

Halina Rarot

Lublin University of Technology (Poland)

## Russian Prefigurations of Post-Secular Thought: Nikolai Berdyaev and Ivan Il'in

Theoreticians of humanistic and social studies have suggested various terms with which to refer to the world at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but in Europe it is commonly described as the post-secular,<sup>1</sup> or post-Enlightenment world. The terms post-secular thought and philosophy of post-secularism refer to the attempts at criticising or reflecting upon the aftermath of the Enlightenment and the twilight of Western secularism which commonly, albeit not exclusively, stem from the method of postmodernist deconstruction. One of the key premises of post-secularism, as formulated in particular by its most radical “right-wing” advocates, sometimes referred to as the Radical Orthodoxy (John Milbank, Philip Blond, Catherine Pickstock), is the abolition of the modern antagonism between religious and secular processes, between religion as such and the public sphere, between faith and reason. These post-secular deliberations pertaining to the complex relationship between science and religious faith are intrinsically tied to various European attempts of approaching this dilemma and readdressing it in a more creative manner. One of the more potent schools preoccupied with the same, although so far somewhat neglected in this context, was Russian religious philosophy which first emerged in mid nineteenth century and enjoyed its heyday in the 1910s and 1920s. It is in this context that varied and highly interesting analyses were

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<sup>1</sup> There are several definitions of the “post-secular world,” just as there are many trends in post-secular philosophy itself. According to one, the post-secular world is where atheism can no longer lay claim to having a scientific character. Post-secular thought stems from the *Imperative* context of several branches of social sciences: sociology, political science, etc. It has been most strongly influenced by the works and opinions of American religious sociologists: José Casanova (*Public religions*, “Public Religions Revisited,” “Rethinking Secularization”), as well as Peter Berger (*Heretical Imperative*, *The Desecularization of the World*).

provided pertaining to the relationship between science and religion. Later, it was forcibly replaced, for over seventy years, by incontestably secular, Marxist paradigm which dominated the discourse on this and other problematic relations.

In our search for further inspiration we could take a somewhat closer look at the parallel religious and philosophical standpoints of Nikolai Alexandrovich Berdyaev (1874–1948) and Ivan Alexandrovich Il'in (1883–1954), both of which can be interpreted as prefigurations of the contemporary philosophy of post-secularism. The turn to this tradition, as repeatedly evoked over the years in various capacities (particularly since the alternative Marxist narration has effectively run its course) is further justified by the fact that Russian religious philosophy originally emerged in a context largely similar to the post-modern (post-Enlightenment) one, i.e. characterised by a more or less unequivocal sense of a crisis in science and philosophy. The philosophical views of Berdyaev and Il'in are similar in that they perceive science as an alternative to religious spirituality (which might be said to be close to contemporary West-European thinking), while at the same time pioneering the belief in the necessity of reconciling said opposites (in which they might have been an inspiration to post-secular thinkers). They are, however, quite distinct from the propositions of other (by necessity left out of the present deliberations) philosophers of the Silver Age of Russian culture: (1) the antagonistic, Rousseauian perception of science understood as a useless and overly abstract attempt at explaining life as such, one that is entirely divorced from reality (Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Bakhtin, Lev Shestov), (2) the attempts to abolish the incompatibility of science and religion by reinterpreting religion as a stern ally of science (Vasily Rozanov, Semen Frank), (3) the view of science as a phenomenon ultimately facilitating religion, one that provides the basis for co-creation of the world (Pavel Florensky, Nikolai Fedorov), or (4) a free synthesis of philosophy, theology and empirical science, commonly referred to as theosophy (Vladimir Soloviev).<sup>2</sup>

### The Place of Berdyaev and Il'in in Russian Culture

Nikolai Berdyaev was active at the turn of nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whose eminence in the history of Russian philosophy is undeniable (the proponent of one of the Russian forms of personalism, Russian version of

<sup>2</sup> Borisova, "Otnosheniye k nauke russkikh filosofov."

existentialism, Russian "philosophy of life," the philosophy of culture).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it is not uncommon for him to be described as a philosopher of a standing equal to that of Aristotle or Nietzsche.<sup>4</sup> Ivan Il'in on the other hand was, and remains to this day, considerably less known and—for various reasons—less valued by historians of philosophy.<sup>5</sup> It would therefore seem prudent to first describe him in greater detail, for instance by recognising his anticipation of certain post-modern post-secular determinations.

