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## Nikolai Berdyaev's Personalism

### Abstract

The author portrays Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev as a pioneer in Eastern Orthodox theology with his ideas of freedom and personality. After his deportation from the Soviet Union in 1922, Berdyaev expounded personalism in opposition to Western individualism and Marxist collectivism. Personality exists in the image and likeness of God, and it culminates in deification. He drew upon the Sobornost' tradition of Russia and interpreted personality as a communion of love in contrast to reflective self-consciousness of the Augustinian tradition of Western theology.



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## 1 Introduction

The aim of this essay is to expound the personalism in the philosophy of Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948) and to assess its significance within the context of Orthodox theology. He was a Christian philosopher who considered himself to be a loyal son of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In 1894 Berdyaev became a Marxist, and he was active in clandestine revolutionary groups. He believed that Marxism was the only means to overcome the evil of capitalism.<sup>1</sup> On 11/12 March 1898 the police rounded up clandestine groups and arrested Berdyaev; he was sentenced to three years exile in Vologda. While in exile, he realized the limitations of Marxism and moved toward a spiritual religion. In a letter of 15 August 1909 to Archbishop Antoine he declared: “By winding and complicated paths I have arrived at the faith and at the Church of Christ, which I now consider my spiritual mother.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1918, one year after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, Berdyaev participated in a large public demonstration led by Patriarch Tikhon, supporting the central role of the church in Russian life.<sup>3</sup> The emerging Soviet state had removed the church from the state that year, but it did not interfere with the protest, even though its authorities were hostile to religion. In 1919 Berdyaev was appointed Professor of Philosophy at the University of Moscow, where he publicly criticized Russian Marxism. Between January and May of 1922 Vladimir Lenin compiled a list of intellectuals opposed to the Bolshevik regime, targeting persons with objectionable ideas, particularly religious ideas of freedom and personality, as well as their

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<sup>1</sup> Donald A. Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Pascal, “Les Variations de Berdiaev, et L’Essential,” in: Tamara Klépinine, *Bibliographie Des Oeuvres De Nicolas Berdiaev* (Paris: Institut D’ Études Slaves, 1971), pp. 7–10.

<sup>3</sup> Lesley Chamberlain, *Lenin’s Private War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2006), p. 54.

social classes as threats to the new government.<sup>4</sup> Lenin gave the intellectuals an ultimatum: either conform to the Soviet state or enter administrative exile in lieu of execution.

Berdyaev and 68 other intellectuals were arrested on the night of 16/17 August 1922 and forced to leave Russia under Article 57 of the Soviet Penal Code for engaging in counter-revolutionary activities and for not accepting Soviet authority. The Soviet government considered the deportees to be parasites on the nation. The intellectuals and their families were placed on two ships, each known as the Philosophy Steamer that sailed to Germany. One was called the *Haken*, which departed from Russia on 28 September 1922, and the other was the *Preussen*, which left on 16 November 1922.

Berdyaev stayed in Berlin until 1924, when he, his wife Lydia, and sister-in-law Eugenie Rapp migrated to Paris where they established a home in the suburb of Clamart. Berdyaev remained in Paris for the rest of his life, participating in theological discussions and ecumenical activities. He was a prolific writer, before and after his deportation, publishing 30 books and 433 papers.<sup>5</sup> His principal themes were freedom, personality, and creativity. During the Soviet period his books were banned and if anyone were found to possess them, he or she would be imprisoned; in the post-Soviet period, however, he has been widely discussed in Russia in the last 20 years but not in the West.<sup>6</sup> In current discussions Berdyaev is regarded as a pioneer in contemporary Orthodox theology. "In the earlier part of the twentieth century Berdyaev in particular attracted a large readership with books on the human situation springing

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 87–88, 308.

<sup>5</sup> T. Klépinine, *Bibliographie Des Oeuvres De Nicolas Berdiaev*, pp. 25–104.

