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# Deification and Creativity

Nikolai Berdiaev, *The Meaning of Creativity* (1916)

God must become human, and humans, God: heaven must become one with earth, the earth must become heaven.

Jakob Boehme, *De Signatura Rerum*, X, 48

Adam, reborn through Christ into a new, spiritual person, is no longer passive and oppressed and blind, but a clear-seeing creator, the son of God who continues his Father's work.

Berdiaev, *Meaning of Creativity*

Nikolai Berdiaev (1874–1948), a major religious thinker and publicist both in pre-revolutionary Russia and in Parisian exile, was a prolific writer throughout his life, but in his autobiography, *Self-Knowledge* (*Samopoznanie*, 1949) he regards *The Meaning of Creativity: An Essay in the Justification of the Human Being* (*Smysl tvorchestva: opyt opravdaniia cheloveka*) as his most inspired work. He claims that he wrote it ‘at a time of well-nigh intoxicating ecstasy’, ‘in a mood of *Sturm und Drang*, in a state of almost feverish excitement’. It was, he says, ‘a book in which my thoughts and the normal course of philosophical argument seemed to dissolve into vision.’<sup>1</sup> In general, Berdiaev identifies himself as a prophetic, rather than an academic type of philosopher, for whom philosophy is primarily an act of self-expression, a performance, and a ‘creative vocation.’<sup>2</sup> For this reason, it would probably not be wrong to suppose that *Meaning of Creativity* expresses Berdiaev’s aspirations for himself and his own work.

Nevertheless, Berdiaev is disingenuous to imply that this work sprang pristine, as it were, from the head of Zeus. On the contrary, it can and

<sup>1</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *Self-Knowledge: An Essay in Autobiography*, translated by Katharine Lampert, 2nd ed. (2009), pp. 101; 210.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82; 86; 91. On Berdiaev’s self-identity as a philosopher, see Edith W. Clowes, *Fiction’s Overcoat: Russian Literary Culture and the Question of Philosophy* (2004), chapter 7, ‘Philosophy as Epic Drama: Berdiaev’s Philosophy of the Creative Act’, pp. 182–210.

should be read as a polemical distillation of the major intellectual influences to which he had been exposed in the years leading up to its composition. Though *Meaning of Creativity* was published in 1916, it was composed earlier, between 1912 and 1914.<sup>3</sup> By this time, Berdiaev had left Marxism and critical idealism behind him. He had left the Symbolist circles of St Petersburg with which he had intensively engaged between 1904 and 1907, and broken off relations with Merezhkovsky and Gippius, with whose 'new religious consciousness' he had once closely identified,<sup>4</sup> having balked at their attempt to create 'a bogus, sectarian church.'<sup>5</sup> He had also broken with the Orthodox intellectual circles in Moscow to which he had turned in 1908 as he developed his Christian faith, experiencing an 'irresistible reaction' against them.<sup>6</sup> *Meaning of Creativity* is a reactive statement of his own personal Christian vision, which takes inspiration from the religious imagination of the seventeenth-century German theosophist Jakob Boehme (1575–1624), whose work began profoundly to influence Berdiaev around 1911.<sup>7</sup> It is apparent that Berdiaev identified with Boehme, who, like himself, was an intuitive and mytho-logical philosopher and a Christian free-thinker who was suspected of heresy by the institutional (in Boehme's case, Lutheran) church.

This chapter consists of two sections. The first, longer, section offers an analysis of the deification narrative in *Meaning of Creativity* in the context of Berdiaev's intellectual debt to Boehme. I will show that *Meaning of Creativity* offers a comprehensive account of world history seen as the progressive unfolding of the divine will from creation to the *parousia*. It incorporates key elements of the deification narrative as found in the Greek Fathers (set out in Chapter 1). These include, first: a dynamic anthropology that draws on image and likeness theology and asserts the freedom of human beings and the potential to cooperate with God in the realization of their destiny; second: a soteriology that makes the Incarnation of Christ the central event of salvation history, as reversing the effects of the Fall of Adam and making possible in principle the deification of humanity and the cosmos; and third: an eschatology whereby at the end of history humanity and the cosmos are fully restored to the divine as a new heaven and a new

<sup>3</sup> Donald Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet: A Life of Nicolai Berdyaev*, 2nd ed. (1960), pp. 132–5.

<sup>4</sup> See in particular his 'O novom religioznom soznanii', in *Sub specie Aeternitatis* (1907) and *Novoe religioznoe soznanie i obshchestvennost* (1907).

<sup>5</sup> Berdyaev, *Self-Knowledge*, p. 163.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>7</sup> Berdiaev's *The Philosophy of Freedom (Filosofia svobody, 1911)* was the first work that reflected his debt to Boehme's theogony. Berdyaev, *Self-Knowledge*, pp. 99–100; 178–9.

(immortal) earth. At the same time, I will argue, all these elements are presented in terms found in Boehme, which differ in significant respects from the doctrine of deification sanctioned by the Orthodox Church. The second, shorter, section, examines the broader conceptual framework of *Meaning of Creativity*, focussing on the critique the work offers of 'historical Christianity', that is, the institutional (Orthodox) Church. Here, it will be seen that Berdiaev remains ideologically close to the 'new religious consciousness'. Berdiaev's enduring hostility towards institutional Christianity, and his desire to promote a new Christian vision from an independent position, accounts for why he privileges Boehme's deification narrative over that of the Greek Fathers.

## **Boehme and the deification narrative in *The Meaning of Creativity***

### The God–world relationship

#### The nature of God

*Meaning of Creativity* is an anthropodicy, a justification of the human being. Anthropology is its dominant theme, but, as is the case in every worldview, this anthropology is comprehensible only in its broader context. In this work that context is Berdiaev's understanding of God and God's relationship to the world we inhabit. Because *Meaning of Creativity* does not comprise a systematic theology, and does not have the nature of God as its focus, we need to reconstruct Berdiaev's position on this subject from isolated passages. Despite a certain level of obscurity, such a reconstruction affirms a fundamentally Bohemian position. Boehme introduced into Christian theosophy a picture of the Godhead as a dynamic entity in an eternal process of becoming: *der werdende Gott*.<sup>8</sup> The Divinity is impelled to express itself maximally, to reveal itself fully to itself: our world and we ourselves are stages in this process and instruments of God's self-expression and self-revelation.<sup>9</sup> Berdiaev encapsulates this idea neatly in the formula 'anthropogony as continuing theogony' (19).<sup>10</sup> The personal God who creates the world is himself, as it were, a phase in the development of the Divinity (apart from

<sup>8</sup> Alexandre Koyré, *La philosophie de Jacob Boehme*, 2nd ed. (1968), p. 317. First published in 1929. Translations from the French are my own.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>10</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, trans. Donald A. Lowrie, 2nd ed. (2009). All citations are from this edition; page references are given in parentheses in the text. Throughout this chapter I modify Lowrie's translation of *chelovek* and its cognates from 'man' to 'human', to avoid gendered language that the Russian does not warrant.

in the created world, all 'development' in God occurs outside of time): this Creator God (Berdiaev calls him the Trinitarian God, 134) is 'preceded' by the Divine Nothing, the absolutely undetermined Absolute, which is wholly inaccessible to thought.<sup>11</sup> Boehme calls this Absolute the *Ungrund*;<sup>12</sup> in referring to it, Berdiaev tends to qualify it as 'the mysterious abyss' (130) or 'primeval abyss' (304). Concluding his work, Berdiaev affirms unequivocally that 'Deity (Eckhart's *Gottheit* and Boehme's *Ungrund*) is deeper than God the Father, Son, and Spirit' (320).

In Boehme's theosophy, the *Ungrund* generates the personal God out of the oppositions that it contains (will and desire), as a stage in the divine self-revelation.<sup>13</sup> For Boehme, a God that is living and personal must, like humans, possess both an organic and a spiritual life. The organic life presupposes a 'nature' or 'body' that 'incarnates' the spirit, and Boehme affirms a 'divine nature' in God that is his eternal 'body'.<sup>14</sup> This body is quite distinct from our perceptible universe, and positing it allows Boehme to avoid a pantheism unacceptable to Christian doctrine. It is produced by the Absolute as a real 'other', opposed to the spirit, by means of which spirit becomes conscious of itself and acquires real being, life. It contains within itself the infinite multitude of energies or forces that is the total possible self-manifestation of the Divine. Boehme calls this divine nature variously Sophia, the divine Wisdom, the eternal Virgin, and the Glory and Splendour of God.<sup>15</sup> It is a divine World or Cosmos; an ideal prototype of our world. This is of course the same Sophia that gets taken up by F. W. J. Schelling, V. S. Soloviev, and S. N. Bulgakov.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the most striking feature of Berdiaev's reception of Boehme is the fact that—unlike these others—he suppresses this essential concept of the divine Wisdom in favour of an image of the divine Cosmos

<sup>11</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, p. 303ff.      <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>13</sup> Since Berdiaev does not concern himself with the details of this process, I will not rehearse them here. For a brief account in English, see Robert F. Brown, *The Later Philosophy of Schelling: The Influence of Boehme on the Works of 1809–1815* (1977), pp. 53–64. For a detailed exposition, see Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 320–414.