Il'in was undeniably a respected scholar, a historian of law and a lecturer at Moscow University's Department of Law. His secondary preoccupation was with the philosophy of law and religious thought, wherein he subscribed, similarly to Berdyaev, to religious rather than scientific worldviews. However, the construction of later religious thought of Il'in differed significantly from that of Berdyaev's. The latter was an advocate of Christian modernism rooted in the tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy, which revolved around the idea of a new religious consciousness aiming to respond to the most pressing questions faced by societies at the turn of the century (formulated within the framework of a new language which allowed for a particular autonomy and departed from the strict tradition of the Greek Church Fathers). Conversely, Il'in, wary of Berdyaev's or Lev Karsavin's intellectual "theologising" and the danger of heresy they entailed, preferred to remain in line with the traditional teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church while attempting to only complement it by considering contemporary problems and formulating what he himself described in *Singing Heart* (1958) as quiet, philosophical praise of God.<sup>6</sup> His religious philosophy, standing in some regard in opposition to Soloviev's or indeed Berdyaev's deliberations, as expressed in *The Way of Spiritual Revival* (1935) and *The Foundation of Christian Culture* (1937), has only recently, since around the 1990s, been re-emerging in modern Russia. In previous years, the entirety of his work was subject to censorship due to the fact that Il'in had been an active theoretician and ideologist of the White Guard lecturing on

<sup>3</sup> Polish reception of Berdyaev's work has been quite extensive, as evidenced in the article by Marek Styczyński, "Polskie badania filozofii Mikołaja Bierdiajewa." Attempts at interpreting the problems of the relationship between science and religion as established by Berdyaev can be found in the works of Polish scholars: Andrzej Walicki, Jan Krasicki, Marek Styczyński, Grzegorz Przebinda, Sławomir Mazurek, Andrzej Ostrowski, Ewa Matuszczyk, Piotr Przesmycki, and Bartłomiej Brzeziński to name but a few. In order to avoid an endless string of references and polemics with regard to said abundance of interpretations, in the present article I focused only on the works of Berdyaev himself and on his anticipation of post-secularism.

<sup>4</sup> Gal'tseva, "Berdyaev."

<sup>5</sup> Krasucka, *Iwan A. Iljin*.

<sup>6</sup> Lisitsa, "Ivan Il'in on the Foundations of Christian Culture," 166.

its behalf in various European countries (after his forced emigration in 1922). What the Soviet authorities could not stand for was the “extreme ideological commitment” of his philosophy, his analysis of what he perceived as the revolutionary catastrophe, as well as his efforts to usher in the ideological rebirth of old Russia. At the same time, many of his beliefs proved unacceptable also for most Christian thinkers, both representatives of the traditional school and the proponents of a new, modernist vision of Christianity.<sup>7</sup> Their censure stemmed mainly from the negation of the author’s (largely misunderstood by his contemporaries) “non-Christian idea” of opposing evil by force in *Resistance to Evil by Force* (1925).<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, despite the many obstacles hampering his creative activity, Il’in’s legacy counts over forty books, brochures, several hundred articles, around a hundred lectures, as well as numerous letters, poems and memoirs.

### Berdyayev and Il’in’s attitude to Science

Berdyayev’s view of science was not set in stone and had indeed evolved over the years. His earliest independently voiced opinions, published in *The Philosophy of Freedom* (1911) and *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (1916), recognised the unquestionable autonomy of science from religion,<sup>9</sup> appreciated its pragmatism stemming from its focus on the description and recognition of natural determinisms (as well as from its compliance with said determinisms),<sup>10</sup> i.e. the “abbreviated, economical description of the world’s determinism for the purposes of self-preservative orientation and reaction.”<sup>11</sup> The only thing he rejected was equalling science with “scientism” which was, in his opinion, yet another ideology, a scientific imperialism that aimed to arbitrarily extend the

<sup>7</sup> The most outspoken critic of this concept of opposing evil was none other than Berdyayev himself (see his “Koshmar zlogo dobra”), which does not, however, hinder the juxtaposition of the full extent of the two thinkers’ works.

