

## Different concepts of personality: Nikolaj Berdjaev and Sergej Bulgakov

Regula M. Zwahlen

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**Abstract** The main concern of both Berdjaev's and Bulgakov's philosophical strivings consists in developing a concept of the person as the foundation of human dignity and creativity within a Christian worldview. Once attracted by Marxism with its emphasis on human dignity and social justice, they started to struggle against Marxism's atheist materialism because of its lack of a concept of person. However, the same concern will lead both thinkers down very different paths with different consequences. This paper argues that, even though Berdjaev has become famous as a philosopher of the person and a herald of creative ethics, Bulgakov developed a more solid Christian justification of the same claims. Both systems are presented by means of comparing some crucial notions within their concepts of personality—potentiality, trinity and autonomy.

**Keywords** Personality · Autonomy · Godmanhood · Creativity · Trinity · Sergej Bulgakov · Nikolaj Berdjaev · Potentiality · Sophiology · Human Dignity · Kant · Feuerbach · Solov'ëv · Jacob Boehme · Ungrund · Meontology

A diary entry by Zinaida Gippius from 1904 gives us a lively impression of the relationship between the two heroes of this paper, Sergej Bulgakov and Nikolaj Berdjaev:

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R. M. Zwahlen (✉)  
Institut für Ökumenische Studien, Forschungsstelle Sergij Bulgakov, Universität Freiburg Schweiz,  
Fribourg, Switzerland  
e-mail: [regula.zwahlen@unifr.ch](mailto:regula.zwahlen@unifr.ch)  
URL: <http://fns.unifr.ch/sergij-bulgakov>

“Bulgakov and Berdjaev are like water and fire. Only a total lack of sensitivity towards the two literary personalities of both authors may explain the ability of our critics to call them an inseparable pair, even Siamese twins of idealism. [...] As to Bulgakov, no man is of less use and more harmful for him than Berdjaev, and no man of less use for Berdjaev than Bulgakov. The best thing for them to do now would be to challenge each other to an open, ingenious life-or-death duel: Maybe the crossing of their rapiers would bring along a spark of the real, religious fire they both are so badly in need of. Instead they are eating from one pot, sleeping in one bed like Siamese twins, while inwardly they are fighting each other – it is really amazing, they have not been fed up by each other for a long time” (Gippius 1999, 316–318).<sup>1</sup>

Gippius’ observation may illustrate, why the comparison of Berdjaev’s and Bulgakov’s thinking could be of special interest.<sup>2</sup> It is about finding the inseparable tie between them, to know what separates them like water and fire, and to learn from the sparks of the ‘ingenious duel’ they indeed were to engage in the years to come. The argument I want to put forward is the following: The main concern of both Berdjaev’s and Bulgakov’s philosophical strivings consists in developing a concept of the person as the foundation of human dignity and creativity within a Christian worldview. Once attracted by Marxism with its emphasis on human dignity and social justice, they started to struggle against Marxism’s materialism and atheism, because according to Berdjaev and Bulgakov it didn’t include a concept of person at all: “For [Marx] the problem of the person as an individual – the indestructible core of human personality, its integral nature – does not exist” (Bulgakov 1979, 51). However, the concern about a new concept of person will lead both thinkers down very different paths with different consequences. And this is why the very comparison of these paths might shed some light on the intellectual and cultural roots of different arguments within the on-going discussions between today’s Orthodox and Western Churches about the moral justification of human dignity, individual and collective rights.<sup>3</sup> Among many admirers of Russian religious philosophy there has been some surprise and disappointment that the Russian Orthodox Church, developing its new Social Conception in the late 90s didn’t directly refer to the writings of Solov’ëv, Bulgakov, Berdjaev, and other Russian religious thinkers, for whom the design of a Russian Orthodox social conception would have been the fulfilment of a dream (Kozyrev 2002, 60). I want to show how different the concepts of these thinkers, often mentioned in the same breath, are, and that they really would have to be studied thoroughly first before they may serve as argumentative basis for official church documents.<sup>4</sup>

I will not conceal my conviction that, even though Berdjaev has become famous as a philosopher of the person and a herald of creative ethics, Bulgakov developed a

<sup>1</sup> All translations from the Russian by Regula Zwahlen.