<sup>14</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 354–5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 344–5. The exact relationship of Sophia to the Divinity is unclear, but Boehme most often describes her as a product or emanation of God: divine, but not in the same way as the Trinity. Koyré minimizes the importance of this problem relative to the fact of Sophia's existence for Boehme; but it would become a crucial question for the (Russian) Orthodox Church in its judgement of Sergei Bulgakov's Sophianic theology.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapters 2 and 5. Berdiaev considered Schelling to have been overrated by his contemporary Russians: Franz von Baader was the better mystic, and Hegel the better philosopher. Schelling's main merit was to have reintroduced German mysticism to philosophical culture. N. A. Berdiaev, *Smysl tvorchestva: opyt opravdaniia cheloveka* (1916), p. 337, note 5.

as—to use Koyré’s expression—God, the ‘perfect person.’<sup>17</sup> He privileges an anthropological over a cosmological reading.

Berdiaev acknowledges that God is both one and many in Boehmian terms: ‘I confess a monopluralism, i.e., I accept both metaphysically and mystically not only the One, but a substantial plurality, the revelation in the One God of a permanent cosmic plurality, a multitude of eternal individualities. The cosmic plurality is an enriching revelation of God, God’s development’ (18). However, his conception of this ‘Pleroma’ (16) owes much to the Jewish esoteric tradition known as the Kabbala, through the lens of which Berdiaev reads Boehme on this vital point. (We can be certain of this from Berdiaev’s own statement that ‘[in] Boehme’s mysticism there is a Semitic in-grafting of the Kabbala, with the exclusive position it accords to the human being, with its concrete spirit’, 307.)<sup>18</sup> According to the kabbalic text *Zohar*, the totality of the divine attributes emanated by the Divine Infinity (the *En-Sof*) is configured as Adam Kadmon, ‘Primordial Man’, also referred to as Adam ‘Ilaya, ‘Heavenly Man.’<sup>19</sup> Berdiaev takes up the latter term (in Russian: *Adam Nebesnyi*) in his exposition of the human being as a microcosm. He affirms that Boehme, Christianizing the kabbalic insights, conceptualizes the Heavenly Adam as Christ: ‘Christ is the Absolute Person [*Absolutnyi Chelovek*], the Heavenly Adam’ (66). In Berdiaev’s view, then, Christ is the figure of the divine Cosmos: the macrocosm of which human beings—with their parallel spiritual–physical structure—are a microcosm (65–6).<sup>20</sup>

Berdiaev’s association of the Absolute Person with the Logos, the second Person of the Trinity, reinforces the connection between the Heavenly Adam and Christ. He states that ‘[t]he Absolute Person, the God-human, is

<sup>17</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, p. 391. Berdiaev expressed a dislike for his contemporaries’ cult of eternal femininity and its attendant eroticism. Berdyaev, *Self-Knowledge*, pp. 74–5.

<sup>18</sup> There is no evidence that Boehme had direct knowledge of the Kabbala. Benz speculates from the parallels that even if he did not, then he must have known of the tradition orally or through its reception in Renaissance writers such as Pico de la Mirandola. Ernst Benz, *Adam, der Mythos vom Urmenschen* (1955), p. 53. See also Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 126–7. For a useful overview of the parallels, see Wilhelm August Schulze, ‘Jakob Böhme und die Kabbala’, *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, Bd. 9, H. 3 (1955), pp. 447–60, <https://www-jstor-org.bris.idm.oclc.org/stable/20480795>.

<sup>19</sup> There are several kabbalic traditions, but Berdiaev draws on the *Zohar* (‘Splendour’), a work first published in Spain in the thirteenth century by Moses de León, who may also have been the author. Berdiaev quotes the *Zohar* primarily from two secondary sources: A. Frank, *La Kabbale, ou la philosophie religieuse des Hébreux* (1889), and S. Karppé, *Étude sur les origines et la nature du Zohar* (1901). Berdiaev, *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 338, notes 9–14.

<sup>20</sup> In the Kabbala the earthly Adam is indeed a microcosm of the heavenly Adam. See Schultze, ‘Jakob Böhme und die Kabbala’, p. 451. In evidence of Boehme’s adoption of this idea, he cites *Vom dreifachen Leben des Menschen*, VI, 48: ‘Wir zeigen euch auch dieses, daß das ewige Wesen gleich ist einem Menschen, und diese Welt ist auch gleich einem Menschen.’

the Logos, the Sun of Creation' (79–80). This is likely also derived from Boehme, one of whose accounts of the production of the divine Cosmos is framed in terms of the theology of the Word. God comprehends himself by articulating himself in speech. If the Word is the Son, the act of speaking is the Spirit, whilst the spoken Word is God's object and God's body, the divine Wisdom.<sup>21</sup> On this account, the Absolute Person can be seen as the union of Logos and Wisdom (Sophia), perhaps analogously to the way in which the word is the union of signified and signifier.<sup>22</sup> Further evidence of the connection of Berdiaev's Logos to Boehme is the solar imagery with which Berdiaev often associates him: in the early *Aurora* (1619) the Son is identified with the sun as the source of light.<sup>23</sup> Finally, but very importantly for Boehme and Berdiaev, the Absolute Person is an androgyne, a union of the male and the female principles, which is a fundamental aspect of her/his perfection.<sup>24</sup> This concept, too, derives ultimately from the Kabbala.<sup>25</sup> Berdiaev does not, I think, explicitly identify the Absolute Person as Logos/Sophia. He does so by implication however in the following passage: 'In the one aspect, Christ the Logos is man rather than woman—the Absolute Person in His masculine nature. In another of His aspects Christ is androgyne' (80). The androgyneity of Christ the Logos must I think refer to the Logos/Sophia union that is the Absolute Person. It is replicated in the incarnate Christ Jesus as the 'new Adam' (191), which is why, according to Berdiaev, he 'never knew a woman and in His own life did not realize the sacrament of marriage' (187).<sup>26</sup> When on the other hand Berdiaev identifies the Logos as 'man rather than woman', he does so in terms of the Gnostic narrative that the Logos came to earth to rescue the fallen Sophia as 'the world's mortal spirit' (80), which in fact implies the same original union, lost in the Fall.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Benz, *Der vollkommene Mensch*, pp. 16–8. He cites *Mysterium Magnum*, VII, 10. See also Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 396–9.

<sup>22</sup> Boehme's thinking here differs from the speculation of the *Zohar*, in which Wisdom (*Hokhmah*) features as just one of the ten *sephiroth* (emanations) of which Adam Kadmon is composed. The *Zohar* does however adapt the logos theology of the first-century Christian Jew, Philo, who was the first to use the expression 'heavenly human' (*ouranios anthropos*), which he conceived, not as the Logos himself, but as his perfect image: the Adam of the first chapter of Genesis, the primordial Adam before his formation from the earth and separation from Eve in the second chapter. Schultze, 'Jakob Böhme und die Kabbala', p. 451.

<sup>23</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, p. 104; Brown, *Later Philosophy of Schelling*, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> Benz, *Der vollkommene Mensch*, pp. 117–19, analyses the Divinity in Boehme as the marriage of Christ and Sophia, in which Sophia is Christ's body and the image of God. He cites *Mysterium Magnum*, I, 48.

<sup>25</sup> Benz, *Adam*, pp. 53–4; Schultze, pp. 450–1.

<sup>26</sup> Berdiaev follows Boehme very closely in this passage on the androgyne, pp. 184–9.

<sup>27</sup> Berdiaev is not consistently Boehmian. The idea of the fall of Sophia derives from a broader esoteric tradition, but not from Boehme, who writes only of the fall of Lucifer and

We have, then, in *Meaning of Creativity*, a conception of God as evolving out of an original nothing into a unity in multiplicity characterized as the Heavenly Adam, the Absolute Person, and an androgynous Christ–Sophia. Clearly this conception has little in common with the orthodox Christian definition of God as Trinity, one God in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In successive works, Boehme makes numerous attempts to conform Trinitarian theology to his intuition about the dynamically self-generating Divinity. Koyré finds these to be unsuccessful, concluding that, in the mature Boehme: ‘God is a person only in Jesus, and only in Jesus is he love; only in him is he truly “God”. The Father tends to become a simple basis or phase in the development of the person of God. The Holy Spirit becomes the emanation of God, the breath, the action *ad extra*, what is communicated, what “inspires”, what is given to man.’<sup>28</sup> Despite Berdiaev’s statements about the personal God as Trinity, with the Persons of Whom alone personal communion and union are possible (134), I find that he, like Boehme, in fact conceives of the personal God only as Christ, the Absolute Person, who is the almost exclusive focus of his metaphysics in *Meaning of Creativity*. He actually quotes from the same passage of *Mysterium Magnum* as Koyré does in this connection: ‘In Christ God becomes a person, and man becomes a person. Boehme says: “*Gott ist keine Person als nur in Christo*”’ (78–9, Berdiaev’s emphasis).<sup>29</sup> Thus, when Berdiaev defines Christianity as a religion of Godmanhood (or divine humanity, 134), he has in mind first and foremost the person of Christ in his relationship to human beings. His most sustained application of the Trinitarian idea is not to God as he is in himself but to the process of God’s self-revelation in our perceptible world in time: the theory of the three ages, to which I will return.