<sup>8</sup> His book was a direct polemic with Tolstoy’s concept of “not resisting evil by violence,” which ultimately evolved into the notion of not resisting evil at all. Tolstoy’s idea which is usually, and overly optimistically, described as a pacifist standpoint, was seen by Il’in as a purely nihilistic proposition. Therefore, he wished to restore the full strength of the old, Orthodox notion of “the sword.” It was his opinion that when the author of the *Sermon on the Mount* spoke of loving one’s enemies, he in fact referred to enemy-kin and never meant loving the enemies of God. Furthermore, the force which was to be used in the fight against evil was, in his opinion, of purely moral character, the force of a man at a high level of spiritual development.

<sup>9</sup> Berdyayev, “Filosofiya svobody,” 38–44.

<sup>10</sup> Berdyayev, *Smysl tvorchestva*, 55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

positivist criterion of science to other areas of human life, including spirituality.<sup>12</sup> As he observed in *The Philosophy of Freedom*: “scientism is founded on the belief [of scientists – H.R.] that science is the ultimate criterion of all life and spirit, that we must all submit ourselves to the principles it establishes, that its decrees and prohibitions must always take precedence.”<sup>13</sup>

The Russian philosopher of culture believed, similarly to his contemporary German philosophers of culture (including the anti-systematic author, Georg Simmel, and his *Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur* published in 1919), that scientism is indeed necessary but solely in the context of science itself, whereas in other areas of culture it represents dangerous reductionism. However, he observed certain negative consequences of the prevalence of this modern ideology even in the scope of science itself. He believed it had been a mistake to enforce a single naturalistic and objectivist methodology on all scientific fields, while in fact a more viable approach would be to allow a pluralism of scientific methods in line with the pluralism of sciences themselves. Naturalistically understood scientism and its prevalent imposition had become, in the philosopher’s opinion, an evident constraint to human spirit. While perceiving the excessive autonomy of science (and the fallacies stemming from the world of scientific methodology), he also observed that due to its deference to the determinisms of the natural world, science fails to serve the purpose of liberating us from their power, instead it must remain an expression of human subjugation by the particular state of existence. For the same reason, science “knows not the Truth, it knows only truths”<sup>14</sup> as it can unravel only that which is visible and remains blind to the ultimate mystery of existence. It promotes a particular “scientific reality” which, however, is hardly the only reality that we, as human beings, inhabit. Alongside it, there are visions of the world offered by religion and philosophy (the latter being capable of the same only if it remains free of said positivist demands of scientism). While summing up his philosophical journey in his autobiographical essay *Dream and Reality*, Berdyayev admitted to a growing appreciation for the role of science and critical (transcendental) philosophy.<sup>15</sup> He saw the value of empirical sciences, particularly the efforts of (European) philosophy in terms of formulating diagnoses of the twilight of Western civilisation. It is through that scientific and critical, philosophical diagnosis that Christianity may yet try to overcome said crisis (or weakness) of European culture. Nonetheless, Berdyayev remained

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>13</sup> Berdyayev, “Filosofiya svobody,” 264.

<sup>14</sup> Berdyayev, *Smysl tvorchestva*, 56.

<sup>15</sup> Berdyayev, *Dream and Reality*.

antagonistic towards the reductionist metaphysics of naturalism as it was incompatible with his idealistic and personalistic worldview. In an even later period, in his posthumously published *The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Caesar* (1951), the philosopher subscribed to the conviction, as dictated by the most authentic Christian standpoint, that rather than negate this or that particular scientific advance, one should strive to seize spiritual control over it by prudently incorporating the same into the Christian perspective.<sup>16</sup>

Il'in, on the other hand, generally refrained from addressing natural sciences as much as he was disinclined to write about the shortcomings of methodological scientism. As a philosopher of history, politics and religion, he would rather analyse the general crisis of Western culture and the widespread sense of being burdened by the demands on Europeans to adapt their traditional value systems to the new civilisational reality of the turn of centuries:

the discord between faith and reason has been present in Europe for a long time. But what is now gradually becoming prevalent is attempts of justifying (apologia) the demoralisation and corruption, an open rebellion against God and everything Divine, a systematic deprivation of any form of sanctity in life and a categorical rejection of Christianity. This rejection found its ultimate apex in Nietzsche's openly hateful and defiant intoxication, and has seen its practical realisation and conclusion in the events of recent decades (1917–1953).<sup>17</sup>