<sup>6</sup> Dimitar Popmarinov Kirov, "The Way of Holiness," in: S. T. Kimbrough, ed. *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), p. 126; and L. Chamberlain, email to the author, 6 March 2013.

from a philosophy of personalism (...) characterized above all by freedom of the Spirit.”<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Berdyaev’s Philosophical Reflections on Personality

In 1925 Berdyaev founded the journal *Put*, or “The Way,” which served as the organ of the Russian émigré religious community, and he was its editor until 1940, when it was suppressed under Nazi occupation. In 1935 Berdyaev published in *Put* an essay on “Personalism and Marxism” in which he distinguished between the person and the individual. “The individual is a naturalistic category, biological and sociological, and it appertains to the natural world.”<sup>8</sup> The individual has no independent existence beyond race or society. In contrast, the person is spiritual and religious, higher than natural or social selves. “Person realizes itself in social and cosmic life, but it can do this only because that within it (...) is independent from nature and from the principle of society.”<sup>9</sup>

Personality is a whole, a unity of multiplicity, changing and affirming itself as a primal unity. Personality is the opposite of egocentricity. The totally self-absorbed individual is not a person, because personality actualizes itself beyond self-absorbed beings. “Person presupposes the trans-personal, the higher being which it reflects, and trans-personal values, which it realizes and which comprise the wealth of its life’s content.”<sup>10</sup> Personality is an act that moves toward other persons and ultimately toward God. “Person is created by God and in this is

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<sup>7</sup> Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers with God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> N. A. Berdyaev, “The Problem of Man,” [http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd\\_lib/1936\\_408.html](http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1936_408.html) (16 July 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

its highest merit, and the source of its independence and freedom."<sup>11</sup>

Personality expresses creativity which comes out of freedom. Creativity is not the same as evolution. The former produces something new, as it moves from nonbeing to being, but the latter is deterministic and a reworking of pre-existing material. Berdyaev contends that personality is a "paradoxical combination of the personal and the trans-personal, of the finite and the infinite, of the interrupting and the developing, of freedom and destiny."<sup>12</sup>

In this essay Berdyaev portrays Marxism as antipersonalistic, because it emphasizes the general over the individual, and social class over the person. While Marxism affirms the totality of human life, it denies the self-worth of every human being and his or her right to the fullness of life. It regards persons as parts not wholes, as means not ends.

In his *Freedom and the Spirit*, written in 1927 and 1928 as a work in Orthodox theology and published in 1935, Berdyaev contends that personality is a living, concrete, dynamic quality and not a substance. "Personality is above all a spiritual energy of qualitative originality, a spiritual activity which is the very centre of creative power."<sup>13</sup> Personality is inseparable from God. To acknowledge a suprapersonal dimension does not deny personality but fulfills it.

In 1938 Berdyaev published *Solitude and Society* in which he reaffirmed the ideas stated above and clarified that personalism is not the same as subjectivist, individualist, empirical, or nominalist philosophies. Personalism uncovers authentic reality beneath general and abstract categories. For example, concepts of universal order or world harmony are objectifications and alien to personalism. "The personality is a

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, trans. Oliver Fielding Clarke (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 101.

spiritual category; it is the Spirit manifesting itself in nature. The personality is the direct expression of the impact of the Spirit on man's physical and psychical nature."<sup>14</sup>

Personality aspires to commune with the We and the Thou. The mystery of personality is best revealed therefore in love between two persons. "Thus authentic love is invariably the herald of the coming of the Kingdom of God, another plane of Being, distinct from the degraded world."<sup>15</sup> Love creates communion without a fear of death, because love is stronger than death.

In the preface and long chapter one of his 1944 *Slavery and Freedom* Berdyaev expounds personality more extensively than in his other writings. He admits that his personalism is existential and anti-hierarchical, and he posits "the primacy of freedom over existence, of Spirit over nature, subject over object, personality over the universal, creativeness over evolution, dualism over monism, love over law."<sup>16</sup> No law applies to personality, as it is unique, unrepeatable, and an interruption in this world. While rational, personality is neither determined nor defined by reason. Reason is "universal, common, impersonal."<sup>17</sup> Personality is social but not determined by social class. Personality determines itself from within.