### The created order

We arrive now at Berdiaev’s conception of the creation and mode of being of our world. How closely does this conception follow that of Boehme? To answer this question is not entirely straightforward. Boehme rejects the idea

Adam. Boehme does have a concept of the ‘world spirit’ (*Geist dieser Welt*), as, among other things, the presence of the divine Wisdom in our world. See Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, p. 226.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411.

<sup>29</sup> *Mysterium Magnum*, VII, 5: ‘Also verstehen wir nun, was Gott und sein Wesen sey: Wir Christen sagen: Gott sey Dreifaltig, aber Einig in Wesen; als aber in gemein gesagt wird, Gott sey Dreyfaltig in Personen, das wird von den Unverständigen übel verstanden: denn Gott is keine Person als nur in Christo.’ Berdiaev quotes Boehme from *Jakob Böhme’s Sämtliche Werke*, 7 vols (Leipzig: K. W. Schiebler, 1831–46): *Smysl tvorchestva*, pp. 337–8, notes 4 and 17.



that our world was created *ex nihilo*, arguing simply that nothing comes from nothing.<sup>30</sup> Rather, God creates the world out of himself, by drawing on his own nature. 'God "sees" the possible world in his Wisdom, as expressive of it, and the divine nature, guided by the divine imagination, desires, engenders, and produces it.'<sup>31</sup> Boehme's conception is organic and vitalistic: his 'creation' is like a birth-giving. Rather like a child's relationship to its parent, the world exists independently of God, but is sustained and nourished by him, through the forces of the divine nature that 'penetrate' and 'inhabit' the world.<sup>32</sup> That God produces a world of independent beings is for Boehme the natural extension of God's will to manifest himself: now not only to himself, but outwardly, to others. Indeed, only outwardly can he reveal himself as a God of love.<sup>33</sup>

Berdiaev certainly follows Boehme in asserting, repeatedly, that the world is a necessary extension of the process of God's self-expression. For example, he states: 'The creation of the world is creative development in God, His emergence from solitude; it is the call of divine love' (128), and: 'the whole differentiated, many-sided world is an expression of the Divinity' (320). At the same time, he insists on the verb 'create' (*sotvorit'*), and does use the expression 'out of nothing' (*iz nichego*). The reason for this is clear: it is essential for Berdiaev to establish the possibility of human creativity by grounding it in divine creativity. Berdiaev requires the creative act to add something to what already exists, to enrich being, in accordance with his thesis—to which we will return—that humans are called to continue the creative work of God. He therefore rejects emanationist models of the universe such as that of neo-Platonism, whereby everything flows outward from the One, diminishing in strength the further removed from the centre it is, with the material world being farthest removed of all (129–32).<sup>34</sup> It is with these in mind that he states: 'The creative act does not create out of the nature of the creator by reducing his powers through transforming them into some other state, but out of nothing' (128). It is reasonable to say, though, that Berdiaev fudges the question of the creation *ex nihilo*. His captivation by the idea of 'creative evolution and development as a theogonic, cosmogonic, and anthropogonic process' (135) heavily countermands it. To some extent, nevertheless, Boehme's pantheistic model works for Berdiaev's

<sup>30</sup> Or, more subtly, that everything comes out of the divine Nothing: 'Gott hat alle Dinge aus Nichts gemacht und dasselbe Nichts ist er selber', *De Signatura Rerum* VI, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 417–18. <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 418–20. <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 391–2.

<sup>34</sup> It has however been argued that Boehme's model is also basically emanationist. See Schultze, 'Jakob Böhme und die Kabbala', p. 448, citing Gershom Scholem.



theory of creativity. As Berdiaev says himself, the most important prerequisite for creativity is not that the world should be outside of God, but that beings should be free and independent of him: just like Boehme, Berdiaev holds that 'God surpasses the world, but the world is divine, divine energy overflows into the world' (134). Besides freedom, the other indispensable prerequisite for creativity is personality, which brings us to humanity.

## The human drama

### Creation and fall

In Boehme's theosophy, the human being occupies a privileged and unique position in the created order. God creates three worlds out of the three principles that he contains. Two are everlasting: Paradise, which expresses the second principle of light and love and is the habitation of the angels; and Hell, which expresses the first principle of fire and wrath. 'Between' them is our world, which uniquely is finite and exists in time: it expresses the third principle of the body (*corpus*), a synthesis of the first two.<sup>35</sup> Adam, however, is not created as part of our world, but separately. Like the three worlds, he is created out of the divine nature, but out of all three principles, so that he is its most complete reflection, is most truly the image and likeness of God.<sup>36</sup> As such, he is superior to the angels. Unlike our world, he is also created everlasting. His body is not grossly material, but spiritualized, ethereal, having neither digestive nor sexual organs; and he is androgynous.<sup>37</sup> He is created between and outside of the three worlds as 'the equivalent of the entire Universe'.<sup>38</sup> He is, then, in a sense, an incarnation of Christ, the Absolute Person.<sup>39</sup>

Boehme's Adam falls, not once, but twice.<sup>40</sup> He abuses his divine freedom out of self-love (*die Selbstheit*) and the desire to know our world in its multiplicity by participation. Weakened by his desire, he is overcome by sleep and awakes in Eden (as described in the second chapter of Genesis) to find

<sup>35</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 400–2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 451; Benz, *Adam*, p. 56, citing *Von den drei Prinzipien Göttlichen Wesens*, X, 11.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 466–7; Benz, *Adam*, pp. 54–9.

<sup>38</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, p. 464.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 455, n. 1. Koyré cites from *De Electione Gratiae*, VII, 37: 'So verstehet mich nun recht: der erste und allerinwendigste Grund im Menschen ist Christus, nicht nach der Natur des Menschen, sondern nach Göttlicher Eigenschaft in dem himmlischen [*sic*] Wesen.'

<sup>40</sup> Koyré writes of a series of falls, p. 467.

that his feminine half—the divine Sophia—has abandoned him and that God has created Eve in her place out of his body as a companion for him, but as a separate being. There follows the second Fall, the eating of the forbidden fruit as described in Genesis. By the end of the process, Adam finds himself alienated from God, enslaved to the universe over which he once ruled, and possessed of a crude, animal-like, gendered, and above all mortal body of which he is deeply ashamed.<sup>41</sup>

In his own consideration of the human condition, Berdiaev starts from the perspective of humans as they experience themselves in this world, and from there speculates about an original state of Adam. ‘The human being is the point of intersection of two worlds’: we are conscious of ourselves as being at once eternal and mortal, free and subject to the laws of nature, a king and a slave (60). His lament, full of pathos, is that we are trapped in the perceptible world as in a prison, that we do not belong here.<sup>42</sup> Our self-consciousness points towards a fall from a superior state of being, in which, first of all, Adam was not a fragment of nature but in the truest sense a microcosm, ‘including the universe in himself’ (58), ‘the image and likeness of Absolute Being’ (60), and the ‘highest hierarchical centre of nature’ (71) understood not as a ‘given, closed planetary system’ but as ‘the whole of being, [...] all planes of being, [...] all worlds’ (76). Berdiaev calls this Adam the ‘all-human’ (*vsechelovek*), which would appear to distinguish him from the Absolute Person, Christ, and align him with Boehme’s Adam.

Nevertheless, Berdiaev is exasperatingly imprecise on the relationship of pre-lapsarian Adam to Christ. He makes no clear statement about a created heavenly Adam as featured in Boehme’s theosophy, and if only for this reason leaves room for speculating that he in fact equates pre-lapsarian Adam with the Absolute Person. One statement that inclines one to this conclusion is his declaration that philosophy is ‘the revelation of the human being as participating in the Logos, in the *Absolute Person*, in the *all-human*’ (52, my emphasis). Perhaps even more compelling is his statement that ‘Boehme daringly brings Christ and Adam together’, immediately followed by: ‘Boehme’s first Adam is the same as the Heavenly Adam

<sup>41</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 467–8; Benz, *Adam*, pp. 60–70.

<sup>42</sup> In this he echoes Boehme. See Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 452–4. Writing more generally of Berdiaev’s personalism, Louth suggests a similarity to the 3rd-century theologian Origen: Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present* (2015), p. 66. Gaidenko relates it to Schopenhauer, but is well aware of German Romanticism’s debt to Boehme: P. P. Gaidenko, *Vladimir Soloviev i filiosofia Serebriannogo veka* (2001), pp. 312; 316.

of the Kabbala' (66).<sup>43</sup> My own view is that in his conception of pre-lapsarian Adam, Berdiaev is influenced more by the Kabbala and gnostic systems more generally, where there is no intermediate, created but spiritual-physical Adam, than he is by Boehme. Nevertheless, what is clear is that both Boehme and Berdiaev insist on a divine element in humans that for both is connected to their special status as children of God who share with him the quality of eternity.<sup>44</sup> This distinguishes them qualitatively from the finite perceptible cosmos and accounts for why they do not feel at home in it.