Unlike Nietzsche, the Western classic of the “devaluation of contemporary values,” Il'in saw a way in which to improve the condition of industrialising European civilisation. He was convinced that the burden of culture experienced and stigmatised by the progressive, secularised strata of Western societies and a faction of Russian intelligentsia, resulted from that very secularisation of culture and deprivation<sup>18</sup> (of its particular domains such as science, religion, art, ethics, politics, or education) of love. For it is love, understood not only as love for fellow human beings but also the adoration of God, that becomes a potent source of human revival and reinvigoration of the ossified culture. It was fairly evident to him that love is indeed the foundation of modern and creative spiritual life as it is the source of deep faith and the entirety of spiritual culture. Notably, the fact that European culture had been stripped of religious

<sup>16</sup> Berdyayev, “Tsarstvo Bozhiye i tsarstvo kesarya.”

<sup>17</sup> Il'in, *Put' k ochevidnosti*, 313.

<sup>18</sup> Il'in spoke not so much of implicit secularisation but rather of the removal and elimination of religious content from culture, which he treated as one of the facets of secularisation.

content, and the consequences of the same, has been of particular interest to contemporary post-secular thinkers,<sup>19</sup> who often express hope that what survives is at least: “a trace reference to transcendence allowing us to maintain a certain balance and direction in our endeavours, which in the absence of said reference would be rendered entirely meaningless.”<sup>20</sup>

As a political philosopher, Il'in focused on the area of humanistic and social studies devoted to law (jurisprudence). To quote his biographers and encyclopaedists, in 1919 he wrote a notable work entitled *On the Essence of Conscience of Law*, published posthumously in Munich in 1956, with a general summary of the same appearing earlier, in 1935, under the title *The Way of Spiritual Revival*.<sup>21</sup> The work was strongly influenced by Il'in's independent, religious and personalistic perspective, in which the author related the civilisational domain of law to the sphere of spirituality, consequently identifying three axioms of legal awareness that lay at the basis of the legal life of any nation, and which constituted his personal ideals (regardless of the inherent difficulty of implementing the same in the day to day political practice): “the right to personal dignity,” “the right to civic autonomy” understood as a citizen's capacity to remain intrinsically free and responsible as a genuine legal entity, and “the right to mutual respect” (the reciprocal respect and trust between citizens themselves and in their relations with state authorities). The barely adumbrated, yet undeniably close correlation between the humanistic and social scope of his philosophy of law (or philosophy of politics) and Christianity is a testament to Il'in's abandonment of the either-or approach: either science or religious worldview, and his leaning towards Berdyaev's concept of reconciling these seemingly contrary cultural domains. In doing so, he can be said to have anticipated the contemporary, post-secular rediscovery of the role of religion (not just Christianity) in public life (as well as legal awareness), which either coincides with the search for new horizons within which modern religion (having abandoned its transcendental claims) can coexist with enlightened reason,<sup>22</sup> or leads to its turn towards metaphysics manifested in the dialogue of contemporary political thought with Plato, Aristotle, the Church Fathers and medieval philosophers (John Milbank, Phillip Blond); the latter being far less valued by most post-secularists of today.

<sup>19</sup> The same refers in particular to the representatives of the English group known as the Radical Orthodoxy as well as Charles Taylor, Gianni Vattimo and Jean-Luc Marion, rather than the more decidedly leftist thinkers, who wish for a revival of religion in the secular sphere but forego any metaphysical claims, such as Alain Badiou or Slavoj Žižek.

<sup>20</sup> Bielik-Robson, “Myśl postsekularna,” 7.

<sup>21</sup> Il'in, *Put' k ochevidnosti*, Chapters 8–10.

<sup>22</sup> Halík, *Europejskie mówienie o Bogu*, 6–9.