<sup>2</sup> This happened to be the task of my thesis, see Zwahlen (2010).

<sup>3</sup> About these discussions cf. Brüning and van der Zweerde (2012), Stoeckl (2012), Zwahlen (2011a).

<sup>4</sup> Alexey Kozyrev supposes they are referred to only indirectly, because their official citation would have been kind of a ‘canonisation’ for which the Russian Orthodox Church is not ready. On the other hand he thinks open references to them would have made some passages more comprehensible.

more solid Christian justification of the same claims.<sup>5</sup> Bulgakov's famous, controversial and dreaded sophiology<sup>6</sup> is not about drowning human persons in an indifferent cosmos, but quite the opposite: it is an anthropocentric system relying on and justifying the idea that man is created in God's image and likeness. Actually, Bulgakov had been charged with anthropocentrism by some of his colleagues and by the Moscow 'Patriarchal Locum Tenens', Metropolitan Sergius, in 1937. Bulgakov's comment:

“But then Metropolitan Sergius accuses me of taking up an anthropocentric position because my starting point would be the axiom of man being God's image and likeness. But what else could that be than a truth given to us by revelation itself? ‘God created humanity in God's own image’ in order to ‘fill the earth and master it’ (Gen 1, 26–28). Is ‘orthodox consciousness’ really allowed to juggle with that truth?” (Bulgakov 1936, 17)

Berdjaev's and Bulgakov's common concern, making them appear as Siamese twins, is the Christian foundation of human dignity, social justice, and creative freedom among human beings. On the basis of these criteria they judged recent spiritual, social, and political movements of their day, the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church as well as famous spiritual leaders like Tolstoj or Dostoevskij.<sup>7</sup> Comparing Berdjaev's and Bulgakov's concepts of the person, it is obvious that they often used the same terms and notions—e.g. God's image, Godmanhood, personhood and trinity—but set them within very different semantic fields and philosophical concepts.

I will present these two systems by means of comparing some crucial notions within their concepts of personality—potentiality, trinity and autonomy. Potentiality, the notion of *me on*, lies at the very core of both Berdjaev's and Bulgakov's concepts; at the same time it is what generates the main differences between them, and what separates them like water and fire, because it defines their understanding of the noumenal source of creation. Talking about God's image and likeness, we would have to say a word about how Berdjaev and Bulgakov relate the person to God's Trinitarian being, and finally what kind of autonomy such an “image of God” enjoys. But before doing this, I would like to add some interpretational background information concerning some difficulties of the topic.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Meerson (1996, 149): “What Berdjaev proclaimed in his affirmative style, Bulgakov elaborated in a systematic fashion, pointing to the infinite content of personality and its dependence in its very structure on the absolute divine personality”.

<sup>6</sup> See Gallaher in this issue. The reconsideration of Bulgakov's sophiology in Russia has only begun, as Bishop Ilarion Alfeev says: “The heritage of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, one of the most outstanding Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century, has not yet been really studied in Russia either. Lossky's and Metropolitan Sergius' (Stragorodsky) criticisms of Bulgakov's ‘sophiology’ were far from [exhaustive] or [closed] the argument, but only the first phase of a discussion which has not yet gained momentum” (Alfejev 1999). The first comprehensive work in Russian about Bulgakov's sophiology has just been published, cf. Vaganova (2010).

<sup>7</sup> The philosophic-literary criticism of Berdjaev and Bulgakov and their comments on recent social problems are thoroughly studied in my chapters III. *Philosophische Literaturkritik: Dostoevskij und Tolstoj* and IV. *Die religiös-philosophischen Sammelbände* (Zwahlen 2010, 111–198).

## Interpretational background

First of all, I would like to present Berdjaev's and Bulgakov's concepts of the person as two attempts to reconcile certain Enlightenment views with Christian teaching:

A church intelligentsia combining true Christianity with a clear and enlightened understanding of cultural and historical tasks (which contemporary churchmen so often lack), were one to arise, would meet an urgent historical and national need. [...] But as long as the intelligentsia uses all the power of its education to undermine the people's faith, the defence of the faith, with sad inevitability, more and more assumes the character of a struggle not only against the intelligentsia but against enlightenment as well. Once the intelligentsia in fact becomes the sole disseminator of enlightenment, obscurantism becomes a means of defending religion" (Bulgakov 1994, 47–48).

Berdjaev and Bulgakov claim that it is not a materialist or socialist image of man which, in the famous phrase of Kant, "releases man from his self-incurred tutelage," but only the Christian teaching of man as made in God's image and likeness. Only a being made in God's image would be able to act freely, while a mere product of nature or society remains determined by its producers. Hence not religion, but materialism is the "opium of the people" (Marx), depriving humankind of its spiritual dimension. Though acknowledging the Marxist social concern for humanity, they criticized Marxism's lack of respect for the individual human being. Upholding Kant's postulate of a man as end in itself, they nevertheless criticized the absence in the concept of a sound metaphysical foundation.<sup>8</sup> In their view this foundation lies in the Christian concept of each person being made in God's image. At the same time they criticized the concept of person advanced by the Russian Orthodox Church that backed an authoritative state. They were convinced of the God-given fact that man is called to rebel against any authority undermining his human dignity and freedom. Hence, although they were critical of Marxism, Kant, and traditional Christianity, they nevertheless combined some of the more attractive components of these doctrines into their own new concepts of the person.

And that is what generates the main differences between Bulgakov and Berdjaev, and what separates them like water and fire. This can be clearly shown in the light of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, in particular the alleged separation of the phenomenon from the noumenon. Both Berdjaev and Bulgakov reacted to this separation and sought to redescribe the relation of man to phenomena, the "things as they appear to us." According to them, Kant's concept of the human relation to "things" is based on doubt about the coincidence of human perception with how things "really are." That is why he distinguishes the "Ding an sich," the *noumenon*, from the "Erscheinung," the *phenomenon*, and postulating furthermore that human knowledge is restricted to the phenomena: "We cannot know the things in themselves, but only the things as they appear to us" (Kant, *Prolegomena*, §10). Russian religious philosophy has been described as an attempt to remove "Kant's

<sup>8</sup> On Bulgakov's relation to Kant see Seiling (2008).

epistemological screen over noumena so that the human mind might recover its lost common intellectual ground with the divine” (Meerson 1998, xv). Pre-eminently following Fichte, Hegel and Schelling, Russian thinkers, according to Akhutin, see the light of the revealed truth where Kant is blinded by the noumenal darkness of the “Ding an sich” (Akhutin 1997, 261). All the same, the modern Russian thinkers follow Kant (and Feuerbach) by approaching the question not from a theocentric, but from an anthropocentric, personalist point of view postulating the noumenal quality of personality.

Indeed, Berdjaev and Bulgakov both defend human access to things in themselves. But the main difference of their thinking has to do with their account of the phenomena. To be short: According to Berdjaev they are *obstacles*;<sup>9</sup> according to Bulgakov, they are *signposts* on the way to the knowledge of the things in themselves.<sup>10</sup> In Berdjaev’s view, the phenomenal world is a consequence of original sin, it is ruled by necessity, coercion, and law. In Bulgakov’s view, the phenomenal world is an ontological fact of divine creation, its plasticity allows creative freedom and generates beauty. This general difference leads to an important conclusion in regard to the possibility of human creation as culture: According to Berdjaev, culture is a means to *overcome* the phenomenal world and to know the things in themselves; according to Bulgakov, culture is the way of *shaping* the phenomenal world in virtue of the knowledge of the things in themselves. In other words, in Berdjaev’s view the fallen “world” must be removed; in Bulgakov’s view it must be shaped or transfigured.

Referring to Kant, we must look at some conceptual difficulties—if not stereotypes—between ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ concepts of the person. The most important difficulty with concepts of personhood concerns the notion of personal *autonomy*. It is crucial to understand the impact of the philosophy of the Enlightenment and Romanticism on European thinking. New research in the history of ideas has shown how important it is to differentiate between the *Kantian* notion of the autonomy of the subject and the *romantic* notion of original individuality, the lonely genius (Haardt and Plotnikov 2008, 17–22).<sup>11</sup> Subjective autonomy in the meaning of the Enlightenment is *not* the opposite of community but its *moral*

<sup>9</sup> “The conflict consists in the maximum break-through by the creative act, out of the closed circle of objectivization, in the maximum existentiality of the creator’s creations, in the irruption of the maximum of subjectivity into the objectivized world. The meaning of creativeness is to be found in the anticipation of the transfiguration of the world, not in the fixation of this world in objective perfection. Creativeness is a fight against the object world, a fight against matter and necessity” (Berdjaev 1944, 128).

<sup>10</sup> “In order to apprehend [noumenal causality], we must know how to look into the depths, into the inner workings of the mechanism, and only after we have understood this *Ding an sich*, by speculative or intuitive rather than scientific-empirical means, its invisible breath will be felt in empirical reality, too, and reality will become comprehensible in its inner meaning” (Bulgakov 2000a, 268–269).

<sup>11</sup> That is why many thinkers within the churches don’t understand that they are not fighting the kind of autonomy of the Enlightenment, but of romantic individualism (cf. Todorov 2006, 34–35: “Jean-Paul II accuse la morale issue des Lumières d’être purement subjective, de dépendre donc de la seule volonté [...]. La morale des Lumières, elle, est non subjective mais intersubjective: les principes du bien et du mal font l’objet d’un consensus [...]. La morale des Lumières découle non de l’amour égoïste de soi, mais du respect pour l’humanité. Qu’on le regrette ou non, la conception de la justice propre aux Lumières est moins révolutionnaire que ne le suggèrent leurs critiques. La loi est, certes, l’expression de la volonté autonome du peuple; mais cette volonté se trouve contenue par des limites”).

*foundation*: moral autonomy is what all subjects have in common. As opposed to this, the original individual in the romantic sense will always rebel against any conventional rules limiting her freedom: individual autonomy is what separates subjects from each other. According to these definitions it is arguable that Berdjaev developed a completely romantic concept of personal freedom trying to enhance individual autonomy in order to overcome it, while Bulgakov developed a concept of the person indebted to the Enlightenment trying to justify and provide moral subjective autonomy by the Christian teaching of man as God's image and likeness. Of course, as Catherine Evtuhov says, Bulgakov "had absorbed a preoccupation with man's relation to the world around him from German Romanticism" too, and his "focus on the inner spirit followed a Russian tradition of concern with organicism and wholeness" (Evtuhov 2000, 20), but the originality of his thinking consists precisely in trying to hold on to autonomy in the Kantian sense within a 'romantic', holistic concept of person, which implicates a certain sense of responsibility within interpersonal relations.<sup>12</sup>

Besides the huge influence of Kant, Berdjaev and Bulgakov were both provoked by Ludwig Feuerbach's claim that God was made in the image of man. According to Feuerbach, God was a projection of human faculties into a non-existing transcendent realm. Berdjaev and Bulgakov agreed with Feuerbach's discovery of the divine essence of man, but they contested his conclusion that therefore God does not exist. On the contrary, according to them Feuerbach's discovery should remind contemporary philosophers and theologians of the old Jewish and Christian anthropological statement that man was made in the image of God, and following Solov'ëv, they connected this with the concept of Godmanhood, which means: God and man do not only stand in a hierarchical relationship of Creator and created being, but first of all in a personal relationship on a common ground. This common ground Berdjaev would call "meontic freedom," while Bulgakov would call it "Sophia." Further they concluded that the concept of human personhood is related to that of the Holy Trinity. Even here, Feuerbach's thinking was inspiring: according to him, the Trinitarian concept of God was the expression of the social life of mankind (Meerson 1996, 141).

There is an important difference in Eastern and Western thinking concerning the relation between the Holy Trinity and the concept of the person: While Augustine in the West drew an analogy between the Holy Trinity and the single human person's *mental* faculties (memory, intelligence, will), the Eastern theological thinkers

<sup>12</sup> The notion of *personal autonomy* is crucial in the on going discussions about human dignity and human rights, morality and liberalism. Autonomy in the Enlightenment sense is not a notion of unbridled subjectivism but the very condition of a responsible life within the human community. The Enlightenment was a revolt against self-righteous authorities, not against authorities and values developed and recognized by the community. An 'Enlightenment morality' is less about individualism and more about interpersonal morality and the search for a balance between individual and common values (Todorov 2006, 35). And if, according to Isaiah Berlin, the romantic revolt "has shaken the foundations of the old traditional establishment" of different universalisms in order to enhance modern tolerance with regard to different worldviews, then moral autonomy in the Kantian sense may still provide the antidote to the dangers of 'romantic will' and the foundation of "active solidarity in the pursuit of common objectives" that "is bound to be an unstable equilibrium in need of constant attention and repair" (Berlin 1992, 209, 235–236).

emphasized the image and likeness of the *relationship* between the divine persons and between human persons. It is arguable that Berdjaev doesn't use any of these concepts for his own notion of trinity and personhood, while Bulgakov simply combines them. Therefore Bulgakov's concept of personhood and inter-personality offers an interesting example of how to overcome some conceptual differences between Eastern and Western thinking about the balance between the individual and the community.<sup>13</sup> In the name of the community, Eastern thinking, in the 'The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights' from 2008 for example, often tends to set up an irreconcilable opposition between liberalism and tradition, secularism and religion, individual human rights and collective rights (Stoeckl 2012, 216). That is what Berdjaev and Bulgakov wanted to avoid by developing two quite different patterns of facing up to modern culture.

## Potentiality

### Meontology<sup>14</sup>

The following lines from a letter from Bulgakov to Lev Shestov in 1938 come as a surprise to many a reader: "Obviously there is no big difference between the philosophy of [...] nothing – the 'Freedom-Antigod' (russ. *svoboda-protivoboga*) of N. A. [Berdjaev] and my sophiology as a philosophy of Being (which is also an 'existential philosophy')" (Berdjaev et al. 1961, 259). What Bulgakov could have meant becomes clearer when we consider the ancient notion of *me on*, the noumenal source and potentiality of creation. On the one hand, this notion fixes the common ground of Berdjaev's and Bulgakov's concepts, on the other hand, their respective definitions of the concept determine the huge gap between them. To put it simply: In Berdjaev's concept, *me on* is the source of (personal) existence, it is the source of God himself. In Bulgakov's concept, *me on* is God's creation, the creaturely Sophia, it is a God-given potentiality as foundation for human creation. Hence, the main difference between them lies in the determination of what is primordial: according to Berdjaev, it is *me on*; according to Bulgakov, it is the Absolute comprising *me on* and generating personal being.

*Me on* as the negation of *on* (*being*) differs from the concept of *ouk on*, the absolute nothing. *Me on* is pure potentiality, it is *not-yet-being*, and according to Berdjaev's and Bulgakov's personalisms, only personal existence is able to bring potentiality into actual being by its creative acts. The concept is mainly inspired by the notions of Boehme's *Ungrund* and *Sophia* and Schelling's 'Potenzenlehre', who is, according to Berdjaev, Boehme's spiritual heir.<sup>15</sup> Boehme's *Ungrund* is the absolute, the 'dark side

<sup>13</sup> See Stoeckl (2008).

<sup>14</sup> This is a technical term not used by Bulgakov and Berdjaev.

<sup>15</sup> Dietrich (2002, 28–31). Berdjaev distances himself from Parmenides' 'static' concept of *on* against *meon*; Berdjaev's notion of *me on* refers to the dynamic action *between* the static concepts of 'nothing' and 'being' (Berdjaev 2003, 337).

of God' containing all antinomies, