Boehme’s *Ungrund*; their inherent mystery can only be stated in terms of a definitive concept.”<sup>84</sup> The ambiguity is evident in Boehme’s original formulation. McLachlan states that in Boehme’s writing, “The *Ungrund* itself is envisioned as the undifferentiated abyss of non-being and Being, the primordial realm of origination. *It is the no-thing that is also everything, potentiality without form.*”<sup>85</sup>

Although Berdiaev will deviate from Boehme’s formulation in several key areas, he retains most of the basic tenets of Boehme’s theory, and therefore also retains the

---

<sup>80</sup> Dye, “Nikolai Berdyaev and His Ideas,” 113.

<sup>81</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 118.

<sup>82</sup> Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, 378.

<sup>83</sup> *BE*, 106. Boehme’s theory of the *Ungrund* is an innovative development. As McLachlan writes, “The basic difference between Boehme and the previous Christian mystics of the Neo-Platonic tradition is that he did not regard the Absolute primarily as Being but as will. In the beginning is pure undetermined will; this gives Boehme’s thinking a voluntaristic character new in Western thought.” McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 124-125. The reclassification of the Absolute as Will as opposed to Being is obviously significant for Schopenhauer – the first philosopher Berdiaev read. Berdiaev writes, “It would appear that Boehme was the first in the history of human thought to locate freedom in the primary foundation of being, at a greater and more original depth than any being, deeper and more primary than God himself. And this was pregnant with vast consequences in the history of thought.” *BE*, 109.

<sup>84</sup> *SR*, 140-141.

<sup>85</sup> McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 126 (Italics mine).

obfuscations. Berdiaev attempts to explain the *Ungrund* by writing: “We should probably be right in thinking of *Ungrund* as the primal pre-existential freedom. For freedom precedes being. Freedom is *not created*. That is the definition I personally should propose.”<sup>86</sup>

Berdiaev’s ‘definition’, however, does not address the basic questions needed to understand what the *Ungrund* is and how it can be, for Berdiaev, a ‘myth’ for a primordial freedom.

In attempting to delineate the essential contours of the *Ungrund*, three basic concepts need clarification: ‘nothingness’, ‘Being’, and ‘non-being’. ‘Nothingness,’ also referred to as groundlessness, has no recognizable form or structure by which it may be described; ‘nothingness’ is the *Ungrund*. As Lossky writes, “That ‘nothing’ is not emptiness; it is a primary principle prior to God and the world, containing no differentiation, i.e., no division into a number of definite elements.”<sup>87</sup>

Boehme postulated, and Berdiaev accepted, that this ‘nothingness’ is primordial freedom, which is an ‘irrational’<sup>88</sup> potentiality. Primordial freedom is not created by God, but, like God, ‘existed’ before all creation. ‘Nothingness’ (*Ungrund*) is a ‘void’ or ‘abyss’ *through* which God has brought all ‘Being’ into existence, it is the potential for both ‘Being’ and ‘non-being’.

Berdiaev understands ‘Being’ as anything that exists. ‘Being’ is the potential within the abyss that responds to God’s intention, and becomes existent. Therefore, God is the source and sustainer of all ‘Being’. Even though God is the source and sustainer, God is not regarded as ‘Being’. “God is spirit, not Being,”<sup>89</sup> which is greater than ‘Being’.<sup>90</sup> Because the *Ungrund* contains only the potential for ‘Being’ it is not considered ‘Being’, i.e. it is not existent, and therefore is classified as ‘no-thing’ (‘nothingness’).

‘Non-being’ is that which arises from the *Ungrund* and does not respond to God’s call to be created into ‘Being’.<sup>91</sup> ‘Non-being’ is the genesis of evil; ‘non-being’ exists in rebellion against God. It impacts the created order, but it is not part of the created order. “Thus evil has no basis in anything; it is determined by no possible being and has no ontological

---

<sup>86</sup> *SR*, 145 (Italics author).

<sup>87</sup> Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 235.

<sup>88</sup> See fn. 109 for a discussion on ‘irrational’.

<sup>89</sup> *BE*, 29.

<sup>90</sup> Berdiaev believed that if God could be regarded as ‘Being’ the result would then be the objectification of God and, therefore, he opposed any type of ontological formulations of God. See McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 121-122 fn.

<sup>91</sup> Berdiaev’s view of non-being differs from the view of theologians contemporary with him (e.g. Paul Tillich). Cf. Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 208. Fiddes incorrectly associates Berdiaev with the position of non-being as a ‘hostile nihil’. The nihil, or ‘nothingness’ of Berdiaev’s thought is the *potential* for non-being, it is not non-being *per se*. Therefore ‘nothingness’ (*nihil*) cannot be ‘hostile’.

origin.”<sup>92</sup> By rejecting God’s intention the potentiality within ‘nothingness’ deteriorates into ‘non-Being’, which gives rise to evil.

The *Ungrund*, then, is a primordial freedom that precedes ‘Being’. “Being springs from freedom and not freedom from being.”<sup>93</sup> Since the *Ungrund* is not derived from ‘Being’, it is considered to be ‘no-thing’ while also being primordial freedom. In Boehme’s original vision, McLachlan writes, “Boehme’s dialectical voluntarism is based on the image of groundlessness which is the beginning of the development of Being. The *Ungrund* contains within it all of the antinomies, but they are unrealized and only potential: Boehme calls the *Ungrund* the ‘eternal silence.’”<sup>94</sup> Consequently, the *Ungrund* is “the primary basis of existence;”<sup>95</sup> “it is both prior to and the basic datum of existence.”<sup>96</sup> Because primordial freedom (*Ungrund*) is prior to existence and thus non-created, Berdiaev believes that this freedom can be considered non-determined. Simply put, *since it has no creator and needs no sustainer it can suffer no impingement.*

Therefore, as non-determined primordial freedom, ‘nothingness’ (*Ungrund*) can only be viewed as potentiality. To consider the *Ungrund* as anything else would be to ascribe to it some quality of Being. Philip Hefner writes: “The *Ungrund* is pure potentiality, and God creates the world by bringing possibility into actuality. . . .”<sup>97</sup> This thought immediately presents the paradox of how ‘nothing’, which is typically defined as having no existence, substance, or quantitative value, can be understood to contain potentiality. Dye poses the question:

A traditional metaphysician might object that it is not possible to conceive anything more ultimate than being, since anything must first be in order to have any other attributes, attributes being ‘substantive-hungry,’ necessarily inhering in some being or substance (*ούσία*).<sup>98</sup>

Berdiaev would respond that ‘nothingness’ cannot be known through rational thought and may *only* be understood through ‘spiritual’ experience, and cannot be analyzed within the context of discursive thought.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> *FS*, 165.

<sup>93</sup> *DM*, 36.

<sup>94</sup> McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 124.

<sup>95</sup> Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 150.

<sup>96</sup> McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 175.

<sup>97</sup> Philip Hefner, “God and Chaos: The Demiurge Versus the *Ungrund*,” *Zygon* 19:4 (December 1984), 479.

<sup>98</sup> Dye, “Nikolai Berdyaev and His Ideas,” 114.

<sup>99</sup> “Freedom exposes the limitations of every kind of rational thought; it appears irrational, abysmal, without foundations, inexplicable, non-objectifiable. It [freedom] is revealed in human existence, in spiritual experience.” *SR*, 115.

Even though this controversial position appears to exclude rational enquiry, thereby encouraging a charge of incoherence, Berdiaev would not alter his position. Rational enquiry cannot penetrate ‘Truth’; Truth may only be understood through myth and the *Ungrund is a myth*. Spinka writes, “But it must be reiterated that the *Ungrund* cannot be grasped conceptually, for it transcends all human concepts – it is a myth, a symbol.”<sup>100</sup> Vallon concurs:

It [the *Ungrund*] is an original intuition – a vision. More specifically, *it is Berdyaev’s own vision which cannot be clearly understood unless one has gained a similar experience*. In his [Berdiaev’s] words, it “can only express itself in terms of spiritual life and experience and not in the categories of a rigid ontology. *As rigid ontology this truth can easily degenerate into a heresy.*”<sup>101</sup>

To propose a primal void suggests the problematic position of postulating an entity that is of equal standing to God. Berdiaev acknowledges this difficulty by stating:

My Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant critics have fiercely attacked the idea of uncreated freedom, which conjured up in their minds a spectre of un-Christian dualism and gnosticism and of a presumptuous limitation of divine omnipotence. I admit that my manner of thinking, in this as in many other respects, contributed to the panic. I have already tried to explain that I am as much opposed to ontological dualism as to ontological monism, and that I regard both as rationalizations.<sup>102</sup>

To defend his thought Berdiaev writes that the *Ungrund* “is neither Creator nor creature and is not a reality co-existent with the reality of God.”<sup>103</sup> He is not postulating a form that is greater than or equal to God.

The irrational mystery of freedom independent of Divine creation and determination does not imply the existence of another being claiming equality with Divine Being, it does not in the least imply an ontological dualism. A dualism of this sort would involve rationalization.<sup>104</sup>

Consequently, Berdiaev believes that by arguing that the *Ungrund* is beyond rational investigation and that the void is in no way comparable to the Deity (since it is ‘no-thing’), the charge of “un-Christian dualism and gnosticism” is unsustainable.

Berdiaev’s appropriation of Boehme is not an acceptance of Boehme’s theory *in toto*. Berdiaev modifies Boehme in several key aspects. In the first instance Berdiaev alters a central tenet of Boehme’s theory regarding the ‘location’ of the *Ungrund*. Berdiaev writes,

---

<sup>100</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 120.

<sup>101</sup> Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 151 (Italics mine). See also Dye, “Nikolai Berdyaev and His Ideas,” 114.

<sup>102</sup> *DR*, 288.

<sup>103</sup> *DM*, 71.

<sup>104</sup> *SR*, 114. See also *FS*, 165.

“According to Boehme this freedom is in God<sup>105</sup>; it is the inmost mysterious principle of divine life; whereas I conceived it to be outside God. . . .”<sup>106</sup>

With this modification Berdiaev emphasizes the *Ungrund* as ‘meonic’ freedom, which is a second instance of deviation from Boehme.<sup>107</sup> By describing the *Ungrund* as ‘meonic’ freedom he is placing greater emphasis on the *Ungrund* as primordial freedom rather than will. “There is nothing more sad and barren than that which the Greeks expressed by the phrase *οὐκ ὄν*, which is real nothingness. The words *μή ὄν* [meon] conceal a potentiality, and this therefore is only half being or being which is not realized.”<sup>108</sup> The *Ungrund* as ‘meonic’ freedom is the primal abyss outside God from which both ‘Being’ and ‘non-being’ arise. Even though it is God’s intent to bring forth ‘Being’ from the *Ungrund* there is no ultimate control over the final result, as God cannot control ‘meonic’ freedom.

As the *Ungrund* is the potential for both good and evil Berdiaev refers to it as the “irrational<sup>109</sup> mystery of freedom.”<sup>110</sup> Since the *Ungrund* is not considered to possess rational qualities – there is no way to control or understand what will come forth (‘Being’ or ‘non-being’), hence Berdiaev classifies the *Ungrund* as irrational.<sup>111</sup>

The source of evil cannot be in God, yet apart from God there is no source of being or life. . . . Evil being absolutely irrational, it is therefore incapable of being grasped by

---

<sup>105</sup> Berdiaev understands Boehme’s esoteric notion of the abyss being “in God” to be firmly situated within the German mystical apophatic tradition. *SR*, 140-141. This tradition envisages the Deity as existing in a dynamic state where God is in continuous motion between the Godhead (also called the Divine Life, the Foundation of God, Eckhardt’s *Gottheit*, or Boehme’s *Ungrund*) and the God revealed in the Bible as the Triune God. Hence, Boehme understands the *Ungrund* to be part of the Divine nature while not claiming it to be God.

<sup>106</sup> *DR*, 99.

<sup>107</sup> McLachlan argues that the term ‘meonic freedom’ is original to Berdiaev. McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 139 fn.

<sup>108</sup> *BE*, 97.

<sup>109</sup> As Isaiah Berlin’s work on J. G. Hamann demonstrates, the term ‘irrational’ is not, by the time Berdiaev employs it, a new concept in philosophy or theology. From Hamann (a contemporary of Kant) onwards, ‘irrationality’ frequently indicates a revolt against reason. In one sense this definition is congruous with Berdiaev’s thought since Berdiaev believed that meonic freedom was beyond rationalization, although it is not necessarily a ‘revolt’ against certain conceptions of reason. It must be noted, however, that even though Berdiaev uses the term ‘irrational’ he is not an irrationalist. For Hamann, irrationality is a stance employed against what he believed to be the fallacy of the Enlightenment. Berdiaev is certainly sympathetic to this idea, as can be seen in his early attraction to the Romantic Movement, specifically in the areas of mysticism and intuition. But Berdiaev is not arguing for irrationality as an epistemological position; rather, if one is to ‘experience’ meonic freedom it must be understood that it is irrational, i.e., beyond rational enquiry. Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North: J. G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 39 ff.

<sup>110</sup> *SR*, 114.

<sup>111</sup> The position that reason cannot be the source of or associated with evil, can be traced back to early Greek philosophy. As T. D. J. Chappell points out, philosophy at the time of Augustine could not posit a “knowing, deliberate choice of evil.” T. D. J. Chappell, *Aristotle and Augustine on Freedom: Two Theories of Freedom, Voluntary Action and Akrasia* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1995), 177. Berdiaev’s understanding of irrationality is not identical to this position; however, this bit of basic logic applies – rational thought cannot explain the existence of evil, i.e. the existence of evil is ‘irrational’.

reason and remains inexplicable. . . . Evil is non-being and has its roots in non-existence. But non-being can have no meaning, for meaning is always ontological.<sup>112</sup>

This understanding of evil, then, is a third way in which Berdiaev deviates from Boehme. Boehme considers evil to be “immature good.”<sup>113</sup> It is this understanding of evil that informs Boehme’s ‘dark side’ of God. Evil, for Berdiaev, has destructive consequences and must be separated from God. A recurring theme throughout Berdiaev’s corpus is that God can in no way be associated with evil; this theme, it will be argued later, is one of the main motivations behind his thought.

The last instance of how Berdiaev’s thought differs from Boehme’s can be regarded as an expansion of how Boehme understands the Deity and the person. McLachlan: “Berdyaeu expands Boehme’s image of the genesis of God from the absolute to include not only the development of God but of humanity and the cosmos as well.”<sup>114</sup> The *Ungrund*, for Berdiaev, is conceived as being integral not only to the development of God, but to *all* existence. It is Berdiaev’s contention that the life of God and the life of the cosmos are inextricably linked to the primal abyss.

Thus, Berdiaev differs from Boehme in the following ways:

- i. Berdiaev re-conceives the *Ungrund* as being ‘outside’ God
- ii. He places the emphasis on the *Ungrund* as meonic freedom
- iii. He rejects the conception of evil as merely ‘immature good’
- iv. He envisages the *Ungrund* as integral to all existence

The modification of Boehme’s thought results in a view where the created order is dependent upon the Creator *and* ‘meonic’ freedom. Since out of the primal void God creates, ‘meonic’ freedom becomes a latent element within the created order. All that is created has meonic freedom as part of its constitution. Berdiaev does not reject creation *ex nihilo*; rather he seeks to transform the meaning of ‘nothing’. He believes that God creates out of ‘nothing’, but this ‘nothingness’ is freedom.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> *FS*, 163.

<sup>113</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaeu*, 124.

<sup>114</sup> McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 135.

<sup>115</sup> God creating through the *Ungrund* has obvious parallels to Platonic thought. Hefner highlights these when he quotes Plato’s *The Timaeus*, “Wherefore also finding the whole visible sphere not at rest, but moving in an irregular and disorderly fashion, *out of disorder he brought order, considering that this was in every way better than the other* (italics added) (1937, 13-14).” Hefner, “God and Chaos,” 476. Even though there is similarity between Plato’s ‘visible sphere moving in irregular and disorderly fashion’ and Berdiaev’s *Ungrund* as ‘irrational mystery’ there are important differences as well that separate the two concepts. Berdiaev is *not* arguing that God creates from something – there is no ‘visible sphere’. God creates through the *Ungrund*, which is nothingness. *BE*, 106-112. See also *DM*, 34-41.

This highly imaginative and heterodox thought, then, grounds the experience of freedom in relation to God since it is God who brings all ‘Being’ into existence. The experience of freedom cannot find its source in religion, philosophy, politics, or the person, it can only be found in relation to God, as well as in meonic freedom. Berdiaev:

The source of human freedom cannot be found in the natural man, for he is not an absolute self-sufficient being possessing in himself the source of life. The source of all life goes back to the original fount of being, that is, to God. Thus we reach the conclusion that the origin of man’s freedom is in God, man’s freedom having the same source as his life. By separation from God, that is to say, from the original source of life, man loses his freedom too.<sup>116</sup>

Therefore, even though meonic freedom is latent within creation, human freedom only ‘exists’ by God’s creational design. It is God who brings freedom from ‘no-thing’ into something; without God, ‘Being’ degenerates into ‘non-being’. “All rebellion against God is a return to non-being which assumes the form of false, illusory being, and is a victory of non-being over the divine light.”<sup>117</sup>

We will examine in a later section how relationship with God sustains freedom; at this juncture what must be noted is that the *Ungrund* is the potential for *both* good and evil. This is possible because of the *Ungrund*’s independence from God; it is not part of the Deity, nor is it created by God. It is potential; to use Lossky’s words, “a potency which is *independent* of God. . . .”<sup>118</sup> So even though God creates *through* the *Ungrund*, God does *not* control the *Ungrund*. That is, God uses the potentiality of the void, in essence uses primordial freedom to bring ‘Being’ into existence, while at the same time not being able to prevent rebellion

---

<sup>116</sup> *FS*, 136. The importance of community for the exercise of freedom is discussed in chapter 4.

<sup>117</sup> *DM*, 34. McLachlan’s interpretation of Berdiaev’s position is problematic when he writes, “But because they [individuals] are by nature free, they may realize their divine destiny and return to being and God, or may destroy the image of God within them and return to non-being.” McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 186. Berdiaev believed that sin severs the relationship with God, but it is questionable whether he believes sin can destroy the *imago Dei*. “The Godlike and spiritual life of man is not destroyed but merely damaged by the Fall, and the image of God in man is dimmed.” *DM*, 61. Although, consider: “The freedom of man presupposes the possibility of his divinization as well as the possibility of the destruction of the divine idea and image.” *FS*, 131. Berdiaev’s views are not entirely clear regarding the person’s final status before God. Berdiaev argues for some form of alienation after death – “. . . he [the person] has a right to hell, as it were.” *FS*, 324. In the final consummation, however, God will conquer Hell and restore all to God’s self. See *DM*, 338-359. In discussing the issue of *apokatastasis* and the parables of Jesus in light of Berdiaev’s perspective, Anna Wierzbicka observes, “The parable [the Great Feast – Luke 14. 16-24] addresses the aspect of hell that in Berdiaev’s opinion presents the greatest theological difficulty: can people be deprived of the option of choosing hell? Can’t some invitees refuse to come to the banquet and never change their minds? According to Berdiaev, this is the crux of the matter – it is not a question of God offering the seats of those rejecting the invitation to someone else or of God condemning them forever but of the right of those rejecting the invitation to persevere in their rejection. . . .” Anna Wierzbicka, *What Did Jesus Mean? Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 353. Wierzbicka’s comments are apt. Berdiaev acknowledges the existence of hell, but what Berdiaev rejects is the idea of an *eternal* Hell, calling the idea “absurd and evil.” *DH*, 90.

<sup>118</sup> Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 241 (Italics mine).

against creational design. This means that the *Ungrund* cannot be differentiated by valuations of good and evil. ‘Non-being’ is evil only after it has rejected God’s call; beforehand it is only ‘nothing’.

The possibility of evil is latent in that mysterious principle of being in which every sort of possibility lies concealed. The void (the *Ungrund* of Boehme) is not evil, it is the source of every kind of life and every actualization of being. It conceals within itself the possibility of both evil and of good.<sup>119</sup>

Berdiaev claims that although his ‘myth’ of the *Ungrund* is a “frontier line idea”<sup>120</sup> (and it is in tension with established orthodoxy), it is not heresy, but rather the means to understand the relationship between God, freedom and the person. Despite the fact that the *Ungrund* and his mystically realist philosophy challenge established orthodox doctrine, he believes that his position can enhance the ways in which the individual and the community understand the nature of God and the person.

To summarize this unorthodox view of freedom’s origination: the *Ungrund* is a primordial freedom that is a void or ‘nothingness’. From this void God brings ‘Being’ into existence, and ‘non-being’ is that which rebels against God’s creational design and results in evil. Therefore, all created matter has within itself meonic freedom, which will develop or deteriorate, depending on the subject’s relationship to God and others.

#### §4 SUMMARY

Berdiaev’s concept of freedom is best seen as a ‘vision’ of freedom. In this ‘vision’ his mystical realism places a high value on the intuitive capabilities of the agent to discover the noumenal reality of freedom. This reality is that freedom, in its primal sense, is non-determined. He uses a mystical approach to re-prioritize the value of reason where it becomes part of a complex cognitive framework that has ‘integral knowledge’ as its goal. This approach is not only methodological; mysticism allows for foundational symbols and myths (e.g. Boehme’s *Ungrund*) that Berdiaev uses to proclaim a freedom that exists outside of God and through which God creates.

Our challenge to Berdiaev’s vision will concentrate on his mystical approach as a means of cognition and on his reliance on the *Ungrund* as a myth to describe and ground freedom. We will compare Berdiaev’s picture of the origination of freedom with Moltmann’s

---

<sup>119</sup> *FS*, 165.  
<sup>120</sup> *TR*, 61.



attribution of freedom to the Triune God, where instead of freedom originating in a mystical abyss, freedom comes from a God who experiences the abyss of the cross. It will be demonstrated that Berdiaev's vision of freedom is sufficiently plastic so that the *Ungrund* can be refuted while the core substance of his vision remains intact. This is possible since Berdiaev, like Moltmann, ultimately sees the person's freedom as being made possible through the suffering and love of God through Christ, which is empowered by the Spirit.

## Chapter 3 – Motivations

### §1 INTRODUCTION

At the core of Berdiaev's work are certain concepts that challenge the boundaries of theology and philosophy. Although Berdiaev's thought continuously evolved throughout his career, the understanding of these core concepts (e.g., meonic freedom, the 'person', etc.) remained basically constant. This resoluteness is noteworthy considering that his commitment to these ideas resulted in significant tension with colleagues and the Church throughout his career.

Berdiaev's commitment to these ideas is based on two primary concerns that are evident throughout his oeuvre. These concerns, which become principal motivations for his work, are: (1) the issue of theodicy, what he calls the 'justification<sup>1</sup> of God', and (2) the 'justification of humanity', which is the attempt to define the nature of the person so that the agent's vocation and destiny can be made known.<sup>2</sup> In both concerns Berdiaev believes that the key for a cogent justification will be found in his concept of the *Ungrund*. Ignoring or bypassing these motivations creates the risk of impeding the reader's ability to comprehend, either theologically or philosophically, Berdiaev's thought.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter we will examine these motivations, beginning with the 'justification' of God. We will pay particular attention to the influence of Dostoevsky's *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* on Berdiaev's position. Following Dostoevsky's influence we consider Berdiaev's attempt to construct what he believes to be an unassailable theodicy that will justify God in the light of evil. From theodicy we move to an examination of Berdiaev's 'justification' of the person, in which we will survey why he believes meonic freedom is necessary in order to justify the person. In this section Berdiaev's particular conception of 'personality' will be highlighted along with an analysis of Berdiaev's proposition that

---

<sup>1</sup> Berdiaev uses the term 'justification' in the sense of 'explaining' or 'accounting for' something. As we will see, with God it is explaining the existence of evil in light of a God who is love. With the person he uses the term in a slightly different way, in the sense of explaining the potential that exists within the person. See also fns. 7 and 51.

<sup>2</sup> Berdiaev's conception of the person's vocation and destiny will be explored in chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>3</sup> An example of this (from a philosophical perspective) is apparent in McLachlan's attempt to clarify Berdiaev's modification of Boehme's thought. McLachlan: "To place the *Ungrund* outside the divine life thus makes little sense if we accept what Berdyayev has said elsewhere about the priority of freedom. The only possible explanation of this seems to be either: (a) a concession to traditional theology, or, (b) an effort to clear God of any possible responsibility of evil." McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 137 fn. As we shall see in this chapter, it is precisely the issue of theodicy that causes Berdiaev to modify Boehme's thought and this appears to elude McLachlan's attention.

freedom is essential to personhood. We will conclude with a summary of the material we have investigated and highlight those areas that will become points of engagement with Moltmann's theology of freedom.

## §2 THE JUSTIFICATION OF GOD

Max Weber argues that the metaphysical conception of God creates an “ineradicable demand for a theodicy.”<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Augustine writes that the question of evil's origination worried him from an early age, “a question that wore me out, drove me into the company of heretics, and knocked me flat on my face.”<sup>5</sup> Because of this, Chappell notes, “It was only when he [Augustine] had a satisfactory answer to it [evil's origination], in Christian Platonist terms, that Augustine returned to the Catholic Church.”<sup>6</sup> The torment of Augustine's experience and Weber's insight intersect in Berdiaev's thought. Berdiaev, like Augustine, is deeply concerned with evil's origination, and, like Weber, believes that a Christian theistic position must address the issue of evil and suffering. He termed this task the ‘justification of God’.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding the problem of evil, Spinka comments, “. . . Russian thinkers have agonized over it, have been tortured by it, more cruelly than others. Dostoevsky in particular was almost morbidly fascinated by it.”<sup>8</sup> Regardless of the veracity of Spinka's observation, his comments illuminate how theodicy became a priority for Berdiaev. The importance of Dostoevsky has already been noted; however, we return to his work, specifically the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, to understand why Berdiaev considers meonic freedom to be essential for addressing theodicy and investigating the nature of God.

---

<sup>4</sup> H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1970), 275.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), Book 1, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Chappell, *Aristotle and Augustine*, 122.

<sup>7</sup> By employing the term ‘justification’ he is not implying that a person can alter the nature of God. He is not using the word ‘justification’ as it is commonly used in theological discourse; the person does not alter God's nature. “God does not need to be sanctified by man; He is holy in Himself alone.” *FMW*, 109.

‘Justification’ is used in the sense of explaining the good in the face of evil. “Theodicy should seek to *justify* God by accounting for the origin of the distinction between good and evil.” *DM*, 56 (Italics mine).

<sup>8</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdiaev*, 123.

## 1. *The Legend*

“I feel utterly one with Ivan Karamazov, who was driven mad by the tears of a single little child,”<sup>9</sup> Berdiaev writes. His affinity with Dostoevsky’s narrative results in the examination of God’s nature through a Dostoevsky-influenced perspective. Lowrie comments on the importance of Dostoevsky’s *Legend* for Berdiaev:

Time and again in books on various topics and at different periods of his life he returned to the Legend, as inspiration, starting point, or clincher for an argument. Almost unique in modern literature is this permanent inspiration Berdiaev received from one small section of a chapter in one of a great novelist’s books.<sup>10</sup>

Lowrie’s observation is apt. Berdiaev was firmly convinced that Dostoevsky reveals a crucial issue for humanity and God when he writes *The Brothers Karamazov* in which the character, Ivan, tells the story of the *Legend*. The central issue, for Berdiaev, is how God responds to the existence of evil while not negating the freedom of the person or society. It is Ivan’s focus on the tears of a child and his story of the *Legend* that inspires and directs Berdiaev’s thought.

Wernham explains how Dostoevsky’s narrative influences Berdiaev,

. . . in Berdiaev’s view, Ivan’s was the atheism which brings liberation from an *unworthy* conception of God. As such and thus far it was entirely valid. But it needed to be transcended, and it could be transcended only by a theism based firmly upon the recognition of God’s humanity, by making explicit of what was already implicit in it.<sup>11</sup>

Berdiaev believed that Ivan was correct – if God can be seen as ignoring evil, allowing it to happen, or equally tragic, overcoming evil by negating the freedom of the person – then atheism would be conclusive. Berdiaev rejects Ivan’s argument, however, on the basis that Ivan’s charge against God is not really against God, but against a *false* conception of God. The false conception is a God of ‘progress’,<sup>12</sup> a God who values the ‘happiness’ of individuals higher than freedom; and, according to Berdiaev, it is this false conception that results in Ivan’s atheism.<sup>13</sup>

The way to overcome this distortion and apprehend a God who overcomes evil, while also preserving freedom, is by recognizing God’s ‘humanity’. Berdiaev writes, “I believe

---

<sup>9</sup> *DR*, 57.

<sup>10</sup> Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 257. See also Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 47-48; Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers*, 12-20.

<sup>11</sup> Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers*, 14 (Italics mine).

<sup>12</sup> See *MH*, 193-194.

<sup>13</sup> See *RI*, 78.

that the greatest revolution brought about by Christianity is the revelation of the *humanity* of God.”<sup>14</sup> Wernham’s analysis here is most helpful. Berdiaev’s ‘humane’ God is drawn directly from the *Legend*. “The essential point, in short, is that the term ‘humanity’, as he [Berdiaev] used it, is a comprehensive one connoting not the characteristics common to humans but the characteristics of the Christ of the *Legend*.”<sup>15</sup> To understand Berdiaev’s conception of a ‘humane’ God one must begin with Dostoevsky’s Christ figure.

The Christ of the *Legend* offers no resistance or response to the Grand Inquisitor, refusing to determine or dominate.<sup>16</sup> Dostoevsky’s portrayal of Christ is of one who confronts evil while holding in tension the value of freedom. Therefore, to overcome evil, Christ is willing to suffer so that the potential of freedom can be preserved. Through this action Christ demonstrates, according to Berdiaev, two characteristics of God: God’s love for the person and God’s valuing of freedom – these characteristics are vital to Berdiaev’s thought, and become the cornerstone of his discussion in delineating God’s nature.<sup>17</sup> Berdiaev’s view of God, like Dostoevsky’s, focuses on the centrality of love and freedom. Therefore, *we can say that it is Dostoevsky’s image of Christ that becomes Berdiaev’s hermeneutical key for considering God’s nature*. Berdiaev:

His [Dostoevsky’s] Christ is a shadowy figure who says nothing all the time: efficacious religion does not explain itself, the principle of freedom cannot be expressed in words; but the principle of compulsion puts its case very freely indeed. . . . Two universal principles, then, confront one in the *Legend*: freedom and compulsion, belief in the meaning of life and disbelief, divine love and humanitarian pity, Christ and Antichrist.<sup>18</sup>

For Berdiaev, Dostoevsky’s *Legend* reveals the truth about God and how God responds to evil. God is love and would rather suffer than exercise dominion over the person in order to overcome evil. Antipodal to Christ is the Grand Inquisitor who “wishes to relieve men of the burden of freedom, so that they may all be happy.”<sup>19</sup>

From this interpretation of Dostoevsky, Berdiaev sees ‘humanity’ as “the chief property of God, not almightiness, not omniscience, and the rest, but humanity, freedom,

---

<sup>14</sup> *DR*, 301 (Italics mine).

<sup>15</sup> Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers*, 18 (Italics mine).

<sup>16</sup> Berdiaev: “Christ does not impose His own example by force. If the Son of God had become a Tsar and organized an earthly kingdom, freedom would have been taken away from man.” *RI*, 180.

<sup>17</sup> *SF*, 83.

<sup>18</sup> *DT*, 189.

<sup>19</sup> *MH*, 203. The figure of the Grand Inquisitor will become within Berdiaev’s thought a trope for any person or system of thought that would regard freedom as being ancillary to some type of greater concern. *RI*, 180.

love, sacrifice.”<sup>20</sup> This position, which stresses God’s humanity, is what Berdiaev terms “divine anthropomorphism.”<sup>21</sup> Berdiaev observes anthropomorphic ideas in theology but it is not an anthropomorphism that is ‘divine’.<sup>22</sup> By ignoring ‘divine anthropomorphism’, ‘rationalistic theology’ has an element of cruelty, which is counter to a God who is love. “What has been wrong with anthropomorphism is not that it ascribed to God the traits of humanity, or sympathy, or that it sees in Him a need for responsive love, but rather that it ascribes to Him traits of inhumanity, cruelty and love of power.”<sup>23</sup> Berdiaev claims ‘rationalistic theology’ to be a system that is willing to ascribe to God attributes of ultimate power that impede an understanding of God’s ultimate love. Thus, as Wernham observes, Berdiaev felt justified “to reject any God who is less than humane. . . .”<sup>24</sup>

Divine anthropomorphism leads Berdiaev to claim that certain theological formulations (e.g. sovereignty, omnipotence, impassibility) ignore the interrelationship between the Divine and the human.<sup>25</sup> He believes that the view of God derived from these theological formulations validates Ivan Karamazov’s charge – if God is impassible, omnipotent, and sovereign in an absolute sense, then God is responsible for evil; hence a response to theodicy cannot be made. His alternative to this view, which incorporates Boehme’s thought, proposes a unique understanding of God’s nature.

## 2. *The Justification of God*

In Berdiaev’s view of God’s nature, God is sovereign over all that exists. This view of sovereignty, however, is given a distinctive treatment. So, Berdiaev can write that sovereignty “does not belong to the people or to the proletariat but to God, to Truth himself . . . ,”<sup>26</sup> while at the same time insisting that God is *only* sovereign over ‘Being’ (existence).<sup>27</sup> “God the creator is all-powerful over being, over the created world, but He has

---

<sup>20</sup> *SF*, 85. See also *TR*, 53.

<sup>21</sup> *TR*, 116. Divine anthropomorphism is drawn from the Eastern Orthodox view of the Incarnation combined with Solov’ev’s doctrine of Godmanhood. For an account of ‘God-manhood’ see chapter 4.

<sup>22</sup> Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 158.

<sup>23</sup> *DH*, 3. See also Robert T. Osborn, *Freedom in Modern Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 224.

<sup>24</sup> Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion on Berdiaev’s view of theology see chapter 2, fn. 48.

<sup>26</sup> *EOT*, 196.

<sup>27</sup> Berdiaev’s understanding of ‘sovereignty’ relies on an understanding of God in relation to the *Ungrund*. This results in a view of sovereignty that is in tension with more traditional understandings of the term. While it may have been more appropriate for Berdiaev to use a term other than ‘sovereignty’, unfortunately, he does not. This is because ‘sovereignty’ is an important concept for his eschatological thought, specifically regarding the *Basileia*, where God will ultimately conquer all.

no power over non-being, over the uncreated freedom which is impenetrable to Him.”<sup>28</sup> This controversial position thus clearly separates itself from more traditional views of sovereignty. For Berdiaev, God is *not* sovereign over ‘nothingness’ (the *Ungrund*), which contains “within it both good and evil. . . .”<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, as God has no power over the *Ungrund*, God cannot dictate the outcome of meonic freedom as it enters the created order.<sup>30</sup> Since God is not sovereign over the *Ungrund*, Berdiaev can state, “We may not think of being as outside of God, but we may thus think of non-being. *This is the only way to understand evil without making God responsible for it.*”<sup>31</sup>

Berdiaev believes that this view provides a clear contradistinction between a God of love and the God of ‘rationalistic theology’. He believes this view also supports his twin concerns of demonstrating that evil does not originate with God and that freedom is an integral element of existence. As Lossky comments, “he is led to that conclusion by his conviction that freedom cannot be created and that if it were, God would be responsible for evil. A theodicy would then be impossible, Berdiaev thinks.”<sup>32</sup> By stating that meonic freedom (which exists outside God’s control) is responsible for evil, Berdiaev believes that God is separated from any association with evil, and *thus God is justified*. According to Berdiaev,

The dwelling place of freedom is the abyss of darkness and nothingness, and yet apart from freedom everything is without meaning. It is the source of evil as well as of good. . . . God is All-powerful in relation to being but not in relation to nothingness and freedom; and that is why evil exists.<sup>33</sup>

Berdiaev is convinced that the alternative to this view –freedom originating in God – will imply that evil can in some way be attributed to the Deity.<sup>34</sup> This is the position, he claims, of ‘rationalistic theology’, whereby a paradigm is created in which God allows evil to

---

<sup>28</sup> *DM*, 34.

<sup>29</sup> *BE*, 108.

<sup>30</sup> *SR*, 115.

<sup>31</sup> *DM*, 39 (Italics mine). For a fuller accounting of this position see *FS*, 163-170; *DM*, 37-47; *SF*, 86-89.

<sup>32</sup> Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 236. Cf. a similar position in Charles Hartshorne: “That God cannot extinguish freedom and hence cannot extinguish all evil is no external constraint upon him but just his own essence. . . . ‘Why did God make free beings, with all the dangers this involved?’ is meaningless, since it supposes an alternative where there is none. Possible alternatives are within freedom, not to it.” Charles Hartshorne, “Whitehead and Berdiaev: Is There Tragedy in God,” *The Journal of Religion* 37:2 (April 1957), 78.

<sup>33</sup> *FS*, 160.

<sup>34</sup> Berdiaev bases this assumption on the idea that evil is the result of the good not being chosen. If God grants the freedom that makes this choice possible then God can be said to be the cause of evil.

occur.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, not only can evil be attributed to God, but the logical extrapolation from this alternative perspective is a God who is impassible; a God who is an absolute sovereign granting freedom and then allowing evil to occur. He rejects this position, writing, “Self-satisfaction, self-sufficiency, stony immobility, pride, the demand for continual submission are qualities which the Christian religion considers vicious and sinful, though it calmly ascribes them to God.”<sup>36</sup>

In opposition to this view of how God interacts with the world, Berdiaev proposes a novel understanding of God’s nature, which takes into account a created order where meonic freedom is latent. In this view, God creates and sustains all that exists, yet God cannot negate freedom. Thus even though God is the Creator, the existence of meonic freedom means that “. . . God is not world providence,” Berdiaev asserts, “that is to say not a ruler and sovereign of the universe, not *pantokrator*. God is freedom and meaning, love and sacrifice; He is struggle against the objectivized world order.”<sup>37</sup>

Berdiaev’s conception of God’s power obviously runs counter to certain strands of Christian scripture and tradition. Where scripture and tradition contradict his view Berdiaev makes the bold claim that they are wrong. He is committed to the position that his view of God’s nature is true to the ‘spirit’ of the Gospels. He believes that traditional formulations of God as a Sovereign are based on ancient societal standards and therefore should *not* be considered normative.<sup>38</sup> With regards to scripture, he is convinced that where scripture describes a God who controls *all* things, such that evil can be attributed in some way to God, it is a result of ‘un-Christian’ influences within the text.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Berdiaev: “Rational theology establishes not only a false theodicy, which in actual fact justifies not God but godlessness; it also sets up a false doctrine of divine providence in the world. . . . It makes God appear always an autocratic monarch, making use of every part of the world, of every individuality, for the establishment of the common world order, for the administration of the whole to the glory of God.” *SF*, 88-89.

<sup>36</sup> *DM*, 37. Cf. a similar line of thought in Moltmann’s *CG*, “For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love; he can only be loved by all non-divine beings by virtue of his perfection and beauty, and in this way draw them to him. The ‘unmoved Mover’ is a ‘loveless Beloved’.” *CG*, 222.

<sup>37</sup> *SF*, 89.

<sup>38</sup> Berdiaev maintains that our knowledge of God must be ‘purified’. “This means the purification of the knowledge of God from the ideas of bad earthly theocracy. It is precisely the absolutist monarchical understanding of God which has given rise to atheism as a righteous revolt.” *SF*, 85. See also Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 126.

<sup>39</sup> Berdiaev: “An absolute and eternal light shines in the Gospels, but there is also a great deal which is petty and unacceptable and in need of clarification. . . . The literal acceptance of the text of the Gospels not only leads to the contradictions which biblical criticism discloses, but also it cannot be reconciled with the higher level of moral consciousness which has been reached under the influence of Christianity itself as it has carried on its work beneath the surface of life.” *TR*, 131. See also *TR*, 114. An example of what is ‘unacceptable’ for Berdiaev would be any reference in scripture to hell being a place where individuals will go to be *eternally* punished.



Berdiaev is convinced that by separating God from the attributes of ‘rationalistic theology’ it is possible to see that not only is God not responsible for evil, but a fuller understanding of God’s perfection is achievable. God is perfect not because he is omnipotent, immutable, or unmoved by the cosmos and the creatures that inhabit it; God’s perfection is revealed in God’s eternal love and yearning for relationship with all that exists. “The fact that God longs for His other self, for the free response to His love, shows not that there is any insufficiency or absence of fullness in the Divine Being, but precisely the superabundance of His plenitude and perfection.”<sup>40</sup>

If God’s perfection, however, rests on concepts such as omnipotence, immutability, impassibility, etc., then Berdiaev believes a perception of God as tyrant is inevitable, since this type of God would be unmoved by what occurs in the created order.<sup>41</sup> By basing God’s perfection on love and freedom (freedom for both God and creation) the perception of a tyrannical God is nullified. God is not a tyrant or despot as can be seen in the fact that God is engaged with the created order – to such an extent that in seeking to restore freedom to the created order and to overcome the consequences of sin, God’s own Son is crucified.<sup>42</sup>

By enduring the torment of Crucifixion, Berdiaev believes God clearly shows that evil can only be defeated through suffering, if freedom is to be preserved. By suffering on the Cross and thereby preserving freedom, God creates the potential for relationship between the Deity and the created order. “But the religion of truth crucified is the religion of the freedom of the spirit. Truth crucified possesses no logical nor juridical power of compulsion and it made its appearance in the world as infinite love, and love does not compel; rather it makes man infinitely free.”<sup>43</sup>

In summary, Berdiaev recognizes that this view of freedom and God’s relation to it is contrary to certain Christian understandings of God’s nature (particularly God’s sovereignty and omnipotence). Yet he propounds that his view is essential for one to understand a God who is love in a world of suffering. “Without freedom there can be no theodicy and the

---

<sup>40</sup> *FS*, 191. See also *SF*, 84.

<sup>41</sup> Moltmann offers a similar observation when describing the problematical nature of narrowly defining God as ‘almighty’: “The ‘Almighty’ can do all things but may not display any weakness. God may rule but cannot suffer. God must direct but cannot be directed. God must always speak but cannot listen. A God who is so one-sidedly defined, simply cannot be the living God. . . . The God who alone is active and all-causative condemns all others to passivity and utter dependence.” *HG*, 95. See also Hartshorne, “Whitehead and Berdyaev,” 72.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. the parallels with Moltmann’s thought: “God allows himself to be humiliated and crucified in the Son, in order to free the oppressors and the oppressed from oppression and to open up to them the situation of free, sympathetic humanity.” *CG*, 307.

<sup>43</sup> *FS*, 141. See also *FS*, 192. For a further discussion on Berdiaev’s Christology see chapter 4.

whole world-process becomes nonsense.”<sup>44</sup> He believes there is no alternative, since to deny primordial freedom is to create a link between God and evil, which will justify Ivan Karamazov’s argument. The root of evil cannot be found in God – its source is in freedom, as “all tragedy is connected with freedom.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the *Ungrund* is inextricably connected to the Dostoevsky-influenced theodicy Berdiaev maintains is essential for understanding God, “Who is a God of love, of sacrifice and of suffering.”<sup>46</sup>

### §3 THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE PERSON

One of the axial themes within Berdiaev’s thought is the person – who she is, why she exists, and what her destiny is. Tillich observes that “. . . not only in Berdyaev but in all those who dealt with the same problem in a similar situation, was the question of the nature and existence of man. The doctrine of history drove us – I include myself in this group – to the doctrine of man.”<sup>47</sup> As Berdiaev writes, “The fundamental problem of philosophy is the problem of the human being.”<sup>48</sup>

For Berdiaev, the ‘problem of man’ is the problem of how to understand the person as being the ‘image and likeness of God’ and being a ‘natural being’ as well. The individual is “the point of intersection of two worlds, he reflects in himself the higher world and also the lower world.”<sup>49</sup> Berdiaev understands this ‘problem’ to be how the individual, who is the intersecting point of these two ‘worlds’, can understand herself and therefore fulfill her vocation and destiny. The attempt to answer this question is what he terms the ‘justification’ of the person.

The term ‘justification’ here can be seen as Berdiaev’s interpretation of the Russian notion of *anthropodicy*. In Russian thought, *anthropodicy* is often viewed as the justification of the person in the light of evil.<sup>50</sup> Berdiaev reconfigures this as he seeks to justify (i.e. to

---

<sup>44</sup> *FS*, 119.

<sup>45</sup> *DM*, 40.

<sup>46</sup> *SF*, 51.

<sup>47</sup> Tillich, “Berdyaev,” 408.

<sup>48</sup> Berdiaev, “МИРОСОЗЕЦАНИЕ,” 24.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>50</sup> A contemporary perspective can be seen in an address from *The Problem of Evil* conference in 2005. Metropolitan Philaret of Minsk and Slutsk writes: “Evil is manifested in us ourselves and sometimes takes hold of us. That is why *theodicy* is linked with *anthropodicy*, ‘justification of the human being’. The question arises: How to justify our own existence, because we can see that sin in us is so all-powerful that good intentions [*sic*] and actions sometimes turn into evil, because we can turn the good that we do into a source of our own destruction if it becomes in us the cause of vanity, hypocrisy, self-praise and pride.” Metropolitan Philaret, “The Problem of Evil in Orthodox Theology,” paper presented at the international conference on ‘The Problem of

explain) the person in the light of freedom, positing that freedom must be considered if we are to understand the person.<sup>51</sup>

Berdiaev's concern to justify the person is a primary motivation within his existentialist approach. His commitment to the person developed early in his career and as Spinka observes, "This conviction [the importance of the person] runs like a red thread through all his works."<sup>52</sup> Berdiaev writes, "Man is the dominating idea of my life – man's image, his creative freedom and his creative predestination."<sup>53</sup> His thought on the person is developed through his concept of 'personality'.

### 1. *Personality*

Berdiaev's existentialism is grounded in the belief that the agent can never be a 'means' to something greater, but is always an 'end'.<sup>54</sup> The person's intrinsic value should never be subsumed under a great good. His existentialism operates on the premise that although the person possesses intrinsic value by virtue of being created in God's image, it is a value that must be actualized and developed through the free activity of the agent. "Man is a person only if he is a free spirit reflecting the supreme Being."<sup>55</sup> This assertion, then, seeks to define the terms 'individual' and 'person' in unique ways while also making a clear distinction between the two concepts. MacKay, commenting on this difference between an 'individual' and a 'person', writes,

---

Evil,' sponsored by The Society of Christian Philosophers, The Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Science of the Russian Federation, and the Synodal Theological Commission of the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow, 6 - 8 June 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Berdiaev's passionate commitment to 'justifying' the person results in his thought often being regarded as anthropocentric. This position is not wholly unique to Berdiaev. As Vallon correctly points out, Russian thinkers are, in general, anthropocentric in their outlook. Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 27. Even though anthropocentrism is not exclusive to Berdiaev, it is Berdiaev, along with Frank and Lossky who are noted, among *Silver Age* writers, as writers who assign to the person a role of central importance. McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 113. It is accepted that the label of anthropocentrism – a proposition that the person is the central factor in understanding existence – has a decidedly negative connotation for theological reflection. Berdiaev held the opposite to be true. Berdiaev believed that to be truly anthropocentric is to be Christocentric since God, through Christ, is both God and human. "... Christian anthropology recognizes the absolute and royal significance of man, since it teaches of the incarnation of God and the divine possibilities in man, the mutual inter-penetration of divine and human natures." *MCA*, 80. This thought draws heavily from his Orthodox understanding of Christ's nature and the concept of *theosis* (for a fuller exposition of this position see chapter 4). Consequently, Berdiaev accepts the term 'anthropocentric', understanding it to be a necessary concept for Christian thought.

<sup>52</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 139.

<sup>53</sup> *SS*, 202.

<sup>54</sup> Once again Dostoevsky's influence is clearly evident. Berdiaev: "Already in *Letters from the Underworld* we are shown oppressed man rebelling against the world of order, 'the power of the generals,' against necessity, against 'twice-two-are-four,' against the transformation of the unique, irreplaceable personality into a 'base machine,' a mere means to ends which are alien to the man himself." *TNE*, 56-57.

<sup>55</sup> *TNE*, 23.

As individual, he is part of nature, a member of society, a number on a National Registration Card, a name on a voter's list, a unit in a factory organization, a *means* to an end. He is an object, the product of his environment, a slave to tradition and custom, capable of communication with other individuals but incapable of communion with them as persons.

As person he is *subject*, free, not part of anything, unique, a creative being, indestructible: not an aggregate, or a unit in a mass, but a primary whole, a microcosm, reflecting, potentially at least, in himself the whole universe.<sup>56</sup>

What enables the individual to become a person, Berdiaev posits, is 'personality' – personality is the basis of personhood.<sup>57</sup> Personality is not simply the qualities that differentiate one individual from another; personality is the means by which a human becomes a person as opposed to remaining an individual. Personality "is the highest value in the world."<sup>58</sup> Berdiaev:

*Personality is the image and likeness of God in man* and this is why it rises above the natural life. . . . Personality is spiritual and presupposes the existence of a spiritual world. The value of personality is the highest hierarchical value in the world, a value of the spiritual order.<sup>59</sup>

This raises the question: how can personality be "the image and likeness of God in man" (i.e. the *imago Dei*) and yet not be evident in all people (for in this view not all individuals are persons)? Berdiaev attempts to overcome this difficulty by re-conceiving the *imago Dei* as a divine-human event. Philippe Sabant addresses this when he writes, "The very possibility for man to become a *personality* . . . presupposes freedom."<sup>60</sup> Sabant correctly interprets Berdiaev's position: personality is both gift (*imago Dei*) and achievement – an achievement that relies on the agent's freedom.<sup>61</sup> Hence, within Berdiaev's thought, personality is a potential created by God that is instilled in all individuals, and must be *actively* received and developed by each human for it to be realized – "personality is a task to be achieved."<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> MacKay, "Relations of God and Man," 381 (Italics author). MacKay is here referencing Seaver's essay on Berdiaev in Stefan Schimanski and Harry Treece, eds., *Transformation Three* (London: Lindsay Drummond Ltd., 1945). It is acknowledged that this language of 'individual' versus 'person' can be confusing since a person is, if anything, an individual. What Berdiaev is striving for, however, is the recognition that a human is not a person simply because she is recognized as an 'individual'. Personality (i.e. personhood) is dependent upon other factors.

<sup>57</sup> For Berdiaev's discussion of the Ego, which is antecedent to personality, see *SS*, 87-89, 159; and McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 175-176.

<sup>58</sup> Spinka, "Berdyaeu and Origen," 20.

<sup>59</sup> *DM*, 72 (Italics mine). See also *SS*, 29.

<sup>60</sup> Philippe Sabant, "Christ, Freedom and Salvation in the Thought of Nicholas Berdyaeu," *The Ecumenical Review* 36:3 (July 1974), 484 (Italics author).

<sup>61</sup> Berdiaev: "Christianity affirms that every man has it in his power to become a personality, and that he must be afforded every opportunity of achieving this end." *SS*, 170.

<sup>62</sup> *DM*, 71.

With his assertion that personality is based on the *imago Dei* and requires the actualization of each individual, we see Berdiaev's commitment to existentialism coinciding with the development of his Christian faith.<sup>63</sup> "I became a Christian," Berdiaev writes, "because I was seeking for a deeper and truer foundation for belief in man."<sup>64</sup> Copleston points to the interconnection between Christianity and 'personality' in Berdiaev when he observes, "Personality is a religious category. That is to say, the human being is a person only as related to God."<sup>65</sup>

Berdiaev's context – a Russian Orthodox perspective modulated by the *Silver Age* – plays a significant part in how he envisages the interconnectedness between his view of Christianity and personality. So, when Berdiaev writes, "The biblical and Christian doctrine alone deals with the whole man, with his origin and destination,"<sup>66</sup> it is consistent with his religious-intellectual context that he goes on to say, "But biblical anthropology is incomplete and insufficient, it is built upon the Old Testament and does not take into account the fact of the Incarnation."<sup>67</sup>

## 2. *Personality, Incarnation, and Theandric Existence*

The Incarnation is a pivotal concept for Berdiaev's thought on personality, as he interprets it as an affirmation of humanity's divine-human potential. "The second Face of Divinity is manifested as the human face, and by this very fact man finds himself at the centre of being. . . ."<sup>68</sup> Consistent with his context, Berdiaev integrates the doctrine of the Incarnation, *theosis*, and the Russian concept of 'God-manhood'<sup>69</sup> to propose his unique conception of personality. This integration of thought allows Berdiaev to interpret the significance of Jesus as God-man to mean that the individual is not *entirely* defined by the parameters of the natural world. Personality, in an ultimate sense, is grounded and sustained

---

<sup>63</sup> Thus we see that Berdiaev's commitment to the Christian faith impacts his methodology. As was demonstrated in chapter 2, Berdiaev's use of mysticism, particularly his mystical realism, was directly influenced by his turn to Orthodoxy. Here we see that his commitment to existentialism also occurs at this juncture of his career.

<sup>64</sup> *DR*, 180. We find a similar perspective in the writing of Berdiaev's contemporary S. L. Frank. "I have already pointed out that Christianity is a religion of human personality; it reveals the holiness and the absolute value of human personality; it preaches faith in man." S. L. Frank, *God With Us: Three Meditations*, trans. Natalie Duddington (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946), 161.

<sup>65</sup> Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, 381.

<sup>66</sup> *DM*, 69.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *FS*, 206.

<sup>69</sup> God-manhood is the unity of God and person and is only intelligible through the Orthodox interpretations of the Incarnation and theosis. For a more detailed account of 'God-manhood' see chapter 4.

by God. Berdiaev believes when Christ assumed the form of humanity, God revealed the divine possibilities for what it means to be human.

The divine-human status of Jesus, then, has a direct bearing as to the development of the individual. As heirs with Christ<sup>70</sup> and created with the *imago Dei*, the maturation of personality can lead to a divine-human person.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, this development of personhood can only be comprehensively realized within the Christian faith, since it is grounded upon a trinitarian understanding of God. Because of this, Berdiaev claims that Christianity is a religion of personality.<sup>72</sup> Spinka accurately summarizes the importance of personality for Berdiaev: “Mature personality is to be regarded as the realization of God’s idea for the particular human being, the supremacy of the image of God in man over his physical nature. In this respect, personality surpasses the other component parts of human nature, as well as the world of matter.”<sup>73</sup>

We can thus make the following observations regarding personality:

- i. It is a gift from God in the form of the *imago Dei* and relationship with Christ
- ii. It is the development of the image and likeness of God within the individual
- iii. It is a spiritual category (i.e. it derives its existence from God and cannot be derived from the natural world)
- iv. It is the highest value the person can achieve<sup>74</sup>

Berdiaev is aware that by arguing for personality as a ‘divine-human potential’ he may be obscuring the distinction between God and human. His particular understandings, however, of *theosis* and the concept of God-manhood means that a precise differentiation between the divine and human is not necessary. Berdiaev minimizes differentiation because he believes God’s intention for the person is a divine-human interrelationship.

Human personality is theandric existence. Theologians will reply in alarm that Jesus Christ alone was God-man, and that man is a created being and cannot be God-man. But this way of arguing remains within the confines of theological rationalism. Granted man is not God-man in the sense in which Christ is God-man, the Unique One; yet there is a divine element in man. There are so to speak, two natures in him. There is within him the intersection of two worlds. He bears within himself the image which is both the image of man and the image of God and is the image of man in so far as the image of God is actualized. . . . That man bears within himself the image of God and in virtue of that becomes man, is a symbol. One cannot work out an

---

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Gal. 4: 7, Rom. 8: 15-17.

<sup>71</sup> *DH*, 112.

<sup>72</sup> See *SF*, 28.

<sup>73</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 140-141.

<sup>74</sup> Regarding the issue of ‘value’ Berdiaev writes, “Man, human personality is the supreme value, not the community, not collective realities which belong to the object world, such as society, nation, state, civilization, church. That is the personalist scale of values.” *SF*, 28.

intellectual concept about it. Divine-humanity is a contradiction for the line of thought which inclines towards monism or dualism.<sup>75</sup>

Personality as ‘theandric existence’ means that it is an activity in which the agent participates in union with God to develop his God-given personality. The individual must actively seek to ‘transcend’<sup>76</sup> and develop this gift.<sup>77</sup> To accomplish this demands the effort of the entire person, therefore, personality “is totalitarian, for it integrates the spirit, soul and the body.”<sup>78</sup>

This ‘totalitarian’ effort requires freedom, so despite the fact that Robert Osborn oversimplifies when he writes that, for Berdiaev, personality is the *telos* of freedom,<sup>79</sup> he is correct in establishing a linkage between personality and freedom. To work towards the development of personality, the person must have some form of freedom. Berdiaev: “A personality is created by the Divine Idea and human freedom. The life of personality is not self-preservation as that of the individual but self-development and self-determination.”<sup>80</sup>

The importance of freedom for the development of personality is related directly to meonic freedom. This is because Berdiaev holds the highly questionable belief that ‘self-determination’ is only possible if the person’s freedom is derived from a non-determined source, i.e. the *Ungrund*. We will address this issue in depth in the next chapter (as well as critically challenging it in chapter 7), but at this juncture what is important to recognize is that Berdiaev believes that if freedom is derived from God, freedom would be in some form ‘determined’. If freedom is determined, the person cannot act in self-determined ways, which puts the development of personality in jeopardy.

Thus meonic freedom becomes an integral concept in Berdiaev’s justification of the person. If personality solely resulted from God’s grace, if the Deity created the human with an established personality, or if God was the sole source of the individual’s freedom then the person would be “merely a good automaton.”<sup>81</sup> There would be no “capacity to feel sorrow and joy,”<sup>82</sup> and therefore no capacity to enter into communion with God and others.<sup>83</sup> As the person is not an automaton, but has the ability for free actions, he is able to respond to God’s

---

<sup>75</sup> *SF*, 45. See also *MCA*, 79.

<sup>76</sup> *SS*, 117.

<sup>77</sup> Although we will examine select aspects of the ways in which the person ‘develops’ this gift in chapter 4, see both Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev* (141-147) and Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom* (188-192) for a fuller accounting of this complex idea.

<sup>78</sup> *SS*, 160.

<sup>79</sup> Osborn, *Freedom in Modern Theology*, 184.

<sup>80</sup> *DM*, 73.

<sup>81</sup> *FS*, 131.

<sup>82</sup> *SF*, 50.

<sup>83</sup> *SS*, 200.

call.<sup>84</sup> The person's free response is a struggle that has consequences, as Spinka observes, for personality ". . . is a duty, a moral obligation. Whether or not a man achieves personality during his lifetime is not a matter of indifference."<sup>85</sup>

This struggle is evident in that there are individuals who would prefer to ignore their duty rather than engage in the task. "The Ego's purpose is to realize its personality, and this involves it in an incessant struggle. The consciousness of personality and the endeavour to realize it are fraught with pain. Many would rather renounce their suffering which its realization involves."<sup>86</sup> Without freedom the subject cannot undertake this duty – development of personality can only occur on the level of the agent. God creates the potential for personality and graciously grants it to the individual. God, however, cannot instill personality. Berdiaev's justification of the person, then, is his assertion that for the individual to become a person, freedom is necessary and must be highly valued.

#### §4 SUMMARY

In this chapter we have examined the twin concerns that are the motivations for Berdiaev's vision of freedom – justifying God in the light of evil, and justifying the person in the light of meonic freedom. In both concerns Berdiaev believes that freedom is essential to adequately explain the existence of evil as well as the nature of the person. Berdiaev's Dostoevsky-influenced perspective emphasizes the 'humanity' of God and God preserving freedom by overcoming evil through suffering (as demonstrated in the crucified Christ). Berdiaev reconfigures the term 'personality' to indicate how the person moves from being an individual to a person; and contends that meonic freedom, which makes self-determination possible, must play an essential role in this development. In conjunction with this, the Incarnation is a highly valued concept as it reveals the divine destiny of the person as well as demonstrating true personhood. Thus freedom is not only the objective for the person, but also the key for understanding both God and person.