Berdiaev's Adam falls cosmically (101), one assumes out of the divine Pleroma. In consequence of his fall, he becomes 'animal-like' (74), and subject to ('in slavish dependence on', 71) the laws of the natural order. Very Bohemian is Berdiaev's account of how Adam loses his original androgynicity, 'the image and likeness of God in him', as the result of which he becomes 'the slave of sexual attraction' (184–9).<sup>45</sup> In *Meaning of Creativity* there is an almost palpable disgust for material existence in all its dimensions: sexual (marriage and the family), cultural (science and art), social (the state, politics), and religious (the church). Berdiaev's overriding wish is to be done with it, to transcend it, even if this is to be accomplished by transforming it: "This world" must be overcome and eliminated. But this does not mean hostility towards the world or the cosmos—it means hostility only toward its disease, its enslavement, and its fall' (143). Despite the qualification here, and despite his professed admiration for Boehme's 'spiritual materialism' (*dukhovnyi materializm*, 64), Berdiaev often betrays a Gnostic sense of material existence as being evil in itself.<sup>46</sup> This is reflected in some of his iterations of the Fall, for example 'the world is captivity by evil, a falling away from the divine life' (17), which statement is in fact consistent with the Gnostics' speculation that material existence came into being as the result of a cosmic fall. Commensurately, unlike in Boehme's theosophy, Berdiaev often causally links Adam's fall away from God with the 'materialization' of the world: 'The obligatory "materiality" of being is born of man himself' (151).<sup>47</sup> Berdiaev's logic is that, since a human caused the problem,

<sup>43</sup> If, as is logical (and see also p. 72), by 'first Adam' Berdiaev means Adam before the fall, he has misread Boehme here. Boehme does not equate Christ as the figure of the divine Cosmos with pre-lapsarian Adam. Rather, as we saw, Adam is an incarnation of Christ.

<sup>44</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, p. 454.

<sup>45</sup> For the Bohemian narrative, see Benz, *Der vollkommene Mensch*, pp. 59–77 and Benz, *Adam*, pp. 59–65.

<sup>46</sup> Gaidenko, *Filosofija Serebriannogo veka*, p. 315.

<sup>47</sup> In Boehme, the perceptible world is produced out of the divine Cosmos as his willed expression *ad extra*. It is spoiled by the fall not of Adam but of Lucifer, and Adam is created 'afterwards', to help repair the damage. Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 426–7; 465–6.

humans must solve it. They must restore the perceptible cosmos to the divine one: 'The world is deadened by man's fall and it is revived by man's uprising (*voskhozdeniia*)' (151). What, then, are the conditions of this 'uprising'?

### Calling and salvation

In Boehme's theosophy, Adam was originally conceived by God 'as his representative in the world [...] ; a being that would incarnate God and that at the same time would express the creation.'<sup>48</sup> Adam is a microcosm, a little world, in two senses: as an incarnation of the divine World (in which capacity one may also call him a *microtheos*), and as a perfect real reduction of the perceptible world. 'Intermediary and link between the perceptible and material world and God, [Adam] represents God in the world and represents the perceptible world to itself and to God.'<sup>49</sup> His ability to represent derives from his structural identity to God and the world, which gives him a privileged kind of knowledge, a knowledge based on participation, or real penetration into the known object.<sup>50</sup> Lucifer's fall gave Adam a further mission: to return this world 'to the state of perfection that should have belonged to it, collaborating with God in an act of repair, combatting and vanquishing Lucifer's nefarious action.'<sup>51</sup> Adam's own fall, however, severely compromises his ability to carry out this task, because he becomes as disordered as the world. Nevertheless, in Boehme's conception Adam is not completely lost after his fall. Humans retain God's image in their freedom, intellect, and, importantly, their body, which in Boehme functions both as a means by which we can show ourselves capable of spiritually dominating our nature, and as a safeguard against spiritual destruction (in contradistinction to the angels). Always concerned to 'combat [the Lutheran doctrine of] predestination in such a way as to protect the freedom and personal responsibility of man', Boehme maintains a fundamentally dynamic anthropology, whereby humans always retain the capacity to determine their own fate, to repent and obtain salvation.<sup>52</sup>

Berdiaev follows Boehme closely in his articulation of the calling of humankind. He adopts his conception of humans as a microcosm with particular enthusiasm.<sup>53</sup> As in Boehme, this status of microcosm pertains both

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 465.      <sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 451.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 456 ff.; Brown, *Later Philosophy of Schelling*, p. 74 ff.

<sup>51</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, p. 466.      <sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 470–1.

<sup>53</sup> Chapter 2, 'Man, Microcosm and Macrocosm', contains his most rhapsodic statements about Boehme (e.g., 'never has human gnosis reached a greater superhuman height', 66–7), and the greatest concentration of quotations from his work.

to the divine Cosmos ('human nature is the image and likeness of absolute being, a microcosm', 62), and to the perceptible world: 'The human being penetrates into the meaning of the universe as into a larger person, into a mac-anthropos. And the universe enters into the human being, submitting to his creative effort, as into a small universe, a microcosm' (59). It is apparent that Berdiaev derives his emphasis on knowledge by participation from Boehme, and not from the Greek Fathers. Though Berdiaev appears to conceptualize the fall differently from Boehme, he agrees with him that afterwards it falls to humans, to 'humanize', 'liberate', 'revive', and 'spiritualize' fallen nature in collaboration with God (72).<sup>54</sup> He shares Boehme's dynamic anthropology, again apparently deriving this from him rather than from the Greek patristic tradition. Both maintain the absolute and inalienable nature of human freedom and its origin in the *Ungrund* (145);<sup>55</sup> both consider the freedom of Adam to be another way in which he is the image and likeness of God (148). For Berdiaev, freedom is the prerequisite for human creativity: still another mark of God's image in us (144). Berdiaev distinguishes between the negative freedom of pre-lapsarian Adam, consisting of a simple choice to rebel against God or to serve him, and the positive, creative freedom that becomes available to humans only with the incarnation of Christ (147–9). Christ's achievement is decisive in equipping humans to carry out the task for which they were conceived.

Both Boehme and, following him, Berdiaev, conceive of Christ as the new Adam who succeeds where the old Adam failed, uses his freedom in the service of God to vanquish evil in principle (in his death and resurrection), and restores the image and likeness of God in his person. This includes Adam's original androgyny, for Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, in whom the divine Wisdom had incarnated herself in order that her child should be a masculine Virgin, the perfect and complete representation of humanity (186–9).<sup>56</sup> In a representative way, Christ restores to human nature its pristine microcosmic structure. It remains only for the individual human being to 'assimilate' (in Boehme's terminology) Christ in order for her or him to be capable of knowing (by participation) and expressing both

<sup>54</sup> Compare Bulgakov, drawing on Schelling (Chapter 5). For Berdiaev, unlike for Boehme, it is a question of humans repairing the damage that they themselves have caused.

<sup>55</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 454; 478; 491. Boehme understands the Absolute to be absolute freedom, since nothing limits or opposes it: *ibid.*, pp. 327; 434, note 1. (C.f., Berdiaev, *Self-Knowledge*, p. 99, where Berdiaev claims that, unlike Boehme, he places freedom outside of God. I suspect this apparently impossible statement arises from the ambiguity of the designation 'God', and that both Berdiaev and Boehme place freedom in the *Ungrund*.)

<sup>56</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 472–3; Benz, *Adam*, pp. 70–5.

the divine and perceptible worlds once more. Boehme's concept of personal salvation represents a rejection of his contemporary Lutheranism, with its cornerstones of *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, and *sola gratia*. For Boehme, Lutheranism had become a dead faith, requiring only intellectual assent to the *fides historica*, the historical fact of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection. By contrast, Boehme asserts that faith is a power and an action. Through the power of the imagination believers reconstruct themselves according to the image of Christ that they form in themselves. Through the imagination Christ becomes incarnate in the believer and the believer participates in him. In this way, the believer becomes in a direct sense the image, incarnation, and expression of God. But, as Koyré points out, this rebirth in the image and likeness of Christ is nothing other than the reacquisition, as it were, of the believer's own nature as originally determined by God, a kind of rekindling of a divine spark that remained latent in the human soul.<sup>57</sup> We will find this theme in Berdiaev also.

For Berdiaev the key point about the Incarnation is the fact that it restores the divine element in human nature in principle and (re-)introduces humanity into the deity: '*Through Christ, the human being becomes a participant in the nature of the Holy Trinity, for the second hypostasis of the Holy Trinity is the Absolute Human*. Oh, certainly, the human being is not God, he is the son of God but not in the unique sense that Christ is the Son of God; but the human being is a participant in the mystery of the nature of the Holy Trinity and is a mediator between God and the cosmos. Through Christ every human person is a part not of the mortal world alone but of the Divine as well' (79, Berdiaev's emphasis). We can perceive the resonance of this idea with the Athanasian doctrine of Christ as having deified human flesh in a representative way and, as the risen God-human, as having introduced human nature into the Godhead. But we should also note the essential point of difference: that in Boehme and Berdiaev this is a restoration of Adam's original status rather than a radically new change in the human condition.<sup>58</sup> There is a tension in Berdiaev's thinking between the idea that Christ's incarnation makes human participation in God possible and the idea that humans even in their unredeemed state remain 'of divine origin'. We should of course see this in Bohemian terms, as the paradoxical rebirth of the believer into her original condition, a restoration of the status quo ante, as is clear from the

<sup>57</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 481–2.

<sup>58</sup> Gaidenko, in her severely critical account of Berdiaev's 'anarchic personalism' from an Orthodox point of view, accuses Berdiaev of equating anthropology and Christology: Gaidenko, *Filosofia Serebriannogo veka*, p. 311.

following statement: 'When the human being is aided by the Divine-human Redeemer, this is not some external help, alien to human nature, but an inward aid which *reveals his own natural likeness to God, his own participation in divine life*, the human's inward upward-striving. Christ is not outside us but within us' (260, my emphasis).<sup>59</sup> Similarly to Boehme, Berdiaev emphasizes the need for individual believers actively to appropriate their new condition in Christ. Though he does acknowledge a preliminary phase of surrender to Christ (311) and repentance from sin (165), Berdiaev's overwhelming emphasis rests on how, once received, the indwelling Christ empowers us to express our natural divinity in a new way, how Christ brings a positive freedom to transform all being through our creative activity: in other words, re-enables us consciously to 'continue God's work of creation' (137) in fulfilment of our original vocation.

The human drama pivots, historically and soteriologically, on Christ's incarnation. Berdiaev affirms this in several iterations of versions of the exchange formula that so often features in patristic treatments of the deification theme. Nevertheless, as with his dynamic anthropology, Berdiaev's treatment of the subject points to Boehme rather than the Fathers as the primary inspiration for the 'exchange' motif. In the tones of one for whom the idea is completely novel, he finds 'astonishing' in Boehme 'a mystical *rapprochement* of heaven with earth, God with the human being, Christ with Adam,' quoting Boehme's exchange formula: 'God must become human, and humans, God: heaven must become one with earth, the earth must become heaven' (67).<sup>60</sup> Similarly, he delights to find terms with which he most probably will have been more familiar from Soloviev's *Lectures on Divine Humanity* (*Bogochelovechestve*) than from the Fathers pre-figured precisely in Boehme's 'exchange' statements. Thus he quotes, as 'Boehme's most essential word on Christ and Adam': 'Understand that human nature must be preserved, and that God did not cast it out entirely, so that a new and strange human being should arise from the old; rather he must rise from the nature and qualities of Adam and from the nature and quality of God in Christ, so that the human being should become an Adam-Christ and Christ a Christ-Adam: a Human-God, and a God-Human' (68, Berdiaev's emphasis).<sup>61</sup> It is because Christ became incarnate as the God-human that a human

<sup>59</sup> Boehme thinks in terms of the re-vivification of the always present internal Logos. *Ibid.*, p. 472.

<sup>60</sup> *De Signatura Rerum*, X, 48.

<sup>61</sup> *Mysterium Magnum*, LI, 26. See also XXXVII, 32: 'So Christ became a God-human, and Adam and Abraham in Christ a human-God.'



becomes a human–God. Berdiaev does not hedge this statement against the possibility that his Russian readers, reading it against the background of Dostoevsky’s Christ-usurping ‘human-gods’ (*chelovekobogi*), would perceive it as blasphemous, which suggests that he did not himself understand it that way. This is of course because Berdiaev finds it unproblematic to view humans as in fact gods by nature and not only by adoption.

### Deification and the creative act

In Berdiaev’s narrative, humans do not need to seek their own deification, because in Christ their divinity is secured. They must, however, seek the deification of this world. Berdiaev sees the Christ-event as the point at which the responsibility for ‘saving’ the world passes decisively to humans, to the extent that God surrenders his omnipotence and makes himself dependent on human activity: ‘With Christ, God’s autocracy ceases, for the human being as the son of God is called to immediate participation in divine life. The government [*upravlenie*] of the world becomes divine–human’ (137). The importance to Berdiaev of God’s need of humans is reflected in the epigraph that he chooses for his book, a couplet from the seventeenth-century German Catholic mystic Angelus Silesius: ‘Ich weiß, daß ohne mich Gott nicht ein Nu kann leben/Werd ich zu nicht, er muß von Not den Geist aufgeben.’ The indwelling Christ assists, but the initiative, and the action, must come from the believer. This is a very strong expression of the synergistic relationship between God and humans as articulated in the Greek patristic tradition, but which once again appears to have been inspired instead by German theosophy. Boehme, like Berdiaev, regards humans as God’s collaborators in the ongoing creation of the world. Their free actions introduce a new, unpredictable element into reality that God himself could not have achieved without their collaboration.<sup>62</sup>

For Berdiaev, our method of collaboration with God is creative activity (*tvorchestvo*): as he says, ‘true creativeness is theurgy, God-activity, activity together with God’ (126). Redeemed humans are co-creators with God. He advances his thesis about the creative act largely without reference to Boehme, but there is nevertheless a strong connection with Boehme’s thought here, too, and one moreover that resonates in Berdiaev’s relationship to his

<sup>62</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, p. 497.

erstwhile Symbolist associates, as this is expressed in *Meaning of Creativity*.<sup>63</sup> In Boehme, humans collaborate with God through thought and speech. Because of the gift of language that is unique to Adam, he is the only created being that can express something other than himself. In Paradise, he names creatures according to their innermost essence, which he perceives through his magical powers.<sup>64</sup> Despite the loss of his powers in the Fall and his expulsion from Eden, he retains the gift of language, and has the potential—once Christ is re-born in him—to be the organ of thought and expression for the world. By exercising this function, *humans immortalize the world*: ‘Language [...] raises the Universe to the spiritual plane. One can therefore say that human speech saves the Universe by spiritualising it and conferring eternity upon it. The human word therefore appears as the counterpart, in a way, of the divine Word, which it reveals and whose action it completes: the divine Word created the world; the human word redeems it from the vanity of its temporal being.’<sup>65</sup> This powerful idea was taken up in German Romanticism, and from there found its way, partly directly, partly through Soloviev’s writings on art, into Russian Symbolist theory.<sup>66</sup> Thence it reached Berdiaev, who rediscovers its source in Boehme.<sup>67</sup>

Berdiaev pays tribute to the theurgic aspirations of Symbolist art, but regards Symbolism as a heroic failure (238). Symbolism brought to full expression the aspiration of all art to ‘create another type of being, another kind of life, to break out through “this world” to another world, out of the chaotic, heavy and deformed world into the free and beautiful cosmos’ (226). But, like all art, in Berdiaev’s view, Symbolist art too succeeded in creating only new values, and not new being. Despite its unprecedented efforts, it was unable to break out of culture, and this is its tragedy (240). The same limitations can be observed in other spheres of culture, all of which—as cultural—have a creative element: philosophy (29), economics (239), social

<sup>63</sup> A possible, if uncharitable, explanation for Berdiaev’s omission would be that he wishes to protect the originality of his thesis of creativity.

<sup>64</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 225–6.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 457, note 1, explicating *De Signatura Rerum*. See also p. 272, for the same idea in *De Triplici Vita*.

<sup>66</sup> For the connections between Russian Symbolism and German Romanticism, see Michael Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Vyacheslav Ivanov* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

<sup>67</sup> Berdiaev is fully cognizant of the German Romantic Novalis’ connection to Boehme: Berdiaev, *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 337, note 1. Gaidenko rightly sees Berdiaev as a neo-Romantic, the philosophical representative of Russian Symbolism: Gaidenko, *Filosofia Serebriannogo veka*, p. 319.

organization (277), and marriage (193). Human culture as a whole is failing to fulfil its vocation of consummating the world process by transforming existence, in Berdiaev's view. Thus, Berdiaev appropriates the idea of theurgy from Boehme via the Symbolists, but he claims that the full potential of human theurgic activity can be realized only in a future age, the inception of which is nevertheless imminent. In an allusion to John the Baptist, the Forerunner (*Predtechii*), Berdiaev declares the Symbolists to be 'the sacrificial forerunners and heralds of the coming world-epoch of creativeness' (241).

Before I come on to Berdiaev's vision for creativity in the future, I would like to consider one aspect of his critique that particularly connects Boehme (and his followers) to the broader project of Russian Symbolism: sexual love. We saw in the Introduction how leading Symbolists experimented with non-conventional forms of erotic union that involved abstinence from sexual intercourse for the purpose of redirecting erotic energy towards the transfiguration of existence; and how these practices were related to the project of life-creation (*zhiznetvorchestvo*), the transformation of life into art. We recall that the Symbolists were inspired in this endeavour by Soloviev's *The Meaning of Love* (1892–4), which was itself informed by Plato's theory of eros as expressed in the dialogue *Phaedrus*, and the German theosophical tradition. In *Meaning of Creativity*, Berdiaev, who personally engaged with the agenda of erotic celibacy, fully exposes the Symbolists' debt to Boehme's concept of the androgyne and its adoption particularly by his nineteenth-century disciple Franz von Baader (1765–1841). For Berdiaev, '[e]rotic energy is the eternal source of creativity' (224). Its expression in sex, however, is a mark, perhaps the principal mark, of our fallenness, not only because we are enslaved to our libido, but also because the procreative sex act traps us in the bad infinity of biological life, enslaves us also to race (and, by extension, nation). If we have Christ in us we can and must be liberated from physical desire to channel our erotic energy towards what it was intended for by God: 'the production of a new world, the continuation of original creation' (201).<sup>68</sup> 'The new person is above all a person of transfigured [*preobrazhennogo*] sex who is restoring in himself the androgynous image and likeness of God, which was distorted by the fall [*raspadom*] into male and female in the human race' (202).<sup>69</sup> In a sense, then, though

<sup>68</sup> This project carries echoes of the eccentric Russian philosopher Nikolai Fedorov's (1829–1903) 'common task'. Berdiaev admired aspects of Fedorov's thought: Berdiaev, *Self-Knowledge*, p. 297.

<sup>69</sup> Lowrie translates *raspad* as 'decadence'.

Berdiaev does not say this directly, the embrace of celibacy is the pre-requisite for fulfilling our creative vocation.

Transfiguration, or transformation (*preobrazhenie*) is the term most frequently employed by Berdiaev to express the desired effect of our properly directed creative energy. 'Every creative act is a partial transfiguration of life', he declares (225). Part of what is conveyed by the use of this term is the concession that humans cannot create anything absolutely new, but only 'supplement and enrich' (138) what is already there: 'Human creativity out of "nothing" does not mean the absence of resistant material but only an absolute increment or gain which is not determined by anything else' (144).<sup>70</sup> This 'absolute increment or gain' is a change of state of the object of creative activity, specifically from disorder into order, or harmony: 'Beauty is not only the aim of art—it is the aim of life. And the final aim is not beauty as a cultural value, but beauty as being itself, that is the transformation [*pretvorenie*] of the chaotic deformity of the world into beauty' (246). This of course is the rectification of the damage caused by the Fall, but it is also the continuation of the creation in so far as it brings into the divine life a material universe that has up to now been deadened: 'The creative act of the personality enters the cosmic hierarchy, gives it deliverance from the power of lower materialised hierarchies, unfetters being' (156). Finally, the transformation of being is conceived as its spiritualization: 'Christianity bears within itself powerful forces for the renaissance of Pan and a new spiritualisation [*odukhotvoreniia*] of nature' (317). In the end, '[t]here will be left of the material only a transfigured sensuality [*preobrazhennaia chuvstvennost'*] and an eternal form of illuminated corporeality [*prosvetlennoi telesnosti*], freed of all weight and of the organic necessity of race' (204).

Berdiaev's vision for human creativity includes both a millenarian and an eschatological element, which are closely interrelated or, one might argue, insufficiently differentiated or even deliberately merged. As discussed in the next section, the full creative potential of humanity will be realized in a future era of creativity that represents the revelation of the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. God will complete his self-revelation in time through human activity during this third age, and this process is identical with the process of restoring the perceptible universe to the divine life. The final consummation of the world process will however occur at the Second

<sup>70</sup> See also pp. 142–3: 'The creative activity [*tvorchestvo*] of created beings can be directed only towards the increase of the creative energy of being, the growth of beings and their harmony in the world.'

Coming of Christ. Nevertheless, it is human creative agency that will make this event possible. Berdiaev views religious creativity as inspired by the victorious and glorified Christ, not the suffering, kenotic one: it not only looks forward to the Second Coming, but actively brings it about. Berdiaev makes a curious claim that those who do not carry out their creative responsibility will not see Christ: 'The Coming Christ will never appear to him who by his own free effort has not revealed within himself the other, the creative image of man' (106–8). In his twelfth chapter, on the social order, he imagines the co-existence of two orders of being, the temporal order in which the spiritually undeveloped will continue to experience the historical evolution of culture (in his example, the state), and an eternal order in which the Kingdom of God will have become a reality for the spiritually advanced already on earth. This Kingdom of God is the New Jerusalem, or the mystical Church. It appears 'catastrophically', but 'out of the creative activity of the spirit of divine humanity', that is, human agency brings it about. Chiliastic debates about whether Christ's thousand-year reign will be on earth or in heaven, before or after the eschaton, are beside the point, claims Berdiaev. It will be in the union of both and experienced in the transfigured flesh of those to whom it has been revealed (295).<sup>71</sup>

In conclusion, Berdiaev's passionate deification narrative, whilst it is recognizably Christian, is unapologetically esoteric and theosophical in the manner partly of Gnosticism, but predominantly of Jakob Boehme. God is not conceived as a perichoretic communion of three Persons, but as the *Ungrund* that generates out of itself the ideal universe configured as the Absolute Person. Human beings bear the image of God not by virtue of how God creates them, but by virtue of their natural participation in that Absolute Person. They fall cosmically as well as morally. Christ comes to restore humans to their original condition as a microcosm of the divine macrocosm and empowers them to fulfil their task of bringing the material order into the life of God, which they do not by grace but by virtue of their natural divine power of creativity. It is in this sense that Boehme's 'exchange formula' should be understood, not in the sense intended by Irenaeus and Athanasius. Their relationship with God is synergistic, but the balance of power, after Christ, lies with them. Berdiaev might have taken much of this from late Schelling, or early Soloviev, because these also drew on Boehmian theosophy for their religious philosophical systems. Instead, he goes directly

<sup>71</sup> This bears some resemblance to Boehme's idea that the spiritualized body develops already within the believer's coarse material body: Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, p. 486.

to Boehme, the only authority he acknowledges in *Meaning of Creativity*. We can speculate that this choice is motivated by the affinity that Berdiaev clearly felt for this figure, a misunderstood *homo mysticus* like himself, who found himself on the margins both of school theology and of the institutional church.<sup>72</sup> Berdiaev likes to think of himself as an independent and original thinker, but his debt to his contemporaries, including in the matter of his Bohemian turn, was in fact rather substantial, as we have already seen with regard to Symbolism. As will become clear in the following section, *Meaning of Creativity* proves to be a work very much of its time in respect of its wider critique of Christianity also.

### Deification and Berdiaev's critique of 'historical Christianity'

In *Meaning of Creativity*, Berdiaev's Bohemian deification narrative is set in the context of a sustained critique of the church: what Berdiaev refers to as 'historical Christianity' (164). As well as shedding light on Berdiaev's motivations for choosing Boehme over the patristic tradition as his theological authority, this aspect of the work also reflects the historical topicality of Berdiaev's ideas, perhaps to an extent that he would himself be uncomfortable with. His critique of Christianity is in turn set in the context of an overarching theory of three historical ages that itself enjoyed wide currency in Symbolist circles in the pre-Revolutionary period, and takes a virtually identical form to the one adopted by Berdiaev's former (by 1916 already long disavowed) associate Merezhkovsky: a first age of the Law, a second of the Redemption, and a third of Creativity. These correspond to stages in God's self-revelation in time, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit respectively.<sup>73</sup> Boehme does not elaborate such a theory: this is Berdiaev's own way of reconciling his concept of an evolving Divinity with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Like many of his contemporaries, Berdiaev believed that he was witnessing a momentous transition between epochs, signalled by a pervasive crisis of culture that he read as the birth-pangs of a new age of 'religious creativity'. He writes: 'Art is overflowing into theurgy, philosophy

<sup>72</sup> Berdiaev, *Self-Knowledge*, p. 83.

<sup>73</sup> The Trinitarian three-age theory derives ultimately from the twelfth-century mystic Joachim of Fiore, whom Berdiaev acknowledges on p. 231. See Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (1957).

into theosophy, society into theocracy, as culture strains to transcend its own limits (121). Christianity as we have known it belongs to the age of Redemption that is passing and is unfit for the coming age. The polemical focus of *Meaning of Creativity*, then, lies in its critical interrogation of the era of Redemption in the light of the anticipated era of Creativity.

Berdiaev has three main, interrelated, criticisms to make of the Christianity of the era of Redemption: that it has an inadequate anthropology; that it is incapable of addressing the problem of culture; and that the route to holiness that it has championed—asceticism—is not equal to the task of fulfilling our God-given vocation to transform the world. Each of these echo the concerns of the ‘new religious consciousness’.

### Anthropology

Berdiaev believes that Christian doctrine has an insufficiently developed anthropology. The Fathers of the church developed only a ‘negative anthropology’ (83), that is ‘too much burdened by the consciousness of humankind’s fall’ (81), ‘the consciousness of sin, and of redemption through Christ as the only way to deliverance from sin’ (82). Thus, the whole of the Christian life is coloured by an attitude of humility before God, of continual repentance, and a passive dependence on God’s grace. These negative values of humility and passivity have coloured all areas of culture in the era of Redemption and have fostered a spirit of conformity to the laws of this world, a slave-like mentality of obedience and submissiveness to the order of things in the face of our perceived helplessness. Berdiaev does acknowledge that ‘Christian anthropology recognizes the absolute and royal significance of the human being, since it teaches of the incarnation of God and the divine possibilities in the human being, the mutual inter-penetration of divine and human natures’ (80). This statement shows that he was informed about Chalcedonian Christology. He also quotes from Gregory of Nyssa, Symeon the New Theologian, and Macarius of Egypt in evidence of patristic awareness of the dignity of the human calling (82–3).<sup>74</sup> Despite this, however, and contrary to the Christological consensus of the Ecumenical Councils, he claims that

<sup>74</sup> Berdiaev quotes from Russian translations: Gregory of Nyssa’s ‘On the Making of Man’ in Part One of the Moscow Spiritual Academy’s 7-part translation (1861); Symeon the New Theologian in Theophan the Recluse’s translation (1892); and Macarius of Egypt in the Moscow Spiritual Academy’s translation (1855). Berdiaev, *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 340, notes 48–50; 58–60.



the ‘monophysite tendency’ of the ‘early Fathers’ managed to colour ‘the whole of Christianity’, with the effect of suppressing Christ’s human nature, and therefore also the potential for grasping the ‘divine nature of the human being’ (80).<sup>75</sup> Berdiaev cites selectively from Isaac the Syrian—a figure whom he actually admires as ‘that most ardent and radical of the Fathers’ (83)—to support his false, either ignorant or biased, contention that the Fathers thought that humans could become divine only by suppressing their humanity:<sup>76</sup> ‘The teachers of the church had a doctrine of the *theosis* of the human being, but in this *theosis* there is no human being at all. The very problem of the human being is not even put’ (84).<sup>77</sup> It is curious indeed that Berdiaev manages not to notice what Macarius and Symeon have to say about the personal transfiguration that is the reward of ascetic contemplation. Rather, he insists the church does not have a ‘Christology of the human being’ that does justice to ‘the creative mystery of human nature’. It has been left to mystics like Boehme to reveal this positive truth about humanity.

Berdiaev claims that this supposed failure of the Fathers to elaborate a robust Christian humanism paved the way for the rise of secular humanism, first in the Renaissance, later in the nineteenth-century anthropotheism of Comte, Feuerbach, and Marx. In Renaissance humanism, the ‘natural’, ‘subjective-psychological’ human is placed at the centre of things, and this leads inevitably to the loss of all consciousness of God and the deification (*obogotovrenie*) of the human (86). Without Christ, however, deification becomes in fact a debasement of the human, as we see in Marxism, in which ‘the intrinsic value of the personality’ is denied and humans become ‘an instrument of material productive forces’. Then, out of the ruins of humanism, the ‘superhuman’ arises: in Marxism, it is the proletariat that becomes ‘the new god’ (88–9). Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* represents the culmination of this process, in which humanism is finally overcome as a new person arises out of the old. Nietzsche is a powerful, tragic figure for Berdiaev, a graceless

<sup>75</sup> Monophysitism was a Christological heresy of the fifth and sixth centuries that asserted a single nature in Christ, either divine or a synthesis of divine and human. The monophysites rejected the affirmation at the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451) that Christ was both fully human and fully divine.

<sup>76</sup> Berdiaev quotes from the 1911 translation by the Trinity-St Sergius Monastery in Sergiev Posad. Berdiaev, *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 340, notes 51–7.

<sup>77</sup> See also p. 111, where the claim about monophysitism and the false representation of the church’s view of human destiny as becoming extinguished in God is repeated. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that Boehme challenged medieval German mysticism (e.g., Meister Eckhart) and the Protestant spiritualists who inherited it (Franck, Weigel) on precisely this point. See Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 483–7.

‘prophet of the religious renaissance of the west’ (90). Nietzsche exposes the bankruptcy of humanism with its choice of a false happiness over creative freedom, but his solution is an ‘Antichristology of man’ that must be overcome, not by a return to the Fathers, but by developing a muscular Christian anthropology, a ‘divine humanism’ to replace the godless one (90).

Nevertheless, in a particular sense, *Meaning of Creativity* is a Nietzschean work.<sup>78</sup> Berdiaev accepts much of Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity, as evincing a morality of ‘adaptation’ and ‘utilitarian fear’, so hostile to ‘heroism’. ‘In the patristic, traditionally Christian consciousness, negative virtues—humility, self-denial, abstinence—eclipsed the positive virtues of courage, nobility and honour’ (252). The Christian world has become spiritually complacent and materialistic: ‘bourgeois in the profoundest sense of the word’ (243). The values that Berdiaev seeks to promote in connection to his religious creativity are Nietzschean: Berdiaev calls for ‘daring’, ‘manliness’, and ‘upward-striving’. But he believes Nietzsche (like the church, indeed *because of the church*) has profoundly misunderstood Christianity: ‘Christian morality is not slavishly-plebeian but rather aristocratically-noble, the morality of the sons of God, with their primogeniture, their high birth and their high calling. Christianity is the religion of the strong in spirit, not the weak’ (260). Seeking to correct Nietzsche, Berdiaev at the same time seeks to harness Nietzsche to correct the Christianity of the era of Redemption.

The early reception of *Meaning of Creativity* indicates that, in the eyes of his contemporaries, Berdiaev’s Christianized Nietzscheanism was unacceptable. Their criticism of it took two forms. On the one hand, his ‘positive anthropology’ was seen to be itself a form of anthropotheism diametrically opposed to the Christian understanding of deification. In his *Unfading Light* (1917), Bulgakov characterized Berdiaev’s anthropology as a ‘mystical Feuerbachianism’, pointing to its ‘immanent divinisation of humankind’.<sup>79</sup> The Symbolist V. Ivanov also saw the distinct possibility that Berdiaev had blasphemed in his ambitious claims about the potential of human agency. Do we co-create with God by our own action (*samodeiatel’no*) or by divine action (*bogodeiatel’no*), he asked? If by divine action, that is, as theurgy, then God is creating through humanity, rather than humanity through God. But if it is by our own action that we co-create, then we are Christ’s rivals,

<sup>78</sup> See Nel Grillaert, *What the God-seekers Found in Nietzsche: The Reception of Nietzsche’s Übermensch by the Philosophers of the Russian Religious Renaissance* (2008), chapter 7, pp. 207–48, for an extended analysis of Berdiaev’s reception of Nietzsche.

<sup>79</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (2012), p. 469, note 5.

and, therefore, antichrist.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, Berdiaev was himself accused of adopting a Nietzschean persona. The philosopher and God-seeker Lev Shestov wrote: 'Nietzsche has completely possessed Berdiaev's soul. [...] Even Berdiaev's style of writing reminds one of Nietzsche, and, what is especially curious, the Nietzsche of the very last period, when he wrote 'The Antichrist.'<sup>81</sup> Berdiaev's self-appointed role as prophet was generally resented as misplaced. This is partly because of the author's perceived elitism: for Rozanov, for example, the book implies that only the 'great humming birds of human nature': Boehme, Eckhart, and Berdiaev himself, get to live and create in the 'real' cosmos, whilst the 'rank and file' (*chinovnaia meloch*), the church-going 'religious bourgeois', have to live in the false one.<sup>82</sup> But his pose is also perceived to run counter to the spiritual sensibility of Russian culture and the Russian people. In the same article, Rozanov contrasts Berdiaev's lengthy text and 'loud words' unfavourably with the Russian saints, who inspire the people by their countenances and not their words, countenances which exclude all possibility of demonism, but bring the divine very close.<sup>83</sup> These responses reflect the fact that by 1916 Nietzscheanism had run its course in Russia; in *Meaning of Creativity*, perhaps, Nietzsche had his last hurrah.

## Culture

The second major criticism that Berdiaev levels at historical Christianity is that it does not have the resources to justify creativity and culture. In this matter he again reveals continuing proximity to the 'new religious consciousness' of Merezhkovsky and his associates: the church's apparent indifference to secular culture was one of the main sources of frustration to the God-seeking artistic avant-garde and a central topic of debate at the Religious-Philosophical meetings and later in the Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society.<sup>84</sup> Whilst he is careful to acknowledge the foundational

<sup>80</sup> V. I. Ivanov, 'Staraja ili novaia vera?', in *N. A. Berdiaev: pro et contra. Antologija. Kniga 1*, edited by A. A. Ermichev (1994), p. 308.

<sup>81</sup> Lev Shestov, 'Viacheslav velikolepnyi'. Cited in Grillaert, *What the God-seekers found in Nietzsche*, p. 227, note 21.

<sup>82</sup> V. V. Rozanov, 'Novaia religiozno-filosofskaia kontsepsiia Nikolaia Berdiaeva', in Ermichev, ed., *N. A. Berdiaev: pro et contra*, p. 268.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>84</sup> Jutta Scherrer, *Die Petersburger Religiös-Philosophischen Vereinigungen* (1973), pp. 293–303; 338–47.

salvific significance of the Gospel, Berdiaev claims that we do violence to it if we seek in it 'a basis for all life's values' (94). The Gospel reveals redemption in Christ and inaugurates a new era in the life of humankind. God never intended it to reveal the secret of human creativity, because it is humans themselves who must do so, in a new revelation 'from below' (98). This new revelation will inaugurate a third Covenant of the Holy Spirit, which has no need of scripture, because life in the Spirit is free and creative, and 'knows no directives' (98). 'God Himself, who gave His Only Son to be broken on the tree, atones for the sin of humankind and he expects that humans, having partaken of the mystery of the redemption, will accomplish the great deed of creativeness, will realise their positive destiny' (110).

Berdiaev claims that at best Christianity has justified creativeness, but it has never understood that it is creativeness that must justify life (110). Though he does not explicitly say so, it is likely that this is why, in his view, culture has existed for the two millennia since Christ's resurrection without breaking through into the creation of being. He sees human creativity thus far as equivalent to the Old Testament practice of animal sacrifice: a foreshadowing of something superior that is to come in the following age (103). In his belief that there will be a shift of emphasis from the moral side of human nature to the aesthetic, Berdiaev again reveals the debt of himself and his contemporaries to Nietzsche. Nietzsche 'burned with creative desire', but had to look to the pagan culture of antiquity for fuel, Christianity having proved lacking (106). The Russian Symbolists and their associates, under Nietzsche's influence, also confronted Christianity—in the form of the Russian Orthodox Church—with pagan celebration of life, the body, and art. In Berdiaev's own words, '[t]he new religious consciousness puts the question of creative experience as in itself religious, as in itself justifying, rather than needing justification' (162). Berdiaev's critique of Christianity's incompatibility with creative values particularly calls to mind one of V. V. Rozanov's contributions at the St Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society, subsequently published as 'Sweetest Jesus and the Bitter Fruits of the World' (1911), in which he complains that the giant phenomenon of Christ has eclipsed all cultural values and rendered them useless.<sup>85</sup> *Meaning of Creativity* is Berdiaev's attempt to resolve the contradiction between Christianity and culture, by arguing for the religious nature and value of human creativity.

<sup>85</sup> Translated in Spencer E. Roberts, ed. and trans., *Four Faces of Rozanov: Christianity, Sex, Jews and the Russian Revolution* (1978), pp. 19–37.

## Asceticism

The critique of Christian anthropology and the critique of Christianity's relationship to culture come together in Berdiaev's assessment of Christian asceticism, another topic that featured strongly in contemporary debate in Russia. Despite being arguably better informed about the Orthodox ascetic tradition than his erstwhile colleague Merezhkovsky, having benefitted from his years moving in Moscow's Orthodox intellectual circles, and for all his reservations about the schematism of Merezhkovsky's spirit–flesh opposition, Berdiaev nevertheless follows him in characterizing the Christian era as fundamentally oriented towards asceticism. If he is able to concede the merits of asceticism, this is because he does not share Merezhkovsky's love of the 'flesh.' Berdiaev shows an understanding and appreciation of asceticism as the most noble phenomenon of the era of Redemption, 'one of the eternal ways of religious experience', as he puts it, which admits of no compromise with 'the "world"' and struggles to overcome it by overcoming the passions in the quest for 'the acquisition of divine life' (161). Unlike Merezhkovsky and others, Berdiaev is able to see beyond the 'life-denying' methods of asceticism to its positive purpose, and is not hostile to its resistance to the 'world' as such, since he himself—again in contrast to Merezhkovsky—shares the Christian understanding of the world as fallen. At its best, during the patristic era, asceticism represented 'a heroic challenge to the old nature, the old Adam', and showed a 'revolutionary spirit' (167). If one takes asceticism at its best, it can be regarded as creativity's equal in value: 'there is neither contradiction nor opposition between creativeness and asceticism.[...] Creativeness presupposes an ascetic overcoming of the world—it is positive asceticism' (164).

On the other hand, Berdiaev regards asceticism as inferior to creativity. Firstly, this is because over time asceticism has deteriorated into 'petrification and inertia' and is no longer the force for change it once was. As the era of Redemption has worn on, asceticism has become compromised by conformity to the world's values and now represents 'conservative guardianship of the past' (167). Christianity has become senile; it needs to be rejuvenated. Berdiaev has firmly in mind contemporary Orthodox monasticism, and particularly the phenomenon of spiritual eldership (*starchestvo*, from *staryi*: old). He maintains that spiritual eldership is inherently afraid of youth, and that the wisdom of the elders can 'easily turn into the morals of

old age, constant fear, constant anxiety, constant concern about the troubles of tomorrow': whilst Christ, the virgin-youth, is eternally young (258–9). Berdiaev harbours a particular animus against Theophan the Recluse (1815–94), translator of the *Philokalia* into Russian and prolific correspondent with his spiritual children, whom he more than once accuses of actively promoting bourgeois values: procreative sex and the family (211), and 'economic accountability and even a moderate accumulation of property' (179). A related target is the higher Orthodox clergy, who were all recruited from the monasteries. Berdiaev blames clericalism for the church's lack of dynamism and creativity. He does so in connection to the argument—taken from Boehme—that there exists a superior divine–human hierarchy, based on humans being created in the image and likeness of God, and an inferior angelic–bestial hierarchy, based on the incomplete expression of God in the angels and the animals.<sup>86</sup> Orthodox hierarchs describe themselves as an angelic order, and indeed, they prove incapable of being actively creative in the world (74–5).

Secondly, though asceticism represents the best spirituality of the age of Redemption, it is constrained by its negative anthropology and champions only negative virtues. Berdiaev does not accept that the Christian vision for humanity and the world might be confined to salvation from sin: 'Salvation from sin, from perdition, is not the final purpose of religious life: salvation is always *from* something and life should be *for* something [...] Humanity's chief end is not to be saved but to mount up, creatively' (105). It can be seen that on this point Berdiaev shares the broader vision of the Eastern Christian church about the positive purpose of the Incarnation, as discussed in Chapter 1, though it is equally clear that the contemporary Russian Orthodox Church had not succeeded in communicating this vision to him. Related to this point is the reservation Berdiaev has about the selfish individualism of asceticism, as he sees it: its heroism is directed inwardly towards the battle against one's personal sin; but it should be directed outwardly, towards the salvation of the world. The ascetic approach is not appropriate for the present time, which demands positive activity that is predicated not on humility but on self-belief and daring (168–70). This line of argument goes back to Soloviev, whose reservations about monastic asceticism exercised an influence not only on proponents of the 'new religious

<sup>86</sup> Koyré, *Jacob Boehme*, p. 451.

consciousness', but also on Bulgakov, including in his *Philosophy of Economy* (see Chapter 5, this volume).

The most compelling illustration of the competition between asceticism and creativity in *Meaning of Creativity* is Berdiaev's comparison between two contemporaries: Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), the 'greatest Russian genius', and Seraphim of Sarov (1754–1833), the 'greatest Russian saint' (170). From the point of view of the religious authorities of the age of Redemption, Berdiaev argues, Pushkin's gift is devoid of religious value and it would have been better for Pushkin himself and for Russia had he been a saint, like Seraphim. Seraphim directs his creative energy inward, towards the ordering of his personality, and thereby 'creates himself, another and more perfect being.' Playing devil's advocate, Berdiaev concedes what he does not elsewhere: that in so doing 'he transfigured the world', that is, that Seraphim's ascetic labour benefitted others apart from himself. Pushkin, on the other hand, directs his creative energy outward, creating 'great, immeasurable values for Russia and the world', but thereby destroys his soul (171–2). For Berdiaev this assessment of Pushkin cannot be adequate. The vocation of the saint and the genius alike must be religious. Both vocations demand enormous sacrifice, and the genius, in addition to sacrificing the comforts of conformity, risks his personal salvation also. This risk-taking is not condemned, but rewarded by God. Elsewhere Berdiaev suggests that 'sin is burned away' in creative ecstasy, and 'another, higher nature shines through' (163). We should regard the sacrifice of the genius as equally salvific to the sacrifice of the saint.

Nowhere more than in his critique of the historical institutional church does Berdiaev reveal himself to be, in spirit if no longer in fact, aligned with the movement known as the 'new religious consciousness' that arose within Russian Symbolism at the beginning of the twentieth century. His Nietzsche-inspired belief in human potential, his defence of creativity as rooted in God and sanctioned by him as the means by which that potential is fulfilled, and his critique of asceticism as militating against humans reaching their potential, all resonate with it. Meanwhile, despite his conversion to Christianity during the Moscow years, and his professed 'sincere desire to share in the life of the Orthodox Church',<sup>87</sup> his anti-clericalism and aversion to the contemporary ethos of the Russian Orthodox Church also find powerful expression in *Meaning of Creativity*.

<sup>87</sup> Berdyayev, *Self-Knowledge*, p. 164.



## Conclusion

*The Meaning of Creativity* is a daring and provocative, avowedly individualistic attempt to rewrite the Christian narrative. According to Berdiaev's understanding, Christianity historically has not gone beyond the essentially negative imperative to achieve redemption from sin, the reward for which is a union with God in which the human element is dissolved. As we saw, this is how Berdiaev believes the church to understand *theosis*, or deification. Apart from rare instances in some Fathers of the church, Christianity has failed to appreciate or promote the supreme dignity of human beings as children of God and bearers of his image. It has failed to find a place for human creative agency in God's plan for the world or articulate a vision of human beings as God's collaborators in the liberation of our world from the burden of materiality and submission to necessity, the bad infinity of biological existence in time. This critique of Berdiaev's betrays a great deal of ignorance about the doctrine of deification and its expression in Orthodox tradition. How wilful that ignorance is, is difficult to say, though Berdiaev is frank about his aversion to organized religion, and is very likely to have allowed this to colour his reading of 'historical Christianity'. Finding orthodox Christian doctrine wanting, Berdiaev turned to Jakob Boehme instead, as one whose personal mystical-imaginative gift opened up new perspectives on the Christian vision. Quite probably Berdiaev felt himself to be a Boehme for his times. Responding to *Meaning of Creativity*, Ivanov considers Berdiaev to be 'Orthodox in spite of everything'. His faith is 'the ancient and true faith that will never age'. He very astutely remarks that his disagreement with Orthodoxy 'is not so much a disagreement of consciousness as a psychological disagreement'.<sup>88</sup> Is this not perhaps the nub of the matter? Berdiaev knew about himself that he was by nature a rebel and a nonconformist, resistant, as he put it, to 'any authority or extraneous power whatsoever'.<sup>89</sup> The Christian value of humility was a stumbling block for him. *Meaning of Creativity* belies his claim that he had 'no wish to break away from the church, or assert [himself] in some sectarian independence',<sup>90</sup> but it also, more than Berdiaev would probably like to admit, amply demonstrates his indebtedness to the intellectual culture of the time in which it was written.

<sup>88</sup> Ivanov, 'Staraja ili novaia vera', in Ermichev, ed., *N. A. Berdiaev: pro et contra*, p. 313.

<sup>89</sup> Berdyaev, *Self-Knowledge*, p. 48.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.