Personality has the capacity for suffering and joy. Collectives like society, nation, or state do not possess this capability. Collectives may have value or soul but not personality. The actualization of personality can be a painful experience, because it exists in conflict with the objective world. The

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<sup>14</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *Solitude and Society*, trans. George Reavey (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1938), p. 121.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>16</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, trans. R. M. French (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

capacity to endure pain is also inherent in personality, and its possession of memory accentuates pain.

Both body and soul belong to personality, and their unity co-exists in the spirit. Therefore, personality comprises body, soul, and spirit. Personality comes from God and not from one's parents. It has character, which is power over oneself and a victory over slavery to oneself, making possible a conquest of the environment and achievement of independence. Personality has a consciousness of vocation which is "a vocation in an individually unrepeatable form to give an answer to the call of God and to put one's gifts to creative uses."<sup>18</sup>

Personality manifests love, and Berdyaev expounds love in the Greek terms of *eros* and *agape*. *Eros* ascends, *agape* descends. *Eros* has passion and rapture, "the love of beauty, of the supreme good, of divine perfection."<sup>19</sup> *Agape* "does not seek on its own behalf nor for its own enrichment; it bestows, it makes sacrifice; it is plunged into the suffering world, into the world which agonizes in darkness."<sup>20</sup> *Eros* sees the image of "the loved one in God, as God's idea of man, it sees the beauty of the loved one."<sup>21</sup> *Agape* aims toward the neighbor who is suffering and in need of help, while *eros* aims at ideal values of art and philosophy. Whether ascending as *eros* or descending as *agape*, love is an eternal expression of personality.

### 3 Personality and Meonic Freedom

In his seminal work of 1916, *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, Berdyaev explains that freedom is nothing in the sense that it stands outside fixed, deterministic, and conditioned structures. Freedom is ultimate, and it has a deep, inexplicable mystery

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 56

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

that cannot be derived from anything. "Freedom is the baseless foundation of being: it is deeper than all being. We cannot penetrate to a rationally-perceived base for freedom. Freedom is a well of immeasurable depth—its bottom is the final mystery."<sup>22</sup>

Berdyaev affirmed the ultimacy of freedom throughout his writing career, and toward the end of his life he clarified aspects of freedom. Freedom is complex and must be understood concretely. It can be outward and formal, but primarily it is inward and real.<sup>23</sup> When living within Soviet Russia, freedom is understood as a collective activity which makes real, inward experience difficult to achieve. Freedom is an obligation connected to human dignity. While humans live naturally within the realm of necessity and are conditioned by economics, as Karl Marx thought, humans are nevertheless called to the realm of freedom beyond necessity.

Within the world of necessity freedom functions negatively as free will. In his autobiography Berdyaev emphasizes, however, that freedom is primordial and not reducible to free will.<sup>24</sup> Free will chooses between good and evil, but real freedom is essentially an eternal, creative means of knowing the revelation of truth. Freedom informs personality, but within individualism it is in a state of estrangement. The freedom of personality breaks the chain of necessity through love and reaches out to the cosmos. Freedom is a religious virtue and the primary way to enter the Kingdom of God.

God does not create freedom. Instead freedom is prior to God, and it originates in the *Ungrund*. Berdyaev borrowed the idea of the *Ungrund* from the German Protestant mystic Jacob Boehme

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<sup>22</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, trans. Donald A. Lowrie (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 135.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, *Towards a New Epoch*, trans. Oliver Fielding Clarke (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1949), p. 70.

<sup>24</sup> Idem, *Dream and Reality*, trans. Katherine Lampert (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 57.

(1575–1624). In 1930 he published in *Put* an essay entitled “The Teaching about the Ungrund and Freedom.” In this paper Berdyaev points out that Boehme defines the *Ungrund* as a dark, irrational principle which is deeper than being but is within God. The *Ungrund* is unfathomable, primordial freedom that is present before the creation of the world and that gives rise to evil.

On the basis of Boehme's *Ungrund* Berdyaev developed his idea of meonic freedom. He derived the word meonic from the Greek term for nonbeing *me on* in contrast to *ouk on* in the Greek indicative tenses. Berdyaev comments: “And I am inclined to interpret the Ungrund, as a primordial meonic freedom, indeterminate even by God.”<sup>25</sup> Meonic freedom has a potentiality which is also “unfathomable and indeterminate will,” consisting of fire<sup>26</sup>. “Within the darkness of the Ungrund there is a blaze of fire and this is freedom meonic with potential.”<sup>27</sup> The will of fire erupting from meonic freedom is an act of creativity, an ecstatic passage from nonbeing to being.

Whereas Boehme located the *Ungrund* within God, Berdyaev placed it outside of God. The primary reason was his unwillingness to assign the origin of evil to God. “The dark freedom is unpenetrable for God. He does not foresee its results and is not answerable for evil as regards its origin, it is not created by God. The teaching about the Ungrund removes from God the responsibility for evil”.<sup>28</sup>

“The principal effect of situating nothingness outside of God was to mythologize, to give life to the notion of a person

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<sup>25</sup> N. A. Berdyaev, “The Teaching about the Ungrund and Freedom.” [http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd\\_lib/1930\\_349.html](http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1930_349.html) (9 March 2013).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

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

possessing a freedom that is absolutely original.”<sup>29</sup> Humankind is the offspring of both God and meonic freedom. God aids humans in their struggle against evil with freedom. God as love, liberty, and sacrifice struggles against evil, suffering, and injustice by suffering with humans. God has power in relation to being but not in relation to freedom.

#### 4 Image and Likeness of God

Throughout his philosophical career Berdyaev stated frequently that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God. This assertion refers to the following passage in the Creation story of the Bible: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness....’” (Gen. 1:26a). The plural tense means the eternal presence of the Trinity in the view of Orthodox theology.<sup>30</sup>

In his *Freedom and the Spirit* Berdyaev declares that personality is “the divine idea, the divine image and resemblance in man, in contrast with individuality, which is a natural and biological conception.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, in order to understand themselves humans must address God, grasp the divine idea, and strive to realize that idea. The realization of the divine idea is, therefore, the goal of personality. In the same book Berdyaev states that humanity is “from all eternity and he also inherits eternity; he is created in the image and likeness of God, he is not a product of cosmic evolution.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Antoine Arjakovsky, *The Way*, trans. Jerry Ryan, eds. John A. Jillions and Michael Plekon (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), pp. 300–301.

<sup>30</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, eds. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), p. 123.

<sup>31</sup> N. A. Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, p. 213.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

Berdyaev also asserted in several places in his philosophical writings that God should be born in humanity, and humanity should be born in God. His belief in the divinity of the human spirit and the humanity of the divine is central to Berdyaev's philosophy and represents his theandric vision of the world. The word theandric derives from the Greek *theos* or God and *andros*, the genitive of *aner* or man. This vision is clearly expressed in his *Solitude and Society*: "For man is the image and likeness of God; and consequently God contains in Himself the image and likeness of man, the pure essence of humanity."<sup>33</sup> In the same context he says that whereas egocentricity is the "original sin," personality is the reflection of the divine image and likeness and "the true path leading to God."<sup>34</sup>

As a philosopher working in the context of Russian Orthodoxy, Berdyaev studied the Church Fathers, specifically the works of Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius, Irenaeus, Maximos the Confessor, and Symeon the New Theologian.<sup>35</sup> A contemporary Orthodox scholar has reported that Gregory of Nyssa was Berdyaev's favorite Church Father and that he studied Gregory's writings as well as the secondary literature of Jean Daniélou and Hans Urs von Baltasar.<sup>36</sup> This insight was confirmed in Berdyaev's essay "The Problem of Man," published in *Put* in 1936, in which he points out that among "the Eastern Teachers of the Church, St. Gregory of Nyssa did the most with anthropology, and he understands man first of all as in the image and likeness of God."<sup>37</sup> Berdyaev goes on to contrast Gregory's view with that of St. Augustine, who defined anthropology mainly in terms of sin and salvation by grace. Subsequent Catholic theologians

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<sup>33</sup> N. A. Berdyaev, *Solitude and Society*, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> Olivier Clément, *Berdiaev. Un philosophe russe en France* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1991), p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Marios P. Begzos, "Nikolaj Berdjajew und die Byzantinische Philosophie," [http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/german/begzos\\_1.html](http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/german/begzos_1.html) (30 January 2014).

<sup>37</sup> N. A. Berdyaev, "The Problem of Man".

identified the image and likeness of God with reason, following Greek philosophy; and the Protestant theologian Karl Barth opened up an abyss between God and humankind, thus denying the God-Manhood of Christ and its bearing upon human personality.

## 5      **Personality and Deification**

In his fundamental work *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* Vladimir Lossky states that the goal of theology is *theōsis* or deification and that this will be achieved in the age to come after the resurrection.<sup>38</sup> Deification means that persons become like God, achieving communion with the divine energies. Deification is based upon the following biblical passages: “I say, ‘You are gods, children of the Most High’ (Ps. 82:6); “Jesus answered, ‘Is it not written in your law, I said, You are gods?’” (Jn. 10:34); and “Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you (...) may become participants of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). In the Pauline and Johannine literature of the New Testament *theōsis* is expressed in terms of adoptive sonship, being in Christ, mutual indwelling, and incorporation into Christ’s body.<sup>39</sup>

Berdyayev has been credited with connecting deification and personalism in 20<sup>th</sup> century Orthodox theology. “He saw human beings not as fallen and sinful but as potentially exalted to heaven because God had become man.”<sup>40</sup> The fulfillment of personality requires a transcendence of the self which reaches its fullest realization in an existential encounter with God.

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<sup>38</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clark, 1957), pp. 11.196.

<sup>39</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, “Theosis as Salvation: An Orthodox Perspective,” *Pro Ecclesia* 6 no.4 (1997), p. 431.

<sup>40</sup> Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers with God*, p. 29.

As the fulfillment of divine-human relatedness, deification cannot be stated in terms of identity, monism, or immanentism but in love and mystery. "This mystery is the need which God feels for His other self, of one who loves and is beloved, of the love which is realizable within the Trinity in Unity, which exists both above, and below, in heaven, and on earth."<sup>41</sup> In the same context Berdyaev explains 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>42</sup> Deification as divine-human communion culminates in Christ, the God-Man.

The human response to God's love and calling is human creativity. While Berdyaev drew upon the Church Fathers to develop the concept of deification, in his paper on "The Problem of Man" he admitted "never did they reveal the image of God within the creative nature of man, in the likeness of man to the Creator."<sup>43</sup> He went on to say that humans are capable of rising above themselves, especially in creativity which is "not a self-affirmation, but rather a self-overcoming. (...) And it is particularly in creativity that man is in the greatest likeness to the Creator."<sup>44</sup>

Toward the end of his life Berdyaev wrote an article entitled "The Truth of Orthodoxy," which was published posthumously in Paris in 1952. In that article he rediscovered the mystical theology of St. Gregory of Palamas.<sup>45</sup> Berdyaev claims that Orthodoxy understands itself through the primacy of the Trinity. "The Orthodox liturgy begins with the words: 'Blessed is the Kingdom, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' Everything begins from above, from the Divine Triad,

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<sup>41</sup> N. A. Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, p. 191.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>43</sup> N. A. Berdyaev, "The Problem of Man".

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Olivier Clément, *Berdiaev. Un philosophe russe en France*, p. 236.

from the heights of the Essence, and not from the person and his soul."<sup>46</sup> Berdyaev follows the distinction made by Palamas between the divine essence and the divine energies. The former is unknowable and inaccessible to human thought, but the latter acts "covertly in man and the world," pouring out upon the natural world and enlightening it. "Orthodoxy understands the purpose of life as the seeking and the attainment of the grace of the Holy Spirit, as a means of the spiritual transfiguration of creation."<sup>47</sup>

In *Freedom and the Spirit* Berdyaev explains that humans are "transfigured and deified only by an inward reception of the Holy Spirit."<sup>48</sup> One means of receiving the divine energy is a recitation of the Jesus Prayer: "O Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner." Through this prayer Jesus Christ himself enters into and enlightens the human heart. The outpouring of the divine energy engenders an internal freedom which is manifest in the church as a community of love.

The transfiguration of the world will occur in the future age of the Holy Spirit, and this means that the Christian revelation is not yet finished.<sup>49</sup> Christianity will be fully revealed as a non-judicial religion of love and freedom. It will not be one of individual salvation, the blessedness of the elect, justification, or eternal damnation which are doctrines of the Western Church. The Eastern Church envisions a cosmic transfiguration of all living beings, and this will coincide with the actualization of the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>46</sup> Nicholas A. Berdyaev, "The Truth of Orthodoxy," <http://www.kosovo.net/ortruth.html> (16 February 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, p. 256.

<sup>49</sup> Idem, *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, p. 305.

## 6 Conclusion

Nikolai Berdyaev was a prominent figure in Russian religious philosophy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Whereas in the West philosophers tend to distinguish sharply between philosophy and theology, philosophers in the Eastern Orthodox tradition take into account the religious dimension of fundamental reality. Berdyaev contended that personality is ultimate and that it is realized in union with God through Christ the God-Man. Thus, divine-human relatedness, as in the Trinity, constitutes ultimate reality.

Berdyaev believed that Russia was the homeland of personalism, and he rejected the Western view of Russia as “the impersonal East.” In an influential essay written the year before his death and published posthumously he set forth the following thesis: “Personality has always been more pronounced in Russia than in the de-personalized, mechanical, and levelled-out civilization of the modern West.”<sup>50</sup> He argued that the West produced an individualism that did not facilitate the emergence of personality but instead produced depersonalization. By the latter he meant socialization which was not the same as community.

Community spirit is fundamental in Russia and in Orthodoxy. Berdyaev insists that Russians are hospitable, extraverted, and capable of sacrifice due to the fact that Christianity has shaped Russia. The Russian communal spirit is grounded in personality and the capacity to go beyond the limitations of individualism. The union of personality and community is expressed in the Russian term *Sobornost'*. This represents communal life in the Holy Spirit as embodied within persons and not imposed from without by an external structure of authority.<sup>51</sup> *Sobornost'* is not a collective like the state which would oppress personality by the mass. *Sobornost'* is not restricted to councils that are

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<sup>50</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *Towards a New Epoch*, p. 53.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

governed by formal institutional regulations; rather a council is present where the Holy Spirit is active.

In another essay Berdyaev defines *Sobornost'* as the corporate experience of love or "the organic union of freedom and love, community."<sup>52</sup> He clarifies that *Sobornost'* cannot be identified with Roman Catholic authoritarianism or Protestant individualism, but that it surpasses these as a third principle. While Orthodoxy is basic to Russia, Roman Catholicism is essential to Western Europe. The European temptation is to fall into rationalism, from which Russians have been spared. Russians are people of the end who think in terms of eschatology and apocalypse, aspiring toward the future, and who appreciate prophetic thinking. Berdyaev was considered by his contemporaries to be a prophetic philosopher.<sup>53</sup>

Personality as understood by Berdyaev differed from that in the West. The Western conception of personality has been shaped by Boethius and St. Augustine, and it consists of two components: rational individuality and psychological experience and consciousness.<sup>54</sup> Boethius defined the person as an "individual substance of a rational nature," and he said that person, or *persona* in Latin, is what the Greeks called *hypostasis* or individual subsistence.<sup>55</sup> Augustine's understanding of personality as reflective self-consciousness came out of his *Confessions*, Book Ten, section 17, in which he created

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<sup>52</sup> Nicolas A. Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), pp. 161–162.

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of Berdyaev's prophetic role see chapter 19 in Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, pp. 259–266.

<sup>54</sup> J. D. Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975): pp. 405–406.

<sup>55</sup> Boethius, *The Theological Tractates*, trans. H. F. Stewart and E. F. Rand. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 85.

personality by a conscious recollection of the past.<sup>56</sup> Augustine exclaimed: "Great is this power of memory; a thing, O my God, to be amazed at, a very profound and infinite multiplicity: and this thing is the mind, and this thing am I."<sup>57</sup> In the Augustinian tradition God was conceived in analogy with "the mental acts of an individual consciousness."<sup>58</sup>

In Orthodox theology personality is conceptualized as openness and *ek-stasis* of being, as a movement toward communion, self-transcendence, and freedom.<sup>59</sup> For Berdyaev the "path of the realization of the human person runs from the sub-conscious through the conscious to the supra-conscious."<sup>60</sup> As supported by Paul Tillich, Berdyaev's acceptance of the unconscious within personality enabled him to attack "the dictatorship of consciousness" of post-Cartesian Western thought and thereby avoid an abstract theistic personalism.<sup>61</sup> Personality is a whole and not confined to individual self-consciousness either in God or in humans.

Berdyaev did not start his reflections with the individual human person and then move to God as an individual divine person, as in the Western personalist tradition. Instead he began with the Trinity, as stated above, and viewed personality in terms of relatedness and intercommunion. In Orthodox theology the three persons of the Trinity share a perichoresis

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<sup>56</sup> Brian L. Horne, "Person as Confession; Augustine of Hippo," in: Christoph Schwöbel, Colin E. Gunton (eds.), *Persons Divine and Human. King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), pp. 67–68.

<sup>57</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. William Watts. Loeb Classical Library. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 121.

<sup>58</sup> Christoph Schwöbel, "Introduction," in Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton, eds. *Persons Divine and Human. King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), p. 13.

<sup>59</sup> J. Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood," p. 408.

<sup>60</sup> Nicholas A. Berdyaev, "The Problem of Man."

<sup>61</sup> Paul Tillich, "Nikolai Berdiajew. *Begegnungen. Gesammelte Werke Band XII* (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1971), pp. 296–297.

with each other. The term perichoresis indicates how unity and distinction are related in the Trinity.<sup>62</sup> Perichoresis is the interpenetrating communion of persons in which each remains distinct from the others. The three persons coinhere with each other, and this coinherence characterizes the nature of ultimate reality.

For Berdyaev the Trinity expresses the inner life of God. God the Father shows love for the crucified Son, a sacrificial love, as an eternal movement toward the Son. The suffering of the Son reveals suffering within the Trinity. God's love for the suffering Son is the deepest mystery of the Christian faith. "The mystery of the divine Trinity is the antithesis of the conception of God as master and a wielder of power, as an autocratic monarch."<sup>63</sup> God is personal in the sense of being loving, relational, dynamic, and capable of sharing the suffering of humanity. God is not an absolute being separated from the world. Humans need to participate in the divine life in order to become fully personal.

In summary, Nikolai Berdyaev presented original interpretations of freedom, personality, and creativity. He faithfully represented the idea of the image and likeness of God and theandric vision of Eastern Orthodoxy. His philosophy affirmed deification as a cosmic and social transfiguration and not restricted to individual judgment and salvation. He has been portrayed as an adventurer in the Russian Orthodox tradition, who neither harmonized nor systematized doctrines but who called all individuals to surpass their historical limitations in the service of ultimate, personal reality.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Verna Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35 (1991), p. 65.

<sup>63</sup> Nicolas A. Berdyaev, *The Divine and the Human*, trans. R. M. French (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009), p. 43.

<sup>64</sup> O. Clément, p. 242.