Our critique of Berdiaev's position will center on whether Berdiaev's justification of God truly overcomes certain challenges of theodicy. We will consider Moltmann's approach to theodicy, which emphasizes God's experience of suffering as a response to evil through the cross of Christ, as opposed to Berdiaev's explanation of evil as arising from meonic

---

<sup>84</sup> *SF*, 48.

<sup>85</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 141. For Berdiaev's conception of duty and ethics see chapter 5.

<sup>86</sup> *SS*, 159. See also *DH*, 112.



freedom. Following this line of thought we will also question whether Berdiaev's justification of the person is substantive enough to meet its objective (i.e., a differentiated person whose freedom and personality are fulfilled in union with God), or whether there needs to be further development to understand who the person is in light of the freedom the Triune God grants.

## Chapter 4 – Freedom within the Created Order

### §1 INTRODUCTION

As a student of history and current events, Berdiaev was cognizant that freedom and “the heroic love of freedom”<sup>1</sup> he was proclaiming were difficult to detect within the created order. Instead, what was plainly evident was an “objectivized world order”<sup>2</sup> where necessity, not freedom, rules.<sup>3</sup> Berdiaev’s belief in freedom originating in a mystical void where there are no determinations is the other side of the coin, so to speak, of his view of the material world’s deterministic character. In describing his position he writes, “My attitude to life, so far from being romantic, has, in fact, always been very realistic; it is my attitude to what transcends life and is accessible solely to vision that was romantic.”<sup>4</sup> Berdiaev’s ‘realistic’ outlook accepts the tragedy of the Fall and acknowledges the dilemma of freedom within an alienated cosmos. His ‘romantic’ perspective, however, is unwilling to accept that an alienated cosmos is the ultimate statement as to what freedom is and how it may be experienced.

In this chapter we will examine Berdiaev’s conception of how a non-created freedom can exist in a created world. We will begin by looking at the foundations for Berdiaev’s understanding of freedom, followed by an analysis of the four modes of freedom within the created order, giving special attention to the consequences of the Fall. We will then turn our attention to what makes the highest form of freedom possible – the God-Man – and the concepts that Berdiaev emphasizes as necessary for this type of freedom. Following this we will consider how Berdiaev understands ‘spirit’ and the relationship between spirit and freedom. We will close with a summary of the material we have surveyed and highlight

---

<sup>1</sup> *SF*, 153.

<sup>2</sup> *SF*, 89.

<sup>3</sup> Berdiaev’s use of specialized terms, such as ‘objectivized’, ‘necessity’, ‘determination’, will be addressed as the chapter progresses. ‘Determination’ is a prime example of Berdiaev’s specialized terminology. The way in which Berdiaev uses the term is in tension with how the word is used in various contemporary debates concerning freedom. In Berdiaev’s terminology, ‘determined’ is normally associated with concepts such as ‘alienated’, ‘exteriorized’, ‘objectified’, ‘slavery’. Although Berdiaev does not have a precise meaning for the concept of ‘determination’ we can say what it is not – determination never indicates *complete* control over the person. Berdiaev is not a ‘hard determinist’. Determination can be understood as a force with fluctuating coercive power over the person, which is dependent on a number of variables. A person who experiences determination in its fullest sense can be seen, according to Berdiaev’s thought, to be enslaved. Yet even in this state, the person still retains some modicum of non-determined freedom. At this point the reader should have in mind an interpretation of determination as a negative external force on the individual that seeks to manipulate or coerce, yet never exercising complete control.

<sup>4</sup> *DR*, 23. Berdiaev use of the term ‘romantic’ here indicates a belief in a reality beyond the ‘objective’ (material) world.

those areas that will be examined through Moltmann's own understanding of freedom, the Trinity, and the person.

## §2 FREEDOM

At the base of Berdiaev's understanding of freedom is a negative perspective – freedom *from* external determination. Giving specific emphasis to freedom's autonomous nature, he writes,

There is a classic definition of freedom which remains indisputably true in spite of its inability to give us a positive clue to its mystery. According to this *freedom is self-determination in the inmost depths of being* and is opposed to every kind of external determination which constitutes a compulsion in itself.<sup>5</sup>

The idea of freedom as self-determination is a frequent motif in contemporary Western culture; however, it is not a strictly modern phenomenon. In Western thought this position can be found in Augustine. Chappell writes,

These conditions [voluntary actions not being compelled or done in ignorance] are evident, for example, at dDA 14 [de Duabus Animabus], which gives us one of Augustine's most adequate formulations of the definition of voluntary action: . . . 'Voluntary action is a movement of the soul, without any compulsion, towards something either not to be lost or to be attained.'<sup>6</sup>

Berdiaev, like Augustine, places great stress on freedom as self-determination. At the same time Berdiaev, also like Augustine, rejects any notion that self-determination is the sole factor by which freedom should be understood. The significance of this point cannot be overstated. Berdiaev is *not* arguing that the person is wholly capable as an individual of being self-determined or that self-determination is the goal of freedom. Freedom is a 'cause' (Copleston) for Berdiaev, it is what the person must strive for; self-determination is a necessary part of freedom but it is not the sole characteristic.

---

<sup>5</sup> *FS*, 121-122 (Italics mine).

<sup>6</sup> Chappell, *Aristotle and Augustine*, 126. It is acknowledged that Chappell's perspective on Augustine represents Augustine's early views on freedom and self-determination. That said, Augustine's thought on freedom is complex, and while his later writings, especially in his confrontations with the Pelagians, appear to overturn his earlier work, in the end they do not – although they do create a significant tension. At the end of his career Augustine writes his 'Retractions' (or, 'Reconsiderations') and it is significant that he does not recant his early views of freedom. See Eleonore Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion To Augustine*, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 130. Thus, while it would be unfair to intimate that self-determination was as important to Augustine as it was to Berdiaev, it can be argued that self-determination and freedom were significant concerns for Augustine throughout his life and were not abdicated in his confrontation with the Pelagians.

If freedom is narrowly defined as self-determination (autonomy), one can conclude that the individual is the apex of existence, which is ‘individualism’. Berdiaev strongly opposes this view; he asserts that a self-determined individual cannot be considered an ultimate goal.<sup>7</sup> Individualism is false and can only lead to alienation, division, and slavery.

Berdiaev recognizes the problem of advocating self-determination while also rejecting individualism and attempts to work through this dilemma by proposing a relational freedom with autonomous characteristics. He is committed to this idea of freedom, believing self-determined freedom is what God expects from the person. “Man must know himself religiously not as the slave of God but as a *free participant* in the divine process.”<sup>8</sup> This ‘freedom of the spirit’ is “limitless” and, he believes, “pervades the Gospels and Epistles.”<sup>9</sup>

Berdiaev is propounding self-determination as a basic concept for freedom and holding it in tension with his belief that, for the person to be whom they were created to be, freedom must be *for* something, i.e., for responding to the Divine Call and fulfilling God’s creational design. While there are certainly similarities between modernist (and post-modernist) views and Berdiaev’s of the importance of self-determination, his view operates on a different trajectory. Berdiaev conceives of self-determination (autonomous freedom) as a point on a spectrum of freedom, in which self-determination (freedom ‘from’) can develop into a positive view of freedom (freedom ‘for’).<sup>10</sup> Yet the positive view of freedom is still qualified by the negative understanding.

An examination of freedom’s latency within the person, which enables a free response from the person, will be addressed in the following section; the point to be emphasized here is that God expects (Berdiaev will also use words such as ‘desire’, ‘require’, and even ‘demand’) “freedom from” the person.<sup>11</sup>

God expects freedom from man; He waits for his free response to the divine call. True liberty is that which God demands from us and not that which we demand from God. It is upon this deep foundation that man’s freedom is based; it is latent in the deepest recesses of his spirit.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> *FS*, 146.

<sup>8</sup> *MCA*, 334 (Italics mine).

<sup>9</sup> *FS*, 119. See *FS*, 120, for a list of citations from scripture and tradition Berdiaev argues support his claim.

<sup>10</sup> Self-determination and ‘freedom for’ operate within a context that depends on *sobornost*’ for its viability. Berdiaev’s understanding of *sobornost*’ will be explored below.

<sup>11</sup> Berdiaev here conflates the meaning of ‘freedom from’. Not only does the term ‘freedom from’ connote a negative form of freedom (the individual is freed ‘from’ oppression); God also expects freedom ‘from’ the individual. That is, God expects the individual to freely respond to God’s call and enter into relationship with the Deity. This movement towards God can only be, according to Berdiaev, accomplished by the person freely responding to God. Hence the person’s positive response to God is made possible ‘from’ freedom.

<sup>12</sup> *FS*, 126-127.

The purpose of freedom is for answering God's call to humanity through Christ and Spirit. The person must approach God through freedom. God cannot force a person into a relationship with God's self, or as Berdiaev writes, "It is impossible to build the Kingdom of God by force; it can only be created in freedom."<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, for Berdiaev, self-determination is a component of freedom; however, it is not the apex of freedom. The highest form of freedom is 'theandric' freedom, which is a freedom based on communion with God and others.<sup>14</sup> So Berdiaev's conception of freedom, in its ultimate sense, can be described by two seemingly paradoxical theses:

- i. freedom is self-determination
- ii. freedom is dependent upon relationship with God and others

As we shall see in what follows, Berdiaev attempts to resolve these seemingly paradoxical statements – freedom is both self-determined and relationally dependent – by proposing a multi-layered view of freedom, which attempts to explain how freedom is experienced within the created order.

### 1. *Embodied Freedom*

This research contends that within Berdiaev's thought freedom experienced in the created order cannot be considered meonic, as it is now within the realm of 'Being', made possible by God's creative act. Even though meonic freedom is a latent part of all that exists, within the realm of 'Being', this experienced freedom is categorically different. The difference is not only due to the constraints of 'Being'; because of the Fall, freedom is fractured into differing but related elements. I will refer to this freedom within the created order as 'embodied' freedom.<sup>15</sup>

Berdiaev gives a rich<sup>16</sup> description of embodied freedom, understanding freedom as being integral to existence.<sup>17</sup> This complex proposal attempts to establish a framework

---

<sup>13</sup> *FS*, 154.

<sup>14</sup> See pp. 84-90 for Berdiaev's conception of theandric freedom.

<sup>15</sup> Although Berdiaev does not use the term 'embodied freedom' it is employed here to differentiate the varied modes of freedom Berdiaev describes (he does use the term 'embodied' to refer to the realization of a creative act. *BE*, 180). Berdiaev's reluctance to define core concepts within his work, for fear of objectification, is as responsible for the lack of clarity in his thought as is his self-described aphoristic style. The term 'embodied' and the distinguishing of four modes of embodied freedom are a heuristic device to aid the reader. Berdiaev's thought on freedom is never so precise as to provide such delineation between different types of freedom.

<sup>16</sup> A rich description is a view of freedom in which the person is not only free from physical constraint, but is also free for the development of personhood, what John Macquarrie would define as the freedom for

wherein the centrality of freedom to the individual's development and ability to relate to God, self, and others can be understood. Within embodied freedom we can distinguish four modes of freedom, in which three of the four modes represent discordant and inadequate expressions of freedom. This can be delineated as a spectrum wherein the individual's progression/regression in relation to freedom is traced:

Slavery ↔ Heteronomy ↔ Autonomy ↔ Theandric Freedom<sup>18</sup>

The individual exists within one of these four modes. His existence within, and movement between, each mode is directly connected with his relation to God, self, and others. The spectrum moves from slavery (representing the lowest mode of existence where freedom is negligible, but still exists in minimal form), to theandric freedom (the highest form of freedom and, therefore, existence).

It is important to note that although 'embodied' freedom is distinct from 'meonic' freedom, they are still related. As we have seen, Berdiaev's conception of creation is that God creates through the *Ungrund* ('nothingness'). In essence, this means that the individual is both a child of God *and* of meonic freedom.<sup>19</sup> This highly provocative thought, then, presupposes that since God creates the individual through the *Ungrund* there always remains a *latency of meonic freedom* within the individual – no matter what mode of embodied freedom the individual exists within.

Operating from a position that considers meonic freedom to be non-determination, Berdiaev maintains that the individual always has the ability to act in ways that are distinctive of that particular agent. This is because there is always some form of non-determined freedom within the agent. Thus the latency of meonic freedom (non-determined freedom) means that there always exists the possibility for self-determined acts. As we shall see, the

---

'outward realization'. See John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 11.

<sup>17</sup> This position – 'freedom being integral to existence' – is analogous to Erich Fromm's understanding of freedom, "... human existence and freedom are from the beginning inseparable." Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1946), 26.

<sup>18</sup> 'Theandric' is not a term Berdiaev often used to describe this mode of freedom; indeed, there was no one single term he did employ. Various terms for this type of freedom include the 'highest freedom', 'libertas major', 'transcendental freedom', 'divine freedom', 'true liberty', 'spiritual freedom', and 'theonomy'. The term 'spiritual freedom' is a particular favorite of Berdiaev's; however, the term can be misleading as the reader may think Berdiaev is referring to a freedom that is not dependent upon the person. 'Theandric', meaning a divine-human enterprise that is dependent upon God *and* person, is much closer to Berdiaev's thought than the terms mentioned above, as well as also reflecting his intellectual and cultural context. 'Theandric' is the term that is used throughout this research, even though primary and secondary sources frequently use other terminology.

<sup>19</sup> *DM*, 39.

ability to engage in a self-determined act, which depends upon latent meonic freedom, will vary greatly depending upon the mode of embodied freedom one experiences, but the potential is ever present.<sup>20</sup>

For Berdiaev, self-determination is the ability to act in a ‘personal’ manner – acting without coercion, or manipulation, or under force. In contemporary contexts this could be identified as acting autonomously, but, not surprisingly, we cannot adopt this terminology because, as we shall see, ‘autonomy’, for Berdiaev, has a specialized meaning.<sup>21</sup> In the attempt to clarify Berdiaev’s thought and distinguish between autonomy and the latency of meonic freedom that enables self-determined acts, I will use the phrase ‘existential liberty’ to refer to the latent form of meonic freedom within the individual.<sup>22</sup> Hence, within embodied freedom, existential liberty is a primary factor in the individual’s potential to progress or regress along the spectrum.

For some individuals there is little to no movement between modalities, their existence is static.<sup>23</sup> This is most evident in the occurrence of individualism. As already discussed, an ‘individual’ is an agent who, for various reasons, has not attained personhood. This would be represented as someone who is confined by slavery, or heteronomous freedom (or to certain degree, autonomous freedom also). An agent, Berdiaev asserts, who is able to exist in union with God and others, is able to overcome stasis and participate in the dynamic of freedom.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Berdiaev’s conception of meonic freedom will be critically addressed in chapter 7.

<sup>21</sup> Berdiaev’s particular way in which he uses the concept of ‘autonomy’ is reflected in the following: “Terminologically it is inexact to speak of the autonomy of personality, or of the autonomy of consciousness, of conscience. In Kant it means subjection to the personal moral-intellectual law. In that case it is not man who is autonomous, but the moral-intellectual law. It is the autonomy of man, as personality, that must be called freedom.” *SF*, 69.

<sup>22</sup> It is acknowledged that Berdiaev would most likely strongly challenge this ‘rationalization’ of meonic freedom. Yet without some sort of distinction between meonic freedom, which only exists outside of Being, and the latency of meonic freedom within Being, Berdiaev’s ambiguous phraseology is only carried forward and not clarified.

<sup>23</sup> The term ‘static’ – indicating non-movement between modalities – changes value as one moves from lower forms of freedom (where being static is negative) to higher forms of freedom (where the ability to remain in one mode is positive). Since theandric freedom is the ultimate expression of freedom, obviously the agent does not want to regress from this position. The difficulty, however, is maintaining union with God, which due to the fallen nature of reality makes a permanent union with God impossible.

<sup>24</sup> “Freedom is often conceived as something static, whereas it must be thought of as dynamic.” *RSRC*, 104. The term ‘dynamic’ is an important concept for Berdiaev. He traces the word, as he employs it, to Hegel, “who was the first to interpret the world process as dynamic, as development and not as a static system.” *BE*, 161. The world as dynamic is directly related to Berdiaev’s formulation of freedom preceding Being, since freedom always involves potentialities, movement, the possibility of development. Although Berdiaev breaks with Hegel on the idea of logical progress and teleology, he clearly follows Hegel with regards to the idea of becoming. Berdiaev: “But Hegel’s discovery remains true, that becoming, development, the appearance of what is new, are impossible and inexplicable if we remain within the confines of being and fail to introduce non-being [meonic freedom] into our dialectic.” *BE*, 162.

Embodied freedom, then, incorporates a broad picture of what it means to be free. It recognizes the reality of determining forces, while also maintaining that determination does not completely negate freedom. Berdiaev proposes that a person who is *not* in relation with God and others is a person who suffers from determination – although the agent has an existential liberty this non-relational freedom is an ‘empty freedom’.<sup>25</sup> Yet Berdiaev’s commitment to overcoming determination and asserting the reality of an existential liberty that makes possible self-determined acts does not mean that self-determination is the ultimate goal for Berdiaev. Self-determination and the overcoming of determining forces are necessary elements in an intricate process, they are never final solutions.

The paradox holds true that man reveals and affirms himself only when he submits himself to a supernatural principle which becomes the content of his life. His repudiation of it, on the other hand, only leads to his perdition, for he is unable to discover a world other than his own human and confined world.<sup>26</sup>

Embodied freedom is conceived of as a process in which the person’s experience of freedom is dependent upon God, the person’s maturation, and the community in which the person exists. “Apart from Christianity there is no freedom, and determinism is always supreme.”<sup>27</sup> Hence, freedom is not understood in a binary sense where the individual is either free or determined, but expanded to include various stages of freedom, which are dependent upon multiple variables.

To understand further how this speculative view of freedom operates we begin by addressing Berdiaev’s interpretation of the Fall. In this section we will examine the modes of autonomy, heteronomy, and slavery. We will address theandric freedom when we explore Berdiaev’s view of the God-Man.

---

Even though Berdiaev distinguishes God from Being (God is spirit, a separate category), the same principle of dynamism applies also to God. This is due to the fact that although God’s freedom is infinitely more expansive than the freedom within Being, it nonetheless has the basic property of ‘potential’. See *DM*, 37; *SF*, 84; *DH*, 43.

Berdiaev’s conception of the dynamic nature of God is a resource for Moltmann’s thought. Moltmann relies exclusively on Berdiaev’s concept of movement within the Godhead to examine “the tragedy of God” in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*. Moltmann: “Anyone who denies movement in the divine nature also denies the divine Trinity. And to deny this is really to deny the whole Christian faith. For according to Berdiaev, the secret of Christianity is the perception of *God’s triune nature*, the perception of the movement in the divine nature which that implies, and the perception of the history of God’s passion which springs from this.” *TKG*, 45. E. J. Tinsley follows an identical line of thought when he writes, “Traditional theology, as Berdyayev hints, has of course been afraid to ascribe change and mobility to God because these were regarded as imperfections. But this is to beg the question whether the traditional immutability and impassibility of God might not have their own deficiencies.” E. J. Tinsley, “The Incarnation, Art, and the Communication of the Gospel,” in *Art and Religion as Communication*, James Waddell and F. W. Dillistone, eds. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974), 58.

<sup>25</sup> *MH*, 178. Berdiaev’s position that the individual still possesses a truncated form of freedom is addressed on pp. 76-77.

<sup>26</sup> *MH*, 180.

<sup>27</sup> *FS*, 121.



## 2. *The Fall*

The salient concepts for Berdiaev's specific understanding of the Fall are as follows:

- i. The Genesis account is a divine 'myth', which expresses an eternal reality,
- ii. the Fall occurred before time,<sup>28</sup>
- iii. Berdiaev understands the soul as pre-existent,<sup>29</sup>
- iv. there is human development within the Fall,
- v. what occurs before time has real and significant consequences *in* time.

In Berdiaev's view, the actions of Adam and Eve resulted in alienation and diminishment for the human race. Yet, contrary to certain strands of theology (especially within Protestantism),<sup>30</sup> Berdiaev believes that although sin jeopardizes the person's existence and dims the *imago Dei*, the person retains remnants of what God proclaimed as "very good."<sup>31</sup> The person still has capacity for limited reason and limited freedom. "The higher nature of man as a free spirit could not have been destroyed and uprooted through original sin; the work of the Creator could not have been finally wiped out."<sup>32</sup> Paul Evdokimov concurs when he writes, "No evil will ever be able to erase the initial mystery of man, for there is nothing that can destroy in him the indelible imprint of God."<sup>33</sup> Thus even though Berdiaev believes that "the Fall is slavery, determinism, in which everything is decided from without, and enmity, hatred and violence. That is the impress which the Fall has stamped upon human life,"<sup>34</sup> he holds to his Orthodox roots – sin cannot completely wipe out God's creation and God's image within the person.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> *FS*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Spinka observes, "Berdyaev's belief in the preexistence of souls exhibits some really astonishing features, for although he is perhaps alone among the religious thinkers of our day to hold the tenet, *he makes no particular effort to establish it*. He merely assumes it." Spinka, "Berdyaev and Origen," 10 (Italics mine). See also *FS*, 326; *DM*, 48. The imprint of Origen's thought is evident at this juncture.

<sup>30</sup> For example, John Calvin: "Therefore let us hold this as an undoubted truth which no siege engines can shake: the mind of man has been so completely estranged from God's righteousness that it conceives, desires, and undertakes, only that which is impious, perverted, foul, impure, and infamous. The heart is so steeped in the poison of sin, that it can breathe out nothing but a loathsome stench. But if some men occasionally make a show of good, their minds nevertheless ever remain enveloped in hypocrisy and deceitful craft, and their hearts bound by inner perversity." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (London: SCM, 1961), Book 2, 340. Berdiaev's strong rejection of total depravity is consonant with his Orthodox context and the Patristic writing that influenced his thought. For Augustine's argument on why a nature cannot be totally corrupt, see Augustine, *On Free Choice*, Book 3, 96.

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 1: 31.

<sup>32</sup> *BM*, 78. See also Seaver, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 61.

<sup>34</sup> *BE*, 214.

<sup>35</sup> In *DM* Berdiaev gives his interpretation of how the three branches of Christianity interpret the Fall. He writes of Orthodoxy, "The Orthodox view of man has been but little worked out, but the central point in it is the doctrine of the Divine image and likeness in man – the doctrine, i.e. that man has been created as a spiritual

## A. *Autonomy*<sup>36</sup>

Post-Fall, humanity's existence is contrary to God's original design. Instead of living in a state of theandric freedom, the person lives in an objectified world. Alienated from God, the person's highest attainment of freedom *humanly possible* is the mode of freedom called 'autonomy'. In certain ways autonomy mirrors theandric freedom in that both involve the subject acting in self-determined ways. Where they differ is that in the autonomous mode, freedom operates primarily within a negative context, i.e. the potential for the person's existential liberty can only be developed to the point of rejecting or resisting deterministic forces. Even though autonomous freedom is necessary in the maturation of a freedom, it remains a limited mode of freedom since it has no relational context.

There is no formal autonomy in the inmost depths of spiritual freedom, *for there is no distinction between autonomy and "theonomy."* A free theonomy transcends both autonomy and heteronomy. . . . Autonomy and heteronomy are juridical and not spiritual categories depending upon the requirements of a divided world in which coercion is a dominating principle.<sup>37</sup>

Autonomy is a freedom that enables rejection; the individual can reject external forces but the individual cannot attain to anything positive – autonomous freedom cannot be 'for' something greater than the person.

The problem, as Berdiaev understands it, is that even though the individual is created in the *imago Dei* with unique abilities, the post-Fall individual does not possess a freedom that can transcend the limiting realities of the natural world. No matter how dedicated or how enlightened an individual may be, her existence can never move past autonomy. "Human freedom as such is powerless to turn man to God, to conquer sin, to vanquish its own abysmal darkness and rise above its own destiny."<sup>38</sup> Hence, sin will eventually cause the autonomous status to degenerate and regression will be unavoidable, leading to heteronomy and, if not checked, enslavement. Berdiaev:

---

being. The Godlike and spiritual life of man is not destroyed but merely damaged by the Fall, and the image of God in man is dimmed." He goes on to refer to this Orthodox view as a divine human anthropology. *DM*, 61. See also Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 237.

<sup>36</sup> Berdiaev's understanding of autonomy must always be held in light of his commitment to *sobornost'*.

<sup>37</sup> *FS*, 147 (Italics mine). The difference between a 'juridical' and 'spiritual' category is important for Berdiaev. He regards autonomy and heteronomy as juridical freedoms because they are concerned with choosing between values that are externally determined. This can be illustrated by the choice whether to obey the law or be punished, follow a social custom or risk estrangement from a social group, etc. Within a spiritual category (theandric) the person is internally determined through union with God and others. This union, which is based on love, means that the person acts on what she knows (which is discerned in a relational context) to be true as opposed to actions being externally imposed. These positions will be developed in the following sections.

<sup>38</sup> *DM*, 46. See also Aubrey, *Philosophy of Nicolai Berdyayev*, 528.

Autonomy is thus not only opposed to heteronomy and rightly so, but it is also in conflict with theonomy; and here it is at fault. *A more profound and positive truth is to be found in the fact that none of us can live solely according to our individual principles, nor can our freedom remain negative, formal, and without an object, but it is, rather, essential to that response which God demands from us and to our conversions to the divine life.* The freedom of the Old Adam, of the natural man, is purposeless and infantile, a mere desire to escape our swaddling-clothes. The freedom of the New Adam, that is, of the spiritual man, is, on the other hand, a freedom which possesses a definite content; it is inward and positive, a desire to live for God and in God.<sup>39</sup>

Autonomous freedom may be a limited form of freedom but it is still is a *necessary* element for the individual's development within a post-Fall created order. If the individual, who is alienated from God and others, is to respond to God's invitation he must possess autonomous freedom.<sup>40</sup> Without autonomous freedom the person is incapable of opening himself to God's grace and Spirit, which makes theandric freedom viable. Consequently, autonomous freedom enables differentiation between person and God. If there is no real autonomous freedom, according to Berdiaev, and God's sovereignty and will are absolute, the person is absorbed into God – God becomes the determining factor in all things. God as the determining factor in all things is what Berdiaev refers to as a 'monistic' perspective, which, he maintains, denies the trinitarian reality of God.

The importance of autonomy is found in its potential to be 'illuminated' by union with God and thereby develop into theandric freedom; i.e., the autonomous nature of the person is completed in theandric freedom. Autonomy, important as it is, is always a 'means' and never an 'end'. If this reality is forgotten or ignored, and the person fails to move beyond autonomy, the continued rejection of external influences will result in a vacuum in which objectification (sin) is able to exert ever greater influence. "Autonomy is a misconception and is by no means the same thing as freedom."<sup>41</sup>

Berdiaev's view of autonomy is closely related to the concept of 'free will' yet stands in stark contrast to Martin Luther's classic treatise on freedom, *De Servo Arbitrio*.<sup>42</sup> Luther argues that autonomous freedom – what he terms *liberum arbitrium* – can only be attributed to God. A person who is not in relation to God only possesses *inconsequential* freedom. Luther grants that the person has some freedom for "eating, begetting, ruling," but in the end

---

<sup>39</sup> *FS*, 147-148 (Italics mine).

<sup>40</sup> How autonomy, which is a negative form of freedom, can respond to God's call, which is a positive act, will be addressed in the following section concerning Berdiaev's Christology.

<sup>41</sup> *DM*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Berdiaev consistently maintained, however, that there needed to be clear separation between his concept of freedom and what he perceived to be the theological understanding of free will.

“man apart from the grace of God remains nonetheless under the general omnipotence of God, who does, moves, and carries along all things in a necessary and infallible course, but that what man does as he is thus carried along is nothing, in the sense that it is worth nothing in the sight of God, and is not reckoned as anything but sin.”<sup>43</sup> For Luther, there is no real autonomy outside the following of basic survival instincts. From this position Luther emphatically states that if one posits free choice then he is denying Christ,<sup>44</sup> because if free choice “is true, it follows that by the powers of his nature man can bring about his own salvation.”<sup>45</sup>

Berdiaev considers the concept of free will, especially as it is conceived in the debates of Erasmus and Luther, to be destructive.<sup>46</sup> This is because under the concept of free will “man is enslaved by the necessity to choose between that which is forced upon him and carrying out the law under fear of penalties. He proves to be least free in that which is connected with his ‘free will.’”<sup>47</sup> Berdiaev wants to maintain a clear distinction between his view of freedom and the concept of free will (as he interprets it).<sup>48</sup> “The religious and spiritual problem of freedom must not be confused with the question of free-will.”<sup>49</sup> Berdiaev contends that free will is a ‘juridical’ view of freedom – the choice either to follow God or to be punished. Thus he claims the concept to be “pedagogic and utilitarian,”<sup>50</sup> reducing freedom, and salvation, to a specific event in the agent’s life.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Martin Luther, “De Servo Arbitrio,” in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. and trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 286-287.

<sup>44</sup> Luther, “De Servo Arbitrio,” 321.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 61.

<sup>46</sup> *DM*, 102-103.

<sup>47</sup> *DM*, 25-26.

<sup>48</sup> *FS*, 120.

<sup>49</sup> *FS*, 117.

<sup>50</sup> *FS*, 118.

<sup>51</sup> *DM*, 102. In contrast to this view, Berdiaev believes, theandric freedom, which is based on meonic freedom, has a more expansive scope. “True freedom is not revealed in the moment when a man must choose, but when he has already made his choice.” *RSRC*, 105. Theandric freedom is focused on union with God and others, and the maturation of the agent from an individual into a free person. In this paradigm, salvation is not limited to a ‘heaven or hell’ dichotomy, rather he is attempting to take the understanding of salvation as eternal bliss and reconfigure it with a present day immediacy. Salvation, Berdiaev vigorously asserts, has implications beyond the absolution of sin.

Regarding what he perceives to be the traditional understanding of salvation, he opines, “From the tragic problem of Christianity there can be only one way out: the religious acceptance of the truth that the religious meaning of life and being is not wholly a matter of redemption from sin, that life and being have positive creative purposes. . . . Salvation from sin, from perdition, is not the final purpose of religious life: salvation is always from something and life should be for something. . . . Man’s chief end is not to be saved but to mount up, creatively. For this creative upsurge salvation from sin and evil is necessary.” *MCA*, 105.

Consequently, he treats the concept of salvation under the same rubric as freedom – salvation cannot be a status of only being saved *from* sin, salvation must be *for* something. *MCA*, 95. For Berdiaev, to be redeemed is not only to be free, it means that the Christian is called to create. This position will be addressed in chapter 5.

Up to this point Berdiaev's understanding of the Fall – the alienation between God and created order in which the human still retains certain capabilities – is well situated within Russian Orthodox thought. A more distinctive approach is evident in his treatment of the doctrine of sin.

Berdiaev argues that the origination of evil is not to be found in the Genesis account. The actions of Adam and Eve result in alienation and corruption, but their rebellion did not bring about evil. “Evil cannot, indeed, be interpreted conceptionally [*sic*], but only mythologically and symbolically.” Berdiaev writes, “Evil and suffering exist because freedom exists; but freedom has no foundation of existence, it is a frontier.”<sup>52</sup> The ‘frontier’ of freedom, the *Ungrund*, then, is the source and explanation of evil; evil is not a result of eating a forbidden fruit. Niebuhr echoes a similar thought when he writes, “Where there is history at all there is freedom; and where there is freedom there is sin.”<sup>53</sup>

Berdiaev understands original sin as egocentricity, “Ego-centricity is, indeed, the Original Sin.”<sup>54</sup> It is the turning away from union with God, the assertion of self opposed to relationship with God and others. Original sin is not a hereditary characteristic of the individual, but a reality of meonic freedom, what Berdiaev refers to as the ‘irrational’ element of freedom, which is within each person. Berdiaev would not refute Paul’s words that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”<sup>55</sup> but he argues that this is a result of existential liberty within creation combined with a basal rift in the relationship between God and human.<sup>56</sup> Sin is not a hereditary characteristic or disease passed down from generation to generation beginning with Adam and Eve.

Berdiaev is proposing that even though the human “is corrupted and contaminated”<sup>57</sup> by sin, so that sin is *a* shared characteristic of humanity, sin is not *the* defining characteristic of humanity. Berdiaev believes he is not underestimating the potency of sin, but seeking to reposition the idea of sin within a proper context. The idea of sin must not be used to ‘humiliate’ the person; the doctrine of sin must be used to demonstrate the potential of the person. “If man is a fallen creature and if he fell in virtue of freedom inherent in him from

---

<sup>52</sup> *SR*, 115.

<sup>53</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 2, *Human Destiny* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1964), 80.

<sup>54</sup> *SS*, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Romans 3: 23.

<sup>56</sup> *FS*, 161.

<sup>57</sup> *FS*, 170.

the first, it shows that he is a lofty being, a free spirit. Awareness of original sin both humbles and exalts man.”<sup>58</sup>

Berdiaev does recognize the dangerous consequences of sin – the reality of sin is equated with what he calls ‘objectification’. Because of sin the person and the created order become objectified and isolated from God, leading away from a state of communion into a state of isolation. Hence, Berdiaev believes that “Objectification destroys life and being.”<sup>59</sup>

Objectification is a recurring theme within Berdiaev’s work. He believes objectification results in a world suffering from alienation – alienation from God and alienation among individuals. The created order has been turned into a world of objects, and as long as the person believes he does not possess a spiritual nature and there is no spiritual realm, objectification will continue.<sup>60</sup> He lists the “marks of objectification” as follows:

(1) The estrangement of the object from the subject; (2) The absorption of the unrepeatably [*sic*] individual and personal in what is common and impersonally universal; (3) The rule of necessity, of determination from without, the crushing of freedom and the concealment of it; (4) Adjustment to the grandiose mien of the world and of history, to the average man, and the socialization of man and his opinions, which destroy distinctive character.<sup>61</sup>

For Berdiaev, the world existing in a fallen state is an objectified world, a world in which alienation between God and the created order exists. This means that instead of the subject moving from autonomy to theandric freedom, the agent regresses on the scale to heteronomy.

## B. Heteronomy

Heteronomy is a mode of freedom in which the person yields her freedom to an external authority. It is a deceptive freedom that can be difficult to identify and overcome, since it regards the person’s freedom as ancillary to a greater good. “The lure of the devil is not freedom, as has often been thought, but the rejection of freedom for the sake of bliss

---

<sup>58</sup> *DM*, 53. Berdiaev’s position finds resonance with Niebuhr’s; “The essence of man is his freedom. Sin is committed in that freedom. Sin can therefore not be attributed to a defect in his essence. It can only be understood as a self-contradiction, made possible by the fact of his freedom but not following necessarily from it.” Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 1, 17.

<sup>59</sup> *DM*, 13. See *SS*, 106-114; Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 770; and McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 121, for the various influences (e.g., Schopenhauer, Buber, Kant) on Berdiaev’s view of objectification.

<sup>60</sup> *SR*, 52.

<sup>61</sup> *BE*, 62. McLachlan attempts a more concise statement: “The problem of objectification arises when interpretations of reality acquire a necessary character that eclipses the creativity and freedom they were meant to illuminate.” McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 161.

mechanically forced upon man.”<sup>62</sup> Heteronomy posits that there are things or values higher than freedom; according to Berdiaev, this position is dangerous for both the person and the community.

While heteronomy can occur in the agent’s relation with other individuals, an organization, or government, Berdiaev frequently focuses on the problem of it within religious (specifically Christian) thought. He asserts that heteronomy is evidenced within Christian thought whenever God is exalted and the person is regarded as corrupt or as a slave. “Heteronomy involves the conception of God as an Oriental despot demanding a slavish submission from His servants. . . . This idea of God has been deeply impressed upon the Christian world and continues to exercise an influence even to-day.”<sup>63</sup>

Berdiaev maintains that Christian anthropology has generally not taken the idea of freedom and the potential of the person seriously, and traces this tendency back to the early Church.<sup>64</sup> Western theology, he believes, is especially susceptible to heteronomous formulations, which lead to the denial of humanity.

In the most uncompromising forms of Western asceticism, in those which regard man and the world as entirely sinful, in Calvinism, for example, with its sentiment of Divine power and glory at the expense of man’s humiliation, in Barthianism, even, with its belief that God is everything and man nothing, in all these we can observe an almost imperceptible transition from dualism (the transcendental gulf between God and man) to a form of monism or pantheism, involving not the deification but the humiliation of the world and man.<sup>65</sup>

This is the type of theology Berdiaev believes he is countering in justifying the person.<sup>66</sup> If this denial of humanity (i.e. heteronomy) is not challenged, if the person does not realize that he must seek freedom in God and not ‘slavish submission’, then life is reduced solely to a preparation for heaven, and living a life of obedience takes on a machine-like quality. “The problem consists in knowing whether man is called simply to salvation, or whether he also has a mission to create.”<sup>67</sup>

Berdiaev makes the unique claim that when heteronomous freedom exists within Christian thought it is a form of monophysitism. The Monophysite heresy, as Berdiaev re-interprets it, pertains not only to the humanity of Christ, but all humanity. Just as

---

<sup>62</sup> *DM*, 362. See also *FS*, 127.

<sup>63</sup> *FS*, 148.

<sup>64</sup> *MCA*, 81. For an alternative Orthodox perspective on the anthropology of the Fathers see Michael Plekon and Alex Vinogradov, eds., *In the World, of the Church: A Paul Evdokimov reader*, trans. Michael Plekon and Alex Vinogradov (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 197.

<sup>65</sup> *SR*, 148.

<sup>66</sup> *FS*, 146.

<sup>67</sup> *FS*, 341.

monophysitism failed to acknowledge, and therefore value, the humanity of Jesus, so too any time the humanity of the agent is devalued, heresy results. Consequently, he proposes that if the value of Jesus' humanity is to be maintained, then the overall value of humanity must also be maintained – to value the humanity of Christ is to value the person. “For truly the God-man is a revelation not only of divine but of human greatness and predicates faith not only in God but in man as well.”<sup>68</sup>

Within this view Berdiaev is not disputing that Jesus is unique – Jesus is “the Unique One,” the God-Man. His divinity, however, does not alter his humanness – as Chalcedon affirmed, he is fully human. So, the humanity of Jesus links Jesus to all humans, with the result that if humanity in general is devalued so also is the humanity of Jesus.<sup>69</sup>

There are countless ways in which humanity can be devalued, although for Berdiaev, this devaluing is most pronounced when the freedom of the person is not held in the highest regard. When a philosophical, theological, or political construct maintains that either the person is not free, should not be free, or that her freedom is a secondary concern, then, that construct is denying a basic principle of God's creational design. Berdiaev interprets all of these positions as attempted devaluations of humanity, *and* any devaluation of humanity is a devaluation of the God-Man (Jesus Christ).

Whenever God and humanity are not valued, Berdiaev believes that heteronomous freedom always results. If only God is exalted then the person is devalued, i.e., the person is viewed as being so utterly corrupted by sin that he has no significance until God chooses him. Berdiaev asserts that this ‘monophysite’ tendency can only lead to diluted forms of either monism or pantheism (this would depend on the bias either towards the transcendence or immanence of God).<sup>70</sup> If only the person is valued, however, and the existence and importance of the Triune God is denied, the person is denied the means to overcome the limitations of the objectified world. Thus, by only valuing the person and denying God the person ends up not being valued, but on a path towards slavery.

The danger of heteronomy, then, is that in this state, the devaluing of self in the light of a greater good numbs the individual to the potential God has created within her. If never challenged the individual is extremely susceptible to becoming enslaved.

---

<sup>68</sup> *MCA*, 99.

<sup>69</sup> *MCA*, 111.

<sup>70</sup> For Berdiaev's view on pantheism, especially within mysticism, see *SF*, 90.



### C. Slavery

Slavery is a mode of freedom where the person is being determined to a high degree by forces external to himself. An individual becomes enslaved when he fails to understand who he is – that is, a relational being created in the *imago Dei*, and thus a divine-human creation. By denying the reality of God and the reality of his spiritual nature, the agent forfeits the resources to resist the determination of the objectified world.

Hence, for Berdiaev, an enslaved individual is an agent who has turned his focus inward and has become preoccupied with self (ego-centricity). This individual only recognizes the world he can participate in, i.e. the natural world. With this denial of the true self (which is natural *and* spiritual) the agent leads an ‘objectified’ existence, which leads to slavery. For Berdiaev, an agent who is enslaved is synonymous with an agent who is objectified. We can see, then, that although slavery means being externally determined, slavery begins with how the individual understands himself in relation to God and the world.<sup>71</sup>

Labeling ‘slavery’ as a mode of embodied freedom may appear to be self-contradictory; but this is not true for Berdiaev, due to his interpretation of the Fall. Even though the Fall gives the individual “a false, an enslaving, direction,”<sup>72</sup> the agent still possesses some form of embodied freedom, which is based on his ‘existential liberty’.<sup>73</sup> This form of freedom may be a vastly truncated freedom as compared to what is possible for the agent in other modes of embodied freedom, yet a form of freedom remains.

Berdiaev’s concept of slavery is one of the areas where his Orthodox perspective is seen to be in sharp contrast to certain Western theological conceptions of freedom and the consequences of the Fall. Since the Fall, according to Berdiaev, does not abolish the *imago Dei*, neither does it utterly vitiate the freedom that is granted with creation. The significance of this is found in his idea that in order for the agent to overcome his enslaved status he must use his stunted form of freedom to stop moving away from God and others while recognizing God’s freely offered grace.

Berdiaev is not proposing that the enslaved agent can save himself or earn God’s grace; however, the individual suffering from slavery must be a willing participant in God’s gracious act of liberation. The ‘residue’ of freedom within the agent is necessary for

---

<sup>71</sup> *SF*, 60. We see within this thought the continuing influence of Marx on his thought, even though he left Marxism decades earlier.

<sup>72</sup> *SF*, 63.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Grace’ will play a significant part in how Berdiaev understands the person moving beyond slavery. See pp. 78-80.

liberation to occur. “Human nature preserves its independence which is necessary to the divine task in the world. But the final victory over evil cannot be achieved by the natural powers of man in separation from God.”<sup>74</sup>

It is acknowledged that this view— an individual who is oppressed by slavery yet still able to exercise some form of freedom – divides many over the issues of freedom, grace, and human agency. Berdiaev believes that his Orthodox foundation provides a perspective where he can avoid the binary dilemma of stating that it is either God’s grace or the individual’s actions that liberate. He is convinced both are necessary, since grace, as we shall see in the next section, is a ‘theandric’ enterprise.

Thus far we have considered three modes of embodied freedom (autonomy, heteronomy, slavery) under the rubric of the Fall. To investigate the fourth and highest form of freedom, we must turn to what makes this freedom possible – the God-Man.

### §3 THE GOD-MAN

The synthesis of philosophy and theology is most evident in Berdiaev’s view of Christ. Despite the fact that Berdiaev is antagonistic towards much theology, his ‘philosophy’ is only comprehensible through specific theological constructs – the most important being his Christology and his conception of the Trinity. Lampert goes so far as to say, “Christ the God-man is the vital pivot of his thought.”<sup>75</sup> And, Oliver Fielding Clarke calls Berdiaev one of “the most Christocentric of philosophers.”<sup>76</sup> These observations are accurate. Berdiaev’s ‘Christocentric’ focus can be seen in the following:

Both philosophy and theology should start neither with God nor with man (for there is no bridge between these two principles), but rather with the God-Man. The basic and original phenomenon of religious life is the meeting and mutual interaction between God and man, the movement of God towards man and of man towards God.<sup>77</sup>

Christ, the God-Man, is the linchpin for his vision of freedom; it is through Christ that theandric freedom is made possible. “The grace of Christ is the inner illumination of freedom without any outward restraint or coercion.”<sup>78</sup> Here we return, yet again, to the influence of Dostoevsky and the importance of Wernham’s observation – Berdiaev’s understanding of

---

<sup>74</sup> *FS*, 171.

<sup>75</sup> Lampert, *The New Middle Ages*, 36.

<sup>76</sup> Oliver Fielding Clarke, as quoted in Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 247.

<sup>77</sup> *FS*, 189. See also *DH*, 21; *DM*, 44.

<sup>78</sup> *FS*, 135. See also *FS*, 126; *BE*, 215.

Christ is the Christ of Dostoevsky's *Legend*.<sup>79</sup> Theandric freedom is only possible because of who Christ is (the God-Man) and what Christ accomplishes.

The truth shall make men free, but they must freely accept it and not be brought to it by force. Our Lord gives man the final liberty, but man must first freely have cleaved to him: "Thou didst desire man's free love, that he should follow thee freely, a willing captive" – they are the words of the Grand Inquisitor. . . . The dignity of man and the dignity of faith require the recognition of two freedoms, freedom to choose the truth and freedom in the truth.<sup>80</sup>

Berdiaev reads Dostoevsky's *Legend* as the affirmation of his conviction that Christ desires, first and foremost, the person's love. This love can only be given and received in freedom. The person, however, exists in a fallen world where alienation and objectification are predominant, not love, thereby making a free loving response to God problematic. Berdiaev attempts to work through this dilemma through a reconfigured view of grace.

### 1. *Grace*

Grace is a distinguishing feature in Berdiaev's thought due to his integration of Orthodox theology, mysticism, and philosophy. He looks to these sources in an attempt to maintain the distinctiveness of both God and person, while recognizing the problem of a corrupted creation. This results in a multi-layered conception of grace that emphasizes a reciprocal relation between God and human.

When Berdiaev writes, "Sin is conquered with great difficulty and it is only conquered by the power of grace,"<sup>81</sup> Vallon correctly observes that this view of grace is quite different from the theological formulations of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin.<sup>82</sup> The difference is based on the fact that Berdiaev proposes a twofold conception of grace: grace as the action that God takes to liberate humanity and grace as a 'divine element' God has placed within humanity, which is restored and nourished by Christ and the free actions of the person. Because of this, he can propose, "Grace proceeds not only from the divine nature of Christ, but also from the human, and from His heavenly humanity."<sup>83</sup>

This twofold conception is extrapolated from his interpretation of how the person is created and what resulted from the Fall. Working from his perspective of 'divine

---

<sup>79</sup> Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers*, 11.

<sup>80</sup> *DT*, 69. See also *RI*, 179-180.

<sup>81</sup> Nikolai Berdiaev, "СПАСЕНИЕ И ТВОРЧЕСТВО," *Put* ' 2, trans. mine (January 1926), 34.

<sup>82</sup> Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 163. Vallon's contention that Augustine *denied* freedom in the cause of grace is contestable.

<sup>83</sup> *FS*, 139.

anthropomorphism' Berdiaev believes grace can only be understood from the perspective of "theandric anthropomorphism', [which is] a creative and Christian standpoint which recognizes the independent existence of the two natures and the reciprocal action of divine grace and human freedom."<sup>84</sup> We have already encountered the term 'theandric' with regards to freedom. Whenever Berdiaev uses the term 'theandric' he is indicating an action that is dependent on God *and* the agent. Theandric anthropomorphism, then, involves a view of grace where the agent is required to work with God in order for God's creation intention to be fulfilled within the person.

The agent's ability to freely receive and nourish God's grace is made possible by the 'divine element' within the agent. Berdiaev's view of grace is muddled when he labels this 'divine element' as 'grace' and proposes that the *imago Dei* should be understood as this divine element/grace. Hence when Berdiaev refers to the grace of the person he is often referring to the *imago Dei*, which results in 'grace' having a double meaning. Although these concepts are related, they remain distinct.

For Berdiaev, the *imago Dei* enables the agent to respond to God's grace, thus he speaks of God's grace to humanity and humanity's grace in the ability to respond. God instills grace (the *imago Dei*) at creation, Christ makes possible the restoration of grace through his agency, and the person must freely respond to Christ so that Christ is able to enact restoration. "Where there is liberty, there is the Spirit of God and grace. Grace acts upon liberty and cannot act upon anything else."<sup>85</sup>

The reciprocal nature of this position cannot be overlooked. God's grace comes by Christ and the person must freely open herself to God for this grace to be actualized. These acts must occur together. The grace of humanity cannot liberate the agent, "Spiritual liberation is *always* a turning to a profounder depth than the spiritual principle in man, *it is a turning to God*,"<sup>86</sup> and God's grace cannot be realized forcefully, without consent, "Man is not forced by grace: he receives it or rejects it freely."<sup>87</sup>

Berdiaev believes that by re-configuring grace as a theandric enterprise the tendency to view the relationship between grace and freedom as antipodal is overcome. This is because grace is not external to the individual, but rather "grace acts within human freedom,

---

<sup>84</sup> *FS*, 209. Also: "Grace, which men have objectified, is actually the divine element in man. . . ." *TR*, 21. And, "Grace is not a power acting from without: grace is the revelation of the divine in man." *RSRC*, 44.

<sup>85</sup> *DM*, 189.

<sup>86</sup> *SF*, 248 (Italics mine).

<sup>87</sup> *DM*, 45.

as its interior illumination.”<sup>88</sup> From this position he roundly rejects the idea of freedom and grace as antagonistic elements, which Berdiaev believes to be the essence of the debates between Augustine and Pelagius and Luther and Erasmus.<sup>89</sup> Berdiaev’s twofold conception of grace is pushed to its limitations at this point. His claim that grace illuminates freedom *and* that the individual uses freedom to accept or reject grace may appear problematic. One might ask which occurs first, does the agent freely accept grace or does grace first have to ‘illuminate’ freedom to make the acceptance possible?

To reconcile this we return to the concept of embodied freedom. In Berdiaev’s vision of freedom the person is still able to recognize the good, i.e., the individual can use her existential liberty either to turn towards or away from God (what Bulgakov refers to as the person using the “residuum of his primitive liberty”<sup>90</sup>). Berdiaev writes, “To receive the freedom of Christ is not only to receive the freedom of God but receive also, by partaking of Christ’s human nature, that freedom which enables man to turn to God.”<sup>91</sup> If the individual responds to God’s calling and opens herself to Christ, then Christ, in a free and gracious act, is able to illuminate the divine element within the agent.

The agent’s free response to God allows God to illuminate the agent’s freedom; this in turn allows a fuller response from the individual. This reciprocal relationship allows for a deepening relationship with God and others, and for fuller expressions of freedom. So, while God’s grace has the immediate effect of establishing a relationship between the Deity and the human, God’s created intention for the individual is an on-going process. Grace is the required action by God *and* the person for the restoration of relationship, the maturation of personhood, and the growth of freedom.

Consequently, God’s given grace is necessary for the attainment of theandric freedom, but that attainment is always dependent upon a free response from the person that is ‘illuminated’ by Christ. Copleston observes, “. . . Berdiaev, insists, if degeneration of freedom is to be avoided, the grace of Christ is required, grace which illuminates but does not coerce.”<sup>92</sup> For Berdiaev, grace is what makes relationship and freedom possible in a corrupted world.

---

<sup>88</sup> *RSRC*, 103.

<sup>89</sup> *RSRC*, 103-104.

<sup>90</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, ed. Donald A. Lowrie, trans. Elizabeth S. Cram (London: The Centenary Press, 1935), 128.

<sup>91</sup> *FS*, 137.

<sup>92</sup> Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, 378. See also Seaver, *Nicolas Berdiaev*, 53.

## 2. God-manhood and Theosis

Reinforcing this conception of grace is Berdiaev's interpretation of the Russian concept of God-manhood, which is foundational to his thought.<sup>93</sup> Berdiaev's vision of freedom and the creative act is based upon the view that the individual belongs both to the created order and the spiritual order – the individual is both divine and human. When Chalcedon affirmed the divine and human natures of Christ, Berdiaev believes that the truth as to what humans can become is revealed. "In the person of Christ the God-Man man has fully come to exist."<sup>94</sup> The humanity of Christ establishes the foundation for what is true humanity. "We belong to the same race as Christ and through His humanity we are associated with His human freedom."<sup>95</sup> God-manhood asserts that the person is to be like God – the person is to be god-like.

God-manhood was integral for Solov'ev's work.<sup>96</sup> Vallon accurately notes that, for Berdiaev, God-manhood is "the encounter and mutual infusion of God and man whereby transcendence and immanence are unified."<sup>97</sup> Berdiaev holds this concept as a symbol; it expresses a truth that is beyond rational explanation. "It is very easy to give a rational exposition in the spirit of monism of the truth that the image of man is the image of God. But there is a mystery of a union of two in one, of God-manhood, of a double movement."<sup>98</sup> Clearly this provocative idea relies on a context where the concept of *theosis* is considered normative.

Berdiaev appropriates the concept of *theosis*<sup>99</sup> and the doctrine of the Incarnation to support the view that Christ, as the God-Man, makes freedom possible not only through his

---

<sup>93</sup> In investigating the early stages of Berdiaev's career Read highlights the importance of Godmanhood for Berdiaev's thought. "Perhaps the deepest and most long-lasting of his ideas at this period was that of Godmanhood as the next step in human and divine progress which was at the heart of his view of the nature and meaning of human life." Read, *Russian Intelligentsia*, 76.

<sup>94</sup> *DM*, 106.

<sup>95</sup> *FS*, 138.

<sup>96</sup> "Godmanhood provides Solovyov with the necessary link to achieve his philosophical aim, a philosophy of total-unity embracing all aspects of reality and uniting science and philosophy on the one hand and theology on the other in the ultimate synthesis which is reality." James M. Edie, James P. Scanlan, Mary-Barbara Zeldin, eds., with the collaboration of George L. Kline, *Russian Philosophy*, vol. III (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, Inc., 1965), 58.

<sup>97</sup> Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 194.

<sup>98</sup> *DH*, 112.

<sup>99</sup> Sergei Bulgakov, a colleague of Berdiaev, writing on the Orthodox Church, addresses this concept. "But man has preserved a residuum of his primitive liberty, and cannot lose it without losing the image of God and the spirituality of being. Consequently, he is called upon to achieve in himself his own salvation. The individual forms, the ways and the different degrees of this salvation are capable of development, but in any case man must participate personally in his salvation. By so doing he does not become his own co-redeemer and co-saviour with Christ, but he is active in the appropriation of his salvation, he seeks it personally, he

passion, but equally importantly, through his incarnation. As Spinka observes, “The incarnation, accordingly, is a revelation of both the character of God *and* the nature and destiny of man.”<sup>100</sup> The incarnation reveals Christ as God-man, and thereby demonstrates the divine-human existence (Godmanhood) for which the agent is created.

*Theosis* originates with Irenaeus and Athanasius. The oft-quoted saying of Irenaeus establishes the basic premise of the idea, “He became like us that we might become like him.”<sup>101</sup> Athanasius, in *De Incarnatione*, writes, “The Word became man that we might become divine; he revealed himself through a body that we might receive an idea of the invisible Father.”<sup>102</sup> These views are intrinsic to the concept.

Based on this position Berdiaev claims that if the person is to be truly human then they must truly be like Christ, the agent must recognize his own divine and human natures – the person should be the “intersection of two worlds.”<sup>103</sup> If the person does not acknowledge a divine element within him, there is no chance to be truly human. “In order to be completely like man it is necessary to be like God. It is necessary to have the divine image in order to have the human image.”<sup>104</sup> So, when the author of II Peter states, “Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and *may become participants of the divine nature*,”<sup>105</sup> Berdiaev would interpret this, according to his Orthodox beliefs, in a literal sense. The person can, through the grace of Christ, be a participant ‘of the divine nature’. “With Him a new race of human beings begins, the race of Christ, born and regenerated in the Spirit. Christ is in man and man is in Christ.”<sup>106</sup>

---

labours at it during all his life. . . . For God so loved the world that He spared not His Son to save and deify it. The Incarnation, first decreed to ransom fallen humanity and reconcile it with God, is understood by Orthodoxy as above all, the deification of man, as the communication of the divine life to him. To fallen man the Incarnation became the supreme way for the reconciliation of man with God, the way of redemption. This produces the concept of salvation as deification (θεώσις). The redemption is the voluntary sacrifice of Christ, Who took upon Himself, together with man’s nature, the sin of man, as well. That is the mystery of the Redemption where the One intercedes for all humanity. But in Orthodoxy the idea of divine Justice is deeply joined with that of the Love of God for man, a gracious and pitying love which leads to salvation. Redemption by the Incarnation is not only the liberation of man from sin by the sacrifice of the Saviour, it is also a new creation, a definitive creation of man as God, not according to nature, but according to grace, creation not by the omnipotence of God, as in the beginning, but by His sacrificing love. Christ, in His holy and sinless humanity, sanctified and deified all human nature.” Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 128-129.

<sup>100</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 137 (Italics mine).

<sup>101</sup> Irenaeus, as quoted in Seaver, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 18.

<sup>102</sup> Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, 54, as quoted in Louth, *Origins of Christian Mysticism*, 78. See also Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 145.

<sup>103</sup> *SF*, 45.

<sup>104</sup> *DH*, 110.

<sup>105</sup> II Peter 1: 4 (Italics mine).

<sup>106</sup> *FS*, 198.

This conviction – the person has a divine nature within herself – drives both his vision of the person and his vision of freedom. “In the language of traditional terminology God-manhood corresponds to the union of grace and freedom.”<sup>107</sup> This is what Berdiaev believes makes personhood and theandric freedom possible. Without a divine nature, that is without ‘grace’, the individual will never truly realize whom she was created to be, nor will she realize ultimate freedom.

Deification implies a distinction between God and man, a dialogical and dramatic relationship between them. If man were already Divine, or if he were entirely sinful and separated from God by an absolute gulf, then such deification could not take place. This deification or theosis, which is a fundamental feature of Eastern Christian mysticism, is neither a monistic identity with God nor a humiliation of man and the created world. Theosis makes man Divine, while at the same time preserving his human nature. Thus, instead of the human personality being annihilated, it is made in the image of God and the Divine Trinity.<sup>108</sup>

As we saw in chapter 3, Berdiaev believes that the concern over whether *theosis* attributes too much to the human and blurs the distinction between God and human is not enough to deny the truth Christ reveals. The divinization of the human reveals the destiny of each person – humanity is created for activity in concert with God. He writes, “The Son of God became a man and not an angel, and man is called to a royal and creative role in the world to the continuation of creation.”<sup>109</sup>

He believes the idea in which humanity holds an exalted status within the created order to be uniquely Christian.<sup>110</sup> In his view, an authentic Christianity is one that seeks to exalt both God and person while maintaining a distinction between the two. Berdiaev is convinced that if *theosis* and God-manhood are ignored, if the divine nature of the person is denied, then Christianity will not possess the vision of what humanity is called to become.

Having considered Berdiaev’s view of grace, God-manhood, and *theosis* we are now prepared to investigate how Berdiaev formulates the ultimate expression of embodied freedom – theandric freedom.

---

<sup>107</sup> *DH*, 127.

<sup>108</sup> *SR*, 148-149.

<sup>109</sup> *MCA*, 73. See also Read, *Russian Intelligentsia*, 58.

<sup>110</sup> *BM*, 80.



### 3. Theandric Freedom

Theandric freedom is the highest form of freedom. It is freedom exercised in union with God and others and is “discovered and revealed in the experience of the spiritual life.”<sup>111</sup> It is what God desires and requires of the person, as well as being the freedom necessary for an agent to mature from being an individual to a person.<sup>112</sup> Berdiaev envisages a theandrically free person as the following:

In a state of freedom man is not determined from without under the compulsion of a nature alien to himself, but he is self-determined in the depths of his spiritual life and out of his own spiritual energies; he finds himself in his own spiritual world.<sup>113</sup>

To understand how Berdiaev arrives at this conception of theandric freedom the following four points will be addressed: (a) the interrelatedness of theandric freedom, grace, and the *imago Dei*, (b) the necessity of autonomy, (c) love, and (d) *sobornost*'

#### A. Interrelatedness

In Berdiaev's thought the term 'theandric freedom' is so closely related to the terms 'grace' and '*imago Dei*' that at times they seem to be interchangeable. This is the result of Berdiaev's proposition that freedom is necessary to actualize the divine element (grace) within the person, which, in turn, is the *imago Dei*. Each concept (theandric freedom, grace, *imago Dei*) is so intertwined with the others that differentiation becomes ambiguous. For example, Berdiaev writes,

Clarifying grace is indeed the highest freedom. God acts in freedom and through freedom, and outside freedom there is no grace. The traditional antithesis between freedom and grace in theological literature is superficial and does not get down to the root of the matter. When man is entirely free then he is in grace. This is the awakening of the divine element in man. If he is without freedom the reception of grace is impossible [as] there is no organ for the purpose, and without grace there is no decisive emancipation of man from necessity, slavery and fate.<sup>114</sup>

Equating 'clarifying grace' with theandric freedom is a consistent stance for Berdiaev.<sup>115</sup> As we have discussed, Berdiaev's idea of grace refers not only to God's liberating action for the created order, but also to the 'divine element' (i.e. the *imago Dei*)

---

<sup>111</sup> *FS*, 117.

<sup>112</sup> *FS*, 126. See also *MCA*, 100.

<sup>113</sup> *FS*, 122.

<sup>114</sup> *TR*, 70.

<sup>115</sup> Although the adjective 'clarifying' is obscure, Berdiaev is intimating the grace that is found in union with God. Since theandric freedom is dependent on God's action (grace) and the *imago Dei* (grace), theandric freedom is equated with 'grace'. This speculation will be challenged in chapter 7.

that the person is blessed with. The person's ability to respond to God's grace is accomplished through the 'grace' (i.e. the *imago Dei* or divine element) within him. "Man is not free if he is merely a manifestation of God, a part of the Deity; he is not free if he has been endowed with freedom by God the Creator, but has nothing divine in himself. . . ." <sup>116</sup>

Operating from this perspective, Berdiaev believes that a person who is theandrically free is a person who exists in an intimate union with God and others. The divine element of the person is so attuned to God that it is possible to say that the person's grace has reached its most redeemed state as a result of God's grace. This person's vision of the world becomes God's vision, his actions are God's actions, his freedom is a 'grace-full' freedom that has no corollary to any type of freedom society could bestow. Consequently, he seems to equate theandric freedom with grace and the *imago Dei*; and grace and the *imago Dei*, in their most mature forms, are equated with theandric freedom.

#### B. *The Necessity of Autonomy*

The autonomous mode of freedom is necessary for the person to achieve theandric freedom. Although theandric freedom is only possible in a *union* between God and person, autonomy is required because the union is based on God's call and the free response of the person. Thus, even though the goal is a union between God and the agent, this union does not negate the autonomous nature of the person.

Despite the necessity of autonomy, Berdiaev also recognizes its limited nature. Autonomy is a factor in theandric freedom but without God, theandric freedom is not possible. For all his 'intemperate' and idealistic language regarding human potential, Berdiaev is quite clear as to the limits of human agency.

So far from diminishing, forcing or destroying freedom, grace seeks to increase it and raise it to a higher level. . . . Human freedom as such is powerless to turn man to God, to conquer sin, to vanquish its own abysmal darkness and rise above its own destiny. Pelagius failed to understand this. . . . The impotence of human freedom and the superhuman nature of grace create an insoluble paradox. The answer to it is contained in the mystery of Christ the God-Man, but that mystery cannot be rationalized. <sup>117</sup>

Since permanence in the union between God and person is not possible, theandric freedom is a fluid state – for while God is constant the person is not. Accordingly, autonomy not only plays an important part in making theandric freedom possible, it also makes possible

---

<sup>116</sup> *DM*, 45.

<sup>117</sup> *DM*, 46.

the diminishment of theandric freedom. If the person turns her focus from God and others to *solely* self (egocentricity), theandric freedom is then nullified. This loss of union, with the resultant loss of theandric freedom, can be seen, for example, in the narratives of Abraham,<sup>118</sup> Elijah,<sup>119</sup> David,<sup>120</sup> and Peter.<sup>121</sup>

### C. Love

The union within theandric freedom is a union based on love – God’s love for the person and the person’s love for God.<sup>122</sup> Berdiaev believes that love is the key for communion and is the reason creation exists. Creation is founded on God’s love, according to Berdiaev, a love that longs for the other. “Spiritual experience also shows us that God longs for man and that He yearns for the birth of man who shall reflect His image. . . . Infinite love cannot exist without a loving subject and a loved object.”<sup>123</sup>

God’s desire is for relationship with persons, a maturing relationship of love between God and person, which requires freedom. As Spinka writes, “A free man is necessary to God. Since God is love, and love cannot exist in a vacuum but must go out to an object and must be reciprocated, He desired a being capable of such a free response.”<sup>124</sup> As love can only be freely reciprocated, Berdiaev asserts that union with God or others in which theandric freedom is experienced is not initiated because of a command or coercion; it is the result of love.<sup>125</sup>

This is a highly significant point for Berdiaev’s thought. The ultimate expression of freedom is attained through union in love. “Truth crucified possesses no logical nor juridical power of compulsion and it made its appearance in the world as infinite love, and love does not compel, rather it makes man infinitely free.”<sup>126</sup> Berdiaev’s vision of freedom, then, has as its goal a freedom that results in a ‘turning outwards’ – a freedom that can only be manifested in a concern and love for others and God. This stands in sharp contrast to popular Western images of freedom that over-privilege concepts such as self-sufficiency and individualism.

---

<sup>118</sup> Genesis 12: 10-20.

<sup>119</sup> I Kings 19: 1-4.

<sup>120</sup> II Samuel 11.

<sup>121</sup> Matthew 14: 22-33.

<sup>122</sup> *DM*, 137.

<sup>123</sup> *FS*, 197.

<sup>124</sup> Spinka, “Berdyaeu and Origen,” 9.

<sup>125</sup> *FS*, 266.

<sup>126</sup> *FS*, 141.

Berdiaev's vision of freedom based on union and love depend not only his mystical understanding of how God and the person interrelate, but also on his interpretation of the Russian principle of *sobornost'*.

#### D. Sobornost'

*Sobornost'* (соборность) is a Russian word that has no equivalent in the English language. R. M. French states that it "is the despair of all translators from Russian. 'Altogetherness' would come near to its meaning. It is the dynamic life of the collective body."<sup>127</sup> Berdiaev states, "The word *sobornost* is untranslatable into other languages. The spirit of *sobornost* is inherent in Orthodoxy and the idea of *sobornost*, of spiritual community, is a Russian idea."<sup>128</sup> The word can be traced back to frequent use in the Old Church Slavonic,<sup>129</sup> but it is Khomiakov who develops and invests it with its unique meaning. Berdiaev credits Khomiakov with being the person who develops the linkage between *sobornost'* and freedom. "At the basis of his theological thought Khomyakov put the idea of freedom – of *sobornost*, the organic union of freedom and love, community."<sup>130</sup>

The concept of *sobornost'* is vitally important to Berdiaev's vision of freedom in which a modified self-determination is highly valued. Even though self-determination may seem to lead to individualism, Berdiaev is not arguing for an individualist conception of freedom. Individualism, for Berdiaev, is the negation of freedom.<sup>131</sup> Berdiaev uses *sobornost'* to counter individualism, with its false promise of autonomous freedom being the

---

<sup>127</sup> *SF*, 1.

<sup>128</sup> *RI*, 162-163.

<sup>129</sup> Walicki, *Slavophile Controversy*, 192.

<sup>130</sup> *RI*, 162. Walicki concurs with Berdiaev's assessment and points to the influence of the Catholic romanticist theologian, J. A. Moehler, on Khomiakov's work. Walicki, *Slavophile Controversy*, 192. An interesting comparison can be made between Berdiaev's view of *sobornost'* and the African concept, *ubuntu*, as described by Desmond Tutu. In discussing the work of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Tutu writes, ". . . that this third way of conditional amnesty was consistent with a central feature of the African *Weltanschauung* (or world-view) – what we know as *ubuntu* in the Nguni group of languages, or *botho* in the Sotho languages. What is it that constrained so many to choose to forgive rather than to demand retribution, to be so magnanimous rather than wreaking vengeance?"

*Ubuntu* is very difficult to render into a Western Language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, 'Yu, u nobuntu'; 'Hey, he or she has *ubuntu*.' This means they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life. We say, 'a person is a person through other people'. It is not 'I think therefore I am'. It says rather: 'I am human because I belong.' I participate, I share. A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are." Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999), 34-35. Considering the physical and cultural distance between Berdiaev's Russia and Tutu's Africa the similarities between *sobornost'* and *ubuntu* are striking.

<sup>131</sup> *MCA*, 153.

highest form of freedom, and proposes that the highest freedom is found in unity with God and others.

. . . *sobornost'* signifies a quality of life which affirms the reality of freedom by widening the scope of freedom and by revealing its transcendent, universal dimension. The recognition of the absolute priority of freedom does not, therefore, denote, as some would like to make out, individualistic self-assertion. Freedom of the spirit has in fact nothing in common with individualism: to be free is not to be insulated; is not to shut oneself up, but, on the contrary, to break through in a creative act to the fullness and universality of existence.<sup>132</sup>

The importance of *sobornost'* for Berdiaev is fairly obvious when we see how Khomiakov understands the term. *Sobornost'* is a context in which the individual, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is bound to others by love and exercises his freedom in that love. Since the state of *sobornost'* is a Spirit-dependent community that focuses on love, Khomiakov believes any type of external authority to be antithetical to this principle.

Although Khomiakov is focused on *sobornost'* within an Orthodox context, for Berdiaev, it quickly translates into a broader concern. Berdiaev agrees with Khomiakov that the Orthodox Church should be a '*soborny*' community, yet Berdiaev's focus is to establish this relationship on a larger scale, for all Christians, regardless of their church allegiance.

Berdiaev admits that this concept may be difficult to grasp for a number of reasons. First, for people in the West it may be difficult since it opposes both "Catholic authoritarianism" and "Protestant individualism"<sup>133</sup> and has no clear definition. "This *sobornost* can have no rational juridical expression. Each must take upon himself responsibility for all. No one may separate himself from the world whole, although at the same time he ought not to regard himself as part of a whole."<sup>134</sup> Second, it may be considered overly idealistic, as Berdiaev acknowledges Khomiakov has "in view an ideal Orthodoxy of a kind that ought to have existed according to his ideas. . . ."<sup>135</sup> And third, granted that there may be cultural differences that impede understanding, there is also the fact that within Russia this was not a universally accepted concept. Berdiaev:

Orthodox circles of the right who considered themselves especially orthodox, even asserted that *sobornost* was an invention of Khomyakov's, that Orthodox freedom in Khomyakov bears the impress of the teaching of Kant and German idealism about autonomy. There was some measure of truth in this, but it only means that Khomyakov's theology endeavoured creatively to give meaning to the whole spiritual

---

<sup>132</sup> *DR*, 54.

<sup>133</sup> *RI*, 164.

<sup>134</sup> *BE*, 131.

<sup>135</sup> *RI*, 162.

experience of the unfolding history of his time. In a certain sense it is possible to call Khomyakov an Orthodox modernist.<sup>136</sup>

Nonetheless, while acknowledging these difficulties, Berdiaev maintains that one cannot understand and experience theandric freedom apart from *sobornost'*.

If a person seeks authentic freedom but cannot 'live outwards' (i.e. look beyond himself to God and the world around him) he has not moved past autonomy. If he remains in this state he is susceptible to ego-centricity and enslavement. The person who opens herself to God and others has the potential to experience true (theandric) freedom. Communion with others is not antithetical to freedom, it is a necessary prerequisite.<sup>137</sup> Because of this *soborny* perspective the person whose goal is freedom should not seek *I-Thou* relationships, but rather relationships that are constituted by *I-We-Thou*.<sup>138</sup> For true freedom is only found when the person exists in a bond of love with others and God.

Therefore, we can see that Berdiaev's Christocentric conception of theandric freedom is dependent on a reconfigured view of grace, requires the autonomy of the individual if it is to be achieved, is experienced in love, and requires *sobornost'* – a community of others who are bound in love to one another and to God. Theandric freedom, then, is a mode of freedom where the person is 'self-determined' through union with God and others. The person does not act based on external determinations, but rather his actions are derived from what he 'knows' to be authentic to who he is in union with God and others. This, in turn, means that his actions will be creative. Although the manifestations of theandric freedom will be investigated in the next chapter, it is important to note the time in history when Berdiaev believes that theandric freedom was clearly evident – the early Renaissance.

Berdiaev broadly interprets this era as a great flourishing of creative activity in conjunction with Christian spirituality. "In medieval Christianity there was a theocratic, hierocratic culture, in which all creative life was a self-subordination to a religious principle. . . ." <sup>139</sup> Also, during this period, the seeds of humanism were sown and began to flourish. People began to understand the potential with which they were created. Berdiaev

---

<sup>136</sup> *RI*, 165.

<sup>137</sup> *FS*, 144.

<sup>138</sup> "Corporate experience of love, *sobornost'*, is the criterion of apprehension. Here we have a principle which is opposed to authority; it is also a method of apprehension which is opposed to the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*. It is not *I* think, but *we* think, that is to say, the corporate existence of love thinks, and it is not thought which proves my existence but will and love." *RI*, 161.

<sup>139</sup> Berdiaev, "СИАЧЕИЕ И ТВОРЧЕСТВО," 27. The terms 'theocratic' and 'hierocratic' are extensions of Berdiaev's 'aristocratic' view. As was discussed in chapter 1, Berdiaev was born into Russian nobility. Although he rejected the Russian aristocracy of his youth, he maintained, throughout his career, the need for an 'aristocratic' approach to life. By this he means that people who have been blessed with gifts from

contends that this creative activity was derived from theandric freedom, for the manifestation of theandric freedom, according to Berdiaev, is always creative acts.<sup>140</sup>

As this period progressed, however, a rebellion occurred and humanism began to replace God with the individual – resulting in the situation where “man has unmanned himself.”<sup>141</sup> With the individual as the focus, rather than God, creativity eventually began to stagnate and give rise to revolution and discord. Humanity lost its true center. Instead of living in relationship with God and others, humanism gave birth to modernistic concepts of freedom, leading to isolation and solitude. In Berdiaev’s view, theandric freedom was lost when the person was elevated over God, as opposed to the person being elevated *with* God.

We have seen that Berdiaev grounds his idea of theandric freedom in his particular Christological beliefs. It is the God-Man who makes possible the experience of freedom within the created order. Through the work of Christ the individual has the potential to develop and mature into what God intends. Theandric freedom enables the individual to become a person (i.e. to be god-like) and exist in *sobornost’* (i.e. communion with God and others). It is, however, not only the work of Christ that makes this freedom and maturation possible, it is also the work of the Holy Spirit and the person’s attention to the spiritual life. Thus we turn our attention to Berdiaev’s understanding of ‘spirit’.

#### §4 SPIRIT

Berdiaev’s proposition that theandric freedom is self-determination “in the depths of his spiritual life”<sup>142</sup> indicates not only the scope of freedom, but also the significance of the ‘spiritual’ in relation to this freedom. Theandric freedom depends on the ‘spirit’. Consequently, the spiritual realm (the noumenal) is an ultimate concern for Berdiaev.<sup>143</sup>

---

God should use them in the service of others. These individuals may be recognized by others as especially gifted, but their giftedness should not create a hierarchy, rather an aristocracy where needs are met by those capable and responsible for addressing them. See *BE*, 226.

<sup>140</sup> For a fuller account of Berdiaev’s view of the Renaissance see chapter 5.

<sup>141</sup> *FMW*, 22. Erich Fromm concurs with the view that it is at this time when individualism is born. Fromm: “In Italy, for the first time, the individual emerged from feudal society and broke the ties which had been giving him security and harrowing him at one and the same time. The Italian of the Renaissance became, in Burckhardt’s words, ‘the first-born among the sons of Modern Europe,’ the first individual.” Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1946), 37. See also Spinka, “Berdyayev and Origen,” 19.

<sup>142</sup> *FS*, 122.

<sup>143</sup> An important influence on Berdiaev’s work on the spirit is Kant. “In Kant the foundation stone of true metaphysics was laid.” *BE*, 28. Berdiaev’s thought demonstrates both his indebtedness to Kant, as well as his disagreement with the German philosopher. Berdiaev’s understanding of the spirit is predicated on his interpretation of Kant’s “transcendental dialectic” – a bifurcated world, a world where there is a phenomenal

Without an understanding of the spiritual nature of the person, the spiritual realm, and the work of the Spirit Berdiaev could not envisage the possibility of theandric freedom. Thus, 'spirit' is an axial concern for his thought on freedom. He addresses the subject of 'spirit' throughout his corpus, with two of his more significant works being devoted to the subject, *Freedom and the Spirit* (1927-1928) and *Spirit and Reality* (1937).

As is the case with all Berdiaev's core concepts (e.g., freedom, creativity, grace, etc.) he operates with the conviction that 'spirit' cannot be defined. "A rationalistic definition of spirit would not only be presumptuous but also a hopeless undertaking. Such a definition would kill spirit or transmute it into object. Spirit defies conceptual interpretation. . . ." <sup>144</sup> Berdiaev's fear that defining 'spirit' will result in objectification, along with his 'tentative' style, raises a serious challenge for the reader who attempts to discern what Berdiaev means by the term 'spirit'. The task, however, is not impossible. His willingness to list the attributes of spirit, as well as his repeated engagement with the subject, allow a general outline to be identified with regard to his vision of freedom. Although 'spirit' fulfils different functions within his thought, there are two distinct, yet related ways 'spirit' is referenced. They are: 'spirit' as a sphere of existence, and 'Spirit' as an active agent, the Holy Spirit.

In the former, when 'spirit' refers to a sphere of existence, it denotes the context where the Deity and the human, who is a 'spiritual being', <sup>145</sup> interact. The spiritual life (spirituality) is the context for experiencing a reality that is deeper than the phenomenal – a reality that is the foundation of the phenomenal or natural realm. Here we return to Berdiaev's emphasis on the 'mystical' experience. It is in the mystical union that the person

---

and noumenal realm. *BE*, 83. This view of the world shapes his mystical thought as well as his concept of freedom.

Theandric freedom is possible because of union with God in the realm of the noumenal (or spiritual). It is the person's experience of theandric freedom within a spiritual experience that enlightens her as to what true freedom is. Hence one of the labels Berdiaev has for theandric freedom is 'spiritual' freedom. Berdiaev insists that his conception of freedom is not possible within the world if the world is *only* understood as the phenomenal – the experience of freedom is possible because of the experience of the spiritual. Spiritual experience broadens the horizon of the individual and reveals the potentialities of a world where the spiritual as well as the natural is recognized. The spiritual molds the individual's concept of the natural. It is at this juncture where we see Berdiaev's most significant divergence from Kant.

Berdiaev asserts that Kant's mistake is his belief that the noumenal world cannot be known. *BE*, 7. For even though "Religion is a paradoxical combination of that which is revealed and that which remains hidden," Berdiaev believes that the noumenal is accessible through spiritual experience. *FS*, 90. "It was a fundamental mistake in Kant that he recognized sensuous experience, in which appearances are the data, but he did not recognize spiritual experience, of which the data are noumenal." *BE*, 14. McLachlan observes, "This is Berdiaev's most important disagreement with Kant and it reflects the mystical element of Berdiaev's thought. Unlike Kant, Berdiaev thinks that the noumenal world can be known through experience, but that experience is spiritual in nature." McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 167 fn.

<sup>144</sup> *SR*, 32.

<sup>145</sup> Berdiaev believes the person to be comprised of three parts, the spiritual, the psychic and the corporeal, although the 'spiritual' is the foundation. *SR*, 5-6.



is able to experience and understand what is truly real. As McLachlan observes, “The phenomenal world is a symbol of a spiritual reality that is deeper than objectification.”<sup>146</sup> “Spirit is not an objective reality,”<sup>147</sup> spirit is the ultimate reality.

When the term ‘spirit’ is referenced in this sense, it is the ground for his vision of freedom, for it is in the spiritual realm that Berdiaev understands the agent to exist in his closest union with God. Therefore, the experience of ‘spirit’ is ‘freedom’, ‘divine’, ‘creative’, ‘non-determined’, and a ‘Divine infusion’.<sup>148</sup> The sphere of the ‘spiritual’ is where the person interacts with the Holy Spirit, and where theandric freedom is developed.

Spirit is freedom unconstrained by the outward and the objective, where what is deep and inward determines all. To be in the spirit is to be in oneself. So far as the spirit is concerned the constraint of the natural world is only the reflection of inward processes. The religious pathos of freedom is the pathos of spirituality; *to win true freedom is to enter into the spiritual world. . . . Freedom must be discovered and revealed in the experience of the spiritual life, for it is impossible to demonstrate it or deduce its existence from the nature of things.*<sup>149</sup>

It is the person who experiences union with God through the Spirit, who seeks theandric freedom. This person experiences and interacts with the natural world with a new perspective and a new liberty. Berdiaev: “This does not mean that the transient and the relative are devoid of all reality, but their reality is secondary, not primary.”<sup>150</sup> The person, who experiences and knows his existence is attributed to something greater than the phenomenal world, can envisage a world beyond necessity.<sup>151</sup>

Idinopulos, however, recognizes the problematical nature of this thought: “. . . it becomes increasingly unclear to the reader what Berdiaev understood to be actual and concrete and not merely ideal or mystically significant about the divine-human spirit in the world of time, matter, and history.”<sup>152</sup> If spirit is the apex of the human existence but the human lives within the natural world, Idinopulos rightly questions what value the natural realm has within Berdiaev’s thought. Zenkovsky is more pointed when he charges Berdiaev with a “constant readiness to repudiate reality.”<sup>153</sup>

Berdiaev counters this type of criticism by arguing that the alienation between the noumenal and the phenomenal is a *reality* due to the Fall – it is not a speculative concept

---

<sup>146</sup> McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 146.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>148</sup> *SR*, 33. See also McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God*, 143.

<sup>149</sup> *FS*, 117 (Italics mine).

<sup>150</sup> *BE*, 154.

<sup>151</sup> As was discussed in chapter 2, it must be remembered that knowledge in this sense is ‘integral knowledge’.

<sup>152</sup> Idinopulos, “Ontology of Spirit,” 91.

<sup>153</sup> Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 780.

within his thought. He does not dispute the reality of the phenomenal realm, but it is a realm within a larger reality. The agent's existence within it is consequential, even though "Spiritual life is lived outside time, space, and matter. . . ." <sup>154</sup> Berdiaev:

It is a mistake to separate this world and the other altogether. It is in fact precisely the concrete life in this fallen objective world, the concrete life of men and women, animals, plants, of the earth with its mountains and fields, its rivers and seas, of the stars and expanses of sky, which contains the noumenal core in it; a noumenal core which is not to be found in the abstractly common, in the hypostatized hierarchy of universals. <sup>155</sup>

Despite the reality of a rift between the two realms, Berdiaev believes the human should seek the integration of the spiritual and the material realms. "*Spirituality* is not opposed to *body* or *material* but implies its transfiguration, the realization of the highest quality of the whole man – his personality." <sup>156</sup> The existence of two realms is the result of rebellion and therefore not part of God's intention for creation. It is the responsibility of the human, whose soul is "the interplay of freedom and necessity, the spiritual and the natural world," <sup>157</sup> to work with God towards the reunification of these realms. Berdiaev:

This is where the new spirituality must strive to be effective, by combining contemplation and activity, spiritual concentration and the will to struggle. It is completely wrong to base the spiritual life on the old antithesis of *spirit* and *flesh*. St. Paul interpreted this as an antithesis between the old and the new man. The new man, the *spiritual* man, does not repudiate the *flesh*, if by that we mean more than simply sin; on the contrary he endeavours to master the *flesh*, in order to illumine and transfigure it into spiritual flesh. <sup>158</sup>

Berdiaev is convinced that any hope of overcoming the disintegrated world will come from humans understanding and striving to exist in the spiritual *and* natural realm. The person's existence within the spiritual realm is made possible by the liberating work of Christ and, equally importantly, by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Thus we come to the second reference of 'spirit' within Berdiaev's thought, the 'Spirit' as the Holy Spirit.

At this juncture we once again find Berdiaev's reluctance to offer precise explanations. He does recognize the importance of distinguishing between 'spirit' and 'Spirit': ". . . the problem of the Holy Spirit and of His relation to spirit is of fundamental

---

<sup>154</sup> *FS*, 17. Berdiaev's assertion here is predicated on his understanding that the spiritual realm is qualitatively different from the natural realm. Even though he maintains that the natural realm is an 'epiphenomenon' of the spiritual, the natural realm can in no way impinge upon the spiritual. It is not until God restores all things in the *Basileia* that the two realms will be unified. This problematic assertion will be critically addressed in chapter 7.

<sup>155</sup> *BE*, 234.

<sup>156</sup> *SR*, 40 (Italics author).

<sup>157</sup> *FS*, 123.

<sup>158</sup> *SR*, 180 (Italics author).

importance to Christian thought. Christianity is *pneuma-centric*. The *pneuma* or spirit is the bearer and source of prophetic inspiration in Christianity.”<sup>159</sup> Yet, regrettably, when he attempts to differentiate he retreats to, “the distinction between the Holy Spirit and spirit is a purely doctrinal one.”<sup>160</sup> Commenting on Berdiaev’s view, David Richardson writes, “Spirit is not Holy Spirit, yet they differ only in degree and are really the same reality.”<sup>161</sup>

Despite Berdiaev’s reluctance to provide a definition, the ‘Spirit’ (Holy Spirit) is central to his thought. Seaver observes that Berdiaev invests the doctrine of the Trinity with a mystical significance in which the Holy Spirit is considered to be the bond between person, Christ, and God the Creator.<sup>162</sup> This is true, and yet, for Berdiaev, the Spirit is more than a bond – it is God’s active presence manifested within the created order. “Spirituality in religious phraseology is the revelation of the Holy Spirit *in the world and in man*.”<sup>163</sup>

God’s active presence means the “Spirit is, as it were, a Divine breath, penetrating human existence and endowing it with the highest dignity, with the highest quality of existence, with an inner independence and unity.”<sup>164</sup> Hence, as the Spirit unites the person to God through Christ, this is not solely for the experience of *ek-stasis*, but for the realization of freedom and the potential of transfiguration. “The stress must always be laid upon enlightenment and transfiguration.”<sup>165</sup>

Berdiaev’s writings on the ‘spirit’ and the ‘Spirit’ provide the initial response to the charge that he is not interested in the material world. In a certain respect, it is possible to say that Berdiaev is not interested in the material realm, but this must be qualified. His primary concern is to look ‘beyond’ the material to the spiritual realm, which is the foundation of the material.<sup>166</sup> The material realm never defines, for Berdiaev, what is truly real; reality can only be defined by the spiritual. Hence Berdiaev’s focus is the transfigured reality of God’s

---

<sup>159</sup> SR, 181. He goes on to observe, “S. Bulgakov very rightly maintains that there can be no personal incarnation of the Holy Spirit, that His incarnation must be universal, diffused throughout the world. Hence the great difficulty of defining the relationship of spirit to the Holy Spirit.” Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> SR, 183. See also TR, “There is a difference between Spirit and Holy Spirit, but they are one and the same reality in different degrees.” TR, 141.

<sup>161</sup> David Bonner Richardson, *Berdiaev’s Philosophy of History: An Existentialist Theory of Social Creativity and Eschatology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 62.

<sup>162</sup> Seaver, *Nicolas Berdyayev*, 44.

<sup>163</sup> DH, 137 (Italics mine). See also SR, 21.

<sup>164</sup> SR, 6.

<sup>165</sup> DH, 85.

<sup>166</sup> Berdiaev asks, “The question is: is the conquest of the objective world a possibility, not the annihilation of what is ‘earthly’, but its liberation and transformation, its transition to a different scheme of things? And that is an eschatological question.” BE, 221-222.

*Basileia*, which will reunite the spiritual and the material realms.<sup>167</sup> For, “God is not a reality in the same sense and of the same kind as the reality of the natural world. God is spirit, not being.”<sup>168</sup> As Spinka observes, “For him [Berdiaev], Christianity is the religion of the future, of the end, of the aeon of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>169</sup> Berdiaev is interested in the world; his interest, however, is in a world that is restored by God through the Spirit, a world yet to be fulfilled.

## §5 SUMMARY

In this chapter we have examined the complex framework Berdiaev constructs to delineate the existence of freedom within the created order. I have proposed that the freedom within creation, in Berdiaev’s vision, should be classified as an embodied freedom that has four distinct modes: slavery, heteronomy, autonomy, and theandric. These four modes constitute a spectrum of freedom that is based on Berdiaev’s interpretation of select theological concepts (e.g. grace, Christology, the Fall, the Holy Spirit, etc.). Embodied freedom for Berdiaev is a seemingly paradoxical state in which the agent must exercise self-determination while also being relationally dependent. To summarize the major points of our discussion:

- i. Although meonic freedom cannot exist within Being, there remains a latency of meonic freedom within each individual. I have described this latency as ‘existential liberty’. Due to the presence of existential liberty the individual always has the potential for self-determined acts in some form.
- ii. The Fall results in alienation of the created order from God and the fracturing of freedom into multiple modes of existence. These modes exist under the rubric of ‘embodied freedom’. The individual is able to progress or regress between these modes based on her existential liberty and her relation to God, others, and self.
- iii. God reveals what is true humanity in the Incarnation. Relying on a novel re-interpretation of grace, combined with the concept of God-manhood and *theosis*, Berdiaev maintains that the revelation of the Son not only offers redemption from sin, but also reveals the destiny of the individual to be a divine-human being.
- iv. It is within the intimate union of God and person, Berdiaev proposes, that theandric freedom, the highest form of freedom, is experienced. This union is based on the love between God and person, maintained in the Spirit and nurtured in *sobornost*.

---

<sup>167</sup> For Berdiaev, a ‘fallen’ reality cannot be the sole measure of what is truly real since fundamental reality is grounded in the spiritual. Berdiaev’s hope in overcoming the rift between the spiritual and the material is eschatological. See *BE*, 192-205.

<sup>168</sup> *BE*, 28-29.

<sup>169</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 180.

- v. We have observed a distinction between ‘spirit’ and ‘Spirit’ in Berdiaev’s work. The former is used to denote the context where the spiritual life of the individual engages with God. The latter designates the Holy Spirit. The emphasis on ‘spirit’ derives from Berdiaev’s understanding of a bifurcated world and his emphasis on the mystical experience. Theandric freedom is possible because of the person’s ability to live a ‘spiritual’ life.
- vi. Berdiaev’s conception of freedom within the created order is a multi-layered view that acknowledges the reality of deterministic forces and various expressions of freedom. As the person’s freedom develops, Berdiaev believes that the individual becomes more self-determined while also becoming more relationally dependent.

Our critique of Berdiaev’s vision of embodied freedom through the work of Moltmann will focus on Berdiaev’s premise that self-determination is a divine element within the person. Using Moltmann, I will challenge the basic assumptions Berdiaev employs to support this view: his re-configured view of grace, the bifurcated understanding of reality, the notion that the creation and giving of freedom cannot be attributed to God, and his conception of the Spirit. Moltmann’s view of freedom will also be used to support Berdiaev’s understanding of freedom being self-determined and relationally dependent – a freedom that enables growth towards God and also, tragically, makes possible the alienation from God.

## Chapter 5 – The Creative Act

### §1 INTRODUCTION

“God calls man to perform the creative act and realize his vocation, and He is expecting an answer to his call.”<sup>1</sup> The ‘creative act’ Berdiaev believes God expects from humanity can be described, in the broadest possible sense, as an ‘act’ undertaken by a ‘free’ person that results in something ‘new’ that has ‘value’. To clarify this description, we will explore Berdiaev’s complex thought on creativity in order to understand how he envisages creativity taking place and its significance for the person and for God.

Creativity, like freedom, is a core element to Berdiaev’s thought. He writes in his autobiography,

The matter of creativity and of the creative vocation of man is not only a facet or one of the facets of my outlook, reached as a result of philosophical reasoning, but a source of my whole thinking and living – an initial inner experience and illumination.<sup>2</sup>

Hence Osborn is correct when he observes that no concept, other than freedom, “is dearer to Berdiaev’s heart than creativity.”<sup>3</sup>

The centrality of creativity to Berdiaev’s thought is based on his premise that the highest forms of freedom depend on creativity. “Creativeness is the way of liberation. Liberation cannot result in inner emptiness – it is not merely liberation *from* something but also liberation *for the sake of* something. And this ‘for the sake of’ is creativeness.”<sup>4</sup> Thus an understanding of the creative act becomes central to comprehend how a free person interacts with the created order. From this position Berdiaev can assert that “the human is called to be a creator and co-participant in the act of God’s creation. This is God’s call directed to the person, which the person should freely answer.”<sup>5</sup> Creativity, for Berdiaev, is the other side of the coin, so to speak, of freedom – one cannot exist without the other. To understand what Berdiaev means by freedom for the person one must also engage his unique formulation of the creative act.

---

<sup>1</sup> *DM*, 164.

<sup>2</sup> *DR*, 207. “The problem of creativity occupies a central place in my world-outlook. The person was created for this, in order to become, in his own turn, a creator.” Berdiaev, “МИРОСОЗЕЦАНИЕ,” 25.

<sup>3</sup> Osborn, *Freedom in Modern Theology*, 188.

<sup>4</sup> *DM*, 189 (Italics author).

<sup>5</sup> Berdiaev, “СПАСЕНИЕ И ТВОРЧЕСТВО,” 38. See also Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 242.

As creativity is directly linked to freedom, it is not surprising that his approach to the topic of creativity mirrors in many ways his approach to the topic of freedom. For example, his approach is existential, he is not concerned with established methodologies or orthodox precepts, he asserts that creativity (like freedom) is relationally dependent, and he uses creativity to paint an exalted picture of the person. As with his work on freedom there will be specialized terms that will need elucidation (e.g. ‘the creative act’, ‘geniality’, etc.) and we will encounter ideas that are not presented in complete or systematic ways. These difficulties, however, do not diminish the important contribution Berdiaev’s thought on creativity brings to the theologian’s discussion of freedom and what freedom means for the person.

In this chapter we will begin by outlining the beginning stages of creativity. From there we will then examine the three primary foundations of the creative act (meonic freedom, the *imago Dei*, and the ‘silent expectation’) and we will then assess Berdiaev’s conception of how creativity is given shape through the inner and outer creative acts. We will then consider what Berdiaev believes to be a notable example of creativity (the Renaissance), discuss his proposition that creativeness is an ethical mandate, and examine the interrelatedness between ‘freedom’ and ‘creativity’. We conclude by summarizing the material we have covered and also by highlighting those points that will be critiqued through Moltmann’s theology of freedom.

Berdiaev is reluctant to define the creative act, “What creativeness is, is inexplicable.”<sup>6</sup> He believes that any attempt to define would only result in ‘objectification’. The fear of objectification is not the only reason he does not define; he is convinced that a definition, or ‘justification’, is not required. “Creativity stands in no need of justification from the religious or any other point of view: it is its own justification in virtue of the very existence of man. . . .”<sup>7</sup>

Combining these initial convictions with his orientation and style, we find that Berdiaev’s thought on creativity is even less detailed than his vision of freedom. Hence I propose that his work should be considered as a sketch of creativity. Even though he will not define or justify creativity, his work on the subject from multiple perspectives enables us to outline a general framework of this sketch. Our outline begins by establishing the broadest

---

<sup>6</sup> *MCA*, 337. The terms ‘creativity’ and ‘creativeness’ are used interchangeably with the term ‘creative act’ throughout this chapter, and within Berdiaev’s work.

<sup>7</sup> *DR*, 207.

possible parameters of his thought, the elements that I believe form the beginning stages of Berdiaev's view of creativity.

## §2 THE BEGINNING STAGES OF CREATIVITY

The beginning stages of creativity involve self-will,<sup>8</sup> newness, and freedom. Even though “creativity is a complex fact”<sup>9</sup> and Berdiaev will propose a wide set of variables for the highest forms of creativity, these three elements form the basic parameters for creativity.

A creative act for Berdiaev will always be a self-willed act by a person that produces some form (whether material, conceptual, or spiritual) of newness, and is dependent on the person's freedom. It is important to note that these three elements do not constitute a creative act; rather, when taken as a whole they form what I will call a ‘novel act’, which is the beginning stage of creativity. Since, as we shall see, his complex conception of creativity is a hierarchical view that depends on a number of variables, there needs to be some type of distinction between the beginning stages of creativity and the creative act in its realization. Although Berdiaev does *not* make this distinction, it is an essential one.

The term ‘self-will’ describes an action that the person takes which is attributable to himself. For Berdiaev, this is a critical distinction. The creative act is the self-willed act and activity of a specific agent. He writes, “Man is called to creative activity, he is not merely a spectator – even though it be of divine beauty. Creativity is action.”<sup>10</sup> Creation cannot result from emanation, evolution, or even a Bergsonian “creative evolution.”<sup>11</sup> In essence what Berdiaev wants to assert is that creativity must begin with an action that is not solely determined by variables external to the person or ‘natural’ processes. If the creator cannot act in a self-willed way then the action takes on the character of an evolutionary process, and this

---

<sup>8</sup> Berdiaev held that creativity depends on the person being free and original. *MCA*, 135. I am using the term ‘self-will’ to help delineate his concept of ‘original’. His use of ‘original’ intimates at least two related but distinct meanings. First is the idea of an action that can be attributed to the person and is recognized as originating with the person. That is, the action did not occur under external coercion or direction, although it is accepted that there may be forces that influence the person. ‘Original’ used in this sense would be understood by many. For instance, a writer's whose work is found to be copied from another author is said to be guilty of plagiarizing – the author's work was not ‘original’. Berdiaev's use of ‘original’ also intimates that the creative act has no precedent, that it is completely new. This controversial position ties into the larger concerns of this chapter and will be critiqued in chapter 7. In order to distinguish between these two meanings, I have chosen to use the word ‘self-will’ to indicate an action that is characterized by a high degree of self-determination.

<sup>9</sup> *DM*, 163.

<sup>10</sup> *DM*, 375.

<sup>11</sup> *DR*, 217.



evolutionary character Berdiaev soundly rejects, “. . . evolution is essentially conservative on principle and takes no cognizance of what is in actual fact new, that is, of the creative.”<sup>12</sup>

From this quote we see not only that creativity must be self-willed but also that it must result in newness. Creativity, as Berdiaev conceives it, will always result in a product which hitherto has not yet existed within the sphere of the agent. From this position he contends that the creative act is an addition to the created order. “In every creative act there is absolute gain, something added. The creative quality of being, the growth which takes place in being, the achievement of gain without loss – all this speaks of a creator and of creativity.”<sup>13</sup>

Berdiaev’s insistence on newness has a resonance with contemporary views of creativity from other disciplines. For instance, Robert Weisberg writes, “The primary criterion for calling some product creative is that it be novel, at least for the individual producing it.”<sup>14</sup> Rob Pope’s survey of creativity also concludes that ‘novelty’ or newness is an important essential for creativeness.<sup>15</sup> Even though these writers would disagree with Berdiaev’s view of creativity on a number of fronts, their agreement at this point is noteworthy.

Berdiaev believes newness is possible based on two suppositions. His first supposition regards the status of creation – he believes creation to be ongoing.<sup>16</sup> The created world is not complete; not only is it not complete but it is also inadequate since it exists in a post-Fall order.<sup>17</sup> The creation looks for restoration, to overcome its objectified nature, but this will only happen if the human assumes her role and exercises creativity.<sup>18</sup>

The second supposition for newness is also our third beginning element of creativeness – freedom. We can make two observations as to how freedom relates to the beginning stages of creativity. First, with regard to our discussion of newness – when Berdiaev asserts that all creative acts originate out of freedom, he is envisioning creativity originating from ‘nothing’ (i.e., non-determined, or meonic, freedom). This formulation of

---

<sup>12</sup> *BE*, 160. This quote comes from his critique of what he refers to as nineteenth century theories of evolution. Berdiaev’s concern is to assert that the person’s creative acts, as well as God’s, must not be viewed as part of a natural or evolutionary process where there would be no element of self-will on the part of the person or God. Berdiaev is clear that God’s creative activity is *not* the result of activity that emanates or evolves from the nature of who God is. Creativeness is a deliberate action God takes, “If the world only emanates from God, there is no creative act, and creativity is not justified.” *MCA*, 130.

<sup>13</sup> *MCA*, 129. See also *DM*, 162.

<sup>14</sup> Robert W. Weisberg, *Creativity: Beyond the Myth of Genius* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1993), 4.

<sup>15</sup> Rob Pope, *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* (London: Routledge, 2005), 57.

<sup>16</sup> *BE*, 171.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> See *MCA*, 143; *BE*, 174.

creativity arising from ‘nothing’ (freedom) allows him to state that because creativity arises from ‘nothing’, whatever takes form will have an element of newness to it, since it did not exist before.

Creation is the greatest mystery of life, the mystery of the appearance of something new that had never existed before and is not deduced from, or generated by, anything. Creativeness presupposes non-being, *μὴ ὄν* (not *οὐκ ὄν*) which is the source of the primeval, pre-cosmic, pre-existent freedom in man. The mystery of creativeness is the mystery of freedom. . . . Out of being, out of something that exists, it is impossible to create that which is completely new; there can only be emanation, generation, redistribution.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to note that Berdiaev does not want to suggest that creativity, which depends on freedom (‘nothing’), has no input from other external variables. Within his idea of freedom and newness he also wants to value ‘tradition’ – that is the creative achievements and accomplishments of past generations and cultures. He considers tradition to be “the creative life of the spirit,”<sup>20</sup> and its importance is realized in that it demonstrates how creativity was previously expressed. Tradition can be that which helps guide the creator in her endeavors.

. . . tradition is by no means just another name for the conservative spirit which is actually prejudicial to creative development: it is rather the inner connection with the creation of the past and its cultural values.<sup>21</sup>

The importance of tradition is tempered with the view that although tradition is a resource for creative acts, tradition should not be a rule or template that creative acts must adhere to. Berdiaev maintains that tradition becomes problematic when it either becomes objectified, so that it is an authority external to the person, or when people believe that the past, where the tradition originated, must somehow be re-created. In this latter deviation tradition becomes nostalgia; Berdiaev considers nostalgia to be a sentimental form of tradition that can lead the person away from creativity.<sup>22</sup>

Our second observation concerning freedom focuses on Berdiaev’s resolute stance that freedom is the precursor to creativity. He insists that creativity always presupposes freedom. The creative act cannot be the result of the person being forced, coerced, or manipulated into acting. The creative act is the result of the person freely engaging with the world and responding based on his freedom. This concept requires much clarification, but at

---

<sup>19</sup> *DM*, 163.

<sup>20</sup> *FS*, 331.

<sup>21</sup> *TNE*, 83. See also *FS*, 234 and *BE*, 228 where he gives special emphasis to the traditions passed down through the Church.

<sup>22</sup> *TNE*, 23.

this point what the reader must bear in mind is that Berdiaev's conception of creativity is dependent upon his idea of the person being able to act with some measure of freedom within the created order. Freedom provides a platform for the person acting in ways that are distinctive to the creator's unique status as a human.

As was previously stated, these three elements (self-will, newness, freedom) constitute what I am referring to as a 'novel act', which is the beginning stage of creativity. A novel act may not always be a creative act, but a creative act will always contain this particular type of novelty. To understand how a novel act can become a creative act we need to consider various factors that are external to the person and foundational for creativity.

### §3 THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE CREATIVE ACT

As with his vision of freedom, Berdiaev's view of creativity places a strong emphasis on the person, while at the same time asserting the need for other 'resources' that exist outside of the person. Hence, like his vision of freedom, we find a view of creativity that is dependent upon factors external to the person – specifically God, others, and meonic freedom – that are the foundation of creativity.

The following statement by Berdiaev forms the framework for our analysis of this foundation. "It [creativity] presupposes, first, man's primary, meonic, uncreated freedom; secondly, the gifts bestowed upon man the creator by God the Creator, and, thirdly, the world as the field for his activity."<sup>23</sup> Thus we begin our exposition of what makes the creative act possible with Berdiaev's first supposition – meonic freedom. From freedom we will go on to examine God's gift of the *imago Dei* and then consider God's desire for human creativity, what Berdiaev calls the 'silent expectation'.

#### 1. *Meonic freedom*

Meonic freedom as the first supposition for creativity is consistent with Berdiaev's overall view of freedom and how the person experiences freedom. We have already examined Berdiaev's conception of meonic freedom and the resultant 'embodied' freedom with its four modes; however, we need to return to Berdiaev's view of meonic freedom to delineate how freedom is foundational for creativity.

---

<sup>23</sup> *DM*, 163.

As was outlined in chapter 4, Berdiaev's 'embodied' freedom is predicated on 'existential liberty'. 'Existential liberty' designates Berdiaev's premise that the agent always has some capacity for self-determined actions, which can then be said to be distinctly personal. So, Berdiaev's paradigm of freedom is a multi-phase view of freedom that values both relationality and self-determination. This proposition relates to the creative act in two significant ways.

First, the creative act, for Berdiaev, must be an action that can always be attributable to the agent in some way. An action that a person undertakes because they are directed, manipulated, or forced, cannot be creative. Here we highlight again the importance of self-will. The creative act must originate in some way with the person. If the agent's actions are predetermined, i.e., if the agent is directed how to think, produce, relate, etc., there is no newness, ergo no creativeness. Now since Berdiaev's conception of freedom is relationally based this does not rule out the fact that the agent may be influenced by any number of variables, but these variables, if the act is to be considered creative, will never force the agent to act in a determined way.

Consequently, existential liberty, as the non-determined element within freedom, means that the person has the potential for distinctly self-determined actions, which may then lead to creativity. Based on this premise Berdiaev can state: "Creativity is inseparable from freedom. Only he who is free creates."<sup>24</sup> Novelty, and ultimately the creative act, will always be the positive expression of an agent's freedom.

The second way existential liberty relates to creativity is found in the idea that creativity is the essential mode of action in theandric freedom. This second point will be addressed at the end of the chapter, once we have explicated Berdiaev's conception of creativity within the material world. At this juncture we can note that creativity, for Berdiaev, is dependent on freedom. As we shall see, the relationship is reciprocal, for freedom is also dependent on the person being able to act in creative ways.

## 2. Imago Dei

E. J. Tinsley writes,

Certainly it is true that human creativity always contains, perhaps more than anywhere else, the most powerful stimulus to *hybris*, to Prometheanism. Creativity is,

---

<sup>24</sup> *MCA*, 144.

at one and the same time, the possibility of man's humiliation and sin, and also of his exaltation and glory.<sup>25</sup>

Tinsley's observation is relevant when considering Berdiaev's approach. Arguing for the creative abilities of the human could be seen as a Promethean argument. Yet in Berdiaev's thought on the *imago Dei* we see that his view of creativity is not trying to supplant the Creator, nor does the *imago Dei* signify mastery or dominion over creation. The *imago Dei*, for Berdiaev, means that humanity has the potential to create.

So sublime and so beautiful is the divine idea of man that creative freedom, the free power to reveal himself in creative action, is placed within man as a seal and sign of his likeness to God, as a mark of the Creator's image.<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, one characteristic of the *imago Dei* is the capacity within the person to create.<sup>27</sup> Although this conception of the *imago Dei* is equivocal, Berdiaev interprets the *imago* to be the person's capacity *and* predisposition for creativity.

The divine-human religion predicates man's activity. If God created man in his own image and likeness, and if the Son of God is absolute Man, this means that man as a son of God is predestined to be a free creator, like his Father-Creator. Christ, the Son of God, Saviour and Redeemer, restores man's creative powers, which had been undermined and weakened.<sup>28</sup>

Hence a distinctive property of what it means to be human, according to Berdiaev, is to create. This is reflected in the original Genesis 'myth', where the human is not only created by God, but is created in God's image, i.e., the image of the Creator.<sup>29</sup>

Based on this understanding, Berdiaev refers to the *imago Dei* as the 'genius' within the person.

Creativeness by its very nature implies genius. In his creative aspect man is endowed with genius; it is the image of God the Creator in him. This does not mean that every man has an outstanding talent for painting pictures, writing poems, novels or philosophical books, ruling the state, or making inventions and discoveries. The presence of genius in man has to do with his inner creativeness and not with the

---

<sup>25</sup> E. J. Tinsley, "The Incarnation, Art, and the Communication of the Gospel," in *Art and Religion as Communication*, eds. James Waddell and F. W. Dillistone (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974), 57. See also Lampert, *The New Middle Ages*, 48.

<sup>26</sup> *MCA*, 99.

<sup>27</sup> Berdiaev's conception of the *imago Dei* is a multi-layered concept that has several functions within his thought. See chapter 4 for how the *imago Dei* is equated with grace.

<sup>28</sup> *MCA*, 137.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. John Zizioulas, "We can see this [personhood being equated with the *imago Dei*] by considering one of the most important capacities of human personhood, namely *creating*: man is capable of creating, of bringing things into being." John Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28:5 (October 1975), 411. Robert Slesinski traces the Slavophile influence through Berdiaev, among others, to present day theologians such as Zizioulas. Robert F. Slesinski, "Postmodernity and the resources of the Christian East," *Communio* 17 (Summer 1990): 220-237.

external realization of it. It is a characteristic of human personality as a whole and not a specific gift, and it indicates that man is capable of breaking through to the primary source of his life and that his spiritual activity is truly original and not determined by social influences.<sup>30</sup>

Berdiaev's use of the word 'genius' is problematic. This is due to the fact that the word 'genius' is often understood as denoting a distinctive and unique talent or ability. Berdiaev's application of the word diffuses this meaning; if everyone is blessed with 'genius' (as all humans have the *imago Dei*) then there is nothing exceptional.

Berdiaev seeks to overcome this difficulty by claiming that genius is first and foremost an *inner* potential. 'Inner' in this sense connotes the person's spiritual abilities. Thus, each individual possesses an 'inner genius'. To distinguish 'inner genius' from a more traditional understanding of the term 'genius' (what he refers to as 'outer genius') he factors in the specific talents or skills of the individual. Thus 'inner' genius plus talent "makes a man a genius in the usual sense of the term."<sup>31</sup> This concept will become modified as his thought develops. In a later publication he alters the term, proposing the term '*geniality*' as opposed to 'genius'.<sup>32</sup>

Equating the *imago Dei* with *geniality* reflects a tendency already noted in Berdiaev's thought, the blurring of terminology concerning core concepts. As already discussed, Berdiaev equates the *imago Dei* with grace and theandric freedom.<sup>33</sup> The *imago Dei* now not only encompasses grace and theandric freedom, it also includes *geniality*. It is accepted that Berdiaev would have been better served if he had exercised greater discipline in delineating these concepts, yet the merit of his thought remains. Berdiaev is *not* arguing that these terms are interchangeable *per se*, rather that they are interconnected in such a way that one cannot use one concept without referencing the other.

Because creativity is dependent upon the *geniality* God has instilled in the person, Berdiaev regards true creativity as 'divine-human'.<sup>34</sup> In one sense creativity is divine-human because it is dependent upon the human actively developing the 'divine' gifts given by God. In a second sense, creativity is divine-human because true creative acts are acts accomplished in union with God, what Berdiaev calls 'theurgy'.<sup>35</sup> "True creativeness is theurgy, God-

---

<sup>30</sup> *DM*, 166.

<sup>31</sup> *DM*, 167.

<sup>32</sup> *SF*, 57. See also Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 248.

<sup>33</sup> See chapter 4. Berdiaev: "Grace is not a power acting from without: grace is the revelation of the divine in man." *RSRC*, 44.

<sup>34</sup> *BE*, 178.

<sup>35</sup> As with his vision of freedom, Berdiaev's work on creativity did not develop in a cultural or intellectual vacuum. Creativity was a prominent topic in the *Silver Age*, with a number of writers addressing its

activity, activity together with God.”<sup>36</sup> Consequently, when the person engages in creative activity based on theandric freedom, she reveals the divine nature within herself. This is because creativity, in its highest sense, will only occur in relation to God – a relationship that requires the person to recognize the divine nature (*imago Dei*) within her.<sup>37</sup>

For Berdiaev, the person’s ability to create is a “gift from God”<sup>38</sup> that does not elevate the human to equal status with God or replace God with the person as the center of creation (the very thing that Berdiaev faults the later Renaissance period as doing). Rather, the person’s creative ability and actions follow God’s design for the person and substantiate the person’s status as being made in God’s image and likeness.

So, the following observations may be made concerning the *imago Dei* and the person’s creative ability:

- i. The *imago Dei* is central in understanding how the person creates.
- ii. The *imago Dei* is a form of grace, since it is a divine element (an element that cannot be attributed to the natural world) bestowed upon the human.
- iii. The *imago Dei* is not only a form of grace but it also means that the person is predisposed to act in certain ways (to create), and in this way the *imago Dei* can be said to be a type of ‘inner genius’ or *geniality*.
- iv. Theandric freedom is central to his thought since the grace that Christ offers (which illuminates the dimmed *imago Dei*) and the actuation of *geniality* (which precipitates creativity) can only occur through the person freely responding to God.

We can thus see that Berdiaev is making a theological assertion regarding the creative act. In his thought, the *imago Dei* is foundational as to how creativity is possible for the individual. This leads to the Orthodox-influenced position that the beginning point of a theological anthropology should not be the person’s fallen nature; rather it should begin with the latent qualities of freedom and the *imago Dei* within the person.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, an

---

significance, with ‘free theurgy’ being a foundational idea. See Shein, “Solov’ev’s Epistemology,” 16. Also, Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle*, 9.

<sup>36</sup> *MCA*, 126.

<sup>37</sup> *MCA*, 99.

<sup>38</sup> *DR*, 213.

<sup>39</sup> *DM*, 65. John Hick writes, “However, the basic Irenaean conception of man as a creature made initially in the ‘image’ of God and gradually being brought through his own free responses into the divine ‘likeness’, this creative process being interrupted by the fall and set right again by the incarnation, has continued to operate in the minds of theologians of the Orthodox Church down to the present day. A developmental or teleological view of man is evident, for example, in the work of the Orthodox thinker whose writings are most familiar to the West, Nicholas Berdyaev.” John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Great Britain: Macmillan and Co Ltd., 1975), 223-224. Although Berdiaev would reject that his view is teleological, since he believes that teleological arguments impinge upon the person’s free engagement with the world, he would most likely accept the term ‘developmental’. *DM*, 185. Berdiaev does not make the distinction, common to Orthodox thought, between the ‘image’ and the ‘likeness’ of God, but his thought does follow the same trajectory, as Hick correctly points out.

individual who believes he is self-sufficient, recognizing nothing greater than himself, and denies the *imago Dei*, severely impairs his creative ability.<sup>40</sup>

### 3. *Silent expectation*

Although freedom establishes the potential for creativity, and the *imago Dei* enables the person to engage in creative acts, Berdiaev believes that there is an expectation, a ‘calling’ for creativity from God as well. “What God expects from man is not servile submission, not obedience, not the fear of condemnation, but free creative acts.”<sup>41</sup> Hence God’s calling is the third foundation of the creative act, a ‘silent expectation’.

This assertion mirrors the thought in Berdiaev’s theory of freedom that God expects freedom from the person.<sup>42</sup> As previously stated, there is a necessary relationship between freedom and creativity in Berdiaev’s thought. Thus, if God expects freedom from the person, God must also expect creativity. Because of this expectation we can say that the person is not only capable of creativity, creativity has a vocational status. Sabant writes, “. . . Berdiaev perceives another duty for man: the duty of creativeness.”<sup>43</sup>

The problem for Berdiaev is that he is proposing an idea – God expects the person to create – that has no explicit reference in scripture. Indeed, the exact opposite can be argued.<sup>44</sup> The lack of scriptural mandate would appear to seriously weaken Berdiaev’s idea that God calls the person to create. Berdiaev attempts to overcome this difficulty by proposing that the call to create within scripture is actually a ‘hidden’ call. “We feel the *holy authority of the Gospel’s silence about creativeness*. This absolute silence of Holy Scripture about man’s creative activity is divinely wise.”<sup>45</sup>

One must recall his hesitation to define the creative act – any definition would result in an objectification of the act. He applies this same principle to his view of scripture. The call to create is intimated within scripture, but creativity cannot be explicitly stated without

---

<sup>40</sup> *MH*, 154-155.

<sup>41</sup> *TR*, 119.

<sup>42</sup> *FS*, 126-127.

<sup>43</sup> Sabant, “Christ, Freedom and Salvation,” 488. See also Lampert, *The New Middle Ages*, 48.

<sup>44</sup> The Hebrew writers were very exacting in attributing the word create (ברא) to God alone. For the writers of the Hebrew Bible, where Berdiaev draws his support for God’s creative activity and the *imago Dei*, attributing the faculty of creation to the person is not supported. The verb (ברא) is used forty-five times in the Old Testament, and in each case it is used singularly as God’s action. Gerhard von Rad writes, “The verb (ברא) was retained exclusively to designate the divine creation activity. . . . It means a creative activity, which on principle is without analogy.” Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 43-44.

<sup>45</sup> *MCA*, 97 (Italics author).



objectifying the act itself.<sup>46</sup> Thus there is “silence” regarding the call to create and that silence is “divinely wise.” He writes, “If the ways of creativeness were indicated and justified in the Holy Scriptures, then creativeness would be obedience, which is to say that there would be no creativeness.”<sup>47</sup>

Since God’s expectation is veiled and the calling to create is not specifically defined, how each person responds will be subject-determined as the person exists in union with God and others. This means that the freedom necessary for creativity is not impinged upon and the creative act can become the act “that constitutes man’s relation and response to God.”<sup>48</sup>

Berdiaev does not find this view of a silent expectation problematic since, in his understanding of scripture, “The solution of many vital and fundamental questions, however, is not made obvious in the Gospel, but is, as it were, veiled.”<sup>49</sup> He is not only convinced that there is a calling to create, but also that failure to understand and recognize this veiled call has dire consequences for the person, the Christian community, and the created order. Sabant writes, “In Berdyaev’s view, the failure of the Church to see the religious meaning of the creative urge in man has been at the root of mankind’s progressive estrangement from God.”<sup>50</sup>

God expects the person to create (to participate in the “eighth day of creation”<sup>51</sup>), and with God’s help fulfill what has not been completed, which is the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>52</sup> Berdiaev recognizes that this idea is in tension with various perspectives within theology. “The official theology which regards itself as orthodox denies that man is a being with a capacity to create. Capacity for creation belongs to the Creator alone who is pure act, and the creature is incapable of it.”<sup>53</sup> Even though his view of ‘orthodox’ theology is

---

<sup>46</sup> Berdiaev interprets the *imago Dei* as an intimation of God’s expectation for the person to create. God expects creativity from the person since the individual is created with the ability to create, by virtue of being made in the image of the true Creator. The New Testament has a similar, if veiled, reference to God’s expectation for the person. Berdiaev: “The Gospel constantly speaks of the fruit which the seed must bring forth if it falls on good soil and of talents given to man which must be returned with profit. Under the cover of parable Christ refers in these words to man’s creative activity, to his creative vocation. Burying one’s talents in the ground, i.e. absence of creativeness, is condemned by Christ. The whole of St. Paul’s teaching about various gifts is concerned with man’s creative vocation. The gifts are from God and they indicate that man is intended to do creative work.” *DM*, 162.

<sup>47</sup> *MCA*, 97.

<sup>48</sup> *DR*, 207. See also Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers*, 33.

<sup>49</sup> *DM*, 161. For another example of Berdiaev’s view of scripture see chapter 3, 9-10.

<sup>50</sup> Sabant, “Christ, Freedom and Salvation,” 488.

<sup>51</sup> *MCA*, 158.

<sup>52</sup> Berdiaev, “СПАСЕНИЕ И ТВОРЧЕСТВО,” 40-41. See also *BE*, 193. Although no mention of the Social Gospel movement or Walter Rauschenbusch is found in Berdiaev’s writings, his thought here bears a striking similarity to that of Rauschenbusch. See, for example, Walter Rauschenbusch, *The Righteousness of the Kingdom*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse (Nashville & NY: Abingdon Press, 1968), 110.

<sup>53</sup> *BE*, 159.

equivocal, he accurately asserts that for many theologians the idea that “the person’s calling is to be a creator, a co-participant with God for world-creation and world-arrangement . . .”<sup>54</sup> is highly problematic. For Berdiaev, this is not an issue, since he is not concerned with an adherence to an established orthodoxy; rather, his goal is an outlook in which both God and person create, and are therefore exalted. He is convinced that if theology denies the calling for the person to create this will only lead to atheism. “The idea, so widely spread in theology, that the existence of God is incompatible with man’s creativeness is a source of atheism.”<sup>55</sup>

To summarize our analysis thus far: creativity begins with a self-willed act that is brought about through the person’s free actions and results in some form of newness within the created order. This beginning stage of creativity I have termed a novel act. For a novel act to develop into a creative act, foundational elements must exist. The foundations for creativity can be found in the following: the existential liberty that exists in all forms of embodied freedom, God creating the person with the *imago Dei* (which means, among other things, the capability to create), and God’s expectation for creative acts from the person. From this point we can now begin our examination of how the creative act can occur within the ‘natural’ world.

#### §4 THE CREATIVE ACT IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

As with his vision of freedom, one must consider Berdiaev’s concept of creativity from a developmental perspective. If novelty is to develop into creativity not only must there be elements external to the agent in place, the agent himself must engage in certain steps to create. This section will outline these various steps and examine how Berdiaev pictures creativity taking shape within the ‘natural’ world.

Berdiaev envisages the development of the creative act taking place in a two-part movement: inner creativity and outer creativity. Each part is comprised of a series of sub-movements that, while not linearly understood, are required for the creative action to develop and maintain its integrity. Berdiaev:

Creativeness has two different aspects and we describe differently according to whether we dwell upon one or the other. It has an inner and outer aspect. There is the

---

<sup>54</sup> Berdiaev, “СПАСЕНИЕ И ТВОРЧЕСТВО,” 41.

<sup>55</sup> *DM*, 192.

primary creative act in which man stands as it were face to face with God, and there is the secondary creative act in which he faces other men and the world.<sup>56</sup>

The distinction between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ acts is critical to Berdiaev’s thought on creativity. The ‘inner’ creative act is also referred to as the ‘primary’ act, and the term ‘primary’ more clearly reveals Berdiaev’s thought. As with freedom, Berdiaev’s fear of objectification leads him to assert that any association with the phenomenal world must be considered as secondary, or inferior, to the noumenal. The phenomenal can never achieve what is possible in the noumenal. “In that primary act man stands before God and *is not concerned with realization*. . . . This alone is first-hand knowledge, my real philosophy in which I am face to face with the mystery of existence.”<sup>57</sup>

The inner creative act is the moment when the person develops a vision and begins to imagine what is possible; it is the primary form of creativity. Everything that follows in the creative process represents a ‘cooling down’ (objectification) and cannot equal the original vision.<sup>58</sup>

### 1. *Inner Creativity*<sup>59</sup>

The creative act, in its highest sense, is a continuation of theandric freedom and is therefore predicated on a similar principle – true creativity is first conceived within the spiritual (noumenal) realm. Hence the highest forms of creativity begin in the noumenal. This stage of creativity is referred to as ‘inner creativity’. ‘Inner creativity’ is when the person’s spiritual experience begins to utilize the necessary disciplines – imagination, contemplation, humility – to reach a stage of ‘outer creativity’, which is the realization within the natural realm.

Since creativity begins within the spiritual realm, Berdiaev conceives of the spiritual life as creative; “It is impossible to conceive of the spiritual life otherwise than as a creative life.”<sup>60</sup> The reciprocal is also true, i.e., the creative life is always a spiritual life. “Spirit is

---

<sup>56</sup> *DM*, 165.

<sup>57</sup> *DM*, 165 (Italics mine).

<sup>58</sup> We will examine Berdiaev’s idea of objectification and its implications in the section on ‘Realization’.

<sup>59</sup> In outlining Berdiaev’s thought it is acknowledged that his repeated assertions on the importance of creativity – while not specifically defining creativity – create a surplus of material that can, at times, lack clarity. What follows is not intended to be a conclusive statement as to what creativity is, but rather an exposition of the key elements that constitute Berdiaev’s conception of creativity.

<sup>60</sup> *SR*, 172.

creative activity: every creative act is a spiritual act.”<sup>61</sup> Based on this view, the Holy Spirit can be seen as the initial inspiration for the person to create.<sup>62</sup> Berdiaev understands this process occurring in the following manner: “In creativeness there are two elements: that of grace, of inspiration coming to man from on high, of genius and talent possessed by man; and that of freedom, having no external cause and determination, but forming the new elements in the creative act.”<sup>63</sup> The encounter with the Spirit is an encounter with inspiration; thus at that moment of encounter the person’s understanding of what is possible is radically expanded. “The very possibility of creation presupposes an infusion of the Spirit into man, and that we call inspiration. And this raises the action of creative power above the world.”<sup>64</sup> Through the inspiration of the Spirit the person’s perspective is altered, so that the agent’s action is based on what is possible with God, as opposed to what is allowable within the natural world.

This moment of inspiration, of being infused with the Spirit, is what leads Berdiaev to refer to the creative act as a moment of transcendence. “The creative signifies an *ek-stasis*, a breaking through to eternity.”<sup>65</sup> The Holy Spirit guides the person to new alternatives and perspectives; the Spirit enlivens the latent potentialities God placed within the person. “Creative experience is a special kind of experience and a special kind of way: the creative ecstasy shatters the whole of man’s being – it is an out-breaking into another world.”<sup>66</sup>

Creativity is a ‘special kind of experience’ for Berdiaev, because he believes creativity to be the intersection between the phenomenon and the noumenon.<sup>67</sup> For the person who is drawn into union with God, creativity is his mode of action. Creativity allows the person to freely respond to God’s call and move towards a reality greater than his current experience.

Although the Spirit and ‘ek-stasis’ are the initial precursors for creativity as Berdiaev envisions it, in order for the creative act to take shape a specific response is required from the person. The creative act does not naturally emanate from a person who has a creative vision. The complexity of creativity, combined with the power of the phenomenal world to delude individuals into thinking that all that exists is the natural world, means certain practices, or

---

<sup>61</sup> SR, 58. Also “Creativity is spiritual action, in which the person forgets about himself, renouncing self in the creative act, is absorbed by his subject.” Berdiaev, “СПАСЕНИЕ И ТВОРЧЕСТВО,” 41.

<sup>62</sup> Calian, *Significance of Eschatology*, 61.

<sup>63</sup> SR, 172.

<sup>64</sup> BE, 184.

<sup>65</sup> DR, 209. Cf. Niebuhr: “Human capacity for self-transcendence is also the basis of human freedom and thereby of the uniqueness of the individual.” Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 1, 55.

<sup>66</sup> MCA, 110. Calian rightly observes that Berdiaev’s use of the term ‘transcendence’ and the phrase ‘the other world’ are eschatological in context. Calian, *Significance of Eschatology*, 58.

<sup>67</sup> BE, 177.

disciplines, are required.<sup>68</sup> These disciplines for ‘inner’ creativity are imagination, contemplation, and humility.

### A. *Imagination*

Since Berdiaev maintains that the source of creativeness is in God and in freedom, he overstates his claim when he writes, “The faculty of imagination is the source of all creativeness.”<sup>69</sup> This overstatement, however, does not diminish the importance of imagination within his thought. The exercise of imagination is an integral step in the process of creation. A person devoid of imagination is incapable of creative activity.<sup>70</sup> Berdiaev writes that “*Without imagination there can be no creative activity.*”<sup>71</sup> As the person engages with the Spirit, her imagination is necessary for the germination of new ideas and concepts. “Productive imagination is a metaphysical force which wages war against the objective and determinate world, against the realm of the commonplace and dull.”<sup>72</sup> Without imagination the person cannot conceptualize the potential that exists beyond the natural world. Accordingly, without imagination the person cannot respond to the Spirit’s inspiration. Imagination is what makes possible the reconfiguration of perceptions and values necessary for creativity, since “Creative fancy is capable of producing real and vital consequences.”<sup>73</sup> For Berdiaev, then, the creative act is that which can “imagine something higher, better and more beautiful than . . . the ‘given’.”<sup>74</sup>

Imagination, however, is not neutral. Berdiaev recognizes that imagination, like mysticism, can degrade and turn the focus away from things ‘higher’ and ‘more beautiful’.

“Imagination may also be a source of evil; there may be bad imagination and phantasms.

---

<sup>68</sup> *SF*, 248.

<sup>69</sup> *DM*, 97.

<sup>70</sup> To summarize Berdiaev’s theoretical underpinning for his concept of the imagination: Berdiaev assumes that his views on the power of the imagination are historically supported and accepted within scholarship of his day. *DM*, 184. In a later publication, *BE*, Berdiaev returns to the subject of the imagination and attempts to offer a philosophically detailed justification for his view. Berdiaev differentiates between the object and the image, which, for him, is ultimately a differentiation between rationalistic metaphysics and the metaphysics of images. “The philosophy of the Spirit is the metaphysics of images.” *BE*, 176. The image, for Berdiaev, “is an act not a thing” that contains a primary reality. *BE*, 176. The image functions as a potential or ideal; and the imagination is the means by which the primary reality of an object is realized. “Imagination brings feeling and thought to bear upon the complete image. The concrete reality which has an image is apprehended through the imagination, not through sensation.” *BE*, 176. Berdiaev’s attempts to define imagination do not succeed. He does not clearly address how the agent’s imagination interacts with the object or how the imagination realizes primary reality. See chapter 2, fn. 24, for the parallels between Berdiaev’s view of intuition and contemporary views of imagination.

<sup>71</sup> *DM*, 183 (Italics mine).

<sup>72</sup> *BE*, 175. If the individual has no desire to move beyond the ‘commonplace and dull’ then imagination is not needed. *DM*, 183.

<sup>73</sup> *BE*, 177.

<sup>74</sup> *BE*, 174.

Evil thoughts are an instance of bad imagination.”<sup>75</sup> A bad imagination is that which deceives. “But a lying imagination, and it is not rare for it to be lying, precipitates a man into a reality which is a nightmare. It is always to be remembered that the imagination can be creative of falsehood, it can cast man into a world which, for all that it is a world of things, is fictitious.”<sup>76</sup>

The risk of a bad imagination exists because freedom exists (freedom always presupposes the possibility of tragedy). As with mysticism, the element of danger does not negate its validity; it merely reinforces it. If no danger was present, imagination could not be part of a free response; it would be merely a static act linked to necessity. Because of freedom, “It is possible for man to become the victim of his own imagination, despite the fact that the imagination is capable of being a way out towards a higher world.”<sup>77</sup>

## B. *Contemplation*

A second discipline necessary for the development of creativity and engagement with the Spirit is contemplation. “Creation is in a profound sense the contemplation of God, truth, and beauty, of the supreme life of the spirit.”<sup>78</sup> The act of creativeness utilizes both the imagination and contemplation. For the person “has as much need of contemplation as of creative activity.”<sup>79</sup>

Contemplation serves two important functions for Berdiaev. In the first instance, it is the practice by which the person is able to maintain proper focus. In the process of creativity, the creator can experience a “superabundance of creative energy which has free scope”<sup>80</sup> resulting from union with God. In experiencing this creative energy it is possible for the person to lose perspective, thereby placing the process at risk. Berdiaev writes, “As soon as man begins to create in his own name, and to affirm himself in his creation refusing the path of sacrifice and asceticism, his work is threatened by eventual sterility. Vanity lies in wait for

---

<sup>75</sup> *DM*, 183.

<sup>76</sup> *BE*, 175. See also *DM*, 230.

<sup>77</sup> *BE*, 175. See also Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 109.

<sup>78</sup> *FS*, 232. Berdiaev traces his understanding of beauty to Kant. “There were some remarkable and far-reaching ideas about beauty and art in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. That is beautiful which, without a concept, pleases *allgemein*. Beauty is adaptability to an end without bringing the end into notice. The beautiful pleases, without serving any interest. The beautiful pleases, not in its reception by the senses, not in a concept, but in an act of judgment, in appraisal. The beauty of nature is a beautiful thing. The beauty of art is a beautiful representation of a thing.” *BE*, 191.

<sup>79</sup> *SS*, 146.

<sup>80</sup> *FS*, 232.

the creator and even his creative nature becomes warped.”<sup>81</sup> Contemplation is the means by which the creator remains attuned to the Creator.

Secondly, contemplation is the solution to the inherent struggle that occurs with creative activity. Berdiaev believes that creative activity always involves ‘struggle’ and if the creator is to overcome, she must be contemplative. The struggle of creativeness is the struggle of living within a world of necessity, a world where freedom and communion are not readily apparent, and contemplation is the rejoinder to this struggle.<sup>82</sup>

This juxtaposition of ‘struggle’ and ‘contemplation’ could intimate contemplation being considered only as rest. If contemplation is ‘rest’, demonstrating how it contributes to the creative process, which is active, can be problematic. Berdiaev believes that contemplation should not be considered a passive state where the person is unaffected by the world. “Contemplation and activity should not be considered as antithetical principles.”<sup>83</sup> The ‘contemplator’ is a person who has an “active spirit.”<sup>84</sup> “But contemplation of God is creative activity. . . . The contemplation of God Who is love is man’s creative answer to God’s call.”<sup>85</sup>

Because the contemplator is focused on a God of love, love then becomes a primary theme of contemplation and therefore of creativeness. True creativeness involves an ascent, a love for God, and a descent, a love for the world. Berdiaev:

Proudly to forsake the world and men for the lofty heights of the spirit and refuse to share one’s spiritual wealth with others is un-Christian, and implies a lack of love, also a lack of creativeness, for creativeness is generous and ready to give. This was the limitation of pre-Christian spirituality. . . . But it is equally un-Christian and uncreative completely to merge one’s soul in the world and humanity and to renounce spiritual ascent and acquisition of spiritual force.<sup>86</sup>

Contemplation as the means to maintain proper focus, as well as proper balance, is a necessary discipline for the person to continue in union with the Spirit and to develop his creative action. As the person is inspired by the Spirit, contemplation is a primary means for the creative act to maintain its integrity. Hence “. . . contemplation is also creativeness, spiritual activity which overcomes anxiety and difficulties.”<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> *FS*, 232.

<sup>82</sup> *DM*, 194.

<sup>83</sup> *SR*, 174.

<sup>84</sup> *SR*, 174.

<sup>85</sup> *DM*, 194. Cf. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971), 157-165.

<sup>86</sup> *DM*, 195.

<sup>87</sup> *DM*, 375.

### C. Humility

The third component necessary for creativity is humility. As humility is sometimes misunderstood as a devaluing of self, it may appear strange to certain readers that Berdiaev, who consistently propounds the fundamental value and dignity of the person, also emphasizes humility. Berdiaev acknowledges this by proposing a specific understanding of humility.

Berdiaev believes that humility has all too often created an “external authoritative-hierocratic system”<sup>88</sup> where the person is devalued and authority is established over the person. In this system, he believes the expectation for the person is obedience to a set of values or beliefs that are *externally* determined. Humility is imposed upon the person – unless the person is humble they are denied what they seek. “The foundation of all Christianity, the foundation for all the spiritual pathways of the individual, the way of salvation for eternal life was supposed to be humbleness. The person must resign himself, and all the rest will happen by itself.”<sup>89</sup> Berdiaev considers this to be a ‘deteriorative humility’ that favors systemization (developing a system as to how the person should act) over liberation (a concern for the person’s maturation and demonstration of her higher nature).

This type of humility not only devalues the person but also results in passivity. In this respect ‘deteriorative humility’ mirrors heteronomous freedom. ‘Deteriorative humility’ resembles heteronomy in that a concept (i.e. being humble) is deemed more worthy than the person. Devaluation occurs and with that there is a loss of freedom. This “servile conception of humility distorts the true meaning of Christianity and the spiritual life.”<sup>90</sup>

In contrast to this Berdiaev states that true humility is based on freedom and enlightenment by the Spirit and results in a ‘heroic’ act as the humble person ‘conquers’ the self-centeredness within him.<sup>91</sup> True humility is a condition the person freely adopts.

An act of humility is not the act of a will alien to my own, but that of my own will enlightened and transfigured by a higher spiritual nature. For example humility towards an elder in the shape of the submission of my will to his spiritual direction is an entirely voluntary act, an act of freedom and not one of forced submission. . . .  
*Humility means the abandonment of self-centredness for God centredness.*<sup>92</sup>

Following on from this conception of true humility, Berdiaev introduces the concept of sacrifice. The person who strives for humility is a person who realizes a higher value in

---

<sup>88</sup> Berdiaev, “СПАСЕНИЕ И ТВОРЧЕСТВО,” 32.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 31. It is acknowledged that Berdiaev’s idiosyncratic understanding of humility (e.g. “The foundation of *all* Christianity . . .”) is highly contestable.

<sup>90</sup> *FS*, 150.

<sup>91</sup> Berdiaev, “СПАСЕНИЕ И ТВОРЧЕСТВО,” 32.

<sup>92</sup> *FS*, 150-151 (Italics mine).



life. A humble person, Berdiaev believes, is a person who seeks to break free from those things that enslave while attaining to higher spiritual values. For this to occur, a humble person must be willing to sacrifice, to leave behind those things that appear important for that which is greater.

As humility is central for the development of the person and overcoming ‘self-centeredness’, it is also central for creativeness. Along this same line of thought, as humility is necessary for creativeness so is the ability to sacrifice. Without an ability to sacrifice, the person cannot look beyond himself; consequently, the creative act cannot be made manifest. Berdiaev writes, “All creative work, all knowledge, all art, the making of all that is new, is impossible without some *self-limitation* and a transcending of one’s lower nature.”<sup>93</sup>

The truth of humility and sacrifice, Berdiaev asserts, is ultimately revealed by Christ, the revelation of God’s sacrifice. “It [freedom] reveals tragedy in the Divine life itself. God Himself, the Only Begotten Son, suffers and is crucified, an innocent sufferer.”<sup>94</sup> God is not to be understood through a monarchical concept, but through sacrifice.<sup>95</sup> As God undergoes sacrifice to restore the cosmos and make freedom possible, so the person must also be willing to sacrifice. Although the ‘sacrifice’ the person makes in creating is not commensurate with God’s sacrifice, the principle remains. Overcoming the ‘necessity’ of the fallen world, while preserving freedom, requires some form of sacrifice.

For Berdiaev, following the thought of Dostoevsky, the Son reveals the necessity of sacrifice for the existence of freedom; and since freedom and creativity are interdependent, sacrifice is also necessary for creativeness. Thus, for the person to fulfill her calling to create, she must be willing to sacrifice. “But the way to all creativity lies through readiness to sacrifice.”<sup>96</sup> The person who refuses this sacrifice is on a path that “. . . inevitably undermines its own creative powers, *for creativeness presupposes sacrifice.*”<sup>97</sup>

In summary, creativity begins with the free person in union with God through the Spirit. As the process of creativity develops (what Berdiaev refers to as ‘inner creativity’), the person is required to exercise imagination, contemplation, and humility. Having

---

<sup>93</sup> *FS*, 230 (Italics mine).

<sup>94</sup> *DM*, 41.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. the similarity with Moltmann’s thought in *CG*: “If God’s being is manifest in the passion and the death of Jesus, through Jesus’ suffering and death ‘for us’ and for our salvation, he is known by that faith which is called freedom. The God of freedom, the true God, is therefore not recognized by his power and glory in the world and in the history of the world, but through his helplessness and his death on the scandal of the cross of Jesus.” *CG*, 195.

<sup>96</sup> *MCA*, 283-284.

<sup>97</sup> *DM*, 195 (Italics mine).

exercised these disciplines the person is prepared to engage in the actual manifestation of the creative act – what Berdiaev terms ‘outer creativity’.

## 2. *Outer Creativity*

Berdiaev uses the term ‘outer creativity’ to designate the embodiment of the creative act within the phenomenal world. Outer creativeness highlights a central dilemma for Berdiaev. If inner creativity is the *apex* of creativeness, what value is there for the creative act in the phenomenal world? The answer to this question was to change during Berdiaev’s career, yet his overall conviction remained constant – outer creativity has value, even though it is negatively affected by ‘objectification’. We can examine his thought under the headings of objectification, transfiguration, and realization.

### A. *Objectification*

Within the phenomenal realm, the key impediment to creativeness is the same impediment to freedom – objectification.<sup>98</sup> Due to the alienation of the phenomenal from the noumenal, objectification is the tragic reality of creativity within the phenomenal. The person’s attempt to embody what has been inwardly achieved can never fully encapsulate the original vision. Regardless of the person’s skill, the created product cannot replicate the spiritual conception. “It must emphatically be recognized that *failure* is the fate that awaits *all embodiments* of the creative fire, in consequence of the fact that it is in the objective world that it is given effective realization.”<sup>99</sup>

This stance is consistent with Berdiaev’s bifurcated world-view. He is unwilling to accept that any creation within the natural world, whether it be material or intellectual, can equal its original spiritual conception. The fallen world always limits creativeness. “Objectification is adaptation to the condition of this world. It is a concession made by freedom of spirit to the necessity of the world. It is an alienation and cooling down.”<sup>100</sup> This does not mean that creativity manifested has no value; rather it is to propound that creativity suffers a reduction in value as it is embodied.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Objectification is to consider the object (whether material or intellectual) as the final reality thereby failing to understand the spiritual significance ‘behind’ it. *DR*, 215. See chapter 4, also Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 106; Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 168.

<sup>99</sup> *BE*, 186 (Italics mine). See also *DM*, 98; *SR*, 52; Dye, “Nikolai Berdyaev and His Ideas,” 122.

<sup>100</sup> *TR*, 146.

<sup>101</sup> *SR*, 60.

In one of his final works, however, Berdiaev begins to modify this position, as we see in the following statement:

There is an inward creative act, and there is the created product, the outward disclosure of the creative act. I have written a great deal on this subject. Here I shall say what is necessary on a *new aspect* of the matter. It is most important to elucidate the question of whether the created embodiment is an objectification or *whether we ought to distinguish between embodiment and objectification*.<sup>102</sup>

This ‘new aspect’ is an important move for Berdiaev – objectification is no longer absolute. By opposing the term ‘embodiment’ to ‘objectification’, Berdiaev attempts to modulate his long standing proposition that the materiality of creation always results in objectification.

In this development ‘embodiment’ indicates a created realization where the ‘infinite’ shines through the ‘finite’ image – within the created realization, the noumenal influence can be detected. This is not to say that embodiment circumvents objectification; the tragedy of objectification remains.<sup>103</sup>

Yet, even with this limitation, Berdiaev maintains that the created realization still possesses value and potential. “Creative power is noumenal in its origin but it is in the phenomenal world that it reveals itself. The product of creative power belongs to the phenomena, but the noumenal also shines through in those phenomena, the eternal is also in them.”<sup>104</sup> When the noumenal is revealed within the created realization, the realization can be regarded as ‘embodied object’. This shift in thought results in a new focus where the created realization is now seen as a necessary outcome of creativity. “Creative activity presupposes matter in the world, in nature, in society and in the soul; it is bound up with them.”<sup>105</sup>

Consequently, within the created object two principles co-exist – the noumenal and the objectified. Berdiaev:

Beethoven makes a symphony and thereupon in this creation . . . people discover ‘objective’ regulating principles. But the creative activity of Beethoven ought to have led to the whole world’s breaking into sound like a symphony. And in the same way the creative power of a genuine philosopher should have led to the changing of the world and not merely to the enrichment of it by new and expensive books.<sup>106</sup>

Embodied creative realization is a creation where the noumenal has not been negated by objectification. Because of the existence of the noumenal within embodied creation, the

---

<sup>102</sup> *BE*, 180 (Italics mine).

<sup>103</sup> *BE*, 181.

<sup>104</sup> *BE*, 185.

<sup>105</sup> *TNE*, 82.

<sup>106</sup> *BE*, 181.

realization points beyond the phenomenal realm. By pointing beyond the phenomenal realm and revealing the reality of the noumenal, embodied creativity also contributes to the overcoming of the phenomenal realm. Berdiaev:

Every creative act, whether moral or social, whether in the sphere of art or in the realm of knowledge, is an act which has its share in the coming of the end of the world, it is a flight upwards towards a different world, it makes a new plan for existence. . . . The creative act of man is an answer to the call of God, it ought to prepare the way for the end of this world and the beginning of another.<sup>107</sup>

Embodied creativity is “therefore, eschatological.”<sup>108</sup> It is eschatological because embodied creativity gives “bodily form to its images of the other world, to its ecstasy, its fire, its transcending experience, its communion with another life; and it is obliged to do this in accordance with the laws of this world.”<sup>109</sup> The eschatological element is further emphasized in Berdiaev’s final work (published posthumously), in which the term ‘symbolization’ is used instead of ‘embodiment’. He writes,

It is very important to understand the difference between symbolization and objectification. Symbolization always provides signs of another world. It does not remain within the closed circle of this world. But symbolization is not actual realization and it is of the utmost importance to grasp the truth that it is not realization, though there are in it reflections of another world and it foreshows the transfiguration of this world.<sup>110</sup>

The use of the term ‘symbolic’ can be helpful in understanding how creativity is eschatological.<sup>111</sup> It is eschatological because by ‘symbolizing’ a higher reality it demonstrates that the phenomenal is not the final reality. From an eschatological perspective, symbolic (embodied) creativity is an important event within the phenomenal realm as it acts as a marker of a spiritual reality by embodying a noumenal presence.

Since this symbolic creativity contains the noumenal within it, and directs the attention of the phenomenal to the noumenal, it possesses a value that is eternal. Berdiaev observes, “Creative failure in this world is a sad and tragic thing. But there is success on the grand scale in the fact that the results of every true creative act of man enter into the

---

<sup>107</sup> *BE*, 185.

<sup>108</sup> *BE*, 183. See also Osborn, *Freedom in Modern Theology*, 190.

<sup>109</sup> *BE*, 185. Although embodied creativity is eschatological it still suffers from objectification as its form is determined by the “laws of this world.”

<sup>110</sup> *TR*, 146.

<sup>111</sup> It is recognized that Berdiaev’s later use of the term ‘symbolic’ is problematic when considered in light of earlier works. ‘Symbolic’ usually has a negative connotation as it merely reflects an eternal value without bringing about change. Hence Calian is correct to observe that Berdiaev emphasized at one time ‘realistic’ creativity over ‘symbolic’ creativity. Calian, *Significance of Eschatology*, 58. This difficulty can be viewed as either due to Berdiaev’s shifting use of terms (where he modified the term ‘symbolic’, ignoring how he used it earlier), or it may be viewed as a continued development within Berdiaev’s thought where ‘symbol’ gains a positive usage. I believe the latter explanation to be more likely.

Kingdom of God.”<sup>112</sup> True creativity then has a lasting significance, since creative acts, which are embodied, will be integrated into the Kingdom.

Berdiaev expands this position to assert that embodied creativity not only reveals the noumenal and is eternal, but creativity also functions as the means by which the agent, acting in unison with God, prepares the way for the *Basileia*. The success of the creative act “lies in the preparation it makes for the transformation of the world, for the Kingdom of God.”<sup>113</sup> To address this issue we now turn to the idea of transfiguration.

### B. *Transfiguration*

Throughout his corpus, Berdiaev maintains that transfiguration is what the human must look toward and God desires; Berdiaev considers transfiguration to be an axial theme for Christianity. “Nevertheless for Christian thought the primary idea is not that of progress or development, but of illumination and transfiguration.”<sup>114</sup> He believes that Orthodox thought clearly demonstrates this.

The central idea of the Eastern Patristic Fathers was the idea of theosis, of deification of the creature, transfiguration of the world and cosmos and not personal salvation. Not by accident the greatest Eastern teachers of the Church, inclined towards the idea of apokatastasis, not only St. Clement of Alexandria and Origen, but also St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Gregory of Nazianzen, St. Maximos the Confessor.<sup>115</sup>

The person’s “creative role in the transformation of the world” is one of Berdiaev’s “most original themes,” Spinka writes.<sup>116</sup> Berdiaev’s combination of Orthodox thought with his vision of freedom and creativeness produces a unique synthesis – human creativeness becomes an integral part of the transfiguration God is enacting. Copleston observes that “. . . Berdyaeu saw what is called the second coming of Christ ‘as dependent on the creative act of man’.”<sup>117</sup>

Because embodied creativity advances transfiguration, Berdiaev considers it to be ‘eschatologically realistic’. “Truly creative realism is eschatological realism. It takes the line not of reflecting the natural world and not of adjustment to it, but of changing and transforming the world.”<sup>118</sup> Eschatological realism then connotes the world yet to come, a

---

<sup>112</sup> *BE*, 187.

<sup>113</sup> *BE*, 188.

<sup>114</sup> *FS*, 315.

<sup>115</sup> Berdiaev, “СПАСЕНИЕ И ТВОРЧЕСТВО,” 34.

<sup>116</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaeu*, 46. See also Calian, *Significance of Eschatology*, 122.

<sup>117</sup> Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, 386-387.

<sup>118</sup> *BE*, 192. See also Calian, *Significance of Eschatology*, 59.

world where the bifurcation between the phenomenal and the noumenal is overcome. A created act that presages and helps initiate the *Basileia* is eschatologically real.<sup>119</sup>

The full implication of Berdiaev's theory of theandric freedom and creativity is revealed at this juncture. Theandric freedom not only makes possible embodied creative acts, but these acts also allow God's intentions for the world to be made manifest. The relationship between God and human being is synergistic – "It is not only God Who makes all things new, it is man too."<sup>120</sup> Continuous with this idea, Berdiaev considers creative action to be the fundamental action a theandrically free person can undertake. This is true not only for the maturation of the person – the creative act makes possible the person's exercise of freedom – but also for God's design for the restoration of the cosmos, wherein creative acts are used to prepare the way for the *Basileia*. Creativeness is a divine-human action that has Divine *and* human implications.

The basis for this belief in the potential of creativity is in two parts. First, creativity is linked with transfiguration because it represents a noumenal presence within the world.

His [the person's] noumenal essence remains in him. And in acts which take their rise from that noumenal essence he can change the world. . . . The eschatological outlook, the transformation of the world, is a possibility precisely because there is a noumenal basis within the concrete life of the world. . . ."<sup>121</sup>

Embodied creativity creates an intermediary space, a place where the 'spiritual' and 'natural' are more closely united.<sup>122</sup> When the person gives form to creativity (providing the person follows the aforementioned disciplines to maintain communion with God) embodied creativity possesses a transcendent quality since it attempts to unite, even though in a partial way, the phenomenal and the noumenal realms. In this transcendent space God can work in and through the person and his creative act for the preparation of the *Basileia*. Berdiaev:

True creative newness is achieved in existential time, time which is not objectified, that is to say it happens in the vertical and not in the horizontal. But creative acts which are accomplished in the vertical are projected upon a plane and are accepted as accomplished in historical time. Thus it is that meta-history enters into history.<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>119</sup> *BE*, 179.

<sup>120</sup> *DH*, 202.

<sup>121</sup> *BE*, 234.

<sup>122</sup> *SR*, 172.

<sup>123</sup> *BE*, 163. History is an important concern for Berdiaev. The Fall, which splits the world into phenomenal and noumenal, also divides history into cosmic, historical, and existential time. Historical time is the linear progression of events within the phenomenal world. Existential time, or as used in this quote 'meta-history', is metaphysical history and connotes the existential time of the spiritual realm. Metaphysical history is the history in which humans will experience the resurrection of all existent things. *MH*, 72, 206. See also Richardson, *Berdyaev's Philosophy of History*.

Copleston observes that without this contact with the spiritual world (vertical contact) true creativity is not possible.<sup>124</sup>

Secondly, as the person experiences freedom and engages creative acts, consciousness is altered and expanded. The creator perceives the natural world with a new horizon.

Berdiaev:

But actively creative events in existential time will have their effects not only in heaven but on earth also; they revolutionize history. The illusions of consciousness upon which the so-called 'objective world' rests can be conquered. The creative power of man as it changes the structure of consciousness, can be not only a consolidation of this world, not only a culture, but also a liberation of the world and the end of history, that is to say, the establishment of the Kingdom of God, not as a symbolic but as a real kingdom.<sup>125</sup>

A person who brings forth embodied creativity that is eschatologically real has a new vantage point from which to view the natural world and act within it. What is possible and what is hoped for is not based on 'eternal progress' or scientific achievement, but on a God who desires the restoration of the cosmos and a "world of spirituality, of freedom, love, kinship."<sup>126</sup> Consequently, the creator experiences a "spiritual revolution."<sup>127</sup> The person whose creative activity is an outgrowth of theandric freedom is a person, according to Berdiaev, in whom "resting content with this given world"<sup>128</sup> is impossible. She is a creator who seeks the world to come and actively strives to work with God to bring that reality into existence.

Embodied creativity that 'anticipates' God's transfiguration is not a renunciation of the natural world, it is the exact opposite. Berdiaev envisages the creative act as that which is used to restore the world. "This does not mean that we have to make a break with the world or with history, but rather that we participate in their transfiguration."<sup>129</sup> Sabant's analysis is correct, "Yet man's every creative act changes something in the world, brings the transfiguration nearer, even when its visible result, in whatever field, only partly corresponds with the original creative upsurge."<sup>130</sup> The person's free creative act is Berdiaev's unequivocal hope for how God will overcome the 'objective' and establish a unified world.

Hence, we can say, according to Berdiaev, the following concerning the creative act:

- i. Embodied creativity requires theandric freedom.

---

<sup>124</sup> Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, 384.

<sup>125</sup> *SF*, 266.

<sup>126</sup> *SF*, 254.

<sup>127</sup> *SF*, 254. See also *SF*, 199; *TNE*, 13.

<sup>128</sup> *BE*, 179. See also *BE*, 186.

<sup>129</sup> *FS*, 338.

<sup>130</sup> Sabant, "Christ, Freedom and Salvation," 489.

- ii. Embodied creativity is dependent upon the material of the natural realm for creativity to take realization.
- iii. Embodied created realization is creativity manifested in the natural (phenomenal) realm while disclosing the spiritual (noumenal) realm.
- iv. Whenever the spiritual is revealed it is an eschatological event because it proclaims a world that is yet to be fully realized. “Creative power anticipates the transfiguration of the world.”<sup>131</sup> Embodied creativity is, therefore, ‘eschatologically real’.
- v. By partially uniting the spiritual and natural realms the creative act has a transcendent quality, which God uses to prepare the way for the *Basileia*.

Having established the tragic and transfigurative elements of creativity we can now turn our examination to what Berdiaev considers to be lasting creative acts.

### C. Realization

The term ‘realization’ is used to designate the product or result of the creative process, for creativity results in a realized ‘some-thing’.<sup>132</sup> Utilizing the aforementioned disciplines the person reaches a point of culmination, a point where some thing, whether material, intellectual, or spiritual, takes shape; “. . . the creating mind cannot remain within itself, it must issue out of itself.”<sup>133</sup> This ‘issuing out’ is the outcome, for Berdiaev, of the creative process. Creativeness is not a theoretical exercise – it is a striving to bring the original vision to some type of realization; even if the realization cannot equal the original vision.

Berdiaev’s eschatological vision – a vision where embodied creativity is integrated into the *Basileia* – enables him to conceive of the manifested realization as something which possesses intrinsic value, even though it is flawed. The flaw is that the manifested realization cannot equal the original vision due to objectification (‘cooling down’), but it still has value because “the noumenal shines through. . . .”<sup>134</sup> Following from this, Berdiaev is able to conceptualize the creative act as a moment of transcendence, an ‘upward’ movement of the person to God, and also as a ‘downward’ movement as well, where the creator turns her attention to the natural realm.

. . . creative activity is not only all this, it is also a turning towards men and women, towards society, towards this world, it is the attraction of the creative act downwards. And here a man must display dexterity, he must be a master of artistry in every respect, not merely in ‘art’ in the strict sense of the word, but in science as well, and

---

<sup>131</sup> *BE*, 174.

<sup>132</sup> Berdiaev writes, “In creativeness there is no matter and no content without form.” *BE*, 181. Berdiaev is using the term ‘form’ in this instance to denote the created object.

<sup>133</sup> *BE*, 181.

<sup>134</sup> *BE*, 185.



in creativeness in the social and moral spheres, and again in the technical side of life.<sup>135</sup>

The person who brings forth an embodied creative act that becomes realized is a person who, according to Berdiaev, understands the importance of both the phenomenal and noumenal realms. This is a critical point in his thought. Berdiaev's work has been criticized for ignoring the 'material' in favor of the 'spiritual'.<sup>136</sup> His language at times supports this charge with his emphasis on transcendence and the realities of objectification. Yet, in the end, if we consider Berdiaev's project from a broad perspective we see his concern for both movements of creativity, the movement upwards, which is towards God, and the movement downwards, which is focused on the world.<sup>137</sup>

According to Berdiaev, the 'downward' side of creativity, the realization of the creative act, is most easily seen in the sphere of art. In one of his earlier works Berdiaev goes so far as to say that "Artistic creativeness best reveals the meaning of the creative act. Art is primarily a creative sphere."<sup>138</sup> Even though this position is modified in later works, artistic creation is a recurring theme throughout his corpus.<sup>139</sup> This is especially noticeable when Berdiaev wants to provide examples of 'true' creativeness.

As already discussed in chapter four, Berdiaev looks to the Renaissance (specifically the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries) as the clearest example of theandric freedom, and therefore, of embodied (true) creativity. He writes, "In the Renaissance there was an extraordinary uprising of human creativeness: the problem of creativity stands out with an acuteness never felt before."<sup>140</sup> The Renaissance provides an example of "man's creative power never before witnessed."<sup>141</sup> He interprets creativeness during this time as a "stormy

---

<sup>135</sup> *BE*, 182.

<sup>136</sup> For example see Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy, 779-780*, and Idinopulos, "Ontology of Spirit."

<sup>137</sup> Therefore, "My critics charged me with a refusal to admit the need of any given 'material' for the creative act of man. This charge was, of course, completely unfounded. I have never denied that man cannot create without a medium, that he cannot dispense with the world of external reality, and that he cannot perform anything in a vacuum." *DR*, 212-213. Whether Berdiaev has successfully answered this charge will be addressed in chapter 7.

<sup>138</sup> *MCA*, 225.

<sup>139</sup> *MH*, 202.

<sup>140</sup> *MCA*, 230.

<sup>141</sup> *MCA*, 231. Reflecting on *MCA* and the time in which it was written, Berdiaev comments: "Italy revealed to me the Renaissance as the dawn of a new age in which the Christian soul became conscious for the first time of a will to creation; and, though I knew that the Renaissance was a failure, I realized that this was the most sublime, significant and tragic failure ever experienced by European man. . . . I was particularly stirred by the Renaissance of the *Trecento* and the *Quattrocento* [*sic*] of the Florentine Period. Botticelli appeared to me as particularly significant of the drama and the paradox of creativity as I myself knew them. But the Italy of the sixteenth century was quite uncongenial to me, and I disliked the lifeless academicism of its architecture. St.

conflict of opposing elements, the eternal struggle of Christian transcendence with pagan immanence, of romantic incompleteness with classic finality.”<sup>142</sup>

It is the early period, the *Trecento*, which Berdiaev holds in particularly high regard. This is a time of creativity that is “tinged with Christian colour.” The work of Giotto “and all the early religious paintings of Italy, Arnolfini and others”<sup>143</sup> represents, for Berdiaev, a definitive example of embodied creativity. This is, however, not the only example of embodied creativity from this period. Indeed, equally important is the work of Dante, Joachim of Fiore, and St. Francis. In these latter three ‘artists’ the ideals were established for the Renaissance, and according to Berdiaev, were to be ignored later with tragic consequences. “The Renaissance of the fifteenth century, the quattrocento, did not realize the ideals of Dante and St. Francis, did not continue the religious art of Giotto – the fifteenth century revealed the struggle between the Christian and pagan elements in man.”<sup>144</sup>

We see that Berdiaev’s interest in the period is not only in the visual arts; embodied creativity is beyond the traditional definitions of art – the ‘realization’ of embodied creativity can be that which establishes ideals for the artist. It is not insignificant that Berdiaev highlights the role of St. Francis. It is through the ‘religious genius’ of St. Francis, among others, that the creative eruption of the Renaissance occurs. The creativity of St. Francis, Dante, Joachim, et al. results in change, in newness, in value being added to the world around them.

Berdiaev sees similar results of embodied creativity in the work of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Ibsen, and the Symbolists of his day (e.g., Ivanov and Byelii), as well as Beethoven. In each case Berdiaev believes that there are points of transcendence in their created works that can be used in God’s transfigurative work. This is because the material realizations that they give to their original vision reveal the noumenal within the phenomenal. Reflecting on creators such as these, and what they produced, Berdiaev can write,

Art is not a reflexion of the world of ideas in the world of sense as idealistic philosophy has supposed. Art is creative transfiguration, not yet real transfiguration, but an anticipation of that transfiguration. The beauty of a dance, a poem, a symphony, or a picture enters into eternal life. Art is not passive but active, and in this sense theurgic.<sup>145</sup>

---

Peter’s was positively distasteful to me; neither could I develop any liking for Raphael. On the other hand, I was deeply moved by Leonardo.” *DR*, 211.

<sup>142</sup> *MCA*, 231.

<sup>143</sup> *MCA*, 231-232.

<sup>144</sup> *MCA*, 232.

<sup>145</sup> *SF*, 241. Embodied creativity not only points towards the noumenal, it is also an historical product within the phenomenal. As such, the objectified created product leads to the development of culture. “Culture is the creative activity of the human being.” Berdiaev, “МИРОСОЗЕЦАНИЕ,” 26. See also, *DR*, 214.

The obvious problem of using art as an example of creativity, in a discourse that assumes God expects creativity from *all* humans, is that the aforementioned creators are exceptional and are not representative of all humanity. They are creators who possess an inner *and* outer genius in a specific field. Hence it is important to remember that art is one example of creativity for Berdiaev. His reasoning, based on inner and outer creative acts, provides other possibilities.

Because creativity begins as an inner creative act, it is not initially dependent upon a specific material realization.<sup>146</sup> Accordingly, creativity is not solely equated with a material object (so, a person who cannot produce a painting, book, or musical composition cannot be said to lack creativity). Focusing on the inner aspects of creativity (engagement with the Spirit, imagination, contemplation, and humility), Berdiaev suggests other demonstrations of creativity. The two most prominent areas where creativity is manifested are knowledge and love.

As already discussed in chapter two, the highest degree of knowledge, for Berdiaev, is ‘integral’ – knowledge that incorporates the experience of the person’s intellectual, affective and volitional life, where reason is subordinated but not eliminated and ‘intuition’ is highly valued. Integral knowledge is creative in that it depends on an engagement with the Spirit, it requires imagination (openness to new ideas and concepts), contemplation, and humility. As knowledge is discovery it contains newness and therefore its concepts are original to the knower. “The mystery of knowledge is that in the act of knowing the knower transcends the object of knowledge. Knowledge always means transcendence of the object and creative possession of it.”<sup>147</sup> In this respect Berdiaev’s thought resonates with Buber’s differentiation between how the subject apprehends the *Thou* and the *It*. Berdiaev:

Thus we must ask ourselves whether intuition, considered as the highest form of knowledge, is a creative act, or whether it is merely a passive reflection of reality? . . . I maintain, on the contrary, that intuition is essentially active. It is the essence of creative activity in the depths of knowledge, and it postulates creative inspiration.<sup>148</sup>

---

Notwithstanding the fact that culture is composed of acts that reflect the inner and outer genius of the person, as well as possessing elements of the noumenal, culture, by its very nature as a phenomenon within the natural world, can never fully enact transfiguration. Hence there may be periods of enlightened culture (as was witnessed in the Renaissance) but there will never be a perfect culture. Culture is always a token of something greater, and because of this it is “doomed to fail within the conditions of this world.” *DR*, 214.

<sup>146</sup> The problematic nature of ‘material’ in Berdiaev’s thought will be addressed in chapter 7.

<sup>147</sup> *DM*, 19.

<sup>148</sup> *SS*, 74. See also *BE*, 38.

To integrally know is creative. Even though no material object is produced, integral knowledge is an intentional act, based on freedom, which results in newness and is an addition to the world. Ergo, it is a creative act.<sup>149</sup>

Love is the second area where creativity is manifested. Whereas the embodied realization anticipates transfiguration, and integral knowledge is an important example of creativity, it is love that is the ultimate demonstration of creativity. In discussing the relationship between knowledge and love, Berdiaev writes, “To pursue knowledge without any consciousness of love, merely to seek power, is a form of demonism.”<sup>150</sup> Love is not only related to the pursuit of knowledge, it is of pivotal importance to Berdiaev’s wider project.

This is because, Berdiaev maintains, in the new age, the aeon of the Holy Spirit, it will be love, and not obedience, upon which spirituality is formulated. Love, God’s love for the world and the person’s love for God and others, will be a creative force that overcomes the objectivity that degrades the cosmos. “Christian love itself should be conceived as a great revelation of creativeness in life, as a creation of new life.”<sup>151</sup>

He believes that Feuerbach’s insight into knowledge and love contributes to his own thought. Specifically, he focuses on Feuerbach’s conception that “knowledge of being is attained through love, that knowing man is the loving man, that love is being.”<sup>152</sup> Berdiaev considers Feuerbach’s atheism as a “dialectical moment in the purification and development of the Christian consciousness.”<sup>153</sup> This purification, for Berdiaev, is the reconfiguration of love over obedience.

Berdiaev narrowly interprets a vast majority of Christian practice as placing a far greater emphasis on obedience than love. Such an emphasis has the detrimental consequence of degrading the person (an emphasis on obedience treats the person as an object) and denying creativity. A spirituality based on love overcomes these problems, Berdiaev believes.

Feuerbach’s atheism is a standing reproach to the old Christian consciousness, to theological doctrines which insisted on obedience rather than on Christian love; for it was the duty of Christians to have affirmed the truths discovered by Feuerbach. Love

---

<sup>149</sup> As Spinka observes concerning ‘intuition’, which is part of ‘integral knowledge’, “For intuition implies no mere perception of the object, but also a penetration into its meaning. *This is a creative act.*” Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 102 (Italics mine).

<sup>150</sup> *SS*, 75.

<sup>151</sup> *SR*, 170. Also, “As has been said already, all creativeness is love and all love is creative.” *DM*, 180-181.

<sup>152</sup> *SR*, 170.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

is creativeness, knowledge is creativeness, the transfiguration of nature is creativeness, freedom is creativeness. Obedience, on the other hand, was a means of stifling creativeness and inspiration, an instrument of man's humiliation.<sup>154</sup>

Created realization, art, knowledge, and love all demonstrate, according to Berdiaev, the potency of creativity in the phenomenal world, and the implications for God's design. As we conclude our examination of Berdiaev's 'sketch' of creativity, and by extension his thought on freedom, one final note must be made as to the quotidian implications of his thought for the Christian, what he terms the ethics of creativeness.

#### D. Ethics

Berdiaev writes, "The ethics of creativity is based on the creative gifts of humanity. The creative act has a moral significance, and a moral act is a creative act."<sup>155</sup> Creativity is moral because it is God's intention and calling for the person. "Creativeness and a creative attitude to life as a whole is not man's right, it is his duty. It is a moral imperative that applies in every department of life."<sup>156</sup> All creativity Vallon observes "is *ipso facto* a moral act."<sup>157</sup>

Since freedom and creativity are a duty – God's calling upon humanity –embodied creativity is a positive moral act as it fulfils God's calling to create.<sup>158</sup> Consequently, embodied creativity not only contains lasting significance for the eschaton, it can also be said to contain an ethical value for the present day. A creative act is a moral act when the creator takes the talent God has given her and develops it in ways that are unique to her creational design.<sup>159</sup> In this way she answers God's call and creativity is manifested.<sup>160</sup>

Berdiaev's assertion that creativeness contains an ethical dimension is consonant with his overall project. The ultimate goal of creativeness is not the production of an object.<sup>161</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> SR, 170-171.

<sup>155</sup> Berdiaev, "МИРОСОЗЕЦАНИЕ," 28.

<sup>156</sup> DM, 169.

<sup>157</sup> Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 247.

<sup>158</sup> DR, 208.

<sup>159</sup> See Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 247.

<sup>160</sup> See Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev*, 160-161. Berdiaev proposes that the Bible formulates two forms of ethics: the ethics of law (Hebrew Bible) and the ethics of redemption (New Testament), and it is the ethics of creativeness that completes the two. Redemption (offered in the ethics of redemption) redeems the person from his fallen state (made evident by the ethics of law), but it is creativeness that reveals the person's vocation. Spinka correctly points out that Berdiaev understood creativity in this regard as justification, whereas it "would more correctly be designated sanctification." *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>161</sup> Idinopulos: "It is true for Berdyaev as it is for Nietzsche that the artist is not the creator of objects of art – these are secondary; the creative intention of the art is, rather, to project symbols of the creator's self-expression. The aim of art is moral; it has personality, or the artist's self hood, as its goal." Idinopulos, "Ontology of Spirit," 85. There is validity in Idinopulos comparing Berdiaev to Nietzsche on this point;

True creativeness will always have a transcendent value and potency. Subsequently, the ethical dimension is not only concerned with following God's call, it is also concerned with overcoming the fallen state of the world that the creator inhabits.<sup>162</sup> Hence, McLachlan is correct when he writes, "Berdyaeв's ethics of freedom and creativity is an ethics of compassion."<sup>163</sup>

### 3. *Interdependence*

In the beginning of the chapter it was noted that 'existential liberty' is a foundational element for the creative act. Now that we have examined Berdiaev's conception of the creative act we can consider the second way in which existential liberty relates to freedom.

As we have seen, when the person acts creatively Berdiaev believes that the person is acting in a self-determined manner. The foundational elements for creativity (meonic freedom, the *imago Dei*, God's 'silent expectation'), combined with the various practices of inner and outer creativity, create the potential for the person to act in ways that are influenced by external variables (e.g., God, others, materiality of the world) while remaining non-determined by them. This is a critical point in Berdiaev's thought. To assert existential liberty (non-determination), which enables self-determination, requires Berdiaev to explain how the person can act in a non-determined manner; i.e. act in ways that are internally, rather than externally, determined.

We can see that the creative act is, for Berdiaev, the means for understanding how a theandrically free person can act, and therefore live, as a free person in union with others in a world of necessity.<sup>164</sup> If a person can participate in a creative act the person is able to act in a self-determined measure. If a person cannot participate in a creative act, he cannot act with freedom.

So, although Berdiaev, in typical fashion, can assign the importance of creativity to a number of issues (e.g. creativity is necessary for transcendence,<sup>165</sup> creativity indicates the person's value,<sup>166</sup> creativity is what God expects from the person<sup>167</sup>) at the base of these

---

however, his analysis concerning Berdiaev's overall objective is faulty. Creativity does have immediate consequences for the development of the creator's self hood, but as has been detailed, this development is not the *only* goal of creativity.

<sup>162</sup> *DM*, 180.

<sup>163</sup> McLachlan, 187.

<sup>164</sup> "The victory over slavery is creative activity." *SF*, 71.

<sup>165</sup> *BE*, 193.

<sup>166</sup> *MCA*, 100.

<sup>167</sup> *DR*, 208.

claims, *is the fact that Berdiaev understands the creative act as the primary means by which a 'free' person can act within the world.* “Man’s destiny is linked up with that of the world; he must bear the burden of the world, *he must be creatively active in as well as free from the world.*”<sup>168</sup> Creativity is the means by which a theandrically free person may act in a world bound by necessity. This proposition is not intended to nullify the preceding claims (i.e. that creativity is important for transcendence, value, and God’s expectation of the person); rather the premise of this insight is that creativity is essential to Berdiaev’s understanding of embodied freedom.

To say that ‘creativity’ and ‘freedom’ are interdependent one must bear in mind that both these concepts, for Berdiaev, are dynamic categories. In parallel with his view of freedom, it is possible to extrapolate from Berdiaev’s thought the notion that creativity can be seen as a spectrum of possible ‘acts’:

Externally determined acts     $\leftrightarrow$     Novel acts     $\leftrightarrow$     Creative acts

On the negative end of the spectrum are actions that are externally determined, i.e. actions that are not ‘creative’ but are carried out due to some sort of external force (societal, familial, religious, etc.). Moving along the spectrum we find actions that can be seen as ‘novel’ acts. These acts are based on ‘self-will’, ‘newness’, and ‘freedom’. Moving further, we see that the most positive acts are creative acts. These are actions that build on ‘novel’ acts and incorporate the aspects of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ creativity. Creative acts are most closely associated with a theandrically free person.

The interdependence of freedom and creativity, then, is an interplay of two multi-phased concepts. As a person moves along the spectrum of freedom they can also move along the spectrum of creativity. A free person may only respond with novelty to a given situation, but the free person always has the opportunity for his novelty to develop into creativity, depending on multiple variables. The importance of creativity is that it allows the person to function in ways that are unique to the person.

Therefore, ‘creativity’ is necessary since Berdiaev’s conception of freedom is focused upon the person either being ‘self’-determined, or moving to that state.<sup>169</sup> If the person is to act in ways that are not external to herself, those acts must be creative acts – acts based on

---

<sup>168</sup> *SR*, 98 (Italics mine).

<sup>169</sup> As was discussed in the previous chapter, the reader must bear in mind that self-determination for Berdiaev is proposed in a relational context. The person who exists in *sobornost*’ with God and others has the potential for self-determination.

freedom, which originate with the person. If the person cannot act creatively then her actions can only arise from external influences, and this is antithetical to freedom. Since freedom exists, creativity is possible; without freedom, creativity is negated. Also, it is possible to act freely in a ‘world of determinism’ because the person can act in creative ways. This interdependence is essential for Berdiaev – freedom is required for the creative act and creativity is required for a free person to act in the world.

## §5 SUMMARY

Berdiaev’s ‘sketch’ of creativity is a complex proposal that seeks to build on his vision of freedom. Within Berdiaev’s thought, the creative act can be understood as a development of embodied freedom, as creativity is the means by which a theandrically free person can act in a ‘world of necessity’. In this chapter we have examined the beginning stages of creativity and the foundations Berdiaev proposes for the development of creativity. We then detailed how Berdiaev conceives creativity occurring within the world through the inner and outer creative acts. To summarize the major points of our discussion:

- i. Creativity, in its beginning stage, can be described as a self-willed act by a person that produces some realization (whether material, conceptual, or spiritual) of *newness*, and is dependent on the person’s *freedom*. I have termed this beginning stage the ‘novel act’.
- ii. The foundations for the creative act to occur are: meonic freedom, the *imago Dei*, and God’s ‘silent’ expectation.
- iii. As with his vision of freedom, the creative act must be considered from a developmental perspective – the novel act can progress into a creative act. For this transition to occur there are core elements that need to be in place, as well as practices required by the person – the inner and outer creative acts.
- iv. Berdiaev considers the Renaissance to be one of the greatest examples of creativity, an historical demonstration of what happens when creators create in communion with God.
- v. As God calls the person to create, Berdiaev propounds that creativity should be considered an ethical mandate issued by God.
- vi. Creativity, like freedom, can be viewed as a spectrum where the individual’s actions move from being externally determined, to novel acts, to creative acts.
- vii. I have proposed that the ‘creative act’ and ‘freedom’ are interdependent concepts within Berdiaev’s thought. ‘Freedom’ is necessary for ‘creativity’ to occur, and, equally important, the ‘creative act’ is the means by which a ‘free’ person acts within a ‘deterministic’ world. Thus, according to Berdiaev’s vision, any theory that posits freedom for the person must also recognize the necessity of creativity.



The critique of Berdiaev's view of creativity, through the work of Moltmann, will critically challenge Berdiaev's exalted view of the person as creator, the possibility of the creative act occurring outside of the 'natural world', what the *imago Dei* (which includes 'geniality') means for the person, and how creativity relates to transfiguration. From this critique we will emphasize the significant contributions Berdiaev's thought can make to the theological discussion of freedom. Specifically, the idea that freedom and creativity are interdependent concepts, and a view of the person that includes the role of creator with God, will be developed.

## Chapter 6 – Jürgen Moltmann’s Theology of Freedom

### §1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1. *Berdiaev’s Theological Orientation*

At the beginning of chapter two it was stated: “*Berdiaev’s vision is that all individuals possess a rudimentary form of freedom. This freedom will either develop through communion with God and others, resulting in personhood and creative acts, or it will deteriorate through egocentricity, resulting in objectification and slavery.*”<sup>1</sup> It has been demonstrated that this ‘vision’ relies on specific theological principles for its framework. As we have seen, the central theological principles are:

- i. Freedom can only develop in relation with God and others.
- ii. Freedom is dependent upon a triune God – a Father who out of love and desire for the ‘other’ creates, a Son (God-man) who redeems, and the Holy Spirit who enlivens and makes freedom possible.
- iii. Creativity, which is a result of freedom, is ultimately grounded in creating with God.
- iv. Berdiaev’s view of freedom has as its horizon the coming reality of God’s kingdom.

So, while Berdiaev does place a substantial emphasis on a ‘philosophical’ understanding of the person as an autonomous, self-determining subject whose freedom is attributable, in part, to the *Ungrund*, his vision of freedom is also dependent upon theological principles for its formulation and development. Therefore, as we discussed in chapter 1, although Berdiaev considers himself to be an existentialist and his work, by extension, to be an existentialist philosophy of freedom and creativity, his vision of freedom is a ‘theological’ work as well. This is evident in the fact that Berdiaev’s view draws significantly from theology, and his ultimate concern – person, community, and God freely existing in communion – is obviously theological.

It is accepted that Berdiaev would most likely object strenuously to his work being classified as theology since he did not hold theology in high regard.<sup>2</sup> Wernham aptly

---

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 2, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Berdiaev maintained that “Divinity cannot be rationally determined and remains outside the scope of logical concepts.” *FS*, 64. Since ‘Divinity’ cannot be determined rationally and he believes that most theology is ‘rationalist and anti-symbolic’ (*FS*, 68), theology can never truly understand the Divine. His favorite targets are the theologies of Aquinas, which is ‘a form of rationalism’ (*FS*, 293) and Barth, where Barth’s ‘dialectic theology is the dehumanization of Christianity’. *FMW*, 31-32. Although Moltmann does not share Berdiaev’s

describes Berdiaev's position, noting Berdiaev's forthrightness: "I am not a theologian, and my approach to and formulation of these problems are not theological. Rather, I speak with the voice of free religious thought."<sup>3</sup> However, Wernham goes on to rightly question whether Berdiaev's protests are enough to prevent his work from being seen as 'theology'. Wernham: "Yet it is not idle to raise the question whether Berdiaev's own judgment on the matter can be allowed to stand."<sup>4</sup>

Berdiaev was wary of theology not only because he considered it to be 'rational' but, as Wernham points out, also because Berdiaev was convinced that theology was constrained by the Church, whereas philosophy was a 'free' enterprise. Theology must answer to the "organized collective, which is invariably the source of orthodoxy"<sup>5</sup> and therefore is hindered, in Berdiaev's outlook, from seeking the truth that is revealed to individual persons. This view, which Wernham correctly describes as a "limited and inadequate conception"<sup>6</sup> of theology, demonstrates Berdiaev's narrow perspective of theology, which we need not accept.

Regardless of Berdiaev's biases,<sup>7</sup> in a contemporary context his thought does fit within the broad enterprise of what is today considered 'theological'. Whether one considers his work to be religious philosophy, a theology, or some type of hybrid, what is clear is that his vision of freedom is theological.

To assess the theological tenability of his thought we will use the work of Jürgen Moltmann, a theologian who has devoted considerable thought to the issue of freedom, and who has also dialogued with Berdiaev's work. In examining Moltmann's theology of freedom we will encounter similarities of thought as well as important differences that will be used to critique Berdiaev's vision of freedom. From this critique it will be shown that while Berdiaev's existential-mystical approach has discernible flaws, the basic content of his

---

narrow view of theology, nor Berdiaev's interpretation of these theologians, there is some congruence with Berdiaev's concern. Early in his career Moltmann observes, "Many believe that Christian theology has become irrelevant. It has become introvert, orthodox, traditionalist, or personalistic. Occupied only with itself, it has lost contact with reality." *RRF*, 200. From this critique of contemporary theology, he will propose that there needs to be a "reorganization of the theological system itself and a reorientation of the entire theological endeavor." *RRF*, 200. In a more recent work, he writes, "There are theological systems which do not merely aim to be free of contradictions in themselves, but which aspire to remain uncontroverted from outside too. In these systems, theology becomes a strategy of self-immunization." *ET*, xx. There is obvious similarity here between the two authors regarding a theology that places a high value on reason and systemization.

<sup>3</sup> *DR*, 177, as quoted in Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers*, 3. For Wernham's argument on Berdiaev as a theologian see pp. 3-11.

<sup>4</sup> Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Berdiaev's bias is certainly shaped by his idea of philosophy suffering under the "tortures and persecutions" of religious authorities. See *SS*, 4-5.

thought – what freedom means for God and the person – remains distinctly relevant for theology today.

## 2. Moltmann

Freedom is a compelling subject for Moltmann and even though his view on freedom has notable differences with Berdiaev's, in the end freedom holds a comparable value for each writer. It is significant that both began their intellectual careers grappling with Marxist theory; from this position they both seek to answer the question of freedom in light of the Christian understanding of God in a world where suffering appears to be ever-present.<sup>8</sup> Neither author presents a systematic theological interpretation of freedom. Both believe that the Christian view of freedom must be comprehensible not only to the Church, but equally important, to the world outside of the Church. In general, they both contend that to be alive is to strive for freedom, that freedom is what God desires for the created order, and corresponding to this, freedom has always been, and always will be, a core concern for the individual and society.

To broadly introduce Moltmann's concept of freedom, we can say that he envisages Christianity as a religion of freedom. To have a relationship with God is to experience freedom and to realize how fettered our lives can be. Moltmann claims that our "experiences of God awaken in us the hope for life, we begin to rebel against the apathy within us and the barbed wire round about us."<sup>9</sup> The Christian faith, according to Moltmann, enables people to see potentialities all around as they view the world in relation to God; to no longer accept the world as it is.<sup>10</sup> This understanding, he argues, is not solely a development of modernity, but the reality of experiencing a triune God and the "written promises of freedom" contained within scripture.<sup>11</sup> Hence, for Moltmann, the 'experience' of the person and scripture are the primary building blocks for his view of freedom, and for that matter, for his entire theological enterprise.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> As with Berdiaev, the ghost of Ivan Karamazov hangs over Moltmann's work as well, e.g., "The suffering of a single innocent child is an irrefutable rebuttal of the notion of the almighty and kindly God in heaven." *TKG*, 47.

<sup>9</sup> *SL*, 104-05.

<sup>10</sup> *SL*, 115.

<sup>11</sup> *RRF*, 98.

<sup>12</sup> As the experience of the person always occurs within a given context, he can write, "It [theology] has to be both 'in accordance with Scripture' and contextual." *ET*, 15. The importance of 'experience' for Moltmann is reflected in the fact that his final major work, in which he addresses his history and methodology, is *Experiences in Theology*

Moltmann's emphasis on 'experience' arises from his view of faith being a 'living relationship'. Because of this, the theologian's task is one carried out within a relationship with God and others, which means that theology not only contributes to faith, but that faith (i.e. the experience of faith) contributes to the theological endeavor. Consequently, the theologian's experience of God and of God's presence (and sometimes God's seeming absence) in the world becomes an important element for theological reflection. Moltmann writes, "Theologians will bring the whole of their existence into their search for knowledge about God. 'Subjectivity is truth.' That postulate of Kierkegaard's is true at least for theologians."<sup>13</sup>

Although 'experience' is primarily subjective, Moltmann wants to distinguish between the subjectivity of modernity and the subjectivity of faith. He describes the subjectivity of modernity as a "culture of narcissism", which makes the self its own prisoner and supplies it merely with self-repetitions and self-confirmations."<sup>14</sup> Whereas the subjectivity of faith values the experience of the person within "the over-riding history of God, and only finds its meaning in that context."<sup>15</sup> Hence 'experience' is not the sole determinative element in theological reflection but neither is experience negated. Rather the experience of the theologian becomes part of an approach that seeks to incorporate experience into the larger web of revelation that God gives through Spirit and Word.

Regarding scripture, the twin themes of 'exodus' and 'resurrection' are important reference points for Moltmann's view of freedom. The Biblical narratives are "histories of exile and exodus, freedom and estrangement, homecoming and indwelling."<sup>16</sup> The Exodus narrative, Israel's deliverance from the powers of Egypt, is "the historical foundation for liberty,"<sup>17</sup> as it reveals a God who wants people to be free – free from political, economic, and spiritual oppression.

In the Resurrection God breaks the power of oppression at a fundamental level. Not only does God deliver people from oppression, but through the Resurrection the powers of sin and death are overcome.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, when we identify God as 'the Lord', we are acknowledging a God who delivers people for freedom, and is the assurance of freedom.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> *ET*, 23.

<sup>14</sup> *TKG*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *ET*, 30.

<sup>17</sup> *SL*, 114.

<sup>18</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "Freedom in the Light of Hope," *Southeast Asian Journal of Theology* 15 (1973),

14.

<sup>19</sup> *ET*, 34.

Understanding freedom as a central tenet of scripture, Moltmann claims that theology is rightly understood as a discourse about people “on the road to the promised land of liberty where God dwells.”<sup>20</sup> Theology must be concerned with freedom and liberation in all its manifold aspects.

Freedom, Moltmann acknowledges, is difficult to define since we have yet to “experience the ‘kingdom of freedom,’ i.e., freedom in a truly free world.”<sup>21</sup> This difficulty, however, does not prevent him from using multiple perspectives to describe freedom. For instance, freedom can be understood as a fundamental part of human subjectivity.

The first principles and supreme values of the modern world are to be found in the self-determination of the determining human subject. The great discovery of modern times is human subjectivity. . . . Every human being is the subject of understanding and will, and can freely confront the forces of his or her origin and nature.<sup>22</sup>

Freedom is also the right to resist<sup>23</sup> and the rubbing against the chains that bind us in un-free circumstances.<sup>24</sup> In the end, “Freedom is not a possession; freedom is an event,”<sup>25</sup> an experience of life *with* God and others where we are not constrained.

Modernist interpretations of freedom would most likely agree with the notion of freedom as being ‘not constrained’, but would object, Moltmann says, to any idea of freedom being relationally dependent. The freedom modernity advocates is the freedom of the individual, which is often interpreted as ‘freedom of domination’, i.e. we are free only insofar as we can dominate or exercise our will over others.<sup>26</sup> Counter to this view, he proposes that the Christian view of freedom should be focused on the person who is filled with the Holy Spirit; so that freedom “means being possessed by the divine energy of life, and participation in that energy.”<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, in contrast to many popular conceptions of the Christian faith (from without as well as within), the experience of God is the experience of freedom.<sup>28</sup> God is the liberator,<sup>29</sup> and the source for our “unending freedom.”<sup>30</sup> To be a follower of Christ, and to

---

<sup>20</sup> *ET*, xx.

<sup>21</sup> *RRF*, 30.

<sup>22</sup> *GSS*, 212. We will examine the concern ‘subjectivity’ raises in chapter 7.

<sup>23</sup> *GSS*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> *RRF*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> *HG*, 67.

<sup>26</sup> *SL*, 114.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *SL*, 103. See also *SL*, 99-100.

<sup>29</sup> *SL*, 100.

<sup>30</sup> *HG*, 69.

participate in the life of the triune God is, as Moltmann frequently reminds us, ‘to be set free for freedom’.<sup>31</sup>

As is readily apparent, freedom is a far-reaching theme within Moltmann’s work. One can view freedom as being interwoven throughout his thought; in his doctrine of creation, Christology, pneumatology, et al, we find his concern for freedom. Since our space is limited, and our task specific, we will not be able to pursue the far-reaching implications of freedom for his thought. Our goal will be to outline the main features of his view, focusing on what Moltmann believes freedom to be, how it exists, and its relevance for God and the created order.

The primary texts used for this chapter are: *Religion, Revolution, and the Future* (’69); *The Crucified God* (’74); *Man* (’74); *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (’81); *Humanity in God* (’83); *God in Creation* (’85); *The Spirit of Life* (’93); *God for a Secular Society* (’99); and *Experiences in Theology* (’00). The criterion for selecting these texts was the inclusion of works that best expound his view of freedom and the implications of freedom for God and the created order; as well as, texts that would span the length of his prolific career so that the development of his thought could be traced.

## §2 THE GENESIS OF FREEDOM

Moltmann’s innovations in theology and the creative applications thereof have garnered much attention throughout his career. As we shall see, his view of freedom is certainly one of those innovations. Amidst the praise and criticism his thought generates, it is important to remember that at the foundation of his thought on freedom is the thesis that freedom exists because God exists, i.e. God is the originator, or giver, of freedom. In this section we will examine the five distinct, yet related factors that I believe comprise Moltmann’s view of freedom.<sup>32</sup> These are: God creating ‘space’ for creation, the nature of the Trinity, the Father’s passion, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We will begin with the freedom made possible by God’s creative act.

---

<sup>31</sup> “For freedom Christ has set us free.” Gal. 5: 1.

<sup>32</sup> Even though Moltmann at one point proposes a ‘Trinitarian Doctrine of Freedom’ (see *TKG*, 212-222), which could lead to the assumption that three factors (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) make up his view on freedom, his thought incorporates other ideas as well. I am using these five factors as an organizing principle to help detail his thought on freedom.

## 1. *Creating Space for Creation*

In the beginning was God. Moltmann believes that we cannot talk about space that was outside of God, because God was all. When he combines this belief with his understanding that “every life needs its corresponding *living space*”<sup>33</sup> he arrives at his frequently commented upon proposition that God had to create ‘space’ in order to create. Without the necessary space for creation, all that God created would be part of the Divine, since it would exist within that sphere. To create a self-differentiated cosmos (as opposed to a pantheistic cosmos) God ‘makes room’ for creation and in so doing ‘makes liberty’ possible for non-divine beings.<sup>34</sup> Moltmann speculates that God makes room for creation by withdrawing God’s self in an act of self-limitation; his thought here is influenced by the kabalistic doctrine of *zimzum*.

### A. *Zimzum*

Moltmann develops this line of thought with the help of Isaac Luria (d. 1572), who utilized the concept of *zimzum* for his own work. Moltmann explains:

*Zimzum* means concentration and contraction, and signifies a withdrawing of oneself into oneself. Luria was taking up the ancient Jewish doctrine of the Shekinah, according to which the infinite God can so contract his presence that he dwells in the temple. But Luria applied it to God and creation.<sup>35</sup>

Moltmann theorizes that by withdrawing a portion of God’s self, God creates the necessary space for creation to occur and to flourish. “It is only a withdrawal by God into himself that can free the space into which God can act creatively.”<sup>36</sup>

Thus, God’s self-limitation is the first step for creation. When God limits God’s self, “a kind of mystical primordial space”<sup>37</sup> is created, which is the *nihil* that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* describes. When God does create, the cosmos exists in relation to God and yet has a life of its own; that is, the cosmos is non-divine, and whereas before everything was God, now there is God and created life. In this way God lets creation ‘be’.<sup>38</sup>

Moltmann posits that Luria’s vision allows one to conceptualize a God who creates all that exists but does not overpower creation by the sheer magnitude of God’s Being. The

---

<sup>33</sup> *SL*, 27 (Italics author).

<sup>34</sup> *TKG*, 111.

<sup>35</sup> *GC*, 87.

<sup>36</sup> *GC*, 86-87.

<sup>37</sup> *GC*, 87.

<sup>38</sup> *GC*, 88.



created order can be thought of as being *in* God, without ‘falling victim’ to pantheism.<sup>39</sup> Although Moltmann uses this idea to counter pantheism, his main objective is to describe how the created order can be free. Because God is willing to withdraw God’s self and create space outside of God, the created order has the ability to experience self-determination. “He withdraws his omnipotence in order to set his image, men and women, free. He allows his world to exist *in* his eternity.”<sup>40</sup>

The impetus for this creative activity – the creation of ‘space’, followed by the created order, and the resultant freedom – is not based on God’s desire for a self-determined cosmos independent of the Divine, rather God creates and endures the “divine kenosis which begins with the creation of the world,”<sup>41</sup> so that God can exist in relationship with the world. The creation of space, the cosmos, and the gifting of freedom, all flow from God’s love.

## B. *Love*

The horizon for Moltmann’s work is love – God’s love for the created order and the expectant history when creation fully reciprocates in its love for God. God’s love for the ‘other’ is witnessed in the interrelationship of the Trinity and in God’s desire for relationship with beings outside of the Trinity.<sup>42</sup> God’s “love is literally ecstatic love: it leads him to go out of himself and to create something which is different from himself but which none the less corresponds to him.”<sup>43</sup> As God is love, creation exists because God desires to be in relationship with God’s beloved.

This does not indicate a weakness on God’s behalf – God is not somehow ‘less’ because God seeks relationship. For Moltmann, it indicates the exact opposite, as God is willing not only to exercise self-limitation, but also to suffer, so that a beloved might exist. This perspective on love in relation ties into his argument for God’s passibility, which will be addressed below; at this juncture our focus remains on what Moltmann perceives to be the implications of God’s love, which not only impacts the created order, but is the reason for its existence.

---

<sup>39</sup> *TKG*, 110.

<sup>40</sup> *TKG*, 118 (Italics author).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> God’s desire for the ‘other’ is first witnessed in the trinitarian interrelationship between the Father and the Son. “Creation is a part of the eternal love affair between the Father and the Son. It springs from the Father’s love for the Son and is redeemed by the answering love of the Son for the Father.” *TKG*, 59. This love for the ‘other’ is the basis for God’s love for creation.

<sup>43</sup> *GC*, 76.

Love is significant for our discussion of his view of freedom because love and freedom are interrelated concerns. A basic feature of love, for Moltmann, whether it is Divine love or human love, is the desire for relationship. Moltmann's thought here mirrors Berdiaev – love, whether Divine or human, is never self-sufficient. We cannot say God is love and then envisage God existing within God's self and only for God's self. As Moltmann rhetorically asks, "Can God really be content to be sufficient for himself if he *is* love?"<sup>44</sup> So, when Moltmann says God is love this is not only a descriptor of God, but also an explanation as to why creation exists and what God waits for from creation – a loving response.

The idea of 'response' is an important factor – not only does God desire a relationship with created beings, but God waits for the reciprocation of God's desire and call. A loving relationship requires response, and this reciprocation must have some form of freedom if it is to be a loving relationship. A loving relationship must be entered freely by both parties; love cannot be dictated or forced. Consequently, if we are to say God desires a relationship with created beings, we must also say freedom is a part of the equation – love must be freely given and freely received.<sup>45</sup>

Although God has the power to bring all into existence, God cannot force others to love, as that would be the negation of love. So, God's self-limitation not only applies to the withdrawing of God's self to create space for creation, self-limitation also means creating a cosmos that has the ability *and* the freedom to love and *not* love.

. . . from his image in the world the Father can only expect the love that is a free response; and in order to make this free response possible, love must concede freedom and offer freedom to the beloved. In order to experience the free response it desires, love must wait patiently. It cannot compel a response by violence. For the sake of freedom, and the love responded to in freedom, God limits and empties himself. He withdraws his omnipotence because he has confidence in the free response of men and women.<sup>46</sup>

As God cannot force the created order into a loving relationship with God's self, God will go so far as suffering for the redemption of creation and the restoration of relationship.

Love for God and person, then, is a risk, since there is always the option that the response may not be the desired one. In observing what love means for humanity, Moltmann writes, "For love leaves us open to wounding and disappointment. It makes us ready to suffer. It leads us out of isolation into a fellowship with others, with people different from

---

<sup>44</sup> *TKG*, 53 (Italics author).

<sup>45</sup> "Creation exists because the eternal love communicates himself creatively to his Other. It exists because the eternal love seeks fellowship and desires response in freedom." *TKG*, 59.

<sup>46</sup> *TKG*, 119.

ourselves, and this fellowship is always associated with suffering.”<sup>47</sup> As we will see when discussing passibility, this idea of risk applies to God as well.

Thus we see that God’s creative acts originate in a love for the other. In this process God creates the ‘space’ for the other to be free and freely respond to God’s outpouring of love. In order to preserve this freedom and not force the desired response from the other, God places God’s self at risk and is willing to suffer to redeem creation and create the potential for relationship with the Divine. God’s willingness to suffer raises one of Moltmann’s well-known themes – God’s passibility.

### C. *The Question of Passibility*

We will examine the specific ways God suffers when we discuss Moltmann’s view of the Father and the Son, at this juncture we will consider Moltmann’s simple yet complex premise – God suffers.<sup>48</sup> According to Moltmann, this is a concept that is evident within the history of the cross, and evident in the encounter with God’s love. God’s passion is not a result of some sort of defect in God’s nature; the suffering of God arises from God’s willingness to suffer because God is love. “God does not suffer out of deficiency of being, like created beings. To this extent he is ‘apathetic’. But he suffers from the love which is the superabundance and overflowing of his being. In so far he is ‘pathetic’.”<sup>49</sup>

The doctrine of impassibility began, Moltmann propounds, with the early Church’s engagement with philosophy.<sup>50</sup> Although this view of God has had, and continues to have, a prominent voice within the Church, it is problematic. The problem, Moltmann asserts, is that this is not how God reveals God’s self, especially in light of the cross. Through scripture and the encounter with God, the person (and community) finds a God who is ‘pathetic’ not ‘apathetic’.

The attraction of the doctrine of impassibility, Moltmann thinks, is due to the fact that “in practice down to the present day Christian faith has taken into itself the religious need of

---

<sup>47</sup> *CG*, 62-63.

<sup>48</sup> Moltmann’s idea of passibility is significantly influenced by Abraham Heschel’s *pathos* of God. *CG*, 270-274. Heschel was one of the first, Moltmann states, to challenge the idea of an apathetic God. *TKG*, 25. Although he draws from Heschel’s thought, Moltmann reaches a different conclusion as he is unable to agree with Heschel’s ‘dipolar theology’ and instead argues for a trinitarian solution to the *pathos/sympatheia* paradox. *CG*, 275. Heschel may be the primary influence, but in *TKG*, 21-60, Moltmann engages other individuals as well, and most significantly for this research, Berdiaev. As we noted in chapter 4, Moltmann relies exclusively on Berdiaev’s concept of movement within the Godhead to examine “the tragedy of God.” See *TKG*, 42-47.

<sup>49</sup> *TKG*, 23. Cf. Berdiaev: “If the capacity for love is ascribed to God, then the capacity for suffering must also be ascribed to Him.” *SF*, 51.

<sup>50</sup> *CG*, 214. Although Moltmann is arguing for God’s *pathos*, he still wants to hold the basic doctrinal affirmation of Nicaea that, at least in a ‘relative’ sense, God is ‘not changeable’. *CG*, 229.

finite, threatened and mortal man for security in a higher omnipotence and authority.”<sup>51</sup>

Following from this, then, any idea of death, suffering, or grief must be excluded from God and God becomes the Unmoved.<sup>52</sup>

Moltmann holds firmly to God’s passibility because without it he believes God’s love cannot be recognized.<sup>53</sup> Simply put, he states “A God who cannot suffer cannot love either. A God who cannot love is a dead God.”<sup>54</sup> The ability to love carries with it the risk of suffering. Moltmann makes no distinction between how God loves and how the human loves; love is incomprehensible if there is no pathos.

The importance of this point cannot be overstated. If it could be demonstrated that love could occur without pathos, then, Moltmann’s position would collapse. But, as Moltmann correctly points out, love is incomprehensible without pathos, and, since God is love and cannot do anything that would be contradictory to himself, God’s suffering is a comprehensible phenomenon. If God wasn’t love then this point would be moot. As God is love,<sup>55</sup> ideas of an impassible God who is not affected by anything external to God’s self need to be rejected, as they do not conform with God’s salvation history.

God creating space for creation to exist based on love for the other, a love which includes God’s willingness to suffer, is the first factor in making freedom possible for the created order. The second factor is drawn from Moltmann’s understanding of the Trinity.

---

<sup>51</sup> *CG*, 214.

<sup>52</sup> “The ‘Almighty’ can do all things but may not display any weakness. God may rule but cannot suffer. God must direct but cannot be directed. God must always speak but cannot listen. A God who is so one-sidedly defined, simply cannot be the living God. . . . The God who alone is active and all-causative condemns all others to passivity and utter dependence.” *HG*, 95.

<sup>53</sup> *SL*, 137.

<sup>54</sup> *TKG*, 38. This position has earned Moltmann considerable criticism. Paul Molnar, who accuses Moltmann’s thought of being ‘theologically inappropriate’ writes, “This clear projection of human love and suffering into the eternal Godhead manifests the mutual conditioning associated with all human love and suffering; it cannot, however, describe the trinitarian God as free in himself or in revelation in a way which definitively overcomes suffering.” Paul Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 2002), 203. Although Molnar correctly points out certain problems in Moltmann’s thought, his sharp critique of Moltmann’s position completely misses the overall objectives of Moltmann’s thought concerning God’s passibility and the Trinity. Moltmann is not centered, as is Molnar, on arguing for God’s sovereignty (although Moltmann is concerned with it). Moltmann’s thought begins with the cross and in trying to explore the implications of Christ being crucified; thus he does *not* have as a primary objective to “describe the trinitarian God as free in himself.” Moltmann, in contrast to Molnar, does not regard God’s freedom as the ability to do whatever is possible. God’s freedom, and hence God’s power, is found in God’s love. “God’s freedom is not the almighty power for which everything is possible. It is love, which means the self-communication of the good.” *ET*, 75. This failure to acknowledge Moltmann’s basic orientation (it is significant that Molnar does not engage *The Crucified God*), combined with a misreading of Moltmann on several key points (e.g. he claims that Moltmann states that “God needs to suffer in order to love,” Molnar, 200), makes Molnar’s critique problematic.

<sup>55</sup> I John 4: 16.

## 2. *Trinity*

Moltmann's conception of the Trinity plays an integral role in his formulation of freedom; he is convinced that an understanding of the Trinity is essential if the age-old paradox of freedom existing for both God and human beings is to be resolved. The Trinity is not an abstract philosophical concept, according to Moltmann, but the means by which one can discuss a God whose freedom cannot be externally thwarted and a free human whose existential freedom does not impinge on God. As Richard Bauckham aptly states, “. . . the doctrine of the Trinity, for Moltmann, is not the problem; properly understood, it is the solution.”<sup>56</sup>

In considering Moltmann's Trinitarian thought our attention will focus on his assertion that the intra-trinitarian relationship reveals a God who exists in relation, and that this relationship creates the 'space' for the created order to be truly free. Thus not only does each Person of the Trinity have a part to play in granting freedom, it is also their existence and their relation to each other that become essential factors for freedom.

### A. *The Triune God*

Acknowledging God as Trinity, Moltmann asserts, means that we recognize the Divine Being as the God who “isn't a solitary, unloved ruler in heaven who subjugates everything as earthly despots do. He is a God in community, rich in relationships.”<sup>57</sup> God is an 'open Trinity', a God who *is* relation – inviting, integrating, and uniting all things.<sup>58</sup> The Trinity is the original community of 'persons'; to speak of Trinity, according to Moltmann, is to speak of the 'divine community'.

This doctrine is essential if humanity is to understand that God is Love. As already discussed, Moltmann's view of love requires an 'other', and this is revealed in God's trinitarian nature. “Because he not only loves but is himself love, he has to be understood as the triune God. Love cannot be consummated by a solitary subject.”<sup>59</sup>

Not only is the doctrine of the Trinity essential for understanding that God is love, but it is also essential for understanding how that love is revealed within the created order. Because God is love, and the created order is alienated from God, at the heart of the Gospels is the cross. To understand God's love in relation to the cross requires trinitarian doctrine –

---

<sup>56</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1995), 171.

<sup>57</sup> *GSS*, 101.

<sup>58</sup> *ET*, 323.

<sup>59</sup> *TKG*, 57.

without the Trinity the cross cannot be grasped. “The Son suffers and dies on the cross. The Father suffers with him, but not in the same way. There is a trinitarian solution to the paradox that God is ‘dead’ on the cross and yet is not dead, once one abandons the simple concept of God.”<sup>60</sup>

Particularly important to Moltmann is that the doctrine of the Trinity helps combat what he believes to be the false view of God as the ‘Almighty Ruler’, the God who is ‘dominion in super-power’<sup>61</sup> as opposed to the God whose primary being is love and relation.<sup>62</sup>

## B. Perichoresis

*Perichoresis* is a fundamental idea within Moltmann’s Trinitarian formulation. When Moltmann states that ‘God is relation’, the type of relationality he is intimating is a perichoretic one. The primary way Moltmann utilizes *perichoresis* is to delineate the ‘mutual indwelling’ of the three persons of the Trinity. He writes:

The idea of mutual indwelling, *perichoresis*, goes back to the theology of the Greek Fathers, and makes it possible to conceive of a community without uniformity and a personhood without individualism. . . . In *christology*, perichoresis describes the mutual interpenetration of two different natures, the divine and the human, in Christ, the God-human being. . . . In *the doctrine of the Trinity*, perichoresis means the mutual indwelling of the homogeneous divine Persons, Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> *CG*, 203.

<sup>61</sup> *HG*, 94.

<sup>62</sup> A central discussion to be found in Moltmann’s political theology is his argument against monotheism. He does not deny the ancient Deuteronomic creed that God is One (Deut. 6.4); however, God is one Triune God. This is a critique of how, he believes, monotheism has been interpreted throughout the history of the church. He traces his thought back to the 1960’s when he first read Erik Peterson’s article on ‘Monotheism as a Political Problem’. *ET*, 303. Following Peterson’s initial thought, Moltmann, along with other political theologians, begins to understand the concept of monotheism as a ‘monarchical’ concept that justifies dominating and hierarchal systems of power – “. . . monotheism is monarchism.” *TKG*, 191. Thus it is a theological concept that results in a political situation that is antithetical to the kingdom of God. Monotheism becomes the religious justification for political sovereignty. *TKG*, 197.

Throughout his work, monotheism is seemingly always negative and is held in contrast to the inviting and integrating unity of the Trinity, which reveals God’s love and sacrifice for creation. This position is obviously problematic, considering that the *shema* is foundational to the Christian understanding of God. Bauckham suggests that Moltmann would have been better served if he had used the term ‘Unitarianism’ instead of ‘monotheism’. Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 172. This suggestion has merit, but it falls short in failing to recognize Moltmann’s critique of other theologies that, he believes, are not based on a ‘relational’ view of the Trinity and are ‘modalistic’. For example, Moltmann believes both Barth’s (one divine Person) and Rahner’s (one divine substance) views of the Trinity to be modalistic in their conception (*ET*, 321); and yet since Moltmann does not regard either as a Unitarian, Bauckham’s label of ‘Unitarianism’ does not work. Moltmann’s concern is to radically re-configure the understanding of monotheism in light of the Trinity, without which we cannot fully understand the suffering of God (*TKG*, 25), the *Basileia* (*TKG*, 131), or how to develop a theological understanding of freedom (*TKG*, 192).

<sup>63</sup> *ET*, 316 (Italics author).

*Perichoresis* is not a 'rigid pattern', according to Moltmann, it is "at once the most intense excitement and the absolute rest of the love which is the wellspring of everything that lives."<sup>64</sup>

Because Moltmann believes *perichoresis* to be the fundamental character of the Godhead's existence, he also believes that the Trinity should not be defined using a 'common nature' orientation.<sup>65</sup> He writes, "There are two points of departure for the development of trinitarian doctrine, the metaphysical one and the biblical one. The metaphysical approach presupposes the proof that God *is* and that God *is One*."<sup>66</sup> If one is concerned with a logically theistic argument, then, a single divine nature is the focus; if the focus is on how God reveals God's self in the experience of history and through scripture, then, Moltmann believes the interrelationship of the Trinity is the starting point.

(a) *Interpenetration*

The interrelationship within the perichoretic union is possible because interpenetration is possible. *Perichoresis* does not mean that the three Persons of the Trinity are fused into each other, thereby losing all differentiation. Nor are they related to each other in the way that humans relate. Each trinitarian Person is related by mutually interpenetrating the other.

The relationship is so central to the existence of the Trinity that it can be said that each Person *exists* in each other and creates space for each other. This means that "every trinitarian Person is not merely *Person* but also *living space* for the two others. In *perichoresis* each Person makes himself 'inhabitable' for the two others, and prepares the wide space and the dwelling for the two others."<sup>67</sup>

Perichoretic interpenetration opens up a view of relationship that is beyond the human experience. The trinitarian relationship is so intimate that the Persons of the Trinity can be said to exist within each other, while also stating that they are distinct.<sup>68</sup> That is, we cannot understand them apart from their relations and we cannot comprehend their relationships apart from their individuality. Based on this paradigm, Moltmann regards the Trinity as a

---

<sup>64</sup> *GC*, 16.

<sup>65</sup> "Ever since Hegel in particular, the Christian Trinity has tended to be represented in terms belonging to the general concept of the absolute subject: *one subject – three modes of being*." *TKG*, 17 (Italics author).

<sup>66</sup> *ET*, 321 (Italics author).

<sup>67</sup> *ET*, 318-319 (Italics author).

<sup>68</sup> "These are two aspects which have to be distinguished from one another. The trinitarian Persons *subsist* in the common divine nature; they *exist* in their relations to one another." *TKG*, 173 (Italics author).

‘Social Trinity’,<sup>69</sup> with relationship becoming the primal defining characteristic of the Trinity. God being a Social Trinity, Volf states, is “one of the basic insights in Jürgen Moltmann’s doctrine of the Trinity.”<sup>70</sup>

The idea of interpenetration has a close affinity to our earlier discussion of *theosis*,<sup>71</sup> and some of the same metaphors apply. A helpful analogy for interpenetration is that of a red-hot iron, where it is difficult to distinguish between what is heat and what is iron. Another metaphor Moltmann cites is that of Moses and the burning bush, wherein the presence of God burns the bush but the bush is not consumed.<sup>72</sup> The Persons of the Trinity exist in this manner – intricately related to such a degree that they exist within each other while never overpowering the other.<sup>73</sup>

Moltmann believes that *perichoresis* is the “the only conceivable *trinitarian concept of the unity* of the triune God, because it combines threeness and oneness in such a way that they cannot be reduced to each other, so that both the danger of modalism and the danger of ‘tritheism’ are excluded.”<sup>74</sup> *Perichoresis* allows the person to understand God as a living fellowship, three Persons existing “in the unity of their tri-unity.”<sup>75</sup> The concept of Trinity does not cloud the revelation of God in philosophical abstraction, but rather reveals a God who is relation and in whom there “is the mutuality and the reciprocity of love.”<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> *HG*, 106.

<sup>70</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 205.

<sup>71</sup> See chapter 4.

<sup>72</sup> *ET*, 316.

<sup>73</sup> It is beyond the scope of this research to detail how Moltmann addresses the questions that this concept of the perichoretic Trinity raises, such as questions of procession, the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity, and relation of the person to the Trinity. In brief, Moltmann responds to the idea of procession by affirming that the Son *and* the Spirit both proceed from the Father. “The Father breathes out the eternal Spirit in the presence of the Son. The Son and the Spirit – if we keep the image of Word and Breath – proceed simultaneously from the Father.” *SL*, 72. See also *TKG*, 169-170. From this position, Moltmann clearly speaks to the idea of the Father as the source of the Godhead, even going so far as to talk about the ‘monarchy’ of the Father. Yet, he will only allow this descriptor of ‘monarch’ to be considered when regarding the constitution of the Trinity. Within the life of the Trinity, one can only talk about the perichoretic unity of the Trinity, any discussion of monarch ‘has no validity’. *TKG*, 176; *ET*, 317. Randall Otto appears to miss this distinction and claims that Moltmann’s stress on the unity of Trinity denies any ontological basis to the Godhead. Randall Otto, “The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54:1 (2001), 372-373. Moltmann asserts that God the Father is the foundation of the Trinity; however, the unity of the Trinity is a defining characteristic of the Trinity’s inner life. *TKG*, 177. It is the Trinity’s unity, not an ontology of Divine Being, which must be the primary focus. Extrapolating from this, Moltmann states that there is little distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity. He believes (referencing Karl Rahner’s well-known axiom) that the distinctions merge (*CG*, 240) and that, in the end, there is no real need for such distinction since “the triune God loves the world with the very same love that he himself is.” *TKG*, 151 (Italics author). For a highly negative appraisal of this position see Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, chapter 7. For Moltmann’s view of how the person relates to the perichoretic Trinity see, pp. 163-164.

<sup>74</sup> *ET*, 322 (Italics author).

<sup>75</sup> *TKG*, 175.

<sup>76</sup> *GC*, 17.



(b) *The 'Broad Place' of the Trinity*

The relationship of 'space' and 'freedom', which is a critical concern in Moltmann's theology of creation, is also evident in his development of *perichoresis*. He asserts that the necessity of 'space' for freedom not only applies to the created order, but also to the Trinity. "For living beings, there is no freedom without free spaces in their social life. In a transferred sense, that is also true for the divine Persons in their perichoresis."<sup>77</sup> By each Person making "himself 'inhabitable' for the two others,"<sup>78</sup> the trinitarian nature creates freedom. Hence we can say that God's freedom derives not only from God being God, but we can also talk about God's freedom being due, in part, to the very nature of the Trinity. For in the unity of the Trinity we can witness the freedom of the Trinity. This type of unifying freedom, what Moltmann refers to as the 'broad place' within the Trinity, also has direct implications for the created order.

As we will see in our discussion of the Spirit, when the Spirit dwells within the person, the person, in a qualified way, dwells with God. For the human to dwell with God through the Spirit, is to experience this 'broad place' of the Trinity and in so doing the person experiences the freedom made possible by this 'space'.<sup>79</sup> This freedom not only applies to the individual human, but also to the community striving to walk with God.

The open space of the perichoretic community of the triune God is the divine living space of the church. In the community of Christ and in the energies of the life-giving Spirit we experience God as *the broad place* which surrounds us from every side and brings us to the free unfolding of new life.<sup>80</sup>

Hence Moltmann contends that the nature of trinitarian life creates a potential for freedom. The fact that God as Trinity exists in freedom through the perichoretic community does not instantly grant freedom to the created order. But, if persons and community accept the gift of freedom God grants through the Son and the Spirit, the trinitarian nature will become a place for that freedom to be truly experienced. Thus we see the trinitarian nature as the potentiality for freedom as a second factor in Moltmann's theology of freedom.

---

<sup>77</sup> *ET*, 318.

<sup>78</sup> *ET*, 318-319.

<sup>79</sup> *SL*, 161.

<sup>80</sup> *ET*, 330 (Italics author).

### 3. *The Passion of the Father*

Moltmann recounts that Dietrich Bonhoeffer, while in his Gestapo cell, “discovered that ‘only the suffering God can help’. Christ helps not by virtue of his omnipotence but by virtue of his suffering.”<sup>81</sup> An essential idea for Moltmann’s thought on freedom is that the ‘suffering God’ not only applies to the Son, but also to the Father.

The passion of the Father is ultimately revealed in the cross – for as the Son suffers on the cross, the Father suffers the pains of the cross as well; albeit in a different way. Jesus suffers the pains of physical torment, death, and abandonment, whereas the Father suffers the grief of watching the Son suffer and die and the loss of his son.<sup>82</sup> The passionate Father was not an unaffected bystander in the passion of Christ.<sup>83</sup>

The ‘active’ suffering of the Father reveals a God who will suffer for the sake of love. The passion of the Father shows how far the Father will go to set the created order free. Hence in the concept of the passionate Father, Moltmann finds part of the answer to the classic quandary that if God is ‘almighty’ or ‘omnipotent’ then human freedom is abolished. God’s divinity does not overwhelm creation, not only because God creates ‘space’ for creation to occur, but also because God is willing to suffer to allow creation the freedom to mature and develop into what God intends.

Moltmann’s thought here does not diminish the power and wonder of who God is. God is still the ‘Almighty God’, but as we have already seen, God’s pathos leads Moltmann to radically reconfigure what is meant when God is described as ‘Almighty’.<sup>84</sup> He still considers God Almighty, but ‘Almighty’ is redefined in light of the cross. This contrasts with traditional formulations where the term ‘Almighty’ is understood in light of God’s power or sovereignty.

As the Father of Jesus Christ, he is almighty because he exposes himself to the experience of suffering, pain, helplessness and death. But what he *is* is not almighty

---

<sup>81</sup> *GSS*, 183.

<sup>82</sup> *CG*, 243.

<sup>83</sup> *CG*, 190. It is acknowledged that one of the difficulties with Moltmann’s thought on God’s passibility occurs with the distinction between the suffering of an individual Person of the Trinity and God as the triune God. Thus in this quote from *CG* I contend that ‘God’ refers to the suffering of the Father, as opposed to the suffering of the entire Trinity. When his thought on passibility, especially in *CG* and *TKG*, is broadly considered we can see that he distinguishes between the sufferings of the trinitarian Persons, but if one only considers discrete passages, confusion may arise.

<sup>84</sup> “Ever since the Renaissance, the understanding of God in Western Europe has been increasingly one-sided: God is ‘the Almighty’. *Omnipotence* has been considered the pre-eminent attribute of his divinity.” *GSS*, 98 (Italics author).

power; what he *is* is love. It is his passionate, passible love that is almighty, nothing else.<sup>85</sup>

Moltmann's description of God as Almighty, then, is not only based on God's love, but it is also based on what he sees as the corollary of God's love, the ability to suffer.

Extrapolating from this leads to a re-consideration of God's omnipotence in a way that is congruous with the freedom that God gifts to the created order. Moltmann considers God's omnipotence to be his suffering love.<sup>86</sup> Citing the work of C. E. Rolt, he observes, "The sole omnipotence which God possesses is the almighty power of suffering love. It is this that he reveals in Christ."<sup>87</sup> God's omnipotence, considered from the perspective of the cross, is defined by God being able to suffer for, *and with*, the created order and still be God, that is, God's suffering does *not* negate the fact that in the end God's will "will be done on earth as it is in heaven."<sup>88</sup>

Thus, for Moltmann, the 'active' suffering of the Father makes a significant contribution to the gifting of freedom and is the third factor in his theology of freedom. Through the suffering of the Father, the potential for freedom is preserved. God's being does not overwhelm humanity through force, but enables the created order to be free through the

---

<sup>85</sup> *TKG*, 197 (Italics author).

<sup>86</sup> As with the term 'monotheism', the term 'omnipotence' also has a decidedly negative connotation within Moltmann's work. He does not want to ascribe to God the characteristic of omnipotence if it is defined as '*all-powerful*' and leads to the conclusion that God can feel no sorrow or pain. "Finally, a God who is only omnipotent is in himself an incomplete being, for he cannot experience helplessness and powerlessness. Omnipotence can indeed be longed for and worshipped by helpless men, but omnipotence is never loved; it is only feared. What sort of being, then, would be a God who was only 'almighty'? He would be a being without experience, a being without destiny and a being who is loved by no one." *CG*, 223. Believing God to have 'absolute power' to do as God pleases "is hardly appropriate for the God who is love." *TKG*, 54.

<sup>87</sup> *TKG*, 31. Moltmann's opposition to popular understandings of terms such as 'almighty' and 'omnipotent', as well as his proposal for passibility, are carried forward in his treatment of theodicy. Moltmann follows Metz, in stating that there can be no Christian theodicy. "To want to justify God in the face of 'the pit' and to seek a meaning in that appalling event would be blasphemy." *GSS*, 182. Therefore, there can be no answer to the 'why' question, but, significantly, nor can the question be forgotten. *GSS*, 172. Theodicy is the 'open' question: "no one can answer the theodicy question in this world, and no one can get rid of it." *TKG*, 49. Moltmann believes it to be the task of faith and theology to help humanity live with the open wound that results from the presence of evil in the world. The only way to respond to 'protest' atheism "is through a theology of the cross which understands God as the suffering God in the suffering of Christ and which cries out with the godforsaken God, 'My God, why have you forsaken me?'" For this theology, God and suffering are no longer contradictions, as in theism and atheism, but God's being is in suffering and the suffering is in God's being itself, because God is love." *CG*, 227. One of the key ways in which Moltmann responds to the theodicy question is with his proposal for a 'solidarity Christology': a position that seeks to acknowledge God's love while also recognizing the tragic reality of suffering within history. His goal is not to reduce God to either a bystander or a causal agent, or to diminish the experience of pain felt by creation, but to demonstrate that God is a participant in suffering (hence the term 'solidarity') through, and in Christ, and is also the liberator by the power of the resurrection and the hope of the *Basileia* to come. *SL*, 130, 131.

<sup>88</sup> Matt. 6: 10. Within this thought the theology of the suffering God takes precedence over the theology of the God who is 'Wholly Other'. *TKG*, 35.

Father's 'almighty' suffering love. Consequently, humanity is able to find the space to 'be' within a relationship with the triune God.

#### 4. *The Son*

Even though God's creative activity engenders a potential for freedom by creating space, the reality is that this 'space' (the created order) is corrupted, which makes talk of this 'potential' problematic.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, part of God's gifting of freedom is not only creating the potential for freedom, but also liberating the created order *from* that which enslaves. Liberation occurs primarily through the efficacies of the Son.

At the heart of Moltmann's theology of freedom is the activity of the Son. Through Jesus Christ, the person and the created order are "set free for freedom."<sup>90</sup> The Incarnation, the life Jesus lived, the crucifixion, and resurrection are all part of how Jesus frees the person and the created order from the sin that binds and the oppressive forces that enslave.

The Incarnation demonstrates God's love as Christ willingly enters "into the limited, finite situation" of humanity and becomes the "human God."<sup>91</sup> Moltmann's thought here is well-known: freedom is gifted to creation through the life Jesus lived, his inauguration of the kingdom, and, ultimately, his becoming the 'crucified God'.<sup>92</sup>

If God's being is manifest in the passion and the death of Jesus, through Jesus' suffering and death 'for us' and for our salvation, he is known by that faith which is called freedom. The God of freedom, the true God, is therefore not recognized by his power and glory in the world and in the history of the world, but through his helplessness and his death on the scandal of the cross of Jesus.<sup>93</sup>

To have faith in and a relationship with this God results in freedom for creation. The cross proclaims the "human God who is freedom and love."<sup>94</sup> The scandal of the cross is that Jesus is abandoned by God; Jesus, God Incarnate, becomes truly God-forsaken,<sup>95</sup> and in so doing becomes, "the most miserable of all 'the damned of this earth'."<sup>96</sup> The gift of salvation and the freedom it offers comes at a great price.

---

<sup>89</sup> We will address the issue of alienation from God in the section below on 'freedom within the created order'.

<sup>90</sup> Gal. 5: 1.

<sup>91</sup> *TKG*, 118.

<sup>92</sup> "And it is here, in the theology of the mysticism of the cross in the late Middle Ages, that we first hear the monstrous phrase 'the crucified God', which Luther then took up." *CG*, 47.

<sup>93</sup> *CG*, 195.

<sup>94</sup> *CG*, 196.

<sup>95</sup> *CG*, 149.

<sup>96</sup> *TKG*, 77.

### A. *Bearer of Sin*

To set the created order free so that relationship with God can be restored, Christ hangs on the cross for us. Moltmann forcefully asserts that whatever else is said about the cross, what cannot be ignored is that through the pain and forsakenness of the cross, humanity is healed.<sup>97</sup> The gift of freedom flows through the pain of the cross. “On the cross hangs the Son of God, forsaken, cursed and damned. He hangs there ‘for us’, so that we might have peace: through his wounds we are healed.”<sup>98</sup>

Even though the cross was a form of civil justice, the cross has nothing to do with a divine justice that could be construed as retribution or an appeasing of wrath, according to Moltmann.<sup>99</sup> Jesus goes to the cross out of love, his love for God and God’s love for creation.<sup>100</sup> The cross proclaims a God who will forsake the Son to provide atonement for the world, an atonement that makes relationship with God possible. For it is only God who can “atone by ‘bearing’ the sins of the people and taking away the burden of them.”<sup>101</sup> Without the cross the created order could not enter into relationship with God – the corrupted nature of creation would remain and slavery to sin and evil forces would be the reality of the human’s existence.

### B. *Solidarity*

The world is not destined for slavery, however, because God does intervene through the cross. Jesus encounters our “world locked up in guilt and death”<sup>102</sup> and overcomes by entering “into the limited, finite situation of man. Not only does he enter into it, descend into it, but he also accepts and embraces the whole of human existence with his being.”<sup>103</sup> This is a crucial step for Moltmann’s thought on freedom. If, as Moltmann claims, Christ is the center for a free humanity and “Lord of the kingdom of liberty,”<sup>104</sup> it is not without significance that this liberation occurs through sacrifice and in solidarity with the sufferers of

---

<sup>97</sup> *CG*, 46.

<sup>98</sup> *SL*, 136. Although the cross represents God’s love for the world, there are still ‘political’ implications that must be remembered. Jesus died as a criminal who had a pronounced effect on the society of his day; his death, then, held both religious and political significance. “This is shown by the effect that the crucified man from Nazareth ultimately had upon the Roman Empire in the life of early Christianity. The worship of such a ‘crucified God’ contained a strictly political significance which cannot be sublimated into the religious sphere.” *CG*, 144. These political implications will be addressed when we consider what Moltmann believes freedom to be ‘for’.

<sup>99</sup> *SL*, 135.

<sup>100</sup> The cross is not only for those who will follow, but also for God’s enemies. *CG*, 249.

<sup>101</sup> *ET*, 260.

<sup>102</sup> *RRF*, 52.

<sup>103</sup> *CG*, 276.

<sup>104</sup> *TKG*, 112.

corruption and oppression.<sup>105</sup> By focusing on the cross and the God-forsakenness of Christ, Moltmann seeks to strike down any ideas of the ‘Almighty God’ who seeks to impose his will through divine *fiat*. Instead we have a God who atones and delivers through crucifixion, suffering, and ultimately, through resurrection. Therefore, “It follows that the freedom of God comes to earth not through crowns, that is to say, the struggle for power, but through love and solidarity with the powerless.”<sup>106</sup>

The ultimate expression of God’s love and solidarity with the powerless is revealed on the cross, where “all the depths and abysses of human history” are to be found.<sup>107</sup> Christ descends into the depths of suffering and walks with humanity in darkness; there is no darkness too great that can separate God from those in need of God’s deliverance. “Christ experiences death and hell in solitude. His followers experience it in his company.”<sup>108</sup> This means that Christ is the ‘personal representative’<sup>109</sup> who bears the sin and grief of the world. By his bearing the guilt of humanity and descending into the darkest recesses of the created order, humanity can find “fellowship with Jesus the brother.”<sup>110</sup> It is this fellowship with Christ that “opens up God’s sphere for the whole of man and for all men.”<sup>111</sup>

### C. *The Crucified and Resurrected Liberator*

As Christ bears the sins of the world and walks with people in the darkness of oppression, he liberates by breaking the ultimate powers of oppression – sin, law, and death – through his resurrection.<sup>112</sup> Christ is not only able to empathize with the plight of humanity; Christ is able to free women and men from the forces that enslave.<sup>113</sup> We will examine the multiple ways Christ liberates in a following section – at this point our focus is on the ‘agent’ of liberation, the ‘Crucified Liberator’.<sup>114</sup>

The resurrection of the crucified Jesus is a key component of Moltmann’s thought on freedom. Ignoring this aspect of his thought can lead one to falsely assume that liberation

---

<sup>105</sup> “But God is already so present that he dwells among the victims and sufferers, comforting them through his eternal companionship.” *GSS*, 185.

<sup>106</sup> *RRF*, 68.

<sup>107</sup> *CG*, 246.

<sup>108</sup> *CG*, 263.

<sup>109</sup> “Understood as a substitution, representation alienates men. But personal representation has within itself an element of liberation. It offers not only a chance to shift responsibility for oneself, but also liberation from impossible burdens and from solitude.” *CG*, 263.

<sup>110</sup> *TKG*, 121; *TKG*, 21.

<sup>111</sup> *CG*, 276.

<sup>112</sup> Moltmann identifies “sin, law and death” as “the great godless powers of this world.” *GSS*, 198.

<sup>113</sup> *SL*, 77.

<sup>114</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, “Liberation in the Light of Hope,” trans. M. D. Meeks, *The Ecumenical Review* 36:3 (July 1974), 422.

occurs only through God experientially understanding human suffering.<sup>115</sup> While this is important, Moltmann sees the Resurrection as the event that breaks the foundation of oppressive powers. By bearing the sins of the world, being abandoned by God, and then being raised to new life, Christ is able to ‘unburden’ the person. As the resurrected Lord, Jesus has the power to set the person free from all that constrains and enslaves.<sup>116</sup> The ‘ground’ of human freedom is the cross, Moltmann states, and the ‘power’ of our human freedom is the resurrection.<sup>117</sup> Thus, God is able to suffer with humanity *and* God is able to free humanity from their suffering. Although the full scope of this liberation will not be experienced until the *Basileia*, through the Spirit, Christ’s liberative work is an ongoing reality within the created order.

As we shall see when examining freedom within the created order, Moltmann’s understanding of Jesus’ liberation is comprehensive. His ministry, passion, and resurrection are concerned with any forces, be they internal (sin, illness, etc.) or external (political, economic, societal, etc.) that would oppress and alienate the person from God, from one another, and from self. The work of Jesus as liberator can be seen in the Gospels, where Moltmann observes, “Jesus is believed in as the Messiah of freedom because he sets sinners free through his word and liberates the sick by his wondrous works. . . . His suffering works as the unburdening of man in order to set man free.”<sup>118</sup> The earthly ministry of Christ was a ministry of liberation; the present ministry of Christ remains a ministry of liberation and is the path to freedom.

To be set free through Christ’s death and resurrection creates a new horizon for the person. The person who is liberated regards the world, and what is possible in the world, from a radically new position – the forces that bind and seek to destroy life do not have the final word. Thus, the freedom Christ offers is not only a freedom ‘from’, but leads the way to being a freedom ‘for’, as the free person begins to see the potential of what a life with Christ can be. The life of faith, according to Moltmann, is a life of unbounded potential.

---

<sup>115</sup> Although there are several issues involved in Molnar’s critique of Moltmann, he does appear to miss the significance of the resurrection in Moltmann’s thought. Molnar: “Both Rahner and Barth recognized that to make suffering part of the nature of the eternal God (who existed before all worlds) would be *to make God powerless to act* as our savior (in history).” Molnar, 223 (Italics mine). The rebuttal to this criticism is that God suffers out of love and *not* weakness, and that through the Resurrection God demonstrates that God is not ‘powerless’ to deliver the created order from its oppression. If the crucifixion was the final word, then Molnar’s argument would be more persuasive .

<sup>116</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, “God Reconciles and Makes Free,” *Reformed and Presbyterian World* 31:3/4 (1970), 116.

<sup>117</sup> *HG*, 60.

<sup>118</sup> *RRF*, 68.

So faith means crossing the frontiers of the reality which is existent now, and has been determined by the past, and seeking the potentialities for life which have not yet come into being. ‘All things are possible to him who believes’; and this being so, believers become what Musil calls ‘possibility people’. Paul goes even further when, talking about believers who live from the powers of the risen Christ, he says: ‘All things are yours; and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s’ (I Cor. 3.22f).<sup>119</sup>

The freedom that is granted through Christ is the fourth factor of Moltmann’s theology of freedom. The person is liberated by Christ bearing the sins of the world, by Christ’s solidarity with those who walk in the darkness of sin and oppression, *and* by Christ overcoming the forces of oppression through the Resurrection. Hence Christ is able to lead humanity into the light of God’s love and bring the person into relationship with the triune God and others.

### 5. *The Holy Spirit*

Moltmann’s thought on the Holy Spirit is a self-described ‘holistic’ pneumatology, one that recognizes the Spirit’s pivotal presence in the Trinity and the Spirit’s life-giving power for the created order.<sup>120</sup> The person comes to know the life-giving Spirit when she encounters God. The Spirit is God’s presence within creation. It is the Spirit who ‘animates’ life, who blesses life with ‘vitality’, and makes possible the relation between creation and God.<sup>121</sup> “Everything that is, exists and lives in the unceasing inflow of the energies and potentialities of the cosmic Spirit. . . . He does not merely confront it in his transcendence; entering into it, he is also immanent in it.”<sup>122</sup> Thus the Spirit enables ‘existence’ to become ‘life’. The life of the created order – the joy and the sorrow – are known to God and the suffering God’s presence is known to creation through the Spirit, who ‘animates’ all living things.<sup>123</sup>

The importance of pneumatology for Moltmann’s thought is reflected in the number of ways in which the Spirit is reflected on throughout his work.<sup>124</sup> Although the efficacies of the Spirit are closely related to the efficacies of Christ, he also maintains that they are distinct

---

<sup>119</sup> *SL*, 115.

<sup>120</sup> *SL*, xiii.

<sup>121</sup> *SL*, 9.

<sup>122</sup> *GC*, 9.

<sup>123</sup> *GSS*, 18.

<sup>124</sup> Examples of this can be seen where Moltmann states: the Spirit is the determining subject between Jesus and Father (*SL*, 61), the Spirit maintains the integrity of the Trinity and prevents it from being a ‘binity’, which leads to monism (*SL*, 13), the Spirit bridges Christology and eschatology (*SL*, 69), the Spirit creates community (*ET*, 326; cf. *SL*, 159), and the Spirit makes possible the confession of Jesus as Lord, which inaugurates freedom (*HG*, 81).



from each other; the efficacies of the Spirit should not be considered ‘absorbed’ by those of Christ.<sup>125</sup> As affirmed by the early Church, the Spirit is a particular Person within the Trinity whose presence and work fulfils an essential function in the nature of the triune God.

The Spirit not only brings life to the created order, the Spirit is also an integral factor in granting freedom. We shall detail this by examining the Spirit as the wellspring of life and relation, and as the giver of freedom.

#### A. *The Wellspring of Life and Relation*

Life within the created order begins with the Spirit. “God the Spirit is the source, the wellspring of life (*fons vitae*) – life that is healed, freed, full, indestructible and eternal. Christ himself is ‘the resurrection and the life’ *in person*.”<sup>126</sup> Life begins with the Spirit, and, equally important, life is also restored by the Spirit – restored from sickness, oppression, and even death. “It [the Holy Spirit] is the power that raises the dead, the power of the new creation of all things; and faith is the beginning of the rebirth of human beings to new life.”<sup>127</sup>

Moltmann’s perspective on life is dependent on the concept of relation. If the human cannot live in relationship, life becomes death. “Total lack of relationship is total death. So ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’ is simply another way of describing ‘the life-giving Spirit’.”<sup>128</sup> Woven into the power of giving and restoring life, the Spirit makes life possible by being the power that can bind life together in relationship.

The fellowship of the Spirit, which enables the union of the Son with the Father, is the same fellowship which gives birth to true human community. The Spirit is the divine force that creates the “union of men and women with God and their union in God (John 17.21).”<sup>129</sup> The fellowship of the Spirit, then, is the ‘divine energy’ that makes relationship possible between all living things, and between all living things and God, and in so doing is not only the wellspring of life but also the sustainer of life.<sup>130</sup>

Life began in relation and life can only be sustained in relation.<sup>131</sup> Moltmann regards the interrelation between God and the created order, and the interrelation between living

---

<sup>125</sup> *SL*, xi. Although he wants a clear distinction between the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit, he maintains that the Holy Spirit can be considered the ‘presence of Christ’ and ‘the atoning power of Christ’. *SL*, 143.

<sup>126</sup> *ET*, 146 (Italics author).

<sup>127</sup> *SL*, 7.

<sup>128</sup> *SL*, 219.

<sup>129</sup> *TKG*, 126.

<sup>130</sup> *SL*, 143.

<sup>131</sup> *GC*, 11.

things within the created order, as foundational to the creation and continuance of life. Since the efficacy of the Spirit makes this relation possible, through the Spirit life is sustained.<sup>132</sup>

The Spirit is able to create community because it is God the Spirit who “indwells the creatures he has made, animates them, holds them in life, and leads them into the future of his kingdom.”<sup>133</sup> God’s presence does not overwhelm the created order; God’s Spirit is one of mutuality, which can bring together diversity and bind it together in love.<sup>134</sup> The Spirit’s presence, then, is always seeking relation – between God and creation and between the living things within creation.

Admittedly, history offers numerous examples that are counter to this view. One could argue that civilizations have been built on force – military and economic might – not on the Spirit and, in this context, relationship has consisted of the ‘haves’ relating to, and controlling, the ‘have-nots.’ Moltmann would not deny this. It would be proof that true community cannot be achieved without the Spirit, and when the Spirit is ignored, community and relationship are reduced to hierarchy, control, and eventually death.

The reality of history does not alter Moltmann’s stance. The Spirit is able to overcome these forces since the Spirit is the power of resurrection, the life-giving power through which God is committed to creation.<sup>135</sup> The assurance of this commitment is found in the presence of God’s Spirit within the world and within communities – it is in the presence of the Spirit where humanity has hope.<sup>136</sup> Regardless of history, the experience of God’s Spirit opens up a new ‘all-embracing horizon’,<sup>137</sup> where it is possible to perceive “God in all things, and all things in God.”<sup>138</sup>

#### B. *The Giver of Freedom*

The Spirit, who is the wellspring of life and who sustains life, is also the Spirit that gifts freedom to the created order. As Christ has broken the forces that enslave creation, it is in the life of the Spirit where creation can begin to live in freedom. The life of the Spirit is the life of freedom, for ‘where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> *GC*, 11.

<sup>133</sup> *GC*, 14.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *GC*, 67.

<sup>136</sup> *GC*, 100.

<sup>137</sup> *SL*, 36.

<sup>138</sup> *SL*, 35.

<sup>139</sup> *SL*, 270.

Although Christ, through the cross and resurrection, has already broken the forces that enslave, creation has yet to participate in the full freedom of a restored creation. Therefore, to enter into relationship with God and experience the Spirit is to “long for liberty.”<sup>140</sup> In relation with God, the person and community can begin to see the life to come, as well as the potential for life as it now exists. Moltmann’s thought does not lead away from the reality of present day existence, but rather the promise of what is to come provides perspective to the liberation that is already being made available.

Because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the resurrection, when the human enters into relation with God through the Spirit the person is already partially participating in the ultimate freedom, the freedom over death. To experience the Spirit, therefore, is to experience the freedom over the most constraining force known to the created order, the force of death. In this experience “. . . we are possessed by a hope which sees unlimited potentialities ahead, because it looks towards God’s future. . . . This gives our own finite and limited life an infinite meaning.”<sup>141</sup> The experience with the Spirit does not obliterate the oppressive forces and unjust conditions that exist in the world, but the Spirit opens the way for God’s transformative work to begin. For, as Christ has revealed, even death cannot resist the power of God.

Consequently, the experience of the Spirit is the broadening of the person’s life, and here again we return to the correlation of space and freedom. Moltmann contends that a central way in which the Spirit liberates is by expanding the ‘living space’ for the person. By being brought into relation with God, the person’s sphere of existence is radically expanded through ‘God’s living energies’. “In the open air of the eternal Spirit, the new life unfurls. In the confidence of faith we plumb the depths of the Spirit, in love we explore its breadth, and in hope its open horizons. God’s Spirit is our space for living.”<sup>142</sup>

In experiencing this new ‘space’ the person can begin to experience the liberation from ‘extraneous rule’ while still existing within the realm where oppression exists. The Spirit’s gift of freedom is not an escape, but rather the beginning of the transformation where God will deliver the created order from all that enslaves.<sup>143</sup>

To experience *ruach* is to experience what is divine not only as a person, and not merely as a force, but also as a *space* – as the space of freedom in which the living being can unfold. That is the experience of the Spirit.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> *GC*, 68.

<sup>141</sup> *SL*, 155.

<sup>142</sup> *SL*, 161.

<sup>143</sup> *SL*, 274.

<sup>144</sup> *SL*, 43 (Italics author).

The space that is granted by the Spirit is a space formed in fellowship. Hence, in contrast to a popular Western notion of freedom, liberation does not occur when the individual exists in a space as a singular agent with no relation to others; it is the complete opposite – liberation occurs in and through relation and commitment to the ‘other’. The space required for freedom cannot be achieved by the person living life as an individual. It is only in closeness to the triune God and with others where the person can find the space to be free, a space made possible by the Spirit.<sup>145</sup> The Spirit brings the person and the community into the perichoretic unity of the Trinity, a space where true freedom is known through God’s love for all living things. Thus it is in the ‘kingdom of the Spirit’ where freedom is found and preserved.<sup>146</sup> The Spirit, then, in its life-giving energies and relationship-binding activity, forms the fifth and final factor of Moltmann’s conception of freedom.

## 6. Summary

Moltmann’s theology of freedom is a complex conception of freedom that engages various theological concerns in light of humanity’s present day existence. As we have seen, by focusing on the triune nature of God, Moltmann has developed a theology wherein the freedom for the person and community relies on five different factors: God creating space for the person to be free, the nature of the Trinity wherein the free person can exist, the Father’s willingness to suffer and let creation ‘be’, the Son redeeming the created order through the cross and resurrection, and the Spirit granting life and drawing people into relationship with God and others so that freedom can be experienced.

### §3 FREEDOM WITHIN THE CREATED ORDER

We have, thus far, examined the God who grants freedom to creation. We now turn our attention to the fundamental questions of why creation needs liberating and what this freedom means for life. In this section we will examine (1) the object of God’s liberating work, (2) the liberation *from* sin and oppression, (3) what freedom is *for*, and (4) how freedom becomes the horizon for liberated people.

---

<sup>145</sup> “To feel the closeness of the living God is to experience new vitality. To believe and sense the closeness of the risen Christ means that body and soul are lifted up by ‘the power of the resurrection.’” *SL*, 275. The importance of human community, for Moltmann, is seen in his thought on ‘open’ friendship and the *imago trinitatis*, which we will examine below.

<sup>146</sup> *TKG*, 220.

## 1. *The Object of Liberation*

God's liberating action has two interdependent foci – humanity and nature.<sup>147</sup>

Moltmann's theology of freedom seeks to establish that freedom is not merely an existential concern for the human agent, but a concern for the entire created order.

### A. *The Human*

The individual whom God desires to liberate is a union of two seemingly opposite qualities. She is a relational being who is also singular and autonomous. While these may appear antithetical, Moltmann argues that they are necessary for human development and, when held in proper balance through relation with God and others, provide the key elements for the individual to become a person.

People experience themselves in the relationships of society, and society is made up of independent people. This polarity is part of life, and keeps life tense and expectant. The Spirit of life is the Spirit of love. Love unites what is separated, and separates what is united, and in this rhythm gives life its movement.<sup>148</sup>

Through the Spirit, the individual can become 'soluble' in relationship and yet also remain 'separate' and 'autonomous'.<sup>149</sup> Moltmann believes that this bi-modal existence allows the person to become a 'determining subject',<sup>150</sup> and thus develop into the person God intends – the person becomes a 'spiritual' person.<sup>151</sup> Space forbids a detailed analysis of Moltmann's anthropology; however, we can trace certain elements of his anthropology that intersect with his thought on freedom by considering three different factors: God's image, the *imago trinitatis*, and the person's relation to the triune God. We begin with God's image.

#### (a) *God's Image*

The human as the *imago Dei* is God's creational intent. The *imago* is not a distinct characteristic *per se*, which allows the person to perform certain functions (contra Berdiaev);

---

<sup>147</sup> "The cry for freedom, however, is not just to be heard in exploited, oppressed, alienated and divided humanity. It reverberates also through *creation* itself which has suffered so senselessly from man's exploitation and oppression. Both nature and our own bodies have become foreign to us." Moltmann, "Freedom in the Light of Hope," 12.

<sup>148</sup> *SL*, 254.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *SL*, 294.

<sup>151</sup> For Moltmann, 'spiritual' denotes a 'whole' person, which encapsulates the person's spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual capabilities. "The human spirit' does not mean some higher spiritual principle [in the Pauline corpus], or some mystical summit of the soul. It means the centre of the whole personal, bodily and spiritual being – the psychosomatic totality of the person." *GC*, 101.

rather the *imago* is a mode of being that is the foundation of what it means to be a ‘person’.<sup>152</sup> Moltmann asserts that to be the *imago Dei* is to be a person in relation with God and with others. Propounding the *imago* as relation to God and others, the ‘person’ is therefore defined by relationship.<sup>153</sup>

Moltmann’s exegesis of Genesis 1 arrives at the conclusion that the *imago* was only completed with the creation of both male *and* female – neither Adam nor Eve could be said to possess the *imago* individually.<sup>154</sup> In considering their humanity in relationship to one another and to God, we see the *imago Dei*. The *imago* designates community; when humans are in relation to God and each other, the *imago* is present.

The presence of the *imago* may be God’s original intention, but the person now exists in a fallen order, so what does that mean for the *imago*? There has been little agreement within Christianity as to how the *imago* can exist in a world that is fallen, or whether it exists at all in this present world.<sup>155</sup> For Berdiaev, the *imago* remains with the person (although in a ‘dimmed’ state) by the very nature of being God’s creation; for Moltmann, the *imago* remains, not due to any inherent quality of the person, but rather because of God’s faithful presence.<sup>156</sup> Through God’s grace the *imago* may be fulfilled as people enter into relationship with God *and* with others. The importance of this last point cannot be overlooked. It must be remembered that, for Moltmann, the *imago* can only be achieved through God’s grace and its development is dependent on relationship with both God *and* other humans.

We can see, then, that Moltmann’s view of the person possesses not only a vertical perspective (the person’s relation with God) but also a horizontal perspective (the person’s relation with others).<sup>157</sup> These two perspectives are interdependent, for life is dependent on

---

<sup>152</sup> Cf. the perspective of Stanley Grenz: “From Augustine to Maslow, from Montaigne to Schopenhauer, thinkers in the Western tradition have pursued the age-old quest for personal identity by attempting to construct the self. From the patristic era to the present, Christian theologians have responded to the challenge posed by this search for an identity-producing self by appealing to the biblical concept of the *imago dei*.” Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 141.

<sup>153</sup> *GC*, 220.

<sup>154</sup> *SL*, 94.

<sup>155</sup> Grenz: “Although the *imago dei* has played a crucial role in the construction of a Christian anthropology through the history of the church, exegetes and theologians have not been in agreement as to what the concept entails. Not only are scholars divided as to the meaning of the term in scripture, but also historians do not even agree as to how many distinctive understandings of the divine image have come to be proposed in the Christian tradition.” Grenz, 141-142. See also Ray Anderson, *On Being Human* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 1982), 220-221.

<sup>156</sup> *GC*, 232-233. See also *ET*, 158.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. the comments of the Orthodox theologian, Kallistos Ware: “The fact that human persons are created in the image of God signifies first and foremost an orientation, a direction, a relationship. The orientation is primarily vertical – a relationship with God. If we are in God’s image, this means that human

both horizontal and vertical relationships.<sup>158</sup> This position is what Moltmann refers to as the ‘social’ concept of the person. An isolated individual is not a ‘person’; a person is a human who lives in relation with others.<sup>159</sup> As Moltmann states, “We say ‘I am because you are: you are because I am’ . . . .”<sup>160</sup>

To describe how people relate to one another and to God within the context of a ‘social’ model, Moltmann uses the concept of ‘open friendship’. Friendship plays a crucial role in his thought and it fulfils various roles: friendship is what affirms the person, it creates space for freedom, it also creates the space for love, it confers respect, and thus “the future of the world will belong to *open friendship*.”<sup>161</sup> Moltmann conceives of ‘open friendship’ as a modality wherein people can be in relation with one another and still maintain a high degree of autonomy.

Joy Ann McDougall describes Moltmann’s view of friendship as being “based on a dynamic of self-donation and self-differentiation”<sup>162</sup> – the person is open, vulnerable and dependent upon others, while maintaining a clear sense of individuality. McDougall goes on to observe that “‘open friendship’ is predicated upon perfect reciprocity and equality among human beings. A person neither appropriates nor possesses another, nor do the two become subject to one another.”<sup>163</sup> Moltmann’s ‘open friendship’ is the means by which he conceives that liberated people can be committed to one another in relationships without being ‘subject’ (McDougall) to each other. Thus, it is not surprising to see him use Hegel’s idea of friendship as ‘the concrete concept of freedom’.<sup>164</sup>

It is at this point in discussing ‘relationship’ and ‘friendship’ that we find the correlation between the *imago Dei* and freedom. Moltmann maintains that freedom is enriched when it receives the mutual help of others.<sup>165</sup> Thus to be in relation with the other

---

personhood cannot be defined and understood simply in terms of itself, as a self-contained, autonomous entity; I do not contain the meaning of selfhood exclusively within myself. Only when I see myself in relationship with God does my personhood acquire authentic meaning; without God I am unintelligible. . . . But this vertical, God-related orientation implies also, in the second place, a horizontal orientation: to be human is to be in relationship with our fellow humans.” Kallistos Ware, “‘In the Image and Likeness’: The Uniqueness of the Human Person,” in John T. Chirban, ed., *Personhood: Orthodox Christianity and the Connection Between Body, Mind, and Soul* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1996.), 3.

<sup>158</sup> See also *SL*, 255-259.

<sup>159</sup> “The modern concept of person is *the social concept*: ‘person’ no longer means the all-sufficing, self-sufficient, universal and reflective figure portrayed in the formative ideal of German classicism from Goethe to Karl Marx.” *SL*, 251 (Italics author).

<sup>160</sup> *SL*, 25.

<sup>161</sup> *SL*, 257 (Italics author).

<sup>162</sup> Joy Ann McDougall, “The Return of Trinitarian Praxis? Moltmann on the Trinity and the Christian Life,” *The Journal of Religion* (2003), 196.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>164</sup> *TKG*, 221.

<sup>165</sup> *HG*, 64.

(i.e. to be the *imago*) is to be open to mutual help. This then means that a greater range of freedom becomes possible, which in turns means a greater development of personhood is also possible. He regards this type of freedom as ‘communicative freedom’ – a freedom that can grow in “the intersubjective relationships in which and from which the human subjects live.”<sup>166</sup> Consequently the maturing of ‘intersubjective’ relations produces the maturation of freedom, which in turn produces a maturation of the person.

(b) *The Imago Trinitatis*

The emphasis on *imago Dei* as relation is yet another important element within Moltmann’s thought on freedom. If freedom is only understood as domination, then God’s liberation of the individual can only lead to ‘individualism’ (i.e. the person as ‘master’ of self) – a position that both Moltmann and Berdiaev hold as antithetical to Christianity. Moltmann’s emphasis on the *imago Dei* seeks to expound freedom as being relationally dependent if freedom is to be fully experienced.

God liberates the individual so that she may be free to develop into what God has created her to be – an *imago Dei*. God’s liberation is a not an escape from the others and the world, rather God liberates in order that the person may exist in relation with God and the world around her. Thus the liberation of the person is understood within the context of mutuality and indwelling as opposed to domination and obedience.

Moltmann develops this thought further, believing that the traditional understanding of God’s image does not adequately described the freed person – the person is more than the *imago Dei*. The person who is freed is a human who exists in relation with the triune God and others; they are not only the image of God but the image of community – the community of God (Trinity) as well as the community of people who make the individual’s life possible. The liberated person who is free and is in relation with God and others becomes an *imago trinitatis*.<sup>167</sup>

(c) *The Person’s Relation to the Trinity*

The potential to be the *imago trinitatis* is found in God’s liberating acts carried out through the Son and the Spirit and grounded in the perichoretic nature of the Trinity.

---

<sup>166</sup> GSS, 158.

<sup>167</sup> “From one another, with one another, and in one another human beings discover that mirror of the Godhead which is called *imago Dei*, and which is in actual truth *imago Trinitatis*.” SL, 221. Moltmann will go on to expand this *imago* image, also describing the person as the *imago Christi* and *imago mundi*. Space forbids a detailed examination of Moltmann’s thought on the *imago*. For further detail see GC, chapter 9 – ‘God’s Image in Creation: Human Beings’ and SL, 94, 175, 221.



Perichoresis not only reveals a God who is relation, but also demonstrates how this Triune God relates to the world *and* how the world relates to God.<sup>168</sup> The relationship between the person and God is not based on ‘lordship’, ‘sovereignty’, or ‘obedience’. What God desires is a relationship based on God being within the person and the person being within God; in other words, a relationship based on abiding in love freely given and freely received.<sup>169</sup> Moltmann acknowledges that the human cannot relate to God in the same way as the three Persons of the Trinity interrelate, but the person can still dwell with God in a ‘creaturely’ way<sup>170</sup> that is made possible through God’s grace.<sup>171</sup> God’s goal is the restoration of all things; a creation that corresponds to God and dwells with God.<sup>172</sup>

The *telos* of this relationship is what Moltmann calls a “realistic divinization.” He writes,

Life in communion with Christ is full life in the trinitarian situation of God. . . . The human God who encounters man in the crucified Christ thus involves man in a realistic divinization (*theosis*). Therefore in communion with Christ it can truly be said that men live *in God* and *from God*, ‘that they live, move and have their being in him’ (Acts 17.28).<sup>173</sup>

Moltmann’s provocative idea of ‘realistic divinization’ follows the thought of the Eastern Church. He is attempting to establish that to be in communion with the triune God is an intimate relationship wherein the person dwells *with* God and God dwells *with* the person.

Thus we see that, according to Moltmann, God’s liberating actions, which are rooted in God’s love and occur through God’s suffering, have a specific focus – that the individual may become a person who dwells with God and with others. God’s liberation, however, not only applies to humanity, but also to the created order. Freedom is not simply an existential or societal concern, but a concern for all living things.

## B. *Nature*

The second object of God’s liberating action is nature. For nature is, according to Moltmann, “. . . the material promise of glory, being full of the cyphers and signs of the

---

<sup>168</sup> “Our starting point here is that all relationships which are analogous to God reflect the primal, reciprocal indwelling and mutual interpenetration of the trinitarian perichoresis: God *in* the world and the world *in* God; heaven and earth *in* the kingdom of God, pervaded by his glory; soul and body united *in* the life-giving Spirit to a human whole; woman and man *in* the kingdom of unconditional and unconditioned love, freed to be true and complete human beings. There is no such thing as solitary life.” *GC*, 17 (Italics author).

<sup>169</sup> *ET*, 323.

<sup>170</sup> *ET*, 311.

<sup>171</sup> *ET*, 325.

<sup>172</sup> *SL*, 234.

<sup>173</sup> *CG*, 277 (Italics author).

beauty to come.”<sup>174</sup> Nature as God’s creation reveals ‘traces of God’ and created things are the ‘real promises’ of the kingdom to come.<sup>175</sup> Hence faith in a God who is non-material does not mean that the material world should be ignored.

Nature may be a ‘cypher’ and a ‘sign’, but it is also corrupted. A natural world that is corrupted is a world that does not exist as God originally intended; creation is enslaved and ‘hopes’ for liberty.<sup>176</sup> One aspect of this enslavement is found in the reality that God does not fully dwell within the world. There is a separation between God and nature that will not be restored till the *Basileia*. Another form of enslavement is found in the human domination and exploitation of nature.<sup>177</sup> This exploitation occurs when humanity only understands freedom as being ‘freedom of domination’.<sup>178</sup> It is a form of freedom that will only degrade and lead to death, as is readily witnessed in the long history of human interaction with nature.

God desires that the created order be liberated. One way this liberation will occur is when God restores all things. Another way this liberation will occur is through humanity’s relation with God, others, *and* nature. The love of God, Moltmann believes, is a love for all living things.<sup>179</sup> As humans come to understand God’s creational intent and God’s presence with all living things, those who love God should become active participants in the liberation of the created order, especially in the areas where enslavement is a direct result of human exploitation. This means that Christians and Christian theology should develop a clear ecological focus in outlook and praxis.

Therefore, we see that Moltmann’s theology of freedom maintains that God seeks to liberate both the person and the world. To examine Moltmann’s conception of freedom within the created order, we begin with his ‘negative’ view of freedom, which explores how God frees the person *from* that which oppresses. In what follows we will focus primarily on the liberation of the human, although we will return to the liberation of nature when we address the ‘project of freedom’.

---

<sup>174</sup> *TKG*, 212. Nature can be ‘full of cyphers’ because nature is integrally linked, in Moltmann’s thought, to ‘heaven’ as well. “Theologically speaking, ‘visible’ nature cannot be adequately understood as creation unless what is in principle invisible is believed in as creation also. Theologically, knowledge of earthly reality cannot be lifted and gathered up into the assumption of a wider creation unless belief in heaven, as the other side of God’s creation, is restored.” *GC*, 39.

<sup>175</sup> *GC*, 63.

<sup>176</sup> “To understand ‘nature’ as creation therefore means discerning ‘nature’ as the enslaved creation that hopes for liberty.” *GC*, 39.

<sup>177</sup> *GC*, 20-21.

<sup>178</sup> *SL*, 119.

<sup>179</sup> *SL*, 172.

## 2. Freedom 'From'

Freedom, as Moltmann envisages it, is clearly *not* common to vast segments of humanity. Although it is possible to cite numerous examples as to why this occurs, at the base of all of these freedom-denying forces is the corrupted nature of the creation.<sup>180</sup> The fallenness of creation means that freedom is highly problematic. Any discussion of freedom, then, for Moltmann, must begin with the idea of being liberated *from*. Within his thought there are two main concerns, which are related, but each receive separate attention – freedom from sin and freedom from oppression (both personal and societal oppression).

### A. Freedom from Sin

Moltmann's conception of being freed from sin is a multi-faceted view that seeks to address various concerns. With regard to the individual he begins his thought with the orthodox understanding of sin as rebellion and alienation. As we have already seen, the efficacies of the Son and the Spirit free the person from sin; however, the state of the individual before this redeeming work is one of alienation, with the alienated person being seen as 'dehumanized'.<sup>181</sup> An individual in this state exists in the 'agony' of searching for himself<sup>182</sup> and until he sees himself in light of God's creative love, he remains lost within "inhuman definitions" and "idolized assertions," which is the result of sin on an existential and societal level.<sup>183</sup> In this state of alienation the individual is turned away from God and is therefore turned away from the source of freedom and life. "The person who loses sight of God and puts something else in his heart instead of God becomes *homo incurvatus in se*, to use Luther's phrase – he becomes turned in on himself."<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> It is acknowledged that Moltmann has a very distinctive understanding of 'fallenness'. For further detail, see the following section on 'freedom from sin' and his concern about the Protestant doctrine of justification.

<sup>181</sup> *CG*, 70. When the human regards himself as the center of existence, his humanity, which is predicated upon relationship, becomes compromised. "Inhuman is the man who abandons his humanity and makes himself the proud and despairing God of himself and his neighbour. He is afraid of himself and of his fellowmen. He can no longer love. He loves only himself." Moltmann, "God Reconciles and Makes Free," 108. That said, in light of Church history, the terminology of 'inhuman' and 'dehumanized' is highly problematic. Moltmann does not regard individuals who are not Christian as somehow less human than the Christian. All of humanity is deserving of respect and dignity. Yet, his language here could certainly lead to the misunderstanding that outside of relationship with God a human can be regarded as somehow 'less than human' (a thought Moltmann would clearly *not* support). Clearly a more appropriate term could be used by Moltmann to convey his thought that for humanity to mature, relationship is required and that all of life must be respected.

<sup>182</sup> *RRF*, 101.

<sup>183</sup> *CG*, 72.

<sup>184</sup> *SL*, 91.

Yet all is not lost, for life can be restored through Christ, who bears the sins of the world<sup>185</sup>, and by the Spirit's ability to convict people of sin. Moltmann propounds:

It is 'the Spirit of truth' who convinces the world of its sins (John 16.7f.), puts the unjust world to rights, and turns believers, from being the slaves and victims of sin, into free servants of the divine justice and righteousness which leads to eternal life in this world and the next (Rom. 6.13ff., 22).<sup>186</sup>

God's redeeming work means that the person can begin to experience the liberation from the godless powers of this world – sin and death.<sup>187</sup> In an interesting turn of phrase, Moltmann states that to be reconciled and free is to be 'wholly godless'.<sup>188</sup> By this he means that the liberated person rejects *self*-deification – since she is now free and exists in relation to God, she no longer has to try to be God.<sup>189</sup> The 'godless' person is liberated from the 'God-complex' – striving to dominate all things, which only results in isolation and death.<sup>190</sup>

Another important element to Moltmann's thought on 'sin' is his attempt to re-orient the place sin has in Protestant thought. He is responding here to what he sees as the "lopsidedness" in the "viewpoint and emphases of Reformation theology."<sup>191</sup> He does not want to diminish the importance of God justifying the sinner and forgiving sins, but he wants to assert that justification is more than forgiveness. In essence, he maintains that to be liberated from sin is a process of justification that is always moving towards 'regeneration' or 'rebirth'. He writes, "The forgiveness of sins is a backward-looking act. The forward-looking act of justification is the new creation of life, the awakening of love, and the rebirth to a living hope."<sup>192</sup> Thus in examining what it means to be freed *from* sin, sin is not the focus. The focus is the new life that is made possible by God's liberating actions, which bring the person and community into right relationship with God and others, resulting in rebirth and new life.

This is a significant point for Moltmann, for rebirth and new life not only pertain to the person's status in relation to God, but also to the world where the person lives out her 'new' life. The 'new life' that God brings about must be a new life for the community just as much as it can be a new life for the individual. Consequently, to be liberated from sin means

---

<sup>185</sup> *SL*, 134.

<sup>186</sup> *SL*, 123.

<sup>187</sup> *RRF*, 23; *SL*, 101.

<sup>188</sup> *ET*, 172.

<sup>189</sup> *CG*, 26.

<sup>190</sup> *ET*, 342.

<sup>191</sup> *SL*, 149.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

not only that the person should turn away from the former desires of his past life,<sup>193</sup> but that the person desires to work with God in breaking the oppressive and ‘sin-ful’ structures that enslave individuals and communities. God’s liberation from sin must be understood, according to Moltmann, as vital for the individual and, equally importantly, for society as well.

Here we have the final element we will highlight in Moltmann’s thought on freedom from sin. He does not consider sin to be only an individual action that contradicts God; sin is also unjust systems and structures that oppress individuals and communities and harm the created order. To be freed from ‘sin’ is not only to enter into relationship with God, but to be delivered from oppressive societal, economic, and political forces – one can be a slave to sin as well as a victim of sin. Liberation from sin, then, must always be directly related to the liberation from oppression.

#### B. *Freedom from Oppression*

While sin does oppress the individual, the liberation from sin and the liberation from oppression are two distinct, yet related, types of liberative work. This is because Moltmann wants to assert that sin is not only an act of the person (or persons), there is also the ‘sin’ of oppressive structures. Oppressive structures, which are the result of actions that are often sinful, have a ‘structural’ constitution that oppresses regardless of the person’s relation to God (the influence of liberation theology is clearly evident here). “Structural sin is sin that has taken on an independence of its own. Now sin is no longer a human act. It is a quasi-objective compulsive force dominating human beings.”<sup>194</sup>

The individual, or community, may exist in right relation to God and still be oppressed by external forces that deny their personhood and reject God’s intention for life. God’s liberating action is not only concerned with freeing the person from the sin that alienates, God is equally concerned with liberating people from the ‘sin-ful’ structures that oppress.

Thus Moltmann propounds that the cross of Christ not only frees the person from the oppression of sin that is experienced existentially, the cross of Christ seeks also to break through all the oppressive forces that enslave. The cross is God’s divine opposition to and

---

<sup>193</sup> I Peter 1: 14.

<sup>194</sup> *SL*, 139.

liberation from the ‘vicious cycles’<sup>195</sup> that only lead to death. When the person is liberated by God they are not only recipients of God’s gracious act, but are also called to be participants in God’s ongoing concern for all who are oppressed.<sup>196</sup> Therefore, ‘authentic’ Christianity, for Moltmann, is always a liberating experience, as Christ breaks “through the boundaries of our limitations” and liberates from all that enslaves, even death.<sup>197</sup>

Authentic Christianity is a freedom from sin and oppression on existential *and* societal levels. From this perspective, the liberated person can see that death is not only personal, but that it is also social and political.<sup>198</sup> So, Christian misery is not only the separation from God, it is also the misery of oppressive forces, within the realm of politics, society, and nature, which degrade the person and community.<sup>199</sup>

God’s liberation from oppression has a preferential focus – the alienated of society. Salvation history, from Israel onwards, reveals a God who is concerned with those who have been denied justice. Thus, to be freed from sin, and to be freed from oppression, are both acts that center on justice.<sup>200</sup> In the former, justice is found wherein the person delivered from sin is made righteous before God.<sup>201</sup> In the latter, the person delivered from oppression is a person who has received justice in an unjust world.

God’s preferential focus on the alienated does not mean that God’s redeeming action is exclusive. God’s desire is to redeem all, both the oppressed and the oppressors.<sup>202</sup> The cross of Christ seeks to bring all into the kingdom. God may seek to destroy the structures that oppress, but in God’s great mercy, deliverance is offered to all, even to the very authors of those structures. In so doing, God seeks the restoration of God’s image throughout the created order.<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>195</sup> *CG*, 329-335. In the cross and resurrection God overcomes the powers that oppress. *SL*, 212. Hence the cross of Christ inaugurates a kingdom that stands in stark contrast to the power structures that oppress. *CG*, 327.

<sup>196</sup> “Exodus theology is not yet resurrection theology, but resurrection theology must always include exodus theology and must again and again be embodied in acts that liberate the oppressed.” *HG*, 59.

<sup>197</sup> *HG*, 62.

<sup>198</sup> *HG*, 68.

<sup>199</sup> “What Christians call the misery of man includes, by all means, political, social, and natural misery and does not exclude these forms, as *Christianity Today* does: ‘. . . man’s problem lies in his sins against the creator, not in domination by capitalistic economic forces.’ The possibilities after which Marxists are striving to overcome this misery are also possibilities for the Christians’ struggle for freedom.” *RRF*, 78.

<sup>200</sup> *SL*, 129. See *SL*, 138-142, where Moltmann outlines how God’s righteousness can be “the creative source of justice for every rule of law which leads to lasting peace.” *SL*, 142.

<sup>201</sup> *SL*, 116.

<sup>202</sup> *CG*, 307.

<sup>203</sup> “But reconciliation and liberation through Christ are directed towards man’s destined ‘likeness’ to ‘the image of God’. That is to say, what is at stake is the fulfilment of the promise given with creation.” *TKG*, 118.

Moltmann's theology of freedom, like Berdiaev's vision of freedom, is not only a negative definition; there is also a positive definition, what Moltmann refers to as the 'project' of freedom.

### 3. *Freedom 'For'*

We have reached a critical juncture in Moltmann's thought. The person has been liberated by the triune God and delivered from sin and oppression. This person, by the very fact that they are free, is a person who exists in relation with God and others and is, therefore, on a path where the highest form of freedom may be discovered. To attain this freedom one must avoid the false claims of freedom as 'domination,' and move beyond the initial freedom found in 'communicative' freedom. If the person follows the leading of God and remains open to God's grace and Spirit, the person will find freedom as the 'creative passion for the possible'. "The definition of freedom to which Christian faith brings us goes even beyond freedom as sociality. We said that the faith of Christians is essentially the hope of resurrection. In the light of this hope, freedom is *the creative passion for the possible*."<sup>204</sup> To explore Moltmann's idea of freedom as a 'creative passion' we turn to his concept of creativity.

#### A. *Creativity*

Moltmann's conception of creativity is often framed in terms of what is 'possible' – what is yet to exist. Within his thought, creativeness can be regarded as the means by which something other than what already exists is brought into being. To create is to 'imagine' something different and act in ways which will embody what has been envisioned.<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>204</sup> *SL*, 119 (Italics author). The term 'possible' is a key term for Moltmann. He often uses the term 'possible' to describe a future event that will be qualitatively better than the present experience. Thus 'possible' becomes a trope within his work to intimate a new and qualitatively better outcome. When freedom is described as a 'creative passion for the possible,' the possible is a more just, liberating and positive outcome. Moltmann believes that creativity is the means by which the 'possible' is achieved since creativity brings about something that is new, and the 'possible' by its very nature must be new. His view on creativity tends towards a 'utopian' outlook here – 'creativity' and what is 'possible' always result in something better. The possibility that the 'possible' may not result in a positive outcome will be addressed in the next chapter and critiqued in light of Berdiaev's understanding of freedom having the potential for a tragic outcome. In this section and the passages that follow, terms such as 'possible', 'creative', 'newness', etc. should be always understood in a positive sense.

<sup>205</sup> *ET*, 176.

Creativity begins with God, whose creative activity did not end with the creation of the cosmos – God continues to create.<sup>206</sup> An example of this ongoing creative activity can be seen in God’s righteousness. Moltmann conceives of God’s righteousness as creative in that it reconciles those who are lost to God and restores hope to the hopeless.<sup>207</sup> Creativity is demonstrated in that both reconciliation and hope, which formerly did not exist in the histories of specific individuals (or communities), have now come into existence.

Human creativity is a different form of creating as compared to divine creativity, but, according to Moltmann, it is nonetheless related. He is not concerned to delve into significant detail as to how human creativity differs from God’s creative activity, nor does he explain how human creativity occurs. Human creativity, for Moltmann, does not threaten the role of God as creator; i.e. there is no inherent tension between creaturely creative activity and God’s creative activity.

This view of creativity utilizes a view which is similar to Berdiaev’s – creativity, the free person’s action, is made possible through relation with God and others.<sup>208</sup> Creativity, in this sense, is always seen in light of relationship. So while Tinsley is correct that human creativity (if it is non-relational) can lead to a ‘Promethean’ stance,<sup>209</sup> human creativity, as Moltmann conceives it, by its very nature, negates the ‘Promethean’ possibility. The person who creates is not trying to usurp God; creativity is how the person exists in relation with God.

This view is congruous with our earlier discussion on freedom, where we saw that the liberated person is freed from the ‘God-complex’ – the person is no longer seeking to be God. A person who is free and who creates isn’t concerned with the specific distinctions between the creative abilities of God and humanity. It is the relationship between God and person, rather than theoretical delimitations, which establishes the parameters of human creativity. To be a person in right relation with God and others is to be an *imago Dei* and to be an *imago* is to be called to create, since the person is the image (relation) of the God who creates. Hence the person as the *imago Dei* can create, because she is ‘rooted’ in the creative ground of the divine life.<sup>210</sup>

---

<sup>206</sup> “In this respect our underlying theological premise must be that *creation is not yet finished, and has not as yet reached its end*. In common with other forms of life and matter, the human being is involved in the open process of time.” *GC*, 196 (Italics author).

<sup>207</sup> *CG*, 178.

<sup>208</sup> *SL*, 119-120.

<sup>209</sup> See chapter 5, fn. 25.

<sup>210</sup> *GC*, 85.



This does *not* mean that the *imago* is some type of ‘faculty’ or ‘genius’ that enables creativity. Rather, as the *imago* is only evidenced in relationship, to be in God’s image, for Moltmann, is to have faith in, and relationship with, God. In this relationship God calls the liberated person to participate in God’s creative action within the created order.<sup>211</sup> “Through faith we participate in nothing more and nothing less than the creative power of God.”<sup>212</sup>

To those who would deny that God continues to create, Moltmann holds forth the cross and the resurrection. When Christ is raised from the dead, a new order is established and the powers of sin, law and death are broken. The person who is in relation with God is a person who has faith in this resurrected Lord. For Moltmann, resurrection faith is a faith in “creative liberty and a rising up in the Spirit”;<sup>213</sup> it is a faith that through God ‘all things are possible.’ This reality means that the freedom found in relation with the resurrected God is, in its highest degree, “the creative passion for the possible.”<sup>214</sup>

As human creativity is enabled through relationship with the triune God, creativity is possible within the created order because newness, or novelty, is possible. Newness, for Moltmann, is not an assertion for something that is without precedent, but rather that newness can arise within a given context.<sup>215</sup> While a completely new creative endeavor may not be possible, neither is it possible that newness cannot exist.

There are two primary examples Moltmann uses to support this claim. The first is found in the resurrection. When Christ rises from the dead, history is altered, and what is possible becomes radically reconfigured. There is a potential for newness (and hence creativity) because “the new possibilities in the world spring from the world as a possibility of the creator God.”<sup>216</sup>

The second example he uses is derived from his understanding of the future. The future, with all the potential that is found in the triune God, also means the possibility of newness. A future that contains ‘newness’ is the Christian hope. If there was no potential for newness, in Moltmann’s thought, there would be no future.<sup>217</sup> But, because of God’s power to create, newness remains – God is the power that can create the new out of the old.<sup>218</sup> Consequently, Moltmann believes that the universal Christian message of newness is,

---

<sup>211</sup> This process of creative participation with God has a specific objective, what Moltmann refers to as ‘the project of freedom’. For a discussion on this see below.

<sup>212</sup> *HG*, 61.

<sup>213</sup> *GC*, 66.

<sup>214</sup> *TKG*, 217.

<sup>215</sup> *CG*, 117-118. “A historical novelty is never totally new.” *CG*, 118.

<sup>216</sup> *CG*, 219. See also *CG*, 105.

<sup>217</sup> *RRF*, 3.

<sup>218</sup> *RRF*, 5.

“Behold, I make all things new.”<sup>219</sup> The resurrection, which opens the future to all that is dying, means newness is always possible. Therefore, to be in relation with God is to be a free and creative person who participates in this reality.<sup>220</sup>

Moltmann considers people who engage in God’s ongoing creative activity as ‘construction workers’ who have “a creative and militant hope in history.”<sup>221</sup> This ‘creative and militant hope’ is based on the belief that creating is, at its core, a liberating act. Creativity, for Moltmann, is not primarily concerned with the creation of objects (although it does not exclude this); at its core creativity is about new life and participating in the liberation of all living things.<sup>222</sup> Creativity is the means by which more just and liberating ways of existence are brought into being. Therefore, to create is to participate in God’s liberating work in novel ways that are unique to the person who creates, with the objective that the creative activity will be used to bring about freedom for those who interact with the new creation.

Therefore, the ‘creative passion for the possible’ can be understood as the highest form of freedom wherein the person and the Trinity exist in an intimate communion and the person comprehends the future as unbounded potential. The person, then, who has a ‘creative passion for the possible’ is someone who freely undertakes ‘projects’ that nurture freedom and foster liberation for others.

### B. *The ‘Project’ of Freedom*

Freedom as the ‘creative passion for the possible’ is freedom ‘turned towards’ the future. When freedom turns towards the future and seeks to realize what is possible as opposed to what already exists, freedom becomes a creative movement. This creative movement is what Moltmann terms the ‘project’ of freedom. “It [freedom] reaches out to future, for future is the unknown realm of possibilities, whereas present and past represent the familiar sphere of realities.”<sup>223</sup>

---

<sup>219</sup> *RRF*, 137. Even though Moltmann grounds his thought on human creativity in relation to who God is and God’s relation to humanity, he also recognizes that creativity has not always been recognized within Church. He writes, “This future dimension of freedom has been overlooked for a long time, because the freedom of Christian faith as participation in the ongoing creative work of God has been so long misunderstood and because, previously, religious anxiety rather than messianic hope ruled even Christianity. In truth, freedom in faith is expectant creativity.” *HG*, 66.

<sup>220</sup> “To be sure, according to the Christian faith, only Christ has yet been raised. Only in him has this future of a new being really begun, whereas we are not yet in the reality of his new being. But in faith and in hope we participate here already in the ‘power of the new world.’” *RRF*, 37.

<sup>221</sup> *RRF*, 217.

<sup>222</sup> *GC*, 208.

<sup>223</sup> *GSS*, 159.

It is a problematic task to explain what this ‘project’ entails. In a broad sense, Moltmann understands it as a hope and movement towards a ‘greater’ future.<sup>224</sup> The ‘project’ of freedom moves beyond the liberation from the realm of necessity, as the person who is liberated by God begins to see the future with God as a future of ‘limitless possibilities’.<sup>225</sup> In this context freedom becomes the creative passion for the future. “Creative passion is always fascinated by a project for the future, which is anticipated in creative imagination.”<sup>226</sup> The ‘project’ of freedom, then, is a creative initiative based on the liberated person’s engagement with God, others, and the world that imagines something greater than what already exists, either on the existential, communal, or global level.<sup>227</sup> The task is a hope-full endeavor, as the person looks towards a future where ‘God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven’. The person, therefore, in relation with God, engages a project that furthers his freedom and God’s liberating works.

The ‘project’ of freedom is an essential element for the nurture and growth of freedom within the created order. Freedom is not an object that can be grasped, nor can it be hoarded as can wealth or resources (things that Western society often equates with freedom).

In this last respect, freedom is not a possession, nor is it a quality. It is a *happening*. We have our creative liberty only in the process of liberation. We are never free once and for all, but we can continually *become* free. And only the people who make use of their freedom remain free. If it is not used, freedom is an empty slogan. In history, freedom is experienced in liberating events, processes and movements.<sup>228</sup>

Stasis degrades freedom, while the continued exercise of freedom fosters its growth and development. The ‘project’ of freedom, the creative turning towards the future, enables this growth.

Since Moltmann believes there is an essential relationship between ‘project’ and freedom, he asserts that true freedom cannot be comprehended without a ‘project’ (which may include an array of initiatives and creative endeavors).<sup>229</sup> True freedom is realized when the liberated agent, in relation with others, acts in ways that further freedom, for themselves and the world. As Moltmann considers creativity, in its most fundamental sense, as liberating action, we see that when he posits true freedom as a creative passion, he is claiming that free creative activity will be a liberating event in its reception and in its exercise.

---

<sup>224</sup> *SL*, 120.

<sup>225</sup> “The future of God is the limitless treasure of possibilities, while the past represents the limited kingdom of reality. Creative passion is always directed toward the project of such a future.” *HG*, 66.

<sup>226</sup> *GSS*, 159.

<sup>227</sup> He refers to the process of ‘imagining’ a better future as ‘productive fantasy.’ *GSS*, 159.

<sup>228</sup> *GSS*, 160-161 (Italics author).

<sup>229</sup> *TKG*, 216-217.

Although it is problematic to detail what a ‘project’ is, we can make the following observations as to what a ‘project’ entails. The ‘project’ of freedom must work towards the liberation of others – liberation from the political, economic, societal and spiritual forces that enslave.<sup>230</sup> Moltmann contends that the exercise of freedom must be cognizant of a ‘moral duty’ to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressors.<sup>231</sup>

The ‘project’ is also doxological. Moltmann envisages that the person who exercises true freedom and offers his praise to God does so in the knowledge of God’s desire for all to be free. Praise and liberation are then inextricably linked. “. . . theology in action and theology in doxology belong together. There must be no theology of liberation without the glorification of God and no glorification of God without the liberation of the oppressed.”<sup>232</sup>

Consequently the ‘project’ of freedom strives to create freedom for communities and society. It is the goal of God’s life-giving Spirit to create community, a community where all are equal.<sup>233</sup> The ‘project’ of freedom works towards that goal in light of the passion of Christ and the Spirit’s ongoing work. The crucifixion should lead people “beyond a concern for personal salvation” to inquire about liberation for society.<sup>234</sup> God’s liberation of individuals should lead to the creation of communities, which are freely constituted; this is a task of those who are followers of Christ.

Lastly, the ‘project’ of freedom should strive for the liberation of the whole created realm. The free person, who lives in relation with God and others, is a person who may intercede and act before God on behalf of creation. This person, Moltmann suggests, is not only an *imago Dei*, but also an *imago mundi*, an individual who may “intercede before God for the community of creation”.<sup>235</sup> The ‘project’ of freedom means that the person seeks ‘the reconciliation of the world’, and works with God towards the time when God will restore all to a harmonious whole.<sup>236</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup> *RRF*, 40-41.

<sup>231</sup> *ET*, 186.

<sup>232</sup> *TKG*, 8.

<sup>233</sup> “*The creation of community* is evidently the goal of God’s life-giving Spirit in the world of nature and human beings. All created beings exist in other beings, not out of themselves, and they are therefore dependent on one another.” *SL*, 219 (Italics author).

<sup>234</sup> *CG*, 4.

<sup>235</sup> *GC*, 190.

<sup>236</sup> *ET*, 91.

#### 4. *The Horizon of Freedom*

God's liberating actions in setting the person free for freedom are ultimately fulfilled in God's eschaton. Christian theology finds that its "beginning is in the end,"<sup>237</sup> and within this paradigm freedom is only understood, Moltmann maintains, by keeping this end in sight. To be set free for freedom is not enacted so that the individual may become the lord of all with no attachments and nothing to impinge on his existence. God sets the human free for freedom so that the individual may become a person, free to enter into relations with God and others, free to love and receive love, free to create and in that creativity to become part of the great kingdom of freedom, which will be finally realized in the *Basileia*. Thus, the horizon of freedom has been, and always will be, Christ's return, when all things are restored and God dwells in all life. The person is set free so that he may be a part of that great community.

Moltmann's thought on freedom is consistently geared towards this event. He believes that the eschaton is *not* about a return to some sort of paradisaal state, but the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.<sup>238</sup> It will be a time when heaven and earth will become God's dwelling and God will be all in all.<sup>239</sup> This will be the 'glorious perichoresis' of God and the world.<sup>240</sup>

The *Basileia* began with the resurrection, which marks the beginning of the end of history.<sup>241</sup> Through the passion and resurrection of Jesus the new creation has already begun.<sup>242</sup> Jesus proclaimed the kingdom and he was, and continues to be, the sign and promise of its fulfillment.<sup>243</sup> Therefore, the Christian hope is a hope fixed on God's promises being realized in a time when Christ returns and 'all will be well'.<sup>244</sup>

Freedom that has the horizon of the eschaton is a freedom that 'cannot be quenched'.

That is why every partial freedom presses forward to total freedom and to the freedom of the whole creation. The thirst for freedom cannot be quenched by any partial satisfaction. It knows no limits. That is why even the freedom of God's friends is not yet complete freedom. In history it is the best of all possible freedoms in our relationship to God. But even this points beyond itself to the freedom that only achieves its complete and perfect bliss in God in the kingdom of glory. When God is known face to face, the freedom of God's servants, his children and his friends finally finds its fulfilment in God himself. Then freedom means the unhindered participation

---

<sup>237</sup> *ET*, xvi.

<sup>238</sup> *GC*, 207.

<sup>239</sup> *GC*, 183.

<sup>240</sup> *ET*, 50.

<sup>241</sup> *CG*, 162.

<sup>242</sup> *CG*, 169.

<sup>243</sup> *CG*, 54.

<sup>244</sup> *ET*, 51.

in the eternal life of the triune God himself, and in his inexhaustible fullness and glory.<sup>245</sup>

#### §4 SUMMARY

In examining Moltmann's theology of freedom we have seen that it is a multi-faceted view that we have considered through five distinct yet related factors. This freedom, when directed towards creation has two related objects – the human and the cosmos. It is a freedom that is both 'negative' (freedom from) and 'positive' (freedom for) and has as its horizon God's eschaton.

To summarize our major points of discussion:

- i. Life requires 'space' and God's initial act of creation is the creation of space in which life can grow and flourish. Freedom, like life, also requires space for its existence and development.
- ii. The nature of the Trinity establishes a pattern of relationship and existence for the person. Even though human existence cannot replicate trinitarian existence, there can be a correlation nonetheless. The life of the Trinity also provides and continually maintains the necessary space for the person to be free in relation to God.
- iii. The 'active' suffering of the Father reveals that God suffers not only in the activity of the Son on the cross, but also in the Father's suffering over the death of the Son. By being willing to suffer – to allow events to occur that are contrary to the Father's desire and result in suffering – the passionate Father shows that he is willing to allow the creation 'to be' in order that freedom may be granted and experienced. Relation with the 'almighty' God does not overpower the finite creature because the Father is a passionate God.
- iv. God liberated when Jesus became 'God-forsaken' and bore the sins of the world on the cross, and then conquered the great enslaver, death, through the resurrection.
- v. The Holy Spirit, who makes life possible by making relationship possible, grants freedom by drawing people into relationship with God and others. Through the Spirit's dwelling within the person and within the community, liberated people are drawn into relationship with the triune God and are able to experience the 'broad place' of the Trinity.
- vi. The objects of God's liberating actions are the human and the created realm. God liberates the person so that he may be not only an *imago Dei* but also an *imago trinitatis*. An *imago Trinitatis* is a person who exists in relationship with God and with others in a relationship of 'open friendship'.
- vii. The person is freed from sin and is brought into right relation with God. This liberated person experiences 'new life' of living with God and in community with others.
- viii. The person is also freed from oppression – the 'sin-ful' structures that oppress individuals and communities. A particular concern for God is freeing from oppression those whose lives are exploited by oppressive forces, although

---

<sup>245</sup> TKG, 222.

Moltmann also holds that God seeks to deliver both the oppressed and the oppressors.

- ix. The person is also liberated for freedom. The liberated person creatively engages life in order to be an agent of God's liberation for others and the natural world. A liberated person can be a creative person who participates in the 'project of freedom' and thus works with God in bringing about liberation for all.
- x. The horizon for Moltmann's freedom is the eschaton, when God will restore and dwell with all living things.

Moltmann's theology of freedom will help us to critique Berdiaev's vision of freedom through a theological lens. This perspective enables us to see the theological orientation within Berdiaev's vision on freedom, as well as establishing a sounder foundation for his thought. Although this critique will draw on Moltmann's thought in criticizing Berdiaev, there will be a certain reciprocity, as Berdiaev's own work will foster critical comments on Moltmann's conception of freedom.

## Chapter 7 – A Critique of Berdiaev in Light of Moltmann

### §1 INTRODUCTION

In his article on Solov'ev's view of the Trinity, David Brown not only argues that Solov'ev's "stranger interests" are peripheral to what he "wished primarily to convey," but also that these peripheral interests do *not* negate Solov'ev's 'compatibility' with 'orthodox Christianity'.<sup>1</sup> Our critique of Berdiaev will follow a similar line of thought as we challenge his more questionable ideas and examine the theological benefits his vision of freedom can offer. This will be accomplished through three primary objectives. First, it will be argued that his 'stranger interests' – which Berdiaev, in many cases, considered foundational for his vision (e.g., a bifurcated reality, the *Ungrund*, etc.) – are actually not essential to his core concerns. Second, we will show that these 'stranger interests' can be replaced with alternative and stronger lines of thought using, in particular, Moltmann's theology of freedom, while still remaining faithful to much of Berdiaev's insight. Third, we will highlight the strengths of Berdiaev's vision of freedom. When we combine the strengths of Berdiaev's insights with aspects of Moltmann's thought we can see that this reconfigured vision can make a plausible contribution to the theological enquiry regarding the nature of freedom for the person and God.

Although this research has explored a wide range of Berdiaev's thought, due to limitations of space this critique will only address those areas that are directly related to his view of freedom. For example, we will not attempt a detailed critique of Berdiaev's methodology and epistemological formulations; rather we will focus on certain methodological assumptions upon which his vision of freedom is predicated.<sup>2</sup>

The chapter is divided into nine sections, which will allow us to address the various ideas and concepts pertaining to Berdiaev's vision. We will begin by assessing certain methodological assumptions along with his mystical outlook; this will be followed by a critique of his view of 'spirit'. In these initial three sections we will be highly critical of Berdiaev's mystical outlook and his bifurcated view of reality. Even though these threads

---

<sup>1</sup> David Brown, "Solovyov, the Trinity and Christian Unity," *Dialogue & Alliance* 4:3 (Fall 1990), 50.

<sup>2</sup> To appreciate the rich complexity and character of Berdiaev's methodology and epistemology would require attention that is beyond the scope of this research. As we saw in chapter 2, even though Berdiaev's 'tentative' style and "shifting usage of key terms" (McLachlan) can obscure his thought, what he was attempting to accomplish – an understanding of the value of the person and the contributions of her talents in light of God – provides an important agenda for theological anthropology.



run throughout his thought we will show that they are not as ‘foundational’ to his thought as Berdiaev believed and can be replaced with concepts that are more theologically sound. It is important to remember that the critique in these sections is aimed at the concepts he uses to ‘explain’ the ‘origins’ of freedom. We are making a sharp distinction between meonic freedom and what we have called ‘embodied’ freedom within his work. Our critique here will strongly challenge the concepts he uses to defend his idea of meonic freedom, while supporting his view of ‘embodied’ freedom.

Moving beyond these weaker links our focus turns to his understanding of *sobornost* and the role it plays with regard to freedom. Next is an analysis of the ‘justification’ of the person and his complex understanding of personhood. We will then critique the ‘justification of God’ and from there our attention turns to the *Ungrund*. Having analyzed the various supporting elements of his thought on freedom, the final two areas to be critiqued will be his conceptions of ‘embodied’ freedom and the creative act.

Our use of Moltmann’s theology will follow the approach we are taking with Berdiaev. While Moltmann’s theology of freedom engenders interesting and challenging questions for the theologian on a number of fronts, our engagement with his thought will be restricted to his view of freedom and the points of correlation and difference with Berdiaev’s view.

## §2 CRITIQUE, ASSESSMENT, AND RECONFIGURATION

### 1. *Methodological Assumptions*

Berdiaev insists that his vision of freedom began with an ‘intuition’ that freedom exists. As we have seen, ‘intuition’ was an important concept within his intellectual and cultural context and his understanding of it is complex. In examining his work we have been able to discern a subtle, and highly nuanced view of ‘intuition’. Intuition is not simply a ‘flash’ of revelation, but encompasses all of the person’s cognitive capabilities. Although his view of ‘intuition’ can be useful for theological reflection, there remains a problem with the stress he places on intuition and how he uses it as a defense for the more questionable areas of his work.

The highly existential character of Berdiaev’s ‘intuition’ leads the reader to believe that intuition is the origination and source for his vision of freedom. While we do not deny

Berdiaev's claim that his vision of freedom began with an intuition (i.e., an initial insight), his vision has a much wider grounding. Also, as we now more fully understand (than when his first works were being translated and commented on) the context of his time, we realize that Berdiaev was not the only Russian writing on freedom and creativity and that many were drawing from the same wells, i.e. the Slavophile movement, Marxist thought, Solov'ev's philosophy, et al. It is safe to say that there were multiple factors involved that exercised considerable influence on his work, not just 'intuition'. This is not to downplay the creative force of Berdiaev's thought or his original synthesis of multiple streams of ideas. Rather, what we need to challenge is Berdiaev's privileging of 'intuition' over what we can call 'experience', i.e. the influence of ideas, people, and culture in unison with the experience of God.

Berdiaev does not deny the effect of experience or external influences on his thought, but throughout his work he exercises considerable effort to maintain this idea of 'intuition' over against any idea that knowledge can be based on an 'objective' reality. This motivation (along with other factors) leads him to formulate his thought in such a way that 'intuition' overshadows the influence of the *milieu* in which he exists. Berdiaev may very well have had an 'intuition' concerning the centrality of freedom, but this 'intuition' was significantly influenced by the intellectual, cultural, political currents he was experiencing.

Our concern here is not only how Berdiaev formulates the cognitive framework for his thought; even more problematic is the way he uses intuition as a defense for highly speculative ideas that could otherwise not be supported (e.g. the *Ungrund*). His defense of these ideas is, ultimately, found in 'intuition'. Berdiaev relies on the position that he 'knew' it to be true and thus it is true. This 'knowledge' was based on his intuition. While we suggested in chapter 2 that his view of intuition included the category of experience, his privileging of the initial intuitive thought often diminished the idea of experience. This leaves Berdiaev's thought open to the charge of being idiosyncratic and therefore unable to provide a generally comprehensible view of what freedom means for the person. This is an unfortunate outcome, since his vision of freedom is not derived solely from an intuition, but, this research contends, also from his experience of the freedom that the Triune God grants to creation. Berdiaev's views on theodicy and non-determination, of course, would prevent him from acknowledging that freedom originates with God. But, if he had been able to understand that freedom originates with God and not with the Abyss, his thought would have had a much more solid footing.

Even though Berdiaev's emphasis on 'intuition' leads him to a questionable understanding of cognition, this does not undermine the internal coherence to be found in his self-described intuitive thought. To use Volf's phrase once again, there is "a basic 'goodness of fit.'"<sup>3</sup> Berdiaev's vision of freedom remained a constant focus within his work, and his thought is consistently directed towards that vision. Therefore, since Berdiaev's vision of freedom is in actuality not derived from a 'singular intuition' but is rather a vision, comprised of an impressive mosaic derived from differing strands of thought – including philosophy, theology, the arts, and culture – and experience, we find his vision to have a certain plasticity, and therein the capacity for reconfiguring his thought in a different theological framework. Because of this we can state that his conception of intuition can be regarded as peripheral and need not be understood as the primary factor for the origination of his core vision. The strength of Berdiaev's vision of freedom is not dependent upon an intuition, but rather upon his creative synthesis (which uses his intuitive capabilities) and astute analysis as to the nature and implications of freedom – a freedom God grants to creation.

The importance he placed on 'intuition' is directly related to his mystical approach and it is to this area that we now turn.

## 2. *Bifurcation and the Mystical Approach*

While Berdiaev's reliance on mysticism and his particular interpretation of it may be comprehensible within the context of the *Silver Age*, this approach makes little contribution to his vision of freedom. His mystical constructions contain difficulties that, at best, do not accomplish what he proposes (either from a theological or philosophical perspective), and, at worst, obfuscate his thought.

Our critique in this section will be focused on his mystical approach and the consequences of this approach.<sup>4</sup> We will bracket out, for the time being, a specific concept

---

<sup>3</sup> Volf, *The Eighth Day*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> While our critique of Berdiaev's mystical approach is, for the most part, negative, this should not be construed to mean that this research views the Christian mystical tradition and practice in the same negative light. Moltmann, especially in *SL*, offers a more acceptable alternative to Berdiaev's own understanding. In describing mystical theology Moltmann comments, "By 'mystical' we do not mean here special supernatural experiences. We mean the intensity of the experience of God in faith, so that in this sense we are talking about the deep dimension of every experience of faith." *SL*, 198. The mystical experience, for Moltmann, is not the domain of the spiritually elite, but rather the province of those who faithfully follow the words of Christ and develop a child-like trust. *SL*, 211. See also, Moltmann, "Theology of Mystical Experience." Moltmann's perspective provides a worthwhile alternative to Berdiaev's mystical approach.

his mystic-thought propounds – the *Ungrund* – till later in the chapter when we address the idea of ‘embodied’ freedom.

It is important to remember that Berdiaev’s mystical *approach* is based on viewing the world as phenomenal and noumenal, which becomes an important theme in his thought. His mystical approach can, in many regards, be seen as a speculative cognitive approach used to assert this bifurcated understanding of reality. He believed that a viable understanding of freedom required this perspective.

There are certainly points of agreement between this understanding and orthodox Christianity. The Christian tradition proclaims that the material world is not the only reality and that God cannot be defined with material concepts.<sup>5</sup> Berdiaev’s mistake, however, is his belief that the spiritual world that Christianity speaks of is wholly separate from the material world. When he communicates this through his ‘tentative’ style, one is left with the impression that he is not discussing the existence of two realms but rather two separate worlds. In conjunction with this, Berdiaev wrongly conceives of the Fall as resulting in the bifurcation of the world into two realms (worlds) as opposed to one realm in need of restoration.

Berdiaev’s commitment to this idea is based on his understanding that freedom is constrained by the reality of existence. He adopts the idea of a bifurcated world early in his career, believing that if freedom and existence only occur within the material world then determinism would be proved right. The problem is that in attempting to overcome the supposed determinism of the material world, his thought results in a depreciation of the ‘material’, along with a highly elevated view of elements conceived to be ‘spiritual’ (we shall see in the following section the problem this raises with regard to his view of the Spirit).

Within this thought the created order possesses little value for the pursuit of freedom. The material (phenomenal) must be transcended, for material is an impediment to the full experience of freedom. One of the problems of a position such as this is highlighted by Moltmann:

Ever since Romanticism, the ‘unhappy consciousness of the beautiful soul’ (Hegel) has fled from the constricting, alienating, and meaningless reality of phenomena into the dream world of the beyond, into the unhindered realm of play where imaginary

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Moltmann’s view on the spiritual and the material: “The ‘nature’ that men and women can make the object of their cognition and domination is for theology only the visible part of creation. Understanding nature as God’s creation therefore means putting together in a wider context the known sector of reality and the sector that is not yet known (but is in principle knowable), and hence seeing the known sector as relative – as not existing of itself but as pointing beyond itself. Theologically speaking, ‘visible’ nature cannot be adequately understood as creation unless what is in principle invisible is believed in as creation also.” *GC*, 39.

possibilities abound. Yet, it is precisely this flight from reality which has abandoned the social and political dimensions to inhuman powers.<sup>6</sup>

In fairness to Berdiaev, he was not ‘abandoning’ the material to pursue the spiritual, but was seeking the restoration of the material through the spiritual. Yet Moltmann’s observation strikes a chord in Berdiaev’s approach. While Berdiaev alludes to the material being united with the spiritual in the eschaton, his belief in a clear separation between the spiritual and the material means that his thought considers the phenomenal world from a decidedly negative perspective. This is a significant problem, for it leaves Berdiaev with a low regard for the material.

Moltmann’s perspective on the relationship between the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘material’ provides a clear alternative to ameliorate this deficiency. In discussing contemporary Christian spirituality, Moltmann rightly observes a ‘Platonization’ of Christianity, which “takes the form of a kind of hostility to the body, a kind of remoteness from the world, and a preference for the inner experiences of the soul rather than the sensory experiences of sociality and nature.”<sup>7</sup> Although Moltmann is not addressing Berdiaev directly, his assessment certainly fits the problem we see in Berdiaev’s view. In contrast to this ‘Platonization’ Moltmann asserts that a person must be seen as a part of the created (material) world. A human being is the image of God in “their whole and particular bodily existence.”<sup>8</sup> The person cannot be understood apart from creation, the materiality of the person is not something to be overcome. The person belongs “within the all-embracing coherences of God’s history with the world, the history of creation and the history of redemption.”<sup>9</sup>

Moltmann shares with Berdiaev the hope for the restoration of all things, but that hope is grounded in the crucified God and the presence of the Spirit, not in a devaluation of the present world.<sup>10</sup> The experience of the Spirit “means that we shall be redeemed *with* the world, not *from* it. Christian experience of the Spirit does not cut us off from the world. The more we hope for the world, the deeper our solidarity with its sighing and suffering.”<sup>11</sup>

Moltmann’s thought allows us to affirm Berdiaev’s basic understanding of the importance of experiencing God through the Spirit, while understanding the material world as a necessary part of that experience and not an impediment to it. Thus, the person does not move between two realms in some sort of Cartesian paradigm but lives in the present as a

---

<sup>6</sup> *RRF*, 185.

<sup>7</sup> *SL*, 8.

<sup>8</sup> *GC*, 245.

<sup>9</sup> *GC*, 189.

<sup>10</sup> *CG*, 312.

<sup>11</sup> *SL*, 89 (Italics author).

spiritual-physical being. Even though Berdiaev's mystical approach posits a problematic view of reality and the material, it does not have a completely negative effect on his vision of freedom.

His mystical approach, in fact, allows him to rightly assess the difficulty of the person attaining freedom through his own power. Recognizing the impact of external forces, Berdiaev's analysis is correct – only through relationship with God and others can the person experience a robust freedom. Thus, although the premise of his mystical approach is faulty (a bifurcated reality), the conclusion is correct – freedom has a relational and 'spiritual' aspect to it.

Another benefit gained from his mystical approach is how it molds his understanding of 'integral knowledge'. We have seen that this thought is not original to Berdiaev, but he does use it to the fullest in expounding his vision of freedom. The idea that cognition involves the "intellectual, affective, and volitional" capabilities is consonant with a general Christian theological understanding of cognition.<sup>12</sup> This research does not attempt to detail Berdiaev's more speculative epistemological constructs, but even these speculations (based on his bifurcated world-view) do not negate the benefit of understanding knowledge – and particularly knowledge of God – as involving the whole person and not simply the use of reason.

Although Berdiaev was convinced his mystical approach was essential to understanding freedom, we have seen that it actually makes understanding freedom within the created order highly problematic. For humanity does not exist in two worlds, but in one world that contains the spiritual and the material. By separating the two he makes it difficult to understand the value of freedom for human existence. Moltmann presents a more holistic conceptualization for the experience of God and the role of the material. This approach is not completely contradictory to Berdiaev's, yet it is more broadly comprehensible and congruous to the reality of human existence. If we use Moltmann's understanding of the relationship between the spiritual and the material we see that we do not have to negate Berdiaev's contribution that knowledge must be integral and that freedom requires a spiritual aspect.

As Berdiaev's mystical approach was based on his concept of the spiritual, we now turn our attention to his view of spirit and what the spirit means for freedom.

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Moltmann: "This identification of the true centre of human beings with consciousness and reason is Western, modern and, not least, typically male. . . . But we acquire most of our experiences neither through our consciousness, nor through our reason, nor as the result of any deliberate intention. We perceive the happenings that affect us by way of our senses." *SL*, 20.

### 3. *Spirit*

The critique of Berdiaev's thought on 'spirit' utilizes the distinction we made in chapter 4, where it was proposed that Berdiaev's use of the term 'spirit' has two different, although related, functions and applications – 'spirit' as a sphere of existence and 'Spirit' as the Holy Spirit. In both instances, Berdiaev's creative thought is obscured by his adherence to a bifurcated understanding of reality and false elevation of elements he conceives to be spiritual.

First, with regard to spirit as a sphere of existence, we recall Berdiaev's formulation of theandric freedom, where the most substantial forms of freedom will be found in the person's spiritual existence. This position *may* appear to be congruous with the apostle Paul's words, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom,"<sup>13</sup> but it is not. The problem, of course, is that Berdiaev uses 'spirit' to denote a sphere of existence, and this is not the same as Paul's understanding of the "Spirit of the Lord." For Berdiaev, the spirit as a sphere of existence is the noumenal realm, and while the Spirit exists in the noumenal realm, the noumenal realm and the Spirit refer to two separate realities.

Hence we encounter the problems of a bifurcated reality yet again. Berdiaev's connection of 'spirit' and freedom means that in certain cases he is attributing the person's experience of freedom to the experience of the noumenal realm. It is at this juncture that the weakness of this bifurcated view is exceedingly apparent. For Berdiaev, the noumenal experience (i.e., the person's spiritual experience) is something that takes place outside of time, space, and matter.<sup>14</sup> Berdiaev's thought here could be construed to mean that a person's spiritual experience is disembodied. This position is clearly not tenable.

A Christian understanding of experiencing the Spirit does not envisage the person becoming disembodied; his materiality is not an impediment. Even if some sort of 'disembodiment' was possible, wherein the person transcends the material, how could the person have any understanding of the experience without the framework of time, space, and matter? Berdiaev's prejudiced view of the material leads him to a confused position. It is unfortunate, since his initial idea that spiritual experience is an experience of freedom has merit.

---

<sup>13</sup> II Cor. 3: 17.

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 4, fn 186.

There is certainly a strong strand within Christian theology that would agree with Berdiaev – to experience the Spirit is to experience freedom.<sup>15</sup> It is even possible to say that this experience is a fuller experience of freedom than what is possible without the Holy Spirit. Moltmann consistently argues for a position that echoes Berdiaev's thought – the experience of the Spirit grants 'space' to the individual, to live 'in' the Spirit is to have the space to be free.<sup>16</sup> But, living 'in' the Spirit, for Moltmann, is living in the material world; it is not an escape from the material. Berdiaev cannot hold this position due to his faulty understanding of the material world. Thus, even though Berdiaev could agree with Moltmann that life 'in' the Spirit brings freedom, he would claim that this life has to transcend the material world for the experience to occur.

Hence transcendence is another important issue for Berdiaev's view of 'spirit' and freedom. This is due to the *mis*understanding that the spiritual is a transcendence from the material world, with transcendence connoting an overcoming of the materiality of creation. Moltmann argues that this is not the case with the transcendent experience of God. The Spirit's transcendence is also immanence; i.e. through the Spirit the person experiences a God who is beyond this world and yet because God dwells in the world through the Spirit, it is also an immanence. "*To experience God in all things* presupposes that there is transcendence which is immanent in things and which can be inductively discovered. It is the infinite in the finite, the eternal in the temporal, and the enduring in the transitory."<sup>17</sup> Contrary to Berdiaev, Moltmann rightly conceives of the transcendence of the Spirit being understood as the transcendent God dwelling within the person and within the created order. It is through this transcendence that the person is made whole – spirit and body.<sup>18</sup>

Berdiaev's thought on the Holy Spirit is also questionable. His tentative style, fear of objectification, and bifurcated view make it problematic to understand Berdiaev's exact conception of the Spirit. In some sense the Trinity becomes a binity, as it is difficult to detect in his work the Spirit being a Trinitarian Person. So, while he gives considerable attention to the Spirit, the Spirit often functions as the presence that makes freedom and life possible – the Spirit can be viewed as an 'actualizer' for a true humanity. The Spirit who acts independent of the person is often missing from his thought. Any notion of the Spirit leading

---

<sup>15</sup> Moltmann: "In the Spirit, Christ is manifested as 'the Lord', and in the Spirit people experience what it is to be free." *SL*, 99.

<sup>16</sup> *SL*, 43.

<sup>17</sup> *SL*, 35 (Italics author).

<sup>18</sup> *SL*, 274.



(Gal. 5: 18) the person becomes difficult to detect as Berdiaev only focuses on the Spirit empowering the person to mature and transcend.

Even with these acknowledged weaknesses, the strength of Berdiaev's assertion that freedom is dependent on the Spirit remains valid. This validity is possible because his conception of the Spirit, ultimately, has its moorings in the Christian faith. For instance, even though his Germanic philosophical influences are pronounced, Idinopulos rightly points out,

He diverged, however, from the tendency of nineteenth-century idealism to conceive of spirit as an autonomous, impersonal, and abstract power of will or mind which expresses itself historically through the instrumentality of human thought and action. In place of rational or "pure" spirit, Berdiaev substituted personality and the meanings of the interpersonal which he discerned in the affirmations of the Christian faith.<sup>19</sup>

Berdiaev's rejection of the Hegelian 'Spirit', commitment to the 'affirmations of the Christian faith,' and his understanding of the Holy Spirit as the link between the person and God ("In the Holy Spirit God becomes immanent in the world and in man. . . ."<sup>20</sup>), indicate the importance of the Holy Spirit for Berdiaev's thought.

The importance of the Holy Spirit for freedom is mirrored in Moltmann: "Freedom and life are the two key facts in experiences of the divine Spirit. Freedom without new life is empty. Life without freedom is dead."<sup>21</sup> One of the strengths of Berdiaev's vision of freedom and creativity is that he understands freedom as finding its fullest expression in union with God and others, and that this union is made possible by the Spirit. Berdiaev's thought would certainly have profited if he had been more disciplined and jettisoned his commitment to the phenomenal/noumenal perspective; however, his vision of freedom finding fulfillment in the life of the Spirit can certainly contribute to a theological discourse on freedom.

#### 4. Sobornost'

Berdiaev's *sobornost'* is one of the clearest demonstrations that his thought was not a modernistic project which sought to replace God with the individual. Berdiaev discovered early in his career that the person's freedom depends on the 'other', and the only way for the free person to relate to the 'other' would be through love and the Holy Spirit. Even though *sobornost'* is central to his vision, he does not devote that much attention, comparatively

---

<sup>19</sup> Idinopulos, "Ontology of Spirit," 84-85.

<sup>20</sup> *FS*, 48.

<sup>21</sup> *SL*, 271.

speaking, to the concept. *Sobornost*’ is a concept that is assumed throughout his thought. He acknowledges that it has not received widespread attention, but does not see fit to remedy that in his own work.

Of all the concepts that Berdiaev synthesizes into his vision of freedom, *sobornost*’ is the least modified, with his basic understanding mirroring the general formulations of Khomiakov and the Slavophiles.<sup>22</sup> Because Berdiaev’s formulation of *sobornost*’ is so closely related to Khomiakov’s understanding, Berdiaev’s thought is open to the critique that has been leveled against the Slavophiles – namely that the concept is impracticable at best and anarchic at worst.

Walicki states that “The main weakness of his [Khomiakov’s] conception was its *utter impracticability*, characteristic of the Slavophile movement.”<sup>23</sup> The issue of practicality is not the only challenge to *sobornost*’, there was also the assertion that it denied ecclesial authority and succumbed to Protestant individualism. This was the basis of Fr. Florensky’s (whom Berdiaev labeled an ‘ultra-Orthodox’<sup>24</sup>) pointed article in 1916 where he questions Khomiakov’s loyalty to the Orthodox Church and to the Tsar.<sup>25</sup> While there is some merit in these charges, in the end it is not sufficient to invalidate the concept or Berdiaev’s integration of it when considering freedom for the person.

As *sobornost*’ is predicated on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit it is first and foremost a Christian ideal. Berdiaev was not proposing a *sobornost*’ State (although he did believe that Christians should relate to government and society within a *soborny* framework). So, in this sense, any charge that Berdiaev was naïve because *sobornost*’ is an impractical ‘political’ solution cannot be supported.

With regard to the person’s immediate faith community, the issue of practicality becomes more pointed. Is it possible for a Christian community to be a *soborny* community, a free egalitarian fellowship based on the Spirit and love that eschews hierarchical structures? Yes, it is. We can see a *soborny* structure in Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians that they should live as one body to such a degree that “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.”<sup>26</sup> One can also recall the early

---

<sup>22</sup> Although Berdiaev did amplify the concept by integrating it into his eschatological thought. Calian, *Significance of Eschatology*, 36.

<sup>23</sup> Walicki, *Slavophile Controversy*, 199 (Italics mine).

<sup>24</sup> *DR*, 191.

<sup>25</sup> Walicki, *Slavophile Controversy*, 200.

<sup>26</sup> I Cor. 12: 26.

church in Acts 2 for another example of a community that could be regarded as a *sobornny* community.<sup>27</sup>

Although there is scriptural reference that intimates *sobornost'*, the question of practicality remains – how does this occur? Berdiaev's response would most likely be that 'practicality' has little to do with the generation and maintenance of *sobornost'*. *Sobornost'* cannot be programmed or instituted from 'above', it can only be developed on a relational level through the presence of the Spirit, which, at times, may appear highly impractical. If practicality or success were the criteria used to demonstrate validity, then one could rightly question whether the Sermon on the Mount is actually applicable to a contemporary context. The strength of Berdiaev's thought is in realizing that because freedom is central for the person's existence, there must be a paradigm for relationship that values relationality, the person, and her freedom. *Sobornost'* is such a paradigm and through it Berdiaev propounds a robust freedom that is relational and 'anti-individualistic'.<sup>28</sup>

There is a considerable correlation between Berdiaev's *sobornost'* and Moltmann's idea of 'open friendship'.<sup>29</sup> It is not without significance that Moltmann arrives at a similar conclusion to Berdiaev's – the existence of freedom requires 'open' and egalitarian relationships and rejects blind acceptance to hierarchal structures.<sup>30</sup> Although Moltmann has been criticized for his idea of 'open friendship', his commitment to it reflects an important consideration for a theological perspective on freedom.<sup>31</sup>

For both authors, their respective positions are not a complete rejection of tradition or obedience (although it is accepted that in Berdiaev's case this is sometimes difficult to determine). Both want to assert that if the person is free, and if their freedom is maturing through relationship with others and with God, then there must be an alternative paradigm possible (Berdiaev: *sobornost'* and Moltmann: 'open friendship') for how the person can exist in community with others. There is little doubt that communities that place a strong emphasis on clear lines of authority and a stress a univocal understanding, where possible, of God and human existence, have a better chance of 'surviving' and being 'practical' than a community that adopts a *sobornost'* principle. But, Berdiaev would most likely assert, the

---

<sup>27</sup> Acts 2: 37-47.

<sup>28</sup> *FS*, 355.

<sup>29</sup> We have already seen that Desmond Tutu talks about a similar African ideal in '*ubuntu*,' which he sees realized, although imperfectly, in many African communities. See chapter 4, fn. 130.

<sup>30</sup> *ET*, 265.

<sup>31</sup> Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom*, 191-192. Bauckham is correct that a problem with this idea is that people can be "left out" of freely chosen relationships, but a freedom that ignores relation with others is a faulty freedom, it is not the subjective-relational freedom that Berdiaev proposes. Also, it is unclear what alternative Bauckham is proposing that would include those who are "left out."

primary objectives of the person and the community are not survival, practicality, or even success, but rather the growth of the person's freedom in relation to God and others, and becoming co-creators with God. *Sobornost'* may sound like an idealized vision, but the idea has strong parallels with the prayer that Jesus prays: "The glory that you have given me I have given them, *so that they may be one, as we are one*. I in them and you in me, that they *may become completely one*. . . ." <sup>32</sup>

It is acknowledged that even though practical concerns do not negate *sobornost'*, they cannot be entirely avoided. The 'how' of *sobornost'*, and for that matter Moltmann's 'open' friendship as well, needs to be addressed, since *soborny* thinking is directed towards the life experience of the person and community. While there cannot be a proposal that is both general and specific since each community, like each relationship, is different, we can, however, develop Berdiaev's thought further by returning to the idea of 'embodied' freedom.

'Embodied' freedom is a developmental proposal, i.e. freedom is not a singular phenomenon but exists as a range of possible modalities of freedom. This research contends that *sobornost'* should be considered from a similar perspective. It would seem clear that if *sobornost'* (and for that matter Moltmann's 'open friendship') exists in a symbiotic relationship with freedom, and if freedom is experienced in varying degrees, then, *sobornost'* must also be considered as existing with a range of possible modalities. Consequently, a *soborny* relationship develops and grows with freedom and deteriorates through the loss of freedom. *Sobornost'* should not be considered a static concept; it is, to use one of Berdiaev's favorite words, dynamic. Because of its 'dynamic' nature, one must expect that the manifestation of *sobornost'* will vary greatly between persons and communities.

Viewed from this perspective we can see that *sobornost'* is not a utopian ideal. A *soborny* community is not a community without conflict, a community where there is harmony and unanimous agreement on all things. <sup>33</sup> A *soborny* community will experience conflict, but it recognizes that unity of the community is as important as any concept or debate that may rupture it. In periods of conflict the question then becomes not who is right and who is wrong, but how bonds of love and fellowship are maintained amongst differing views.

Another contribution that Berdiaev's *sobornost'* makes to a theological discourse of freedom is the uniting of freedom with love. We have already suggested that a strength of

---

<sup>32</sup> John 17: 22-23 (Italics mine).

<sup>33</sup> Moltmann: "Whenever people live together there are conflicts. A community of trust cannot aim to be a community free of conflict. It would then merely become a community afraid of conflict." *SL*, 238.

Berdiaev's thought on spirit is that he links the experience of the Spirit with experience of a robust freedom. In *sobornost'* we see that the experience of the Spirit is also an experience of love and this love is integrally connected to the experience of freedom. A similar connection is evident in Moltmann describing the experience of the Holy Spirit: "The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is experienced by those who know it as both *the love* that binds and *the freedom* which allows everything to arrive at itself, in its own unique nature."<sup>34</sup> Through his commitment to *sobornost'*, we see that Berdiaev does not regard the higher forms of freedom as isolating experiences that result in individualism, but rather as a way of existence that leads both to personhood and to whole communities.

### 5. *Justification of the Person*

The importance of *sobornost'* must be seen in the light of Berdiaev's 'justification' of the person. Although the individual must exist in relationship to mature and grow, the community is never greater than the individual. He is consistent in his belief that the person is never a 'means' but always an 'end'. His thought on personality, while convoluted at times, constantly returns to this theme, as he rightly asserts that the person possesses an intrinsic value.

The integration of freedom and creativity into the discussion concerning the development of the individual into a person is one of the strengths of Berdiaev's view of 'personality'. Personality cannot be solely given by God; the individual must freely contribute to her development. He is unusually direct in maintaining the importance of freedom for personhood. Without freedom (and the human subjectivity it engenders) the individual's own contribution to her development is problematic. Embodied freedom, then, can be rightly seen as an integral concept for his idea of personhood.

Recognizing the benefit of his view that stresses the importance of the person and maintains a linkage between freedom and personality, there are several areas that are problematic. First, although Berdiaev was correct to posit that the person must contribute to his development, his view can be seen to be too simplistic, since the development of personhood (personality) relies on more than freedom. The individual develops his 'personality' in concert with a host of factors, including the gift of being created, and the

---

<sup>34</sup> *SL*, 220.

context of his existence. Freedom does play an important role in this, but a free person needs more than himself to develop, grow, and mature.<sup>35</sup>

Personhood relies on the giftedness of relationship with God and others, as well as the context of the person's existence, which is not (contra Berdiaev) always negative force. Berdiaev's thought, with his stress on the individual's freedom and creative abilities, looks past this fact. It would seem that in the attempt to demonstrate that the individual can be free from external forces, Berdiaev downplays the important reality that the gift of external sources is required in the person's maturation.<sup>36</sup> Berdiaev's existential outlook at times ignores the important differentiation between external 'forces' and external 'sources' for the development of the person.

The second concern pertains to his concept of 'divine-human'. As we saw in chapter 4, Berdiaev's vision of freedom is closely related to his vision of the person, with the intersecting point between his ideas of 'freedom' and the 'person' being 'divine humanity'. From a theological perspective, the first obvious problem concerns terminology. 'Grace', '*imago Dei*', and 'theandric freedom' all overlap and in the end, for him, seem to intimate the same thing: the person's divine-human potential. His appropriation of these terms was creative and original, and his speculative thought hints at some interesting interpretative possibilities, but in the end his thought remains that, a 'hint'. His treatment of grace and the *imago* requires significantly more development than he provides. His thought, in its current state, reduces 'grace' to a 'theandric' action – an act dependent on God *and* the individual. This means that 'grace' is no longer 'freely' given, since it is now dependent upon the person's response.

Berdiaev was trying to overcome the tension between God's grace and human agency, and his 'theandric' concept moves in a helpful direction (the person's response to God does matter). But, because his thought is under-developed, his fear of grace becoming something that is 'forced' upon the person leads to his view of 'grace' becoming something that is dependent upon the person. As such, the free and gracious acts of a loving God, who wishes "to freely bestow"<sup>37</sup> grace, becomes difficult to see in Berdiaev's view of personality.

---

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Moltmann: "It is not when we withdraw into the self that we find God; it is when we go out of ourselves. It is not in the I that God is hidden; it is in the Thou." *GSS*, 83.

<sup>36</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain overstates this position when she writes, "We are not *individuals* whose sociality is the result of voluntaristic motion but *persons* whose sociality is given," but her idea still has merit. The development of the person depends on the 'gift' of God and other persons. Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Who are We? Critical Reflection and Hopeful Possibilities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 143 (Italics author).

<sup>37</sup> Ephesians 1: 6.

A reason for this under-development can be found in his flawed vision of ‘divine-humanity’. Berdiaev’s early commentators supported this concept of divine humanity as evidence of Berdiaev’s valuing the person. Vallon: “The conclusion of the matter is that Berdiaev’s emphatic anthropodicy or defense of the infinite value of man is both scriptural and Christian.”<sup>38</sup> The problem with Berdiaev’s idea that the person is divine-human (and its related view that God is ‘humane’<sup>39</sup>) is that he moved beyond highly valuing the person, and instead elevated the person beyond what can be supported by scripture or a vast segment of tradition. Vallon’s comment that Berdiaev’s view is “both scriptural and Christian” is false. This is not to say that Berdiaev did not have important contributions to make concerning the relationship between God and human. There are certainly grounds to view the person as participating in the divine nature of God, but Berdiaev’s thought takes him beyond a participation to often regarding the person as divine.<sup>40</sup>

Berdiaev does acknowledge that the person is not ‘Divine’, but his tentative style along with his desire to elevate the person often intimates that the primary concern is seeing the person as ‘divine’.<sup>41</sup> This can be seen in his use of *theosis*. A concept that is well-established in the Orthodox tradition, Berdiaev frequently only emphasizes deification while neglecting the theme of redemption. He does acknowledge that the person’s divinity is realized in relationship with God, but more often than not, the ‘divinity’ of the person overshadows the importance of the relationship with God through redemption. *Theosis*, then, becomes a concept to affirm the ‘divine’ nature of the person, as opposed to a doctrine that is concerned with the relationship between the divine and the human.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 303. See also Spinka, *Nicolas Berdiaev*, 194.

<sup>39</sup> Berdiaev’s ‘divine anthropomorphism’ (the humanity of God), which he uses in his ‘justification of God’, is integrally tied to this view of the person’s divine nature. This can be clearly seen in *Truth and Revelation*: “But there are two sorts of anthropomorphism, there is the anthropomorphism which believes in the inhumanity of God, in which he is very like men and women, and there is the anthropomorphism which believes in the humanity of God. It is only the second sort of anthropomorphism which reveals the highest in man and is a divine anthropomorphism; there is a divine humanity. . . . *The highest humanity is the divine in man and the human in God, this is the mystery of God-manhood.*” *TR*, 116 (Italics mine). Thus his proposition for a humane God becomes also a proposition for a ‘divine’ person – one cannot talk about a ‘humane’ God without also acknowledging a ‘divine-human’ person. The differentiation between God’s nature and the human’s nature collapses into a speculative interdependence. His reliance on Chalcedon to support this view (the affirmation of Christ’s divine and human natures applies to humanity in general) defies the understanding Chalcedon put forward.

<sup>40</sup> *SR*, 148-149. His predilection for regarding the person as divine is most readily apparent in his view on human creativity, which will be addressed in our final section. Cf. *GC*, 162.

<sup>41</sup> *SR*, 156.

<sup>42</sup> An example of a more orthodox and holistic understanding of *theosis* can be seen in Zizioulas: “There are, therefore, two aspects in Christology, one negative (redemption from the fallen state) and another positive (fulfillment of man’s full communion with God; what the Greek Fathers have called *theōsis*). *Only if the two are taken together, can Christology reveal human destiny in its fullness.*” Zizioulas, “Human Capacity and Human Incapacity,” 434 (Italics mine). Berdiaev’s interpretation of *theosis* stresses the divinity of the

Thus even though he states that the divine and human natures of the person must be preserved to avoid a 'monistic' perspective, it becomes difficult to understand what value Berdiaev sees in the person's human nature. His emphasis on the divine nature of the person creates the impression that ultimately he is not really that concerned with the humanity and bodily form of the person.<sup>43</sup> This is a regrettable turn in his thought, especially considering his constant references to the humanity of Christ along with his novel interpretations of the Monophysite heresy. As we have seen, he correctly points out that the "The Son of God became a man and not an angel"<sup>44</sup> and therefore God affirms the value of humanity. Yet, more often than not, the 'humanness' of the individual is lost in repeated attempts to assert the person's 'divine' nature.

Berdiaev's belief that by emphasizing the 'divinity' of the person he could show the distinctiveness of the person is problematic. By blurring the differentiation between Divine and human, and the resultant misreading of *theosis*, Berdiaev loses sight of what makes the person distinctive, namely his humanity. Obviously his bifurcated view of reality contributes to this difficulty, since in his desire to elevate the person beyond the realm of necessity and slavery, he regards the material as an objectifying force. We thus see that Berdiaev's skewed view of divinization is directly linked to his bifurcated view of reality. In a certain sense they are two sides of the same coin. His belief that the person is 'divine-human' is his 'answer' for how the person can avoid the objectifying nature of the material realm.

It is possible to affirm Berdiaev's basic tenet (highly valuing the person), without having to maintain his 'divine-human' concept, through Moltmann's perspective. Moltmann shares a similar conviction that the person, who is more than an individual, must be valued. Yet, for Moltmann, the dignity of the person does not depend upon a 'divine' nature that is based on the *imago*, but rather, the *imago* indicates that the person is created by God and can exist in relation to God and others. It is these two factors – being created by God and existing in relationship – from which the person derives her value. Hence Moltmann conceives of relationship as something that not only makes freedom possible, but personhood as well.<sup>45</sup>

---

person as opposed to the 'communion' with God while also ignoring the 'negative' (i.e. redemption). This aspect of his thought tends to neglect his work on *sobornost*'. Berdiaev does not recognize that his emphasis on the 'divine-human' has an 'individualist' tendency as it elevates the individual above the relationship in which the individual participates.

<sup>43</sup> Moltmann offers a more holistic view of the human: "In this sense, it is important for the way the human being understands himself that he should not see himself initially as subject over against nature, and theologically as the image of God; but that he should first of all view himself as the product of nature and – theologically too – as *imago mundi*." *GC*, 51.

<sup>44</sup> *MCA*, 73.

<sup>45</sup> *GSS*, 80.



The individual becomes a person in relationship and relationship becomes the most decisive characteristic of her existence.<sup>46</sup> This thought does not preclude talk of ‘deification’, but ‘deification’ (‘realistic divinization’) becomes dependent upon the person’s existence with God through Christ and the ongoing work of the Spirit, as opposed to Berdiaev’s construct that depends on his speculative understanding of grace, the *imago*, and the person’s theandric capabilities. Moltmann’s thought does not seek to ‘elevate’ the person at the expense of the individual’s humanness, but rather highlights the dignity of the person as a human (mind, body, and spirit) in relation to God and others.

Moltmann’s perspective does not vitiate Berdiaev’s understanding that the person is called to participate with God in creative acts, but rather it more firmly grounds the person’s creativity in their participation *with* God as opposed to any inherent nature the person may possess outside of relation to God and others.

## 6. *Justification of God*

The justification of God (Berdiaev’s theodicy) is a constant reference point for his vision of freedom. We have seen that the problem of evil is an ever-present concern in Berdiaev’s work. The focus on theodicy is notable for his strong conviction that any talk of freedom must always address the question of evil. At the core of his ‘justification’ is the *Ungrund*.<sup>47</sup> In this section we will assess whether the conception of meonic freedom is effective in his theodicy; in the following section we will critique Berdiaev’s integration of the *Ungrund* in his vision of freedom.

Our main critique of Berdiaev’s ‘justification of God’ is that it fails to accomplish what it proposes – it is not the unassailable theodicy he claimed it to be. As we have seen, Berdiaev was convinced that the *Ungrund* provided the explanation as to how freedom can exist without God being responsible for evil. It is an interesting view but in the end it does *not* solve the paradox of freedom, God, and evil. Berdiaev is convinced that if God creates freedom, God is then responsible for evil. Yet his solution, that God is absolved because ‘freedom’ does not originate with God, God only engages with this ‘stuff’ to create, falls far

---

<sup>46</sup> “Theologically, the human being’s likeness to God is not based on the *qualities* of human beings. It is grounded in their relationship to God. That relationship is a double one. It means God’s relation to human beings, and the relation of human beings to God. Human beings’ objective likeness to God subsists in God’s relation to them.” *GSS*, 84 (Italics author).

<sup>47</sup> The other part of the ‘justification of God’ is Berdiaev’s ‘divine anthropomorphism’. The main critique of ‘divine anthropomorphism’, however, pertains more to the person’s ‘divine’ nature than to the humanity of God. See fn. 39 above.

short of ‘justifying’ God.<sup>48</sup> Spinka correctly argues that God is not successfully ‘justified’ (to use Berdiaev’s term).

. . . Berdiaev’s “uncreated freedom” theory really does not free God from responsibility for at least consenting to use the “meonic” stuff in creation, although he knew it contained freedom. Did not God know what the consequences of freedom would be? How much difference is there between God’s creating freedom, and his using matter which contained it?<sup>49</sup>

Berdiaev’s myth creates an extra step in the process of creation; it does not, however, remove God’s responsibility for the existence of evil. If God brings creation into existence using meonic ‘stuff’ (even if it is ‘no-thing’), and this meonic ‘stuff’ can also precipitate evil, then the absolute separation that Berdiaev seeks between God and evil is not clearly demonstrated. God is still responsible for using this ‘stuff’, which contains the potential for evil, in bringing creation into existence.

Vallon counters this with the argument that God creates because that is who God is and, therefore, God also redeems creation.<sup>50</sup> It is accepted that highlighting redemption is one approach to theodicy, but this is *not* Berdiaev’s approach. Beside the unintentional intimation Vallon’s argument seems to make, that redemption can be viewed as ‘atonement’ for creating (God could not help creating with the *Ungrund* so God will redeem creation), Vallon’s argument does not meet Berdiaev’s own standard and, thus does not support Berdiaev’s position.<sup>51</sup>

A much more comprehensible approach to theodicy is found in Moltmann’s theology. Moltmann shares Berdiaev’s angst over the problem of evil, but Moltmann’s position, that theodicy must be the ‘open’ question that humanity lives with, provides a more helpful, and plausible, response. It is an ‘open’ question because, in the end, humanity cannot formulate an ultimate answer for theodicy.<sup>52</sup>

Theodicy as an ‘open’ question does not deny the existence of suffering, or ignore the reality that suffering causes in the world. By not focusing on a final answer and keeping the question ‘open’, it strives to keep the sufferer’s plight from becoming abstracted. Also, by

---

<sup>48</sup> Idinopulos asserts that the ambiguities in his thought arise from a basic misunderstanding of what type of theodicy Berdiaev was proposing. “Berdiaev’s confusing and contradictory views of freedom have their origin in his failure to distinguish between what I would call *philosophical* theodicy and *mythological* theodicy.” Idinopulos, “Ontology of Spirit,” 90 (Italics author).

<sup>49</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdiaev*, 121-122. For a similar critique see David Baily Harned, *Theology and the Arts* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 84.

<sup>50</sup> Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 300.

<sup>51</sup> Berdiaev would not deny the importance of redemption, but, as far as theodicy is concerned, the *Ungrund* is the answer to the question of theodicy, not redemption.

<sup>52</sup> See chapter 6, fn. 87.

stressing the openness of the question, further investigation and thought is encouraged, as opposed to claiming that the question has been solved. Therefore, all views of freedom and relationship must be cognizant of those who are not free and those who suffer.

Moltmann's 'open' question not only seeks to recognize the suffering of humans and the created order, it also recognizes God's suffering. Both writers contend that God suffers, but whereas Berdiaev's thought begins with Dostoevsky's *Legend*, Moltmann grounds his 'open' question in the cross and in God's suffering and devotes considerable attention to the idea of a passible God. Moltmann's view of the cross being a two-fold response to evil (God 'walks' with those who suffer *and* will eventually restore all, either in this time or in the time to come) has much to commend it.<sup>53</sup> Although Berdiaev's use of Dostoevsky is highly creative, Dostoevsky's image of Christ being silent before the Grand Inquisitor appears to have led Berdiaev to not seriously consider the implications of his conviction that God suffers. Dostoevsky's influence kept the angst of theodicy in front of Berdiaev, but Berdiaev's belief that he could solve the problem using Boehme's mystical construct leads him to an unsatisfactory conclusion.

Therefore, Berdiaev's contention, that the origination of freedom and God must be separated so that God is not responsible for evil, is faulty. A freedom originating outside of God does not provide a comprehensible theodicy if one wants also to maintain some sort of fidelity to the basic Christian understanding of God's nature (which Berdiaev does strive for). Also, as Moltmann rightly contends, theodicy is not a problem that can be solved in this current time. Thus, the response to theodicy is not to be found in separating freedom and God, but rather in focusing on a God who suffers for the creation and delivers it through his suffering.

---

<sup>53</sup> Regardless that inside academic theological circles "there is a strong conviction about the suffering of God" (Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 1), passibility remains for some, especially for those within the Church, a debatable proposition. Molnar would be an example of this, with his direct opposition (which is contestable) to Moltmann's position. Molnar: "Moltmann's analysis explicitly negates God's freedom in the interest of stressing the fact that suffering (the historical suffering of Christ) defines the nature of both God's freedom and love." Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, 226. Even though the doctrine of passibility is challenged by some, it is a commendable idea. As Moltmann has shown, the idea of a suffering God is not only sensible in the light of what love is, but, equally importantly, it is what is revealed in scripture, with the cross being the focal point of this view. Passibility may not be required to hold that freedom is possible for the person, but it does make the relationship between the free person and the God who is the creator of all more comprehensible – i.e. the person can be free and God can be 'almighty' because God is willing to suffer so that the person may freely enter into relationship with God. As Fiddes rightly states, "... if the claim that 'God is love' is to have any recognizable continuity with our normal experience of love, the conclusion seems inescapable that a loving God must be a sympathetic and therefore suffering God." Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 17.

## 7. *The Ungrund*

The *Ungrund* is the most controversial aspect of Berdiaev's work. It is the culmination of his mystical approach and as such the weaknesses of this approach are fully evident within this 'myth'. The extremely speculative character of his conception of the *Ungrund* raises numerous difficulties, and with no grounding in scripture and little support from the Christian tradition, it is theologically indefensible. The speculation about the *Ungrund* – what Wernham refers to as “turgid metaphysics”<sup>54</sup> – is a visible fault line in his vision. Spinka observes that “The doctrine of ‘uncreated freedom’ drew upon Berdyaeu more criticism than any other of his views. He was aware of it, and even came to the conclusion that he was alone in holding the doctrine. And no wonder. For this highly speculative theory raises more serious problems than it allays or solves.”<sup>55</sup> Spinka's analysis is clearly in line with the majority of Berdiaev commentators.

One of the primary problems with this thought is that Berdiaev never clearly delineates the relationship between the *Ungrund* and God. McLachlan observes that Berdiaev's modification of Boehme (the *Ungrund* to be ‘outside’ of God) is problematic.

But I don't think it is clear how even symbolically this can be. The *Ungrund* as pre-existential freedom provides a common link between both God and creation [in Boehme's thought]. It precedes them both and they are both grounded in it. To place the *Ungrund* outside the divine life thus makes little sense if we accept what Berdyaeu says elsewhere about the priority of freedom.<sup>56</sup>

Although McLachlan ignores the primary reason for Berdiaev considering the *Ungrund* to be outside of God, his observation on the problem that this modification raises is correct. McLachlan points out that Berdiaev's position (God and *Ungrund* being separate) leads to God, in relation to creation, being reduced to an “intelligible ideal pole in relation to the indetermination of freedom.”<sup>57</sup> God as an ‘ideal pole’ is clearly not Berdiaev's vision of the Deity, and yet because Berdiaev is unable to provide a cogent explanation of how God relates to the *Ungrund*, God's interaction with creation can be reduced to such a status.

As questionable as Boehme's vision was, at the minimum it maintained some type of unity between God and the *Ungrund*. When Berdiaev severs that relationship in the interests of theodicy he creates a dualist picture that is contrary to one of the most basic tenets of

---

<sup>54</sup> Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers*, 33.

<sup>55</sup> Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaeu*, 121.

<sup>56</sup> McLachlan, 137 fn. McLachlan ignores that a primary motivation for the *Ungrund* is theodicy. From this perspective Berdiaev's modification of Boehme's theory is consistent since Berdiaev could not have the origin of evil related to God.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

orthodox Christianity; i.e., in the beginning there was only God. We have seen that Berdiaev rejects the charge of ‘ontological dualism’, claiming that the *Ungrund* is a ‘myth’, (the *Ungrund* is a ‘no-thing’) and that this therefore cannot be an ‘ontological’ dualism. This defense is inadequate.

There are some scholars who have supported Berdiaev’s defense of the *Ungrund* on the grounds of ‘myth’, and in so doing have attempted to counter Lampert’s assessment that it “is probably the most disastrous conclusion in his [Berdiaev’s] philosophy. . . .”<sup>58</sup> Osborn (echoing the work of Clarke and Seaver) seeks to mitigate some of the harsher criticisms by emphasizing that the *Ungrund* is a premise and not a metaphysical conclusion.<sup>59</sup> This argument, however, fails to address the problem that while Berdiaev claimed that the *Ungrund* was a ‘myth’ about ‘no-thing’, in the end he is still describing ‘some-thing’. Berdiaev attached great significance to this ‘myth’, to explain the existence of freedom, non-Being, and even God; all the while claiming it was a ‘void’ or ‘nothing’. This is nonsensical. By attaching such significance and claiming that the ‘void’ is ‘meonic’ freedom and thus the ‘potential’ for Being and non-Being, he is intimating (despite his denials) that this ‘no-thing’ is really ‘some-thing’. One cannot describe something as ‘potential’ and then claim it to be non-existent.

While his ‘no-thing’ statement is a clever *riposte* to the dualist charge, in the end it cannot be supported, since his ‘myth’ is trying to describe something that “escapes both the unequivocal character of the concept and its abstraction from time” (Moltmann).<sup>60</sup> Even if we were to accept Berdiaev’s mystical approach and his claim that his mystical experience verifies the *Ungrund*’s existence, we would still have to say that he is describing something and, because it is ‘some-thing’, his critics are proved right. Berdiaev is postulating an entity that is completely independent of God and existed with God before all things. The charge of the *Ungrund* being part of a dualist view is valid.

Once we recognize the dualism that comes with this conception of the *Ungrund*, it becomes impossible to integrate this idea into a broadly Christian view of freedom, which is what Berdiaev was attempting. To begin with, the ‘myth’ contradicts the doctrine of *creatio*

---

<sup>58</sup> Lampert, 53.

<sup>59</sup> Osborn, 211 fn. See also Vallon, *Apostle of Freedom*, 301. Osborn also attempts to demonstrate that by the end of his career Berdiaev was shifting his focus from the *Ungrund* to a Christological foundation when examining the nature of God. Osborn, 229. It is an interesting observation, and it is true that in *Truth and Revelation* (‘53) the *Ungrund* is not mentioned as Berdiaev examines issues such as freedom, existence and eschatology – a significant fact (although one must also take into account that *TR* was published posthumously and edited from a working draft). Yet the *Ungrund* is central to Berdiaev’s thought and there is no indication in Berdiaev’s autobiography, or in any other later work, that he believed a new direction was warranted.

<sup>60</sup> Berdiaev’s concept of ‘myth’ loosely mirrors Moltmann’s concept of metaphor. *ET*, 162.

*ex nihilo*. Berdiaev asserts that God creates out of the *Ungrund*; as such God is relying on something outside of the Deity to bring creation into existence. Berdiaev's claim that it is a 'void' or an 'abyss' does not negate the fact that God is still 'using' something for God's created activity. This stands in direct contrast to an orthodox Christian understanding of God's creative endeavor. As Moltmann rightly explains,

Whenever and whatever God creates is without any preconditions. There is no external necessity which occasions his creativity, and no inner compulsion which could determine it. Nor is there any primordial matter whose potentiality is pre-given to his creative activity, and which would set him material limits.<sup>61</sup>

As this critique demonstrates, the *Ungrund* cannot be integrated into a Christian theological discussion of freedom. The concept is too flawed to serve any real purpose in explaining how freedom originates or exists.

That stated, we can only give a qualified assent to Lampert's assertion that the *Ungrund* is a 'disastrous' conclusion, since his assertion could be taken to intimate that the 'myth' does irreparable damage to Berdiaev's thought. This, however, is not the case. As we will demonstrate, the *Ungrund* can be removed from Berdiaev's vision of freedom and replaced with a more cogent understanding of freedom's origination, while still maintaining the valuable insights of Berdiaev's vision.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, despite the fact that our critique of the *Ungrund* has been overwhelmingly negative, there are several aspects of this thought that have potential for a current dialogue on freedom. First, by operating from a perspective that freedom originates in an 'abyss' (a non-determined potentiality), Berdiaev was able to fully explore what he calls the 'irrational' side of freedom.<sup>63</sup> With freedom having no connection to God, imagining the *Ungrund* enabled Berdiaev to see that freedom is the potential for either good or ill.<sup>64</sup>

One of the strengths of Berdiaev's vision of freedom is the emphasis on freedom *not* being a guarantee of progress or a better state; freedom is the potential for progress and growth *and* for rebellion and tragedy. This is a significant point; for as we have seen with Moltmann's thought, the existence of freedom, with the resultant 'creative passion for the possible', is almost always presented by Moltmann as a positive development. Berdiaev's speculative concept allowed him to recognize the 'irrational' nature of freedom. Thus, while

---

<sup>61</sup> *GC*, 74.

<sup>62</sup> For further discussion, see section 8 below.

<sup>63</sup> 'Irrationality' here means that freedom may result in 'good' (a rational outcome) or 'evil' (an irrational outcome).

<sup>64</sup> Berdiaev was certainly not the first Christian thinker to propose an 'irrational' quality to freedom, i.e. freedom may lead to good or evil. This thought can be traced back at least to Augustine. See Augustine, *On Free Choice*, Book 1.

his concept may have been faulty, his observation as to the nature of freedom was correct – freedom contains the potential for evil and tragedy.

Second, the ‘myth’ of the *Ungrund* can help describe the non-determinative nature of freedom. This can be seen in Macquarrie’s interesting interpretation of Berdiaev’s ‘myth’. While acknowledging the ‘obscure’ language Berdiaev used in formulating the idea of the *Ungrund*, Macquarrie concurs with Berdiaev that freedom is ‘no-thing’. Macquarrie: “Freedom is the empty space, the room that is still left for manoeuvre and has not yet been filled up and determined. It cannot therefore be grasped by rational thought; it cannot be observed.”<sup>65</sup> Macquarrie’s creative interpretation is commendable. Following Macquarrie’s lead, if we treat the *Ungrund* as a ‘myth’, i.e. recognize it has not objective or mystic reality but rather points to a truth we experience, the ‘myth’ can illustrate that freedom has an ‘empty’ quality to it, which is its non-determinative character. To develop this thought further, we must assess Berdiaev’s conception of ‘embodied’ freedom.

Before we address the central elements of this critique – embodied freedom and the creative act – let us summarize what we have examined thus far:

- i. Berdiaev’s emphasis on ‘intuition’ tends to overshadow the vast mosaic of thought from philosophy, theology, art, and culture that constitutes his vision. Because his vision is constructed with multiple strands we find his vision to have a certain plasticity, while also possessing a strong internal coherence as to the centrality of freedom.
- ii. Berdiaev’s mystical approach degrades the materiality of creation by stressing a bifurcated understanding of reality. We have seen that Moltmann provides a clear alternative to this understanding by advocating the unity of creation through the presence and life-giving energies of the Holy Spirit.
- iii. A benefit of his mystical approach is that it supports his understanding that freedom requires relationship.
- iv. A second benefit of his mystical approach is the stress on knowledge being ‘integral’.
- v. Berdiaev’s thought on ‘spirit’ also suffers from the weakness of his bifurcated view of reality, which also has a deleterious effect on his view of the Holy Spirit. These weaknesses do not negate the positive development of recognizing a dependence on the Holy Spirit for a robust expression of freedom. The dependence on the experience of the Spirit for freedom finds parallels in Moltmann’s thought.
- vi. Berdiaev’s use of *sobornost*’ establishes the interdependence of freedom and relation – relation between the person and God and the person with others. It also provides a key element to understanding how the individual can exist as a free person, which is through the indwelling of the Spirit and love for God and each other. Moltmann’s ‘open’ friendship can be seen as a complementary idea to Berdiaev’s *sobornost*’.

---

<sup>65</sup> Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity*, 13.

- vii. In the ‘justification of the person’ Berdiaev rightly emphasizes the value of personality (personhood) and the importance of freedom in the development of personality. His stress on the person’s freedom, however, fails to see how personhood is also a gift. The emphasis on the person’s contribution is carried further when the ‘justification’ focuses on the ‘divine-human’ nature of the person. In an effort to demonstrate the significance of the person, Berdiaev improperly credits the person with a divine nature. Moltmann’s thought allows for an understanding of the person participating in the Divine, while avoiding the problems of Berdiaev’s ‘divine-human’ paradigm.
- viii. We have recognized the ‘justification of God’ as an admirable quest on Berdiaev’s part. Yet, as a comprehensible theodicy it fails; the *Ungrund* does not provide the resources for an unassailable theodicy. Moltmann’s approach to theodicy, with his emphasis on the Crucified God, and theodicy being the ‘open’ question that must be ever-present, provides a much more satisfactory approach to theodicy, while encouraging further thought.
- ix. We have rejected Berdiaev’s premise concerning the *Ungrund*. It is not a ‘myth’ but rather a metaphor, as Berdiaev is attempting to describe some-thing. Even though this creative approach is rejected, we have seen that there is a positive element to his thought – freedom being considered ‘no-thing’. We will return to this in our critique of ‘embodied’ freedom.

We have critiqued a vast range of thought that Berdiaev uses to support his vision of freedom. It is important to note that although our critique has been pointed at times, there has not been a negation of Berdiaev’s basic understanding of freedom. Also, Moltmann’s perspective provides a helpful corrective to Berdiaev’s own understanding. Thus, even though we have rejected Berdiaev’s belief that his thought is primarily ‘intuitive’ and dependent on a mystical approach, we have affirmed his conviction that the role of the Spirit, loving relations with God and others, and an awareness of the problem of evil are important elements to a Christian understanding of freedom.

## 8. *Embodied Freedom*<sup>66</sup>

Before we can evaluate the contributions that Berdiaev’s concept of embodied freedom can make there are two concerns to address. The first concern relates to the rejection of the *Ungrund*. Since Berdiaev was convinced that the *Ungrund* was critical not only for theodicy but also for understanding how freedom exists, one may rightly question whether it is possible to reject this premise without collapsing his entire vision of freedom. Here we return to our earlier critique of Berdiaev’s methodological assumptions. As

---

<sup>66</sup> We must remember our position that ‘embodied’ freedom is a freedom realized within the created order. This is in contrast to meonic, or primal, freedom, which is outside the created order. Although ‘embodied’ freedom arises from meonic freedom in Berdiaev’s thought, we have seen that they are two distinct types of freedom.



previously stated, since Berdiaev's vision is *not* constructed as a system with a set of necessary premises, it is sufficiently plastic to allow for reconfiguration, providing it conforms to the overall assumptions of his outlook. As Lossky observes:

. . . Berdiaev's doctrine of the *Ungrund* and of the creature's will not being created by God, cannot be accepted as a part of Christian philosophy. But this by no means implies that the rest of his system must be rejected also; *the main content of it is unaffected.*<sup>67</sup>

Lampert concurs when he writes that the rejection of the *Ungrund* does not negate Berdiaev's thought *in toto*. "If Berdiaev claimed to have built up a harmonious philosophical 'system' this doctrine would be a real *rent* in it. Fortunately his philosophy is no such system. . . ."<sup>68</sup> The *Ungrund* is not an inviolable proposition for Berdiaev's vision.

As we have seen, outside of his theodicy concerns, Berdiaev's commitment to the idea of meonic freedom stems from his belief that it provides a 'myth' (or narrative) that unfolds the origination of non-determined (meonic) freedom and its latency (what we have termed 'existential liberty') within the created order. Berdiaev uses the *Ungrund* primarily to assert one theme: non-determined freedom.<sup>69</sup> The importance of this point cannot be ignored. The *Ungrund* is intended to explain a concept that Berdiaev believes to be a reality (non-determined freedom), but because of his concerns (1) to separate God from evil and (2) to separate freedom from God (Berdiaev cannot conceive of freedom originating from God and still being non-determined), he is convinced that non-determined freedom cannot be attributed to God. Thus Berdiaev clings to the concept of the *Ungrund* because without it he believes he cannot assert non-determined freedom.

Even though Berdiaev believed there was no other way to explain non-determined freedom, it has been demonstrated that Moltmann's theology of freedom propounds just such an idea. Moltmann's conception of freedom is one where the freedom of the person is non-

---

<sup>67</sup> Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 249 (Italics mine).

<sup>68</sup> Lampert, *The New Middle Ages*, 53 fn. (Italics author).

<sup>69</sup> Although non-determined freedom originating with God is not an unquestionable supposition, there is considerable scholarship to support the position. Augustine states, "The fact that human beings could not live rightly without it [free will] was sufficient reason for God to give it." Augustine, *On Free Choice*, Book 2, 30. Macquarrie writes that the person "is a centre of freedom." Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity*, 9. Grace Jantzen observes that to be a human is to be born free. The granting of freedom by God does not mean that the person is 'owned' by God. "From this it follows that nobody, not even God, can both own a person and maintain their full humanity: this is a contradiction in terms." Grace M. Jantzen, "Human Autonomy in the Body of God," in *Being and Truth: Essays in Honour of John Macquarrie*, ed. Alistair Kee and Eugene T. Long (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1986), 188. Axel Steuer writes, "Indeed, the possession of freedom seems to be a (if not *the*) major justification for claims that humans are in an important way images of God." Axel D. Steuer, "The Freedom of God and Human Freedom," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983), 163. And, Moltmann asserts, "God unceasingly desires the freedom of his creation. God is the inexhaustible freedom of those he created." *TKG*, 218.

determined, maturing or degrading depending upon the person's relation with God, others, and self. Consequently, since Moltmann's theology of freedom results in a concept of freedom that is in many ways identical to Berdiaev's, we are able to reject the *Ungrund* and insert Moltmann's understanding without altering Berdiaev's view of embodied freedom.<sup>70</sup> The obvious benefit is that we can ground freedom in the Triune God as opposed to a mystical abyss, and provide a more theologically comprehensible vision of freedom.

A second concern to address is the relationship between freedom and constraint in Berdiaev's thought. In describing his relation to others and the world around him, Berdiaev writes, "... the feeling of distance, the knowledge of having come from some other world, to which I would return, never left me."<sup>71</sup> This theme of distance and dissonance with what he calls the 'objective' world is significant. As we have seen in his bifurcated view of reality, Berdiaev clearly regarded human existence as a negatively constraining experience. Hence he writes that his love for metaphysics "is largely the result of a reaction against the *external* environment, against the 'necessities' of empirical reality and the commonplace."<sup>72</sup> At the base of his thought there is a conviction that the created order constrains one's freedom.

This belief is certainly not unique to Berdiaev; indeed some would say that this is a basic flaw in much modernist thinking concerning freedom. By contrast, in his insightful work, *Theology, Music and Time*, Jeremy Begbie carefully sets forth the argument that the context of human existence is not a negative constraint to be overcome but rather a 'liberating

---

<sup>70</sup> Moltmann's commitment to non-determined freedom is apparent in his appreciation of human subjectivity, a position that is challenged by Bauckham. Bauckham observes that Moltmann's view of freedom has a basic concern for the 'freedom of choice' (Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom*, 191) and as such demonstrates that Moltmann tends to the 'same direction' as modernistic conceptions of freedom. Ibid., 192. He recognizes that Moltmann challenges the 'dark side' of modernity, but when Moltmann asserts the importance of human subjectivity ('self-determination' GSS, 212) Bauckham charges that "Moltmann remains profoundly modern in his thinking about the self and community." Ibid., 193. As Bauckham believes that modernistic accounts of freedom create a 'crisis' for the person and community this evaluation is decidedly negative. Bauckham's evaluation is not without merit, but overall his argument is flawed. It is correct that Moltmann's views on freedom have a correspondence to modernistic notions of freedom, but his constant rebuttal of individualism and what he terms 'freedom of domination' clearly differentiate his view from the 'dark side' of modernity. Self-determination and subjectivity are not only aspects of individualism but also of relationship. Moltmann rejects certain elements of modernistic interpretations of freedom (individualism, self-sufficiency, domination) while at the same time affirming the distinct values that were emphasized in modernity. As Berdiaev and the religious renaissance of the *Silver Age* demonstrate, subjectivity cannot be instantly equated with individualism. Thus Moltmann can affirm human subjectivity and at the same time state, "It is not the human being who is the measure of all things. It is God, who has created the whole of life in order to invite everything living to the sabbath feast of creation. Once we overcome modern anthropocentrism, we shall once more set free the suppressed dimensions of human bodiliness and the senses." GSS, 22.

<sup>71</sup> DR, 35.

<sup>72</sup> DR, 88 (Italics mine). It is noteworthy that this belief did *not* lead to a retreat from humanity and world or the problems that afflict it. Throughout Berdiaev's life we see an abiding concern for the plight of others and a devotion of time and energies to various political and social causes.

constraint' that 'marks the freedom of the Christian'.<sup>73</sup> Begbie's analysis has much to commend to it and is a trenchant response to this weakness in Berdiaev's thought. Berdiaev (and there is an echo of this in Moltmann as well) did not properly take into account the context of human existence and often interpreted it as being antagonistic to freedom.

Human freedom always exists within a context and that context (cultural, familial, religious, political, etc.) is not always antagonistic to freedom.<sup>74</sup> Begbie rightfully details the numerous ways in which a 'constraint' can be a liberative force for the human and her development, which can result in more robust forms of freedom. It is clear that Berdiaev's vision of freedom would have benefited from a broader appreciation of the context in which the human exists and freedom is experienced. Yet Berdiaev is also correct that there are numerous ways that a context can constrain and degrade the person's freedom and existence. Thus there are times when it is proper and necessary for the person to strive to overcome and break free of constraints that bind.<sup>75</sup>

Although Berdiaev's thought is often negative regarding the human context we must be careful to avoid carelessly labeling Berdiaev as a 'modernist', and assuming that he subscribes to the modernistic understanding of freedom that Begbie details. The context of Berdiaev's development and maturation was that of the *Silver Age*, a religious and cultural environment that rejected the individualist tendencies of the West and highly valued the concept of *sobornost'*. His dedication to *sobornost'* and, equally importantly, his appreciation of the Renaissance with its influence on people and culture, demonstrate that within his thought, not all factors external to the person are negative.

---

<sup>73</sup> Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 223. See especially chapter 8. Begbie's work raises the question of whether 'constraint' is the best term for this discussion. It certainly works well in his opposition to the ideas of Boulez and Cage and in his opposition to modernistic concepts of freedom. Yet, if theology wants to move beyond the false dichotomy of freedom and constraint (context) another term may be more appropriate. One possibility would be to recast what Begbie identifies as 'liberative constraints' with something like 'external resources'. This would recognize that there are factors outside of the person (God, relationships, traditions, history, etc.) that are important for the person's development and freedom, while also recognizing that external factors can be troublesome constraints, which must be overcome (Begbie recognizes negative constraints such as "epilepsy or solitary confinement" (Ibid., 199), but surely there are other constraints that need to be overcome that are not so visibly obvious – e.g. oppressive religious structures, abusive relationships, etc.). It is recognized that this recasting might be problematic for where Begbie's discussion leads (the 'improvisation and dynamic of election'), but it is nonetheless worth considering if theology is to overcome the polarizing debate between 'freedom' and 'context' that has plagued the contemporary dialogue on freedom.

<sup>74</sup> As we have seen, Berdiaev's commitment to a noumenal realm was his attempt to overcome the context of freedom by speculating a non-material experience.

<sup>75</sup> Evdokimov offers a view much more congruous with Berdiaev's when he comments on Gregory of Nyssa: "Holiness is nothing but an unquenchable thirst, the intensity of the desire for God. St Gregory of Nyssa teaches that every limit contains in its essence a beyond, its own transcendence, and this is why the soul can rest only in the actual infinity of God. The saints are souls of longing." Evdokimov, *The Sacrament*, 58.

As we saw in chapter 4, even though Berdiaev's view has trouble appreciating the 'material', his vision of freedom was still directed towards the human in his daily life. We introduced the term 'embodied' to distinguish between this type of freedom, which is experienced within the realm of existence, and meonic freedom. Although Berdiaev's view of meonic freedom was too speculative to support, his view of 'embodied' freedom has much to commend to it. Berdiaev's astute analysis as to how freedom exists in the created order and what freedom means for the person and God can be a valuable resource for a theological view of freedom. In this section we assess three contributions Berdiaev's vision can make under the following headings: modality of existence, subjective-relational approach, and tragedy. In our last section we will critique a fourth contribution, Berdiaev's view of the creative act.

#### A. *Modality of existence*

One of the primary strengths of Berdiaev's vision is his rich description of freedom, which emphasizes the importance of non-determination. To be free is to have the possibility to do otherwise. Macquarrie is correct; Berdiaev's description of primal freedom being a 'no-thing' is an apt description for freedom. Freedom as 'no-thing' is a freedom that cannot be determined, a freedom that is the 'empty space' where the person has 'room' to move and live.<sup>76</sup> As we have seen, from a theological perspective, this can be traced back, at least, to Augustine and, from a standpoint of scripture, to the Deuteronomic author who recounts God's charge to the Israelites through Moses: "Choose life so that you and your descendants may live. . . ."<sup>77</sup> This thought has a close correlation with Moltmann's thought where freedom is valued as the space 'to be'.

Speaking of freedom as a 'no-thing' does not indicate that the freedom is nothing; freedom is something, although trying to characterize it is a difficult proposition. Begbie's observation has merit when he maintains that freedom cannot be grasped. But his description of freedom being 'adjectival' wherein freedom "qualifies arrangements of persons and things; it describes proper relationships. . . ." is lacking.<sup>78</sup> Moltmann's description of freedom being a type of 'happening' is closer to Berdiaev's thought.<sup>79</sup> Berdiaev's rich description of

---

<sup>76</sup> Macquarrie goes on to observe that this freedom is experienced and acted upon "The fluid, abyssal, plastic nothingness that was freedom is given a definite shape, and something new enters the world and the stream of happening." Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity*, 13. This 'shape' reflects back to our comments above about freedom existing within a context.

<sup>77</sup> Deut. 30:19.

<sup>78</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 199.

<sup>79</sup> See chapter 6, fn. 228.

freedom, as represented by the term ‘embodied’, may not provide a precise definition, but it does illustrate that freedom can be viewed as a modality of existence. Freedom is an integral and distinctive feature of the person’s existence and, although it depends on a wide array of variables, its base characteristic is non-determination.

Based on Berdiaev’s view, the examination of freedom can move beyond the binary paradigm of an individual either being free or not, to see that freedom is experienced on differing levels and to differing degrees. Embodied freedom stretches across a wide spectrum of life and the person’s exercise and experience of it will vary depending on context, relationships, and the person’s maturation. Berdiaev’s vision of freedom allows for all of these contingencies (and others) to be considered. Thus while freedom is part of the person’s existence, it is possible to understand that the person will experience freedom in differing modes and in differing situations. Freedom is not a static category but a dynamic experience that is constantly modulating.

Therefore, the conception of embodied freedom shows that freedom is a developmental concept. The person’s freedom will mature or degrade; seldom is freedom a constant within a person’s life. In this sense freedom is a ‘theandric’ enterprise, as the person must seek to develop his freedom in relationship with God and others. From a theological perspective this view of freedom allows one to consider how the person who is liberated by God can be can still be ‘enslaved’ in specific areas of his life.

Being enslaved brings up the complicated issue of ‘sin’. Sin is addressed by Berdiaev, but not extensively. The loss of freedom, ‘objectification’, and ‘slavery’ are all topics that are concerned with sin and evil, but Berdiaev was hesitant to devote too much attention to the matter.<sup>80</sup> His vision of freedom, however, does recognize sin’s detrimental consequences for the person and her freedom, but sin never has the power to completely negate the freedom of the individual.

---

<sup>80</sup> It is not difficult to speculate that Berdiaev’s lack of attention to the problem of sin can be attributed to his insistence on propounding the ‘divine-human’ nature of the person. See *MCA*, 96. Another probable reason for Berdiaev’s minimal attention to the problem of sin is his belief that Christianity (especially in the West) improperly focused on the issues of ‘personal salvation’. His difficulty with ‘obedience’ is tied into this view. Personal salvation, for Berdiaev, ignores the commandment to ‘love one another’ and makes the individual’s salvation the primary concern. Hence, “Insistence on obedience led Christianity to evolve the notion of personal salvation and to become an expression of transcendental egoism.” *SR*, 169. Berdiaev’s comments have value and he is right that an individual only concerned with his own salvation has missed Jesus’ great commandment (Matthew 22: 39). Yet, the fact remains that salvation, on a certain level, is personal. The ministry of Christ moves the call of God from a nation to individuals of many nations (e.g. the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15: 3-7).

For example, take the apostle Paul's words to the Romans. He exclaims, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."<sup>81</sup> Clearly Paul is talking about sin – the sins of commission and omission – and calls out to Christ to deliver him from this. Are we to assume then that Paul, the apostle who proclaims that Christ has set us free for freedom, is no longer free?<sup>82</sup> If it is accepted that sin is the complete negation of freedom, then that is the conclusion. Understanding freedom through the lens of embodied freedom we can state that Paul, at that moment, still had some form of freedom, but his freedom was degraded, not completely lost. Depending on the significance of this sin for Paul, it would also be possible to talk about the loss of freedom in a specific area, while still retaining fuller experiences of freedom on a deeper level of his life.

The degree, or intensity, of the sin will have a corresponding impact on the person's freedom. The subtlety of Berdiaev's view provides a context to deal with the complex relation between sin and freedom.

### B. *Subjective-relational*

One of the most significant variables in the development of freedom is the individual's relation with others and God. Due to the import of relationship within this view we can talk about the concept of embodied freedom as a 'subjective-relational' concept. The term 'subjective-relational' may seem self-contradictory (in the same vein as a 'determined freedom'<sup>83</sup>) but if we understand the term 'subjective' as Berdiaev and Moltmann do, we see that this phrase is fitting. The claim that we have embodied freedom seeks to assert the importance of the person in the context of relationship, thus human subjectivity is a valued idea, and not directly connected with individualism. As we have seen, how the person understands and conducts himself has a marked effect on his experience of freedom. If he sees himself as secondary to more primary concerns (heteronomy) or understands himself as the center of existence (slavery) and acts accordingly, his freedom (and hence his existence) will suffer. It is only when a person realizes that as a 'subject' he carries responsibilities for his development, and crucial to that development is his existence in relation with others and God, will his freedom mature and expand.

This perspective has a certain coherence with both the person's experience of freedom in culture, and specific theological assumptions concerning what freedom means for the

---

<sup>81</sup> Romans 7: 19.

<sup>82</sup> Galatians 5: 1.

<sup>83</sup> Colin E. Gunton, "Barth, the Trinity and Human Freedom," *Theology Today* (1986), 316, 321.

person. From a cultural standpoint, Berdiaev's qualified acceptance of 'autonomy' recognizes that individuals today (especially in the West) certainly can live relatively autonomous lives. His complex understanding of autonomy and the individual, however, allows him to affirm the importance of autonomy and the human subject, while also being able to maintain a view that asserts that 'autonomy' and the human existing as an individual are limited modes of freedom and existence. Autonomy is an integral point in the spectrum of freedom – if valued and understood for what it is, the person can move to greater experiences of freedom and relationship; if misconstrued and understood as an end goal, the person's freedom will degrade.

Therefore, Berdiaev's conception of embodied freedom allows the theologian to posit the value of subjectivity, along with the necessity of relationship with God and others, within a discussion of freedom. Relationships and commitment to others need not be seen as limiting factors to the person's experience of freedom, but rather can be regarded as sources for the person's exercise and experience of freedom and, equally importantly, for the individual's development as a person.

This approach also affords an interesting perspective on the issue of obedience. Although Berdiaev's tentative style and enthusiastic writing concerning the individual's divine-human nature would seem to indicate otherwise, Berdiaev did not completely reject the idea of obedience. He maintained that obedience is not the primary focus for human existence. The human was not created to obey but to live in relation with God and others.

It is accepted that obedience does play a part in the relationship with God and others. The examples in scripture are well-known. From the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible to the Great Commission where Christ exhorts his followers "to obey everything I have commanded you,"<sup>84</sup> obedience is obviously part of Christian faith. What Berdiaev insisted upon, however, was the recognition that love is of greater importance to God than obedience. Berdiaev would not deny that obedience is part of what it means to love God, but as the person matures the emphasis on obedience grows into an emphasis on love – a love for God and others.<sup>85</sup> Berdiaev does overstep when he states that "Obedience is a pseudo-spirituality,"<sup>86</sup> though the reader must remember that what he was opposing was a tradition in

---

<sup>84</sup> Matthew 28: 20.

<sup>85</sup> Berdiaev will acknowledge Christ's *command* to love, but he does so in the context of a mystical union: "It [the mystical union] is the realization of love and of creative energy, for love is creation. In this way the command of Christ to love God and man is fulfilled." *FS*, 266.

<sup>86</sup> *SR*, 169.

Christianity wherein he felt obedience was the primary concern and, in his opinion, led to the devaluing of love for others. As Copleston comments:

A point emphasized by Berdyaev is that, whatever human societies, secular or ecclesiastical, may have done or do, God does not coerce anybody. . . . Christ, as represented in Dostoevsky's Legend of the Grand Inquisitor, refused the temptation to exercise coercion of any kind; *he sought a free response of love, not submission to power.*<sup>87</sup>

A subjective-relational freedom does not make freedom and obedience antithetical concepts. Instead it seeks to understand freedom as being a condition for obedience as well as freedom as being a goal of obedience. A person who freely obeys God, i.e. a person who is not 'forced' by external authority, is a person who will grow in relation with God and others. As the person grows relationally her freedom will then become more robust.<sup>88</sup> Berdiaev's subjective-relational freedom offers the advantage of not denying 'obedience', but rather seeing it as a means and not an end. God grants freedom that the person may obey, mature, and grow in relationship with God and others. The *telos* of the freedom God grants is not obedience, but relationship and love.

### C. Tragedy

It is a belief, almost without question, that freedom is a worthy goal, and Berdiaev would certainly concur. Yet what is noteworthy in Berdiaev's thought is that he not only expounded the value of freedom, but also a characteristic of freedom that is often overlooked – freedom's tragic nature. His conception of embodied freedom recognizes that the experience of freedom may not always result in a positive outcome. Freedom may bring harmony and growth and freedom may also bring turmoil and discord.

Berdiaev's thought is based on his view of the *Ungrund* as "primal irrational freedom and infinite potentiality."<sup>89</sup> Despite the fact that we have rejected the *Ungrund*, his observation concerning freedom's irrational nature was valid. The existence of freedom invites a wide range of contingencies that are positive and negative. Niebuhr writes, "As

---

<sup>87</sup> Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, 380 (Italics mine).

<sup>88</sup> Bauckham provides an interesting observation on obedience in the light of freedom stating that "God's rule is different precisely because it coincides with human freedom, and human obedience to God is unlike obedience to any human authority precisely because it is fully compatible with human freedom." Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom*, 202. While Bauckham's comments certainly have merit they raise questions such as if God's rule is different from any type of human rule, should we not use a different term than 'obedience'? Also, since obedience to God has been, and in many cases continues to be, associated with some type of obedience to ecclesial authorities, how is 'obedience' to be interpreted in the light of ecclesial authority?

<sup>89</sup> *FS*, 161.



freedom develops, both good and evil develop with it.”<sup>90</sup> The insight that freedom may produce negative or evil consequences is sobering and is an important contribution of Berdiaev’s thought. For the theologian who speaks of freedom there should be, according to Berdiaev’s position, the recognition of the possibility of an ‘irrational’ outcome.

Moltmann’s theology follows a similar line of thought when he maintains that freedom “may be used properly – that is to say, for life’s preservation *and not for its destruction*.”<sup>91</sup> Yet, although Moltmann does recognize the potential for ‘destruction’, his thought is often focused on the positive side of freedom, which colors his view with a utopian bias. Thus, “Freedom in the light of hope can be compared with a train travelling through history into an increasingly greater future. Freedom, like this train, can not [*sic*] be stopped once it is running at full throttle.”<sup>92</sup> While this quote is from earlier in his career (’73), we can still read his positive assessment in later works.

That is why this ‘lordship’ is better described as ‘the free power’ and ‘the free space’ or ‘free place’ of human freedom. Through it and in it people are raised above earth and heaven, life and death, present and future, to God himself, and participate in his creative freedom (cf. I Cor. 3.22 with Rom. 8.38f.). Anyone who experiences God and a ‘deification’ (theosis) of this kind, is freed from all the godless ties of this world, and is nobody’s slave. He lives in the free space of God’s creative possibilities, and partakes of them. But for that very reason he also participates in the complex web of relationships through which the Creator loves everything he has created, and preserves its life.<sup>93</sup>

Berdiaev would certainly find much to agree with in these statements. The problem, however, is that Moltmann at times treats the experience of freedom as an inevitable progression and this is something that Berdiaev would rightly oppose. Freedom cannot be seen as a guarantee of positive development. The overall picture of embodied freedom shows that freedom, even its fullest forms, is a necessary potential, but it is not an assurance for positive development. For the potential of freedom to develop there must be a context that values freedom; it must also recognize that freedom contains an ‘irrational’ aspect, an irrationality that cannot be externally determined. Berdiaev’s *sobornost*’ was his outline for such a context, where freedom could be valued *and* developed through God’s presence and the love of others, while also recognizing the possibility of tragic outcomes.

Berdiaev’s recognition of the tragic side of freedom raises the question of whether the experience of freedom is to be highly valued – if tragedy can arise from freedom would

---

<sup>90</sup> Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 2, 95.

<sup>91</sup> *TKG*, 213-214 (Italics mine). See also *ET*, 110, 297 and *GC*, 315.

<sup>92</sup> Moltmann, “Freedom in the Light of Hope,” 16.

<sup>93</sup> *SL*, 121-122.

humanity be better off without it? This is a question that has plagued theologians and philosophers through the ages. Augustine decided that “a creature that sins by free will is more excellent than one that does not sin *only* because it has no free will.”<sup>94</sup> Berdiaev and Moltmann would strongly concur – the ‘irrationality’ of freedom is troubling and painful, but life without freedom is inhuman.

We now turn to the fourth contribution to a theological view of freedom, the ‘creative act’, which due to its wide implications is examined in our final critique.

### 9. *The ‘Creative Act’*

We have described Berdiaev’s view of the creative act as a ‘sketch’ since there are various ideas and concepts that are not fully developed. Although the term ‘sketch’ may have a negative connotation (since it intimates a lack of completeness), one must remember Berdiaev’s context and time period when he was developing his thought. Pope claims,

. . . it is an arresting fact that the abstract noun ‘creativity’ was not widely current until the 1940s and 1950s (it did not appear at all in the 1933 edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary*), and when it was used it was invoked in contexts and with applications that were highly specific to that time.<sup>95</sup>

In many respects Berdiaev’s thought was ahead of its time and while he could draw on the work of Solov’ev, he was introducing a highly original synthesis concerning freedom, the creative act and its implications for the person. Considering that Weisberg observes (over 75 years *after* Berdiaev’s publication of *The Meaning of the Creative Act*) that “understanding creativity is a challenging task,”<sup>96</sup> it is not necessarily surprising that we find Berdiaev’s thought to be not fully developed.

Berdiaev’s highly complex view of creativity includes a notable attempt to discern the relationship between freedom and creativity. Berdiaev discovered early in his career that the concept of the creative act would be essential for his understanding of freedom and his anthropological concerns. His thought on creativity, while obscure at times, consistently focused on the importance of creativity for the growth and maturation of the person and for

---

<sup>94</sup> Augustine, *On Free Choice*, Book 3, 81 (Italics mine).

<sup>95</sup> Pope, *Creativity*, 19. It is acknowledged that Pope’s work is highly prejudiced in favor of a Western perspective, with little consideration of Eastern thought.

<sup>96</sup> Weisberg, *Creativity*, 3.

God's intentions in creation.<sup>97</sup> We will critique his work by first highlighting the contributions of his thought under the headings: interrelatedness, theological discourse, positive freedom, and love. Following these contributions we then turn our attention to the equivocal areas in Berdiaev's thought and we will conclude with some suggestions for overcoming these deficiencies.

## A. Contributions

### (a) *Interdependence of Creativity and Freedom*

As we have seen, Berdiaev was not the first Russian to highlight the importance of creativity; Solov'ev's work had made the topic a point of interest for many in the *Silver Age*.<sup>98</sup> What makes Berdiaev's thought notable is the stress he places on creativity and his formulation of the interdependence between freedom and the creative act. His view of the relationship between freedom and the creative act is an astute insight into the nature of freedom. Without creativity, freedom would have no means to be fully embodied. As we saw in chapter 5, since creativity, like freedom, has a spectrum-like quality, there is a considerable range as to how creativity is expressed, which depends on a host of variables; yet the interdependence remains. Even if a free person willingly follows or obeys an external authority, how the person follows and acts on those instructions will contain some form of creativity (novelty).

Creativity is the outcome of embodied freedom and embodied freedom must exist for creativity to occur. At the core of Berdiaev's complex understanding of creativity is this basic tenet. While his thought in this area can be ambiguous, it never negates this central idea. If the free person cannot act creatively, i.e. act in ways that possess some form of self-determination and novelty, the person's freedom is endangered. The potential for a creative act, however small, is required for the person to freely act. The converse is also true, if the person is to create (be creative) there must be some degree of embodied freedom.

---

<sup>97</sup> Commenting on *MCA*, his most extensive work on creativity (and also one of his earliest), Berdiaev writes, "It [*MCA*] is an impulsive, unpremeditated and unfinished work (I am least of all satisfied with the section on Art), but it contains in that raw form all my dominant and formative ideas and insights." *DR*, 210

<sup>98</sup> Although creativity was an interest for many in the *Silver Age*, it must be noted that Berdiaev's understanding of creativity was not widely supported. In reflecting on *The Meaning of the Creative Act* Berdiaev recalls: "So far as I can remember the only critics in whom my book met with any response were Rozanov and Vyacheslav Ivanov. Sergey Bulgakov, on the other hand, in his book, *The Light That Never Fades*, which was published shortly after, spoke of my defence of creativity as 'demonic', 'titanic', 'humanistic', and nearly akin to anti-Christ." *DR*, 212.

(b) *Theological Discourse*

Berdiaev's view enables creativity to be seen as an inherent theological concern. Because freedom and creativity are interrelated, this means that a theological assertion of freedom must be cognizant of creativity. Hence for the theologian to propose freedom for the person there must be some type of recognition and provision for the person's creative acts as well. Setting aside Berdiaev's 'divine-humanity', his thought still rightly posits that one aspect of what it means to be human is to create. Creating is a human activity. Theology may properly differentiate between the creative acts of God and the creative acts of the human, but it also seems plain that humans create – culture, technologies, politics, philosophies, etc.

Berdiaev's thought on the creative act provides a point of reference to examine the phenomenon of creativity from the context of the person in relation to God and others. Berdiaev's position has visible weaknesses, but the basic thrust of his thought has merit for the theologian. As we have seen in Moltmann's view, he generally mirrors Berdiaev's idea in categorizing the highest form of freedom as a 'creative passion for the possible' – freedom leads to creative activity and this creative activity is necessary for freedom.

(c) *Positive Freedom*

Another contribution is the idea that creativity can be regarded as a positive expression of freedom – creativity is not only necessary for freedom, creativity is valued by God. Berdiaev develops this in his thought on the 'silent call' of scripture. Although this concept is speculative and difficult to support with specific scriptural reference, this suggestive idea has merit.

One does not need to completely adopt Berdiaev's view on obedience to recognize that God desires something more from his followers than obedience to a set of commandments and laws. This idea can be seen in one of Berdiaev's favorite passages of scripture, the parable of the talents.<sup>99</sup> The person who is rewarded is the person who uses his talents and multiplies their worth. Berdiaev understood this parable to mean that God expects the person to use and develop her talent. To use one's talents, according to Berdiaev, is to engage in creative acts. Thus to view God as calling for creative acts from humanity, and more specifically from the followers of Christ, can enlarge the scope of what it means to be in relation with God. The person who walks with God, and is a 'co-participant' in God's

---

<sup>99</sup> Matthew 25: 14-30.

creative works, is a person whose creative acts play a part in God's intentions for the created order.<sup>100</sup>

This valuing of human creativity does not negate the difference between Divine and human creativity. Berdiaev's view is not an attempt to usurp God, rather it propounds that the highest forms of creativity, like freedom, can only occur in relation with God. As Moltmann rightly asserts, ". . . divine creativity and human activity are not comparable with one another."<sup>101</sup> Berdiaev identified the problem of human creativity attempting to usurp God as developing in the Renaissance, and he believed that this will continue till Christ's return. Yet, the proper theological protestations against this 'usurping' should not so completely define the discourse on creativity that any talk of creating 'with' God is excluded.

Berdiaev's enthusiastic discourse on 'divine-humanity' may be questionable, but a commendable idea within his thought is this idea that the person creates *with* God. We can build on Berdiaev's idea by stating that it is in relation with God where the person's creative abilities will reach their highest potential. By stressing the importance of relation we can possibly allay some of the fears that 'co-participation' may raise – the person does not create to replace God. The person creates because he exists in relation with a God who creates. Relationship is a parameter for human creativity. Thus the person's creative activity is circumscribed by relationship with God and others while being encouraged and valued by those same relationships.

(d) *Love*

The importance of relationship in human creativity is reflected in what Berdiaev considers to be the highest form of creativity, love. By positing love as the highest form of human creativity he affirms several key ideas within his thought – ideas such as freedom, subjectivity, newness, which are all central for his vision of freedom and also for love. In the ability of the person to love, Berdiaev sees all the central elements of freedom coming to fruition. Love, which obviously involves commitment to others, is not seen as an abridgement to freedom, but as the culmination of it. For Berdiaev, a loving relationship is a union of persons with God and with each other, a union where limits exist, but those limits are existentially affirmed, not externally commanded. Jesus' command to love God is

---

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Moltmann: "This future dimension of freedom has long been overlooked, because the freedom of the Christian faith was not understood as participation in God's creative acts, and because Christianity was dominated by religious reverence rather than by messianic hope. But in fact freedom in faith is the creativity in the forecourt of the possible which breaks down frontiers." *SL*, 119.

<sup>101</sup> *GC*, 73.

predicated upon the fact that “We love because he first loved us.”<sup>102</sup> Thus love, with its mutual concern for the ‘other’, makes ever-expanding experiences of freedom possible. We have seen a similar line of reasoning in Moltmann’s thought as well, with regard to his views on friendship. Consequently God ‘commands’ the person to love and yet the free person who follows the commandment finds deeper expressions of freedom, not limitations on his freedom.

Having addressed some of the contributions Berdiaev’s view of creativity can offer to a theological discourse, we now turn to the problematic areas in this thought.

### B. *The Equivocal Areas within Berdiaev’s ‘Creative Act’*

The equivocal areas within Berdiaev’s conception of creativity stem from two of the basic assumptions that underlie his thought: a bifurcated view of reality and the ‘divine-human’ nature of the person. We have seen that neither of these assumptions, which have a noticeable imprint upon his view of creativity, can be supported and that they are a detraction.

The bifurcated perspective leads Berdiaev to a questionable understanding concerning the value of materiality within creativeness. His commitment to a ‘divine-human’ perspective results in Berdiaev considering creativity not only as a way in which the free person can act; creativity also reveals, Berdiaev asserts, the ‘divine-human’ nature of the person.

Man is not only called to creativeness, as an activity which operates in the world and is exerted upon the world, but he is himself creative power and without that creative power his human countenance is lacking. . . . Man is a being who masters and surmounts himself and overcomes the world; it is in that that his value and dignity consist.<sup>103</sup>

Consequently, part of his commitment to the creative act is his commitment to show the person’s elevated status. This is based on his belief that human creativity demonstrates the person’s ‘divine’ nature. To illustrate the ambiguities that result from these assumptions we highlight three areas of his thought as the following: materiality, genius, and *Basileia*.

#### (a) *Materiality*

The bifurcated understanding of reality obviously raises problems with regard to the materiality of creation; not only with regard to a valuation and appreciation of the material,

---

<sup>102</sup> I John 4: 19.

<sup>103</sup> *BE*, 172.

but also pertaining to how the material is to be regarded in the creative process. From the beginning of his career, the material world was a source of tension within his thought. While there was some modification towards the end of his life, Berdiaev's thought was basically unchanged – the material must be overcome. This is a noticeable fault in his thinking.

Creativity is dependent upon the material, not only for the 'outer' creative act but for the 'inner' creative act as well. Berdiaev's insistence that 'inner' creativity takes place on a 'spiritual' plane outside of the material world and, therefore, beyond the reach of objectification, may be consistent with his vision, but it does not reflect the reality of how human creativity occurs.<sup>104</sup> Berdiaev claims that he never held that the person can create in a 'vacuum' or that the materiality of creativeness was unimportant.<sup>105</sup> Yet, even if we accept Berdiaev's defense of his position (and there are grounds for this), we are still left with the problem that while he may have accepted the need for materiality, it was a grudging acceptance at best. Thus an underlying theme within his thought is the devaluation of the material. Harned writes, with regard to Berdiaev's view, that an understanding of creativity "must see more than the negative aspect of man's relation to nature. It must not divorce freedom and authentic creativity from man's response to the challenges of his environment."<sup>106</sup>

In Berdiaev's bifurcated view the 'spiritual' is the focus; anything outside of the spiritual is considered degraded. He does, of course, assert that God's transfiguration will restore the two worlds, so that the physical and spiritual will once again be unified (thereby showing a concern for the material); however, until that point the material world is a lesser value. This position creates a significant ambiguity within his thought. How can one envisage a creative act within a spiritual realm without reference to the material?

Berdiaev maintains that the human creator is swept up in union with the Spirit, receives his inspiration and begins to imagine, contemplate, and eventually humble himself to this vision. The problem is that in this vision, creativity, conceived in the spiritual as part of the inner creative process, does not appear to be dependent upon the material. Could

---

<sup>104</sup> In discussing what 'art' reveals, Hart observes that art enables the viewer to "know *more* than is presented to us at the level of the physical or historical." Trevor Hart, "Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth," in *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation Through the Arts*, ed. Jeremy S. Begbie (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 22 (Italics author). Yet this revelation of meaning does not discount the material nature of the creation. ". . . these same eyes and ears do not see or hear *less* than what is presented physically, and what they see and hear is bound up inextricably with the 'more' that is there to be discerned." Ibid, 23 (Italics author). The material cannot be relegated to a secondary importance in the creative process, it is an integral part of the process.

<sup>105</sup> Chapter 5, fn. 137.

<sup>106</sup> Harned, *Theology and the Arts*, 102.

Beethoven have conceived his music without reference to the actual sounds that the musical instruments create? Could Giotto receive his inspiration, and imagine what his vision would be, without reference to his tools and medium? Berdiaev's premise "the basic characteristic of a creative act consists in not being wholly determined by its medium"<sup>107</sup> seems to intimate that the creator is not dependent upon his material.

Berdiaev tried to ameliorate this with his conception of embodied creativity and the recognized need for 'realization' in the creative act. Yet he never clearly outlined how the noumenal is revealed in and through the phenomenal and even if he was able to explain how this revelation occurs, it is still an idea that privileges the 'spiritual' over the 'material'. His view falls short, as the material remains a decidedly secondary concern; when in actuality, the 'inner' creative act is just as dependent upon the 'outer' creative act as vice versa.

Berdiaev could not accept that there was an interdependence between the two phases of creativity (as opposed to the outer creative act being only a necessary by-product) since that would mean that there is an inherent material parameter within the initial creative process. The 'inner' creative act, as he conceives it, is independent of the material world. Yet in the creative process the creator does *not* transcend the boundaries of this world and become a disembodied person; rather the human, as mind, body, and spirit, creates in and through an interaction with the material. The material is *not* an obstacle to be transcended, but a resource to be engaged. Berdiaev's thought in this regard allows for no such interdependence but instead creates a stark dichotomy where the manifested realization of creativity is devalued.

The devaluing of the material also raises other issues. Among them is the concern that Berdiaev did not appear to realize that his consistent de-valuing of the material can also be extrapolated to de-value the person. The person is a material being, she is neither a 'spirit' nor does she create as a 'spirit', but as a bodily creature. By de-valuing the material, an essential aspect of what it means to be human is also de-valued. As Elshtain comments, "We do not *have* a body. We simply *are* body and soul, ensouled bodies."<sup>108</sup> The devaluation of the individual's 'humanness' is a troubling idea within his thought, especially from a writer who placed such emphasis on the Incarnation and Christ being 'human'.

Another concern is that his focus on the inner creative act leads to a faulty view of what is 'original'. As we saw in chapter 5, one of the ways in which Berdiaev uses the term

---

<sup>107</sup> *DR*, 213.

<sup>108</sup> Elshtain, *Who are We?*, 16 (Italics author).



‘original’ is to indicate a created realization that is without precedent.<sup>109</sup> It is accepted that the creative acts of the person will be unique as the person is unique, but human creativity does not exist in a vacuum. Human creativity is grounded in a vast matrix of factors that make up who the person is at that creative moment. To insist on the created act as being original *and* without precedent because it originates within a ‘spiritual’ realm denies the varied influences upon the person. Once again Berdiaev’s prejudice against anything that can be construed as ‘external’ to the person results in him failing to see the necessity and giftedness of external ‘resources’ in the person’s life. As *sobornost* maintains, life cannot be lived in isolation, and neither can creativity occur in isolation. The created act may be ‘original’ but it is not without precedent.

(b) *Genius*

Berdiaev’s thought on ‘genius’ (*geniality*) is problematic in several respects. First, there is nothing in scripture and little in the Christian tradition to support his premise that the *imago Dei* can be interpreted as ‘genius’. As we have commented, Berdiaev’s reliance on the *imago* to support his claim for the divine nature of the person is problematic. To then push the idea further, and propound that the *imago* can be regarded as the inner ‘genius’ that makes human creativity possible, obfuscates both the idea of the *imago* and the concept of genius. For this idea to have merit, Berdiaev would have had to support this formulation with some type of further evidence or a more elaborate picture as to how the *imago* and ‘genius’ interrelate. As it stands within his thought, it remains an interesting, but undeveloped idea.

A second problem is the basic premise behind this concept. Berdiaev believes that by reformulating the *imago* as ‘genius’ he can maintain creativity as originating with the person and also having a ‘divine’ source. He is convinced that human creativity must be attributable to the person. “Man’s answer to God’s call cannot entirely consist of elements that are given by and proceed from God.”<sup>110</sup> In this convoluted thought ‘genius’ is used to claim that the person’s creative act can be attributed to the person, since creativity is predicated upon ‘genius’ and ‘genius’ is the *imago* within the person.

In recasting the *imago* as ‘genius’ he turns God’s image into a personal characteristic of the person, almost as if it is something the person can claim as a possession. He thus ends up asserting the paradoxical position that the person’s creative activity is distinctly his own because of God’s image within him. Yet if the creative activity is distinctly the person’s,

---

<sup>109</sup> Chapter 5, fn. 8.

<sup>110</sup> *DM*, 164.

how can it depend on God's image? Here we see that 'genius' (*imago*), in this area of thought, represents a nature that is 'divine' (or possibly god-like) more than an 'image' of God. On the basis of this claim, Berdiaev goes so far as to envisage the person's creative activity as being outside the influence not only of God but of society also. The existence of 'genius' "indicates that man is capable of breaking through to the primary source of life and that his spiritual activity is truly original and *not determined by social influences*."<sup>111</sup>

From a Christian theological perspective this is an impossible position to support. As with our previous critiques, the idea that the person can 'self-transcend' because of a 'divine' nature so that her creative act is without precedent simply does not agree with scripture, or accepted understandings of personhood and human creativity. Union with God and the experience of the Divine never negate the multiple influences that constitute the person. The ideas (1) that the person's creative act is valuable because it originates in a state of 'pure' self, and (2) that the person is valued because she can create on the basis of her 'genius', cannot be supported. Berdiaev's view of genius detracts from the positive contributions his thought can make.

As we have already stated, Moltmann's idea of the *imago* is much more coherent from the perspective of scripture and tradition. The person is in God's image because of God's grace and faithful presence, and creativity is possible because the person exists in relation with a Creator God.

### (c) Basileia

The significance of creativity for establishing the value of the person is most readily apparent in the role of human creativity in the *Basileia*. In this thought the person goes beyond the role of participant to become a principle element in God's plan.<sup>112</sup> For Berdiaev, the person's role is so central that God waits upon the person's free created response to bring about the consummation of the world. So, when Berdiaev writes that he regards "the Second Coming of Christ in power and glory as *dependent* on the creative act of man,"<sup>113</sup> the person becomes arbiter for God's intention.

Berdiaev:

---

<sup>111</sup> *DM*, 166-167 (Italics mine).

<sup>112</sup> Moltmann comments on the person as 'participant' in God's plan: "So as not to give all the times equal significance through the 'already, but not yet', it is important to perceive the *presence of the kingdom of God in the Spirit*, and in that presence to do what is required *today*. It is the martyrs who tell us what is timely, and the same is impressed on us by the Jewish understanding of time: 'When, if not now? Where, if not here? Who, if not us?'" *ET*, 248 (Italics author).

<sup>113</sup> *DR*, 297 (Italics mine).

Thus I understand by creative spiritual activity not only the creation of cultural products which are always symbolical, but also a real transformation of the world and of human relationships – in other words, the creation of a new life, of a new being.<sup>114</sup>

Even though Berdiaev is propounding that creative spiritual activity is accomplished in unison with God, his thought has the strong intimation of *God and agent being on an equal footing*.<sup>115</sup> God must wait upon the person to engage in true creative acts for the transfiguration of the world to occur. This is a troubling notion coming from a writer who experienced the results of ‘utopian’ societies; a philosopher who realized that, “. . . *human nature is prone to evil*.”<sup>116</sup>

In examining how Berdiaev understood the person’s role in God’s design, Copleston writes,

If human beings are free, as Berdyaeu insists that they are, it follows that they may not do that to which they are called. *In that case the second coming of Christ would presumably not take place*. But Berdyaeu seems to be confident that the goal of history will be realized, though not by evolution within historical time. This is doubtless a matter of faith. It involves, however, not simply faith in God but faith that human beings will freely prepare the way for the kingdom of God. At any rate this seems to the present writer to be the case.<sup>117</sup>

Dye, examining a similar issue within Berdiaev’s thought, concludes that Berdiaev’s Christological and Trinitarian commitments result in a world process where there is an “idea of reality as purposive but not entirely determined.”<sup>118</sup>

Thus, while Dye’s analysis partly answers Copleston’s query (God still acts, God still has a purpose), in the end it is inconclusive. Berdiaev never adequately addresses how God’s non-determinative purposive reality is fulfilled by relying in some way (Berdiaev is unclear as to the degree) on the free creative acts of individuals. Copleston’s observations are apt; when Berdiaev elevates the role of the person to such a degree that the *Basileia* is *dependent*

---

<sup>114</sup> SR, 175.

<sup>115</sup> An example of this can be seen in *DR*: “Redemption and salvation are, therefore, also acts of divine-human creativity. Similarly, the ultimate fulfilment of redemption and the coming of God’s Kingdom comprises a creative act on the part of man.” *DR*, 213.

<sup>116</sup> *EOT*, 192 (Italics mine).

<sup>117</sup> Copleston, 387 (Italics mine). In examining the writings of Dorothee Sölle and her views on God’s suffering Moltmann arrives at a similar critique: “If God is no longer the Almighty, who has everything under control, then we human beings are called to participate in God’s suffering in the world and to collaborate – to be co-instrumental – in its redemption. Then ‘the sanctifying of his Name’ and ‘the doing of his will’ is in our hands, and hence ‘the coming of his kingdom’ too. I respect this humanist interpretation of our responsibility for God, as Dorothee Sölle maintains it. But I feel that it makes too great a demand on beings as ambiguous as us. God himself must help us. If, as Bonhoeffer said, God does not help through his omnipotence but through his powerlessness, not through his untroubled bliss in heaven but through his suffering on this earth, then God is still the determining subject of redemption, both his own redemption from his suffering with us, and the redemption of this unredeemed world too.” *GSS*, 184.

<sup>118</sup> Dye, “Nikolai Berdyaeu and His Ideas,” 116.

upon human action, faith must be not only in God but also in the human ability to follow God. It is recognized that although there is no definitive understanding concerning what role the human plays in bringing about the *Basileia*, yet when Berdiaev claims that the human is such a prominent factor in God's intent, the onus is placed on him to provide further detail.

Lampert observes,

Many are alarmed and repelled by Berdyaeu's exaltation of creativeness, and objections have been raised from all sides to the very understanding of man as creator and as called to creativity. It may seem however that his critics, who accuse him of over-valuing and divinizing man, of "titanism" and humanism, have largely misunderstood the particular way in which he posits the whole problem."<sup>119</sup>

This research does concur with Lampert that there are misunderstandings of Berdiaev (Berdiaev recognizes that in certain respects he is responsible for them). Also, it is accepted that Berdiaev was not attempting either to replace God with the person as creator or to grant the person equal status with God. As the above criticisms demonstrate, however, Berdiaev's ambitious agenda to prove the 'divine-humanity' of the individual leads him to transgress the very boundary that he himself acknowledges – a boundary based on the substantial difference between the creative abilities of God and the person. The desire to elevate the person, to assert the person's 'divine-human' nature, in conjunction with his faulty bifurcated view of reality, lead to ambiguities in this thought on the creative act. While the charge of 'titanism' may be too harsh, it is not difficult to see why the charge has been leveled against him.

### C. A Suggestion

The ambiguities in Berdiaev's conception of the creative act can be easy targets for critics, especially theologians, and this can lead to a premature dismissal of his work. Clearly what he perceived to be a central feature of human creativity (the *Basileia* depending on human creativity) is antithetical to a wide portion of Christian thought. Lampert's claim (as quoted above) is unconvincing – to say that Berdiaev was *not* 'over-valuing and divinizing' the human is difficult to support. It seems clear, at least to this researcher, that this is precisely the direction of Berdiaev's 'creative act'.

Yet Lampert's position of trying to absolve Berdiaev by following the line that Berdiaev was trying to preserve the dignity of the person (a position that is evident in a number of early works on Berdiaev) is not the only means of defending, and more importantly, appreciating his thought. The value of Berdiaev's work lies in the insights he

---

<sup>119</sup> Lampert, *The New Middle Ages*, 47-48.

gives into what creativity can be for the human. It is possible to demarcate the questionable *telos* of his thought from the insights he achieves regarding the creative act. Consequently we can recognize that though some of what he formulates from these insights is questionable, the basic insights are cogent.

Thus, we need not subscribe to his position that creativity demonstrates the divinity of the person, with its accompanying thought that creativity must transcend the material world, or that God is dependent upon human creativity, to appreciate the contributions his thought makes. Indeed if we remove these unattainable expectations from the conception of human creativity, and draw instead on the insights we have gained from Moltmann's thought regarding the integral relationship of the material and spiritual, we are able to conceive of human creativity in a more comprehensible and better supported pattern.

Beginning with Berdiaev's conception of embodied freedom we can propose that creativity occurs in everyday acts. At some points creativity produces great works of art, thought or culture, at other times its outcomes are much more quotidian. As Johnson observes:

Creativity occurs at all levels of our experiential organization and not just in those rare moments when we discover novel ideas. We are imaginatively creative every time we recognize a schema in a new situation we have never experience before and every time we make metaphorical connections among various preconceptual and conceptual structures. For example, we are creative even when come to see a dinner conversation as a process moving from a beginning point toward some indeterminate completion, for example, a new understanding of the participants in the conversations. This creativity is modest and unnoticed, but it is the basis for our more remarkable acts of innovations, too.<sup>120</sup>

Considering creativity from this broad perspective we are able to appreciate the insights that Berdiaev's view of creativity provides. For example, it is possible to affirm that human creativity does involve 'self-will', 'newness', and 'freedom', and his thought that creativity has an 'inner' and an 'outer' aspect is coherent with how creativity occurs. Most importantly, his belief that there is an interdependency between freedom and creativity is astute.

It is recognized that his thought does not provide a comprehensive account of human creativity; as we have said, it is a 'sketch'. But, as Pope observes, neither should we think that a definitive account of human creativity is possible. "Something relevant may be said about creativity, provided it is realized that whatever we say about creativity there is always 'something more and something different.'"<sup>121</sup> By setting aside his questionable ideas as to

---

<sup>120</sup> Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 170.

<sup>121</sup> Pope, *Creativity*, 53.

what creativity accomplishes, we can appreciate Berdiaev's recognition of the important role creativity plays in being a person, and in what God desires from the person. We can then see that creativity does not prove the person is divine, but rather, and more significantly, that the person is human.

### §3 SUMMARY

Moltmann's theology of freedom has provided a much firmer grounding for Berdiaev's vision of freedom without compromising Berdiaev's overall concerns. By inserting Moltmann's perspective into Berdiaev's view we can see that it is possible to understand embodied freedom as originating with God. We are thus able to affirm the following positive contributions of this reconfigured vision:

- i. Embodied freedom is a dynamic concept with freedom being experienced in different modalities depending on multiple variables.
- ii. Embodied freedom is to be understood by a subjective-relational approach that recognizes the centrality of relationship for the experience of freedom, and also the potential for tragedy.
- iii. A good understanding of embodied freedom recognizes the importance of creativity for the expression of freedom and for the person's existence.
- iv. Although Berdiaev's view of creativity is not fully developed and is susceptible to faulty interpretations and extrapolations, his view still possesses valuable insights as to the nature of creativity and its relation to freedom.

Having used Moltmann's theology of freedom to reconfigure Berdiaev's vision we are able to see that Berdiaev's vision of freedom can be made theologically tenable. As was stated at the beginning of chapter 6, even though Berdiaev had a definite prejudice against the theological endeavor, his vision of freedom is theologically relevant. His vision asserts that whatever else may be said about God and the person, a non-determined, relational freedom that results in creative acts must be part of our theology. It is the contention of this research, that when his vision of freedom is constructively engaged with Moltmann's theology of freedom, Berdiaev's vision of freedom is compelling and of value for a theological discourse on freedom.

## Chapter 8 – Conclusion

In conclusion, let us recall what this research has surveyed. We began with a brief introduction to the life of Berdiaev, highlighting his significant influences and placing his thought within the context of the Russian *Silver Age*. We also noticed that certain formative events in Berdiaev's life share a similarity with events in Moltmann's life, which helps explain the importance of freedom for both writers.

The exposition of Berdiaev's thought started with the analysis of his orientation and style. We agreed with his suggestion that his thought on freedom should be regarded as a 'vision' of freedom. Although Berdiaev claimed that his thought was non-systematic and aphoristic, we have seen that there are clear and discernible themes that shape his thought and guide his work. We also gave considerable attention to his view of the 'origins' of freedom, particularly his mystical claim that the *Ungrund* is a primal void that is the origination of freedom, and from which God brings forth all Being.

We then examined the motivations behind this highly speculative thought – Berdiaev's proposal that there must be a justification of God and a justification of the person. The justification of God was Berdiaev's attempt to put forth what he believed was an unassailable theodicy based on the *Ungrund*. The justification of the person detailed his complex understanding of personality and how personhood is achieved, which gave particular attention to the Incarnation.

Meonic freedom within the created order then became our focus. Our proposal was to re-conceive meonic freedom within existence as 'embodied' freedom, and the latent quality of meonic freedom within Being as 'existential liberty'. Embodied freedom was examined within a model that distinguished four modes of freedom. The experience of freedom within any of these modes is modulated by numerous variables, one of the most significant being the person's relation to God, others, and self. Within this discussion of freedom we also examined Berdiaev's interpretation of 'Godmanhood' and considered how Berdiaev deploys this thought to claim that the most robust expressions of freedom are dependent upon the person's communion with the Divine. We also explored the distinctively Russian idea of *sobornost'*, examining the importance Berdiaev attached to this concept of persons relating to one another and to God, based on love and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Our examination of embodied freedom led us to Berdiaev's understanding of the creative act. We described his view as a 'sketch', and while his view raises substantial

questions, we were able to follow a general line of thought that began with the formation of what we termed a ‘novel’ act, and from that proceeded to the complex process of the creative act, a process that depended on an ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ creative action. We concluded our discussion with his highly suggestive thought pertaining to the interdependence of freedom and the creative act – discussing creativity as necessary for the free person to be able to act in a self-determined way, and the necessity of freedom for creativity to occur.

This concluded our examination of Berdiaev’s work and we then turned our attention to Moltmann’s multifaceted theology of freedom. We identified five factors that comprise Moltmann’s view on freedom, and detailed his thought accordingly. It was shown that Moltmann understands freedom as being grounded in the nature and actions of the Triune God. We then examined what Moltmann believes the implications of this freedom to be for the created order – being freed *from* sin and oppression and being freed *for* creativity and a ‘project’. Moltmann’s view has distinct similarities to Berdiaev’s conception – the importance of human subjectivity, freedom as self-determined, and the importance of creativity for freedom – as well as having important differences – freedom originating in God alone, a strong appreciation for the material aspect of creation, and a much more comprehensible and supportable approach to theodicy.

In our penultimate chapter we offered a critique, assessment and reconfiguration of Berdiaev’s vision of freedom. We rejected his bifurcated view of reality and his claim regarding the person’s ‘divine-human’ status, along with his over-emphasis on ‘intuition’. We found in Moltmann more solid grounds for appreciating the materiality of creation, the humanity of the individual, and the person’s participation with God in the created order. We affirmed Berdiaev’s view of embodied freedom and identified several contributions his view can offer. We also affirmed his view of the creative act and detailed four different contributions his view makes, most importantly the interdependence of freedom and creativity within his thought. We concluded with an examination of several areas that are problematic within his thought on creativity.

By reconfiguring Berdiaev’s vision of freedom with Moltmann’s theology of freedom we achieved a view of freedom that is theologically tenable, as well as having implications for a theological discussion on what freedom means for the person and the created order. Berdiaev’s overall objective has been maintained – this reconfigured view still propounds the importance of human subjectivity and non-determination as base characteristics of freedom, as well as affirming Berdiaev’s interpretation of *sobornost*. This re-configured view, then, posits that freedom depends on human subjectivity and relationship with God and others –



freedom is a subjective-relational phenomenon. In addition, this reconfiguration also addresses the problem of evil and suffering, and stresses the importance of the individual's role in his/her development as a free person participating with God in God's ongoing creativity. While we have affirmed Berdiaev's overall objective, we have also rejected those areas of his thought that were equivocal and, in certain instances, obfuscations to his creative synthesis and original ideas.

It is acknowledged that this research has raised questions that have been left open. Further research and development is certainly warranted in areas such as Berdiaev's epistemology, his concept of the 'creative act' (especially concerning 'embodied' creativity), and the relationship between freedom and its framework of limits and constraints. Also, with regard to Moltmann's thought, we have not fully addressed the implications of his Trinitarian thought with regard to *perichoresis*, and how fully the human can participate in the perichoretic life of the Trinity. While these questions invite further discussion, their open-endedness should not detract from our aim to put forward Berdiaev's vision as a theologically tenable understanding of freedom. We have seen that this vision of freedom, when reconfigured through Moltmann's theology, can be a vision that challenges and pushes forward the ongoing dialogue concerning what freedom means for the Christian and for the world.

We hope that through this research the reader has begun to appreciate the creative insights of Berdiaev's thought. We have found in Berdiaev a complex and robust understanding of freedom and of its importance for the person and the community. His vision of freedom has significant implications for the theologian and the Christian community who value freedom. If Berdiaev is correct, that there is a direct relationship between freedom and creativity, and we believe he is, the question becomes: how does theology account for creativity? Is theology merely a 'defense' of established truth, or does theology build on the truths that scripture reveals and past generations have discovered? How do the theologian, and more importantly, the Body of Christ, respond to the creative activity of people who experience freedom in union with God and one another?

Berdiaev's vision strongly intimates that human creativity should not be a matter of debate for the Church; if people experience God's liberative works, creativity will sooner or later result. Hence one of the areas Berdiaev's vision lead us to is the current dialogue taking place between theology and the arts, which would seem to have an even greater import under a Berdiaevian view. This dialogue is not only of consequence for what theology can contribute to the artistic endeavor, but, equally importantly, for what the theologian can learn

from the person who creates. Can the artist offer insights into creativity and freedom that the theologian and the Church might find meaningful as they ponder what it means to be free, creative individuals who are grafted into Christ's Body to the degree that Paul talks about in I Corinthians 12? These are questions that deserve further attention.

Berdiaev's vision of freedom can be a rich resource for this current generation to reflect on these questions. As Christians continue to try to understand what it means to be 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church', in a global context, and as various denominations struggle to maintain their identities, it may be time to consider again Berdiaev's vision of a freedom that is self-determined and relational, a freedom that looks towards creative acts that can benefit the person, the community, and further God's desire for this world.

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Nicholas. "Eschatology Sacred and Profane: The Effects of Philosophy on Theology in Pannenberg, Rahner and Moltmann." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2:3 (November 2000): 284-306.
- Anderson, Ray. *On Being Human*. Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 1982.
- Aubrey, Edwin E. "The Philosophy of Nicolai Berdyaev." *Theology Today* 4:4 (January 1948): 522-533.
- Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*. Translated by Thomas Williams. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993.
- Barth, Karl. *The Humanity of God*. Translated by John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1960.
- Bauckham, Richard. *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *God Will Be All In All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1999.
- Begbie, Jeremy S. *Theology, Music and Time*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts*. London: T & T Clark Ltd., 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation Through the Arts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000.
- Berdyaev, Nicolas. *Dostoevsky*. Translated by Donald Attwater. New York: Meridian Books, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography*. Translated by Katharine Lampert. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Freedom and the Spirit*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Translated by Oliver Fielding Clarke. London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1948.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Slavery and Freedom*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Translated by R. M. French. London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1944.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Solitude and Society*. Translated by George Reavey. London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1938.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Spirit and Reality*. Translated by George Reavey. London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1939.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Beginning and the End*. Translated by R. M. French. London: Geoffrey Bles, Ltd., 1952.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Bourgeois Mind: and other essays*. Translated by Donald Attwater. London: Sheed & Ward, 1934.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Destiny of Man*. Translated by Natalie Duddington. London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1937.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Divine and the Human*. Translated by R. M. French. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1949.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The End of Our Time*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Translated by Donald Attwater. London: Sheed & Ward, 1933.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Fate of Man in the Modern World*. Translated by Donald A. Lowrie. New York: Morehouse Publishing Co., 1935.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Meaning of History*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Translated by George Reavey. London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1936.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Meaning of the Creative Act*. Translated by Donald A. Lowrie. London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*. Translated by Donald A. Lowrie. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1952.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Russian Idea*. Translated by R. M. French. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Towards a New Epoch*. Translated by Oliver Fielding Clarke. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1949.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Truth and Revelation*. Translated by R. M. French. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953.
- Berdiaev, Nikolai. "МОЕ ФИЛОСОФСКОЕ МИРОСОЗЕЦАНИЕ." In *N. A. Berdiaev: pro et contra*. Edited by A. A. Ermichev. St. Petersburg: Russian Christian Humanities Institute, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "СПАСЕНИЕ И ТВОРЧЕСТВО." *Put' 2* (January. 1926): 26-46.
- Berger, Peter L. *Facing up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977.
- Berlin, Isaiah. *Russian Thinkers*. Edited by Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly. London: The Hogarth Press Ltd, 1978.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Magus of the North: J. G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism*. Edited by Henry Hardy. London: Fontana Press, 1993.
- Brown, David. *Continental Philosophy and Modern Theology: An Engagement*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Solovyov, the Trinity and Christian Unity." *Dialogue & Alliance* 4:3 (Fall 1990): 41-54.
- Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970.
- Bulgakov, Sergius. *The Orthodox Church*. Edited by Donald A. Lowrie. Translated by Elizabeth S. Cram. London: The Centenary Press, 1935.
- Burghardt, Walter J., S.J. *The Image of God in Man: According to Cyril of Alexandria*. Woodstock, MD: Woodstock College Press, 1957.
- Burns, J. Patout, S.J., ed. *Theological Anthropology*. Translated by J. Patout Burns, S.J. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.
- Calian, Carnegie Samuel. *The Significance of Eschatology in the Thoughts of Nicolas Berdyaev*. Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1965.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 2 vols. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. London: SCM, 1961.
- Chappell, T. D. J. *Aristotle and Augustine on Freedom: Two Theories of Freedom, Voluntary Action and Akrasia*. London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1995.
- Chirban, John T., ed. *Personhood: Orthodox Christianity and the Connection Between Body, Mind, and Soul*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1996.
- Clément, Olivier. *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Text and commentary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Translated by Theodore Berkeley, O.C.S.O., revised by Jeremy Hummerstone. London: New City, 1994.
- Coleman, Earle J. *Creativity and Spirituality*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.
- Copleston, Frederick C. *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev*. Kent, England: Search Press Ltd., 1986.
- Corry, James Edwards, Jr. "Ethica Communionis: Nicolas Berdyaev's Philosophical Concept of Communion." Ph.D. diss., University of Basel, 1957.
- Dye, James Wayne. "Nikolai Berdyaev and His Ideas on the Fundamental Nature of All Entities." *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 2:3 (1979): 109-134.

- Eddie, James M., James P. Scanlan, Mary-Barbara Zeldin, eds., *Russian Philosophy*. Vol. III. With the collaboration of George L. Kline. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, Inc., 1965.
- Elshtain, Jean Bethke. *Who are We? Critical Reflection and Hopeful Possibilities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.
- Erasmus. "De Libero Arbitrio: Diatribe Seu Collatio." In *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*. Edited and translated by E. Gordon Rupp. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969.
- Evdokimov, Paul. *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*. Translated by Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985.
- Evtuhov, Catherine. *The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "On Neo-Romanticism and Christianity: 'Spots of Time' in the Russian Silver Age." *Russian History* 20: 1-4 (1993): 197-212.
- Fiddes, Paul S. *The Creative Suffering of God*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002.
- Frank, S. L. *God With Us: Three Meditations*. Translated by Natalie Duddington. London: Jonathan Cape, 1946.
- Freyberg, Bernard. *Provocative Form in Plato, Kant, Nietzsche (and others)*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2000.
- Fromm, Erich. *The Fear of Freedom*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1946.
- Gerth, H. H. and C. Wright Mills, eds. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1970.
- Godsey, John D., ed. "Karl Barth's Table Talk." *Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers* No. 10. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Gunton, Colin E. "Barth, the Trinity and Human Freedom." *Theology Today* XLIII (1986): 316-330.
- Harned, David Baily. *Theology and the Arts*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966.
- Hartshorne, Charles. "Whitehead and Berdyaev: Is There Tragedy in God." *The Journal of Religion* 37:2 (April 1957): 71-84.
- Hefner, Philip. "God and Chaos: The Demiurge Versus the Ungrund." *Zygon* 19:4 (December 1984): 469-485.

- Heinemann, F. H. *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament*. London: Adam & Charles Black Ltd., 1958.
- Hendry, George S. "The Freedom of God in the Theology of Karl Barth." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 31 (1978): 229-244.
- Hick, John. *Evil and the God of Love*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Great Britain: Macmillan and Co Ltd., 1975.
- Horton, Michael. "Eschatology After Nietzsche: Apollonian, Dionysian or Pauline?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2:1 (March 2000): 29-62.
- Hughes, Robert P. and Irina Paperno, eds. *Christianity and the Eastern Slavs: Russian Culture in Modern Times*. Vol. II. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994.
- Idinopulos, Thomas. "Creativity and Christianity: A Polemic Based upon Rudolph Bultmann, Emil Brunner, and Nicolas Berdyaev." Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Nicolas Berdyaev's Ontology of Spirit." *The Journal of Religion* 49 (1969): 84-93.
- Jantzen, Grace M. "Human Autonomy in the Body of God." In *Being and Truth: Essays in Honour of John Macquarrie*. Edited by Alistair Kee and Eugene T. Long. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1986.
- Jenson, Robert W. "An Ontology of Freedom in the De Servo Arbitrio of Luther." *Modern Theology* 10:3 (July 1994): 247-252.
- Johnson, Mark. *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Kearney, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-modern*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Translated by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie. London: Oxford University Press, 1941.
- Kirk, J. Andrew. *The Meaning of Freedom: A Study of Secular, Muslim and Christian Views*. Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998.
- Klépinine, Tamara. *Nicolas Berdiaev Bibliographie*. Paris: Institut D'Etudes Slaves, 1978.
- Kornblatt, Judith Deutsch and Richard F. Gustafson, eds. *Russian Religious Thought*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.
- Kuvakin, Valery, ed. *A History of Russian Philosophy: From the Tenth through the Twentieth Centuries*. Vol. II. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1994.
- Lampert, Evgueny. *Nicolas Berdyaev and the New Middle Ages*. London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1945.

- Lane, Ann M. "Nietzsche Comes to Russia: Popularization and Protest in the 1890s." In *Nietzsche in Russia*. Edited by Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal. Guildford, Surrey, UK: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Lossky, N. O. *History of Russian Philosophy*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1952.
- Louth, Andrew. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.
- Lowrie, Donald A. *Rebellious Prophet: A Life of Nicolai Berdyaev*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1960.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Christian Existentialism: A Berdyaev Anthology*. Translated by Donald A. Lowrie. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1965.
- Loya, Joseph A. "For Harmony in Freedom and Truth: 'Radical' Visions of the Church from 19th century Russia." *Ostkirchliche Studien* 33:D (1984): 302-309.
- Luther, Martin. *Christian Liberty: A Treatise on Christian Liberty*. Translated by W. A. Lambert, revised by Harold J. Grimm. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "De Servo Arbitrio." In *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*. Edited and translated by Philip S. Watson. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Luther's Works*. Vols. 1 & 9. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. Translated by George V. Schick. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958.
- MacKay, Donald G. M. "The Relation of God and Man in the Writings of Nicolas Berdyaev." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 3:1 (March 1950): 380-396.
- Macquarrie, John. *In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983.
- Martensen, Daniel Feldtmose. "The Vision of Integral Transfiguration and the Concept of Creativity in Nicholai Alexandrovich Berdyaev: An Exposition of the Fundamental Motif of Berdyaev's Thought with Special Reference to his Concept of Creativity." Ph.D. diss., The Claremont Graduate School and University Center, 1964.
- McDougall, Joy Ann. "The Return of Trinitarian Praxis? Moltmann on the Trinity and the Christian Life." *The Journal of Religion* (2003): 177-203.
- McLachlan, James Morse. *The Desire to Be God: Freedom and the Other in Sartre and Berdyaev*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Nicolas Berdyaev's Existentialist Personalism." *Personalist Forum* 8:1 (1992): 57-65.
- Mendel, Arthur P., *Dilemmas of Progress in Tsarist Russia: Legal Marxism and Legal Populism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961.



- Merton, Thomas. *Contemplation in a World of Action*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971.
- Metzger, Lawrence, S.J. "Vladimir Solovyov's 'Signposts' Along the Eschatological Path to Godmanhood: Genesis of the 'New Religious Consciousness in the Soviet Union.'" *Diakonia* 19: 1-3 (1984-1985): 44-67.
- Molnar, Paul D. *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 2002.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. London: SCM Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and The Spirit of God. The Gifford Lectures 1984-1985*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Man: Christian Anthropology in the Conflicts of the Present*. Translated by John Sturdy. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Religion, Revolution and the Future*. Translated by M. Douglas Meeks. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Crucified God. A Trinitarian Theology of the Cross." Translated by Keith R. Crim. *Interpretation* 26:3 (1972): 278-299.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Freedom in the Light of Hope." *Southeast Asian Journal of Theology* 15 (1973): 12-20.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "God Reconciles and Makes Free." *Reformed and Presbyterian World* 31:3/4 (1970): 105-117.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Liberation in the Light of Hope." Translated by M. D. Meeks. *The Ecumenical Review* 36:3 (July 1974): 413-429.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Theology of Mystical Experience." Translated by Alasdair Heron *Scottish Journal of Theology* 32 (1979): 501-520.

- Moltmann-Wendel, Elisabeth and Jürgen Moltmann. *Humanity in God*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1983.
- Mooney, Ross L. and Taher A. Razik, eds., *Explorations in Creativity*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1967.
- Müller-Fahrenholz, Geiko. *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. Translated by John Bowden. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Nauen, Franz Gabriel. *Revolution, Idealism and Human Freedom: Schelling, Hölderlin and Hegel and the Crisis of Early German Idealism*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971.
- Nicholls, David. *Deity and Domination: Images of God and the State in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Vol. 1. London & New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*. 2 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964.
- Nucho, Fuad. *Berdyayev's Philosophy: The Existential Paradox of Freedom and Necessity*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966.
- Osborn, Robert T. *Freedom in Modern Theology*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967.
- Otto, Randall. "The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54:1 (2001): 366-384.
- Philaret, Metropolitan. "The Problem of Evil in Orthodox Theology." Paper presented at the international conference on 'The Problem of Evil,' sponsored by The Society of Christian Philosophers, The Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Science of the Russian Federation, and the Synodal Theological Commission of the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow, 6-8 June 2005.
- Plekon, Michael and Alex Vinogradov, eds. *In the World, of the Church: A Paul Evdokimov reader*. Translated by Michael Plekon and Alex Vinogradov. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001.
- Plekon, Michael. "Paul Evdokimov, A Theologian Within and Beyond the Church and the World." *Modern Theology* 12:1 (1996): 85-107.
- Poole, Randall A., ed. *Problems of Idealism: Essays in Russian Social Philosophy*. Translated by Randall A. Poole. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Pope, Rob. *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Pyman, Avril. *A History of Russian Symbolism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Rasmusson, Arne. *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.

- Rauschenbusch, Walter. *The Righteousness of the Kingdom*. Edited by Max L. Stackhouse  
Nashville & New York: Abingdon Press, 1968.
- Read, Christopher. *Religion, Revolution and the Russian Intelligentsia 1900-1912: The Vekhi Debate and its Intellectual Background*. London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1979.
- Riasanovsky, Nicholas. "A. S. Khomiakov's Religious Thought." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 23:2 (1979): 87-100.
- Richardson, David Bonner. *Berdyaev's Philosophy of History: An Existentialist Theory of Social Creativity and Eschatology*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968.
- Ricoeur, Paul. "Theonomy and/or Autonomy." In *The Future of Theology*. Edited by Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg, Thomas Kucharz. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- Ritchey, Mary G. "Khomiakov and his Theory of Sobornost." *Diakonia* 17:1 (1982): 53-62.
- Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer and Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, eds. *A Revolution of the Spirit: Crisis of Value in Russia, 1890-1924*. Translated by Marian Schwartz. New York: Fordham University Press, 1990.
- Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer, ed. *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Sabant, Philippe. "Christ, Freedom and Salvation in the Thought of Nicholas Berdyaev." *The Ecumenical Review* 36:3 (July 1974): 484-494.
- Sayers, Dorothy L. *The Mind of the Maker*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1941.
- Scanlan, James P. "The New Religious Consciousness: Merezhkovsky and Berdiaev." *Canadian Slavic Studies* 4:1 (Spring 1970): 17-35.
- Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Schillebeeckx, Edward and Bas van Iersel, eds. *Jesus Christ and Human Freedom*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1974.
- Schwöbel, Christoph and Colin E. Gunton, eds. *Persons, Divine and Human: Kings College Essays in Theological Anthropology*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1991.
- Seaver, George. *Nicolas Berdyaev: An Introduction to His Thought*. London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1950.
- Shatz, Marshall S. and Judith E. Zimmerman, eds. *Vekhi Landmarks: A Collection of Articles About the Russian Intelligentsia*. Translated by Marshall S. Shatz and Judith E. Zimmerman. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994.
- Shein, Louis J. "V. S. Solov'ev's Epistemology: A Re-examination." *Canadian Slavic Studies* 4:1 (Spring 1970): 1-16.

- Sherry, Patrick. *Spirit and Beauty: An Introduction to Theological Aesthetics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- Slaatte, Howard Alexander. *Personality, Spirit, and Ethics: the Ethics of Nicholas Berdyaev*. New York: P. Lang, 1997.
- Slesinski, Robert F. "Believing Thought as a Category in Russian Religious Philosophy." *Communio* 26 (Fall 1999): 571-582.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Postmodernity and the resources of the Christian East." *Communio* 17 (Summer 1990): 220-237.
- Solovyev, Vladimir. *God, Man and the Church: The Spiritual Foundations of Life*. Translated by Donald Attwater. London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1938.
- Spinka, Matthew. *Nicolas Berdyaev: Captive of Freedom*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Berdyaev and Origen: A Comparison." *Church History* 16 (March 1947): 3-21.
- Steuer, Axel D. "Once More on the Free Will Defense." *Religious Studies* 10 (1974): 301-311.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Freedom of God and Human Freedom." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983): 163-180.
- Strémooukhoff, Dimitri. *Vladimir Soloviev and His Messianic Work*. Translated by Elizabeth Meyendorff. Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, Inc., 1980.
- Stump, Eleonore. "Augustine on Free Will." In *The Cambridge Companion To Augustine*. Edited by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Thornton, Mark. *Do We Have Free Will?* Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989.
- Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Nicholas Berdyaev." *Religion in Life* 7:3 (Summer 1938): 407-415.
- Tinsley, E. J. "The Incarnation, Art, and the Communication of the Gospel." In *Art and Religion as Communication*. Eds. James Waddell and F. W. Dillistone. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974.
- Torre, Michael, ed. *Freedom in the Modern World*. Mishawaka, IN: American Maritain Assoc., 1990.
- Tutu, Desmond. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. London: Rider, 1999.
- Vallon, Michel Alexander. *An Apostle of Freedom: Life and Teachings of Nicolas Berdyaev*. New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1960.

- Volf, Miroslav. *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Review of *The Eighth Day of Creation*, by Ivan Devcic. *Books & Culture* 10:1 (January/February 2004): 24.
- von Rad, Gerhard. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956.
- Wakefield, James L. *Jürgen Moltmann. A Research Bibliography*. ATLA Bibliography Series. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2002.
- Walicki, Andrzej. *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*. Translated by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Warnock, Mary. *Imagination*. London: Faber and Faber, 1976.
- Weeks, Andrew. *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991.
- Weisberg, Robert W. *Creativity: Beyond the Myth of Genius*. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1993.
- Wernham, James C. S. *Two Russian Thinkers: An Essay in Berdyaev and Shestov*. Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1968.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Religion in the Making*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926.
- Wierzbicka, Anna. *What Did Jesus Mean? Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Art in Action*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980.
- Zenkovsky, V. V. *A History of Russian Philosophy*. 2 vols. Translated by George L. Kline. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1953.
- Zernov, Nicolas. *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963.
- Zizioulas, John. "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28:5 (October 1975): 401-447.