## The Concept of Philosophy in the Works of Berdyaev and Il'in

Berdyaev was at least somewhat "touched" by Western European Enlightenment secularism, as evidenced by a period in his thinking influenced by the German rationalist school of philosophy (Marx, Kant). However, by the time he engaged in developing his own independent philosophical stance, he had already placed himself in direct opposition to the enlightened-rationalist<sup>23</sup> or naturalistic-scientific standpoint. The basis for his criticism of the modern philosophical tradition stemmed from an argument often evoked by various Russian philosophers, namely the objection to its lack of capacity for addressing the multi-faceted, multidimensional condition of human existence which is not easily reduced to the status of a cognitive subject so readily assumed in modern epistemology. Above all, rationalist philosophy is oblivious to the tragedy of human existence, the dramatic circumstance that contributes to life experience, because it lacks the methodological tools necessary to account for it. In its system-forming disposition, a weakness rather than strength of philosophy to date, it is oriented solely towards science and the explication of its studies. Meanwhile, reality continues to be perceived as something alien and hostile, consequently inviting various irrational (occult or magical) explanations. What is then needed is a new philosophy, one that would strive to grasp the actual meaning of the world and human existence, and would guide human spirit towards a state of freedom. Berdyaev rejects the attachment of nineteenth century Western philosophy to science (and the requirement of scientific approach) as something that makes it a mere passive reflection of the world, a passive philosophy of determinism that fails or neglects to understand what the human spirit actually craves.<sup>24</sup> In his early idealistic deliberations, he proposed to liberate philosophy from its close external ties to Christian theology so that it does not fall into the pattern of medieval scholastics. At the same time, however, he emphasized that any true thinker must be a deeply religious person. Eventually, he succeeded in finding a solution to this painful antinomy: free creativity of the human spirit striving to discover the meaning of the world and oppose the laws of deterministic reality is possible only if it stems out of Christianity, as historical Christianity (as well as the idea of new Christianity which he co-created) has always been a religion of freedom and creativeness, despite the various

<sup>23</sup> However, Berdyaev's attitude to Kant's works evolved, as observed first by Shestov (who diagnosed Berdyaev's eventual inclination in favour of Kantianism). A Polish researcher, Grzegorz Przebinda, distinguished four stages of said evolution.

<sup>24</sup> Berdyaev, *Smysl tvorчества*, 57.

social and cultural determinisms which affected it throughout its history. All we need is to bring back to light the imperative of the creativity of human spirit, which is implicitly present in the Bible, and encourage creative attitudes within the realm of Christian philosophy. Such seemingly subjective and non-scientific philosophy may indeed prove far more authentic than autonomic modern philosophy with its claims of objectivity and scientific approach. It is because it has the benefit of the living truth inaccessible to the Enlightenment mind guided exclusively by the principles of logical reasoning; it captures the specific, dynamic and antinomic truth, as dynamic as life itself. Therefore, as has already been observed elsewhere, it cannot be reduced to "conformity of judgement with the actual state of affairs."<sup>25</sup> This new philosophy does not deal with an outside object (or an ordered system thereof) but a mystery within which such an object is embedded, where it lives, a mystery manifesting itself to the object, controlling and enveloping the same. Such philosophy is not a product of studying reality with the aim of gaining practical control over it, but rather the result of cognition understood as an intuition, it is a contemplation of the truth and meaning of reality. It is a proper manifestation of the mystery, one to provide the light which evokes awe, ecstasy, light which illuminates all things and belongs neither to man himself nor to the disappearing mystery as such. In Berdyaev's opinion, the thus manifested Truth is the "meaning of the one who exists, and the meaning is his truth."<sup>26</sup> Naturally, cognising the Living Truth is not attainable by everyone, as is the case with intellectual cognition. Instead, it requires the background of a particular spiritual or religious experience, a tragedy and contradiction tormenting the cognisor, or possibly his unique vital or spiritual capacity.<sup>27</sup> Berdyaev's response to anticipated doubts as to whether such a *living truth* could possibly be widely adopted was the following:

The problem of whether something is generally accepted is not a logical one, it is a problem of spiritual community, of council, and strength of spirit. For the internally distressed, the world is governed by the laws of mathematics and physics, rather than freedom and meaning. Those alien to themselves require that every truth be proven. The generally accepted science is understood as adaptation to a given condition of the world, it is a manifestation of an inferior, incomplete form of cooperation grounded in determinism. The generally prevalent philosophy assumes a higher form of community because philosophical literature evokes the notion of heroically prevailing over

<sup>25</sup> Rarot, "Obiektywistyczny paradygmat," 230.

<sup>26</sup> Ostrowski, *Bierdiajew*, 80.

<sup>27</sup> Proleyev, "Kul'turno-istoricheskiye razlichiya razuma," 231.

the world's determinism, which can be achieved by only a limited group of people. Philosophical intuition is challenged by the spirit of the council.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, the institutionally conceived meaning of existence is not independent as it is a meaning born in God, "and that birth is then repeated by everyone in existence (as it is found in the very core of the cognitive subject, in his heart, which listens in and senses the obviousness of divine inspiration)."<sup>29</sup>

The secularist and somewhat rare reflection on Il'in's philosophical legacy has so far taken note only of his two-volume *The Philosophy of Hegel as a Doctrine of the Concreteness of God and Humanity* (1918) comprising a collection of his early lectures.<sup>30</sup> It has been said to be one of the better interpretations of Hegel's philosophy.<sup>31</sup> Il'in's approach to Hegel is different from that of modern post-secularists who see it as "abolishment of religion in philosophy" and ask: what does it mean if "transcendence is truly disappearing, and man awakens free and alone in the world of infinite immanence?"<sup>32</sup>

Conversely, in Il'in's portrayal, as demonstrated by researchers of his philosophy and his biographers, it is seen as a pantheistic religious experience and a crisis of rationalist theodicy incapable of systematising the explanation of the irrational element of the empirical world.<sup>33</sup> For that reason (as well as due to his earlier, unpublished texts devoted to Hegel), many considered him exclusively as a Hegelian and deliberately neglected the fact that his philosophy went far beyond analyses of Hegel's works. After all, it inspired a whole school in Russian religious philosophy, namely Orthodox philosophy evoking the tradition of Greek Church Fathers. The only thing that Il'in borrowed from others, more specifically from one of his contemporaries—the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, was the desire to provide a clearer description of the phenomenon of human religiousness. Said description was employed in *Axioms of Religious Experience* (1953). Generally speaking, Il'in, much like Berdyaev, was dissatisfied with German systematic thinking which conceived reality as a rational cognitive paradigm. In his critical article *What is Philosophy?*, he argued that no-one granted philosophers the right to assume that the claims of rational cognition are indeed the principles by which a given object exists, as well as that: "it is likely that the object of philosophy is intelligent, but he may

<sup>28</sup> Berdyaev, *Smysl tvorchestva*, 64.

<sup>29</sup> Rarot, "Obiektivistyczny paradygmat," 231.

<sup>30</sup> Il'in, *The Philosophy of Hegel*.

<sup>31</sup> Lisitsa, "Ivan Il'in on the Foundations of Christian Culture," 163.

<sup>32</sup> Bielik-Robson, "Myśl postsekularna," 7.

<sup>33</sup> Kurayev, "Filosof volevoy idei," 404–05.

be intelligent with Intelligence to dwarf our own common "intelligence" to the level of total unintelligence."<sup>34</sup>

A systematic philosopher is, in his opinion, much like a pitiful bookkeeper trying to tidy up his office. Il'in wished for a philosophy that would be more adequate to the complexity of life, one that would facilitate the merger of mind, heart and senses, which would in effect allow "contemplation with the heart." Only this could constitute a truly Russian philosophy capable of reforming from the ground up the national spiritual experience and freeing itself from foreign Western influences. Otherwise, philosophy is in danger of becoming a lifeless and redundant scrap heap in the history of Russian culture.<sup>35</sup> This redefined Russian philosophy would aim to honestly and responsibly study and describe objects, but not to construct them; it would perfect contemplation and steer clear of creating any abstract systems. Il'in devaluated deduction (establishing the system of an axiom) in favour of contemplative induction, empirical description of an object in its particular manifestations and in accordance with its actual nature. To the potential allegation that thus understood philosophy becomes indistinguishable from other sciences, he would reply that it is a science that requires a religious-spiritual person to pose experience and a particular artistry in the description of the studied objects. Indeed, it requires a philosophical experience which pertains to not only the sense of cognitive obviousness resulting in a contemplable truth, but also the experience of true love, of hearing the voice of one's conscience, taking in a work of art, or submitting oneself willingly to the rule of law. It eventually also requires a certain, deepened moral experience.

It is therefore clear that in his radicalism, Il'in expected philosophy to return to its ancient roots in becoming a source of wisdom and the teacher of life, while Russian thinkers were to practice their reflection in an involved manner, thus distinguishing themselves from indifferent and overly distanced western philosophers. And so, should a Russian philosopher wish to write about virtue and goodness, he must above all expand and deepen his own moral experience, as morality must not be conveyed or presented in terms of abstract constructs or speculation. Failing this is bound to only produce lifeless and ossified truths about moral phenomena. The argument also extends to epistemology which requires the philosopher to demonstrate a personal and deep experience of obviousness. Similarly, the theory of aesthetics demands of the philosopher a deep and not exclusively subjective experience of a work of art, etc. At the same time, this new Russian philosophy understood as *contemplation with*

<sup>34</sup> Il'in, *Put' k ochevidnosti*, 363.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

*the heart* evolved into a “philosophy of belief,” philosophy of religion. What it means is that it ultimately placed man in a world created by God as only such a world, unlike Western nihilistic perceptions of the same, possesses meaning and can deliver us from the despair of the contemporary crisis of values. This philosophy was meant predominantly for those Russians who needed to be liberated from the yoke of secularist and materialistic worldviews and longed for a spiritual rebirth that would rely on an equilibrium of spirit and instinct, laws of nature and principles of spiritual life (the already mentioned *The Way of Spiritual Revival* and *Foundations of Struggle for the National Russia* (1938)).

### Berdyaev and Il'in on Religion

Berdyaev negated the approach advocating the cognitive advantage of science over religion, as well as any concepts proclaiming absolute superiority of religion over science, and finally, any calls for a radical dualism between scientific knowledge and faith that denied the existence of any commonalities (Kantianism). It should be added that his interest in the relationship between science and religion was strictly limited to the context of Christianity. As already mentioned above, his ultimate position in this argument (the final product of the evolution in his thinking) was to accept a synthesis of antinomic parts constituting a single, consistent entity. On the one hand, he emphasized that religious faith and scientific knowledge, i.e. the two ways in which human spirit relates to the world, are indeed focused on two opposite spectra of reality: the former aiming to reveal its invisible aspects, the latter preoccupied with the visible; faith is the freedom of accepting that which has been revealed, while scientific knowledge is the compulsion to do so. On the other hand, however, he noticed that the two approaches are perfectly complementary, together giving way to the varied conditions and needs of the irreducible human spirit: “ultimately, knowledge and faith are the same thing... the world of knowledge and the world of faith are given as relatively incompatible systems, but they can be reduced to a singular entity.”<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, despite claims made by advocates of the critical Enlightenment to which he refers in his epistemology as gnoseological illusionism entirely divorced from actual being, religious faith is treated by Berdyaev as a form of knowledge. It should be critically mentioned at this point that although the author wished to declaratively steer clear of any comparison between the two

<sup>36</sup> Berdyaev, “Filosofiya svobody,” 53.

cognitive systems and the inevitable prioritisation of one over the other, he himself often saw cognition through faith as superior to cognition through science, because:

through faith, one gains knowledge, but knowledge that is higher and fuller, an all-encompassing perspective, limitlessness. Scientific knowledge addresses reality but it is unable to perceive the imitations and pathology that said reality entails.<sup>37</sup>

Cognition through faith allows, at the cost of abandoning the small reason concerned with the wisdom of this world, access to the Great Reason, the universal reason, the reason of mystics and Christian saints (the sole protectors of the complete experience unaffected by practicalities). Berdyaev called it the cosmic reason, the Logos, which holds in its grasp the “community of man and Universe, microcosm and macrocosm.”<sup>38</sup> Such a reason is finally capable of perceiving the order and purpose of the world, feats far beyond the little reason. The thinker objectively observed that autonomous philosophers were at times able to transcend the wisdom of the world, to tap into the Logos-Reason, but in his opinion they still voiced visions of reality marked with particularity. Only religious philosophers, in his case Christian thinkers, by freeing themselves from sin and vice i.e. the sources of cognitive errors, are able to fully transcend the exclusively worldly wisdom, which is but “folly in the eyes of God.”<sup>39</sup> Thereby he referred to the Old Testament’s idea of Wisdom, according to which “Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins” (Wis 1:4).

An important argument testifying to the limitations (and thus secondary quality) of the cognitive potential of science was, in Berdyaev’s opinion, its inability to account for the incidence of miracles, the miraculous intervention of another Reality in the matters of this world. Following Dostoyevsky and the Orthodox doctrine, Berdyaev was convinced that, on the one hand, mature religiousness has no need for physical miracles as they effectively render it an empirical fact depriving the believer of his freedom. On the other hand, however, as a religious thinker aspiring to participation in the great Reason, he claimed that although the physical world is subject to the laws of nature (which God himself imposed on it), the “enclosed compartment of our world can be penetrated by forces originating from beyond, powers of a divine

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

nature, powers of grace.<sup>40</sup> However, such instances in no way undermine natural principles but rather permeate them with other, unfamiliar influences. After all, the miracle of Christ's Resurrection, far from annulling the law of death as such, constituted a certain exception and a victory of an otherwise unchallenged principle. Having brought up the above argument, however, the author hurried to clarify that despite its evident superiority, religious faith should remain respectful of scientific knowledge which, at the present stage of development of both the world and the human spirit, must be considered the necessary good (a view he would extend to the existence of the earthly state which he deemed necessary until mankind is mature enough to finally establish the Kingdom of God, first in the outside world and then—solely in their hearts).

Everything said so far about Berdyaev's attitude to religion seems to lead to the critical conclusion that counting him among the group of philosophers anticipating modern post-secularism is somewhat unjustified. After all, any mention is yet to be made of the Russian author's position on the central motif of post-secular discourse, namely interpretation of the "exemplarily modern death of God."<sup>41</sup> However, several of Berdyaev's works do indeed discuss this particular idea of Nietzsche's,<sup>42</sup> wherein his chief criticism of the German philosopher pertained to:

his inability to account for the transcendental, mystical character of Christianity, very different from its historical and worldly dimensions. For that reason, the author of *Will to Power* also could not perceive the latent, restorative potential that Christianity represents, it was why it seemed to him a creation of the weak, capable of preaching exclusively of the sinfulness and powerlessness of the human condition. Nietzsche could not, or rather would not consider, as Christian modernists did, the new dimension of Christianity, one able to complement the old teachings of law and redemption with the new revelation of freedom and creativity. He was oblivious to the other aspect of the Suffering Christ: His Divine Power and Glory evident in the context of the historical Orthodox Church.<sup>43</sup>

When it comes to Il'in's attitude towards religion and religiousness, the philosopher also perceived it in a deeper, more mystical way (as recounted in a letter to his friend entitled *What is Religiosity?*). Religiousness is the spiritual pinnacle, the inner unity of a human being, which harmoniously merges his

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>41</sup> Bielik-Robson, "Myśl postsekalarna," 7.

<sup>42</sup> Berdyaev, "Salvation and Creativity" and *The Divine and the Human*.

<sup>43</sup> Rarot, *Od nihilizmu do chrześcijaństwa*, 224–25.

instincts, desires, soul and spirit. A religious person is easy to identify as he or she is a monolith, a spiritual wholeness (not only in the face of danger). Religiousness is therefore neither merely an opinion and a point of view, nor a dogmatically obedient stance in life and thought.<sup>44</sup> Instead, it constitutes a new, creative life, a new human condition which will become possible once the world of men embraces the grace of God and divine energy. On the outside, such a person is immediately recognized as somehow transformed, while on the inside there is a sense of great care and desire to prove worthy of the grace and Strength received. Il'in goes on to discuss the full extent of a religious experience in the already mentioned two-volume work *Axioms of Religious Experience*, where the central focus is on a phenomenological description of a religious act understood as a spiritual state affecting man in his relationship with God.

## Conclusions

Discussing these two philosophers together may seem somewhat unjustified given the fact that Berdyaev long advocated the unpopular Christian modernism and Christian universalism, while Il'in fully subscribed to the rational doctrine of the Orthodox Church as well as nationalistic and monarchist ideologies. However, despite these glaring discrepancies, there was also an important similarity—the symbiotic definition of the relationship between religion and science (unlike the one proposed in the confrontational model, where religion, in whatever form, is always conservative while sciences are seen as revolutionary and facilitating changeability and the evolutionary progress). The symbiotic model is normally advocated by theologians and Christian thinkers who are typically deeply convinced that their duty is to maintain a positive attitude towards scientific advances and to skilfully incorporate scientific discoveries into the Christian worldview.<sup>45</sup> Notably, it required considerable effort and a relatively long time for Berdyaev to fully acknowledge the positive role of science. Meanwhile, Il'in did so virtually from the very beginning and the height of his symbiotic approach to science was the use of the phenomenological method in the description of a religious experience. The question of whether the model of a symbiotic relationship between science and religion formulated by the two philosophers has any chance of effectively

<sup>44</sup> Il'in, *Put' k ochevidnosti*, 398.

<sup>45</sup> I write also about this in the article "Religia a nauka."

contributing to the discourse with the modern post-secular thought as its prefiguration, remains, as yet, unresolved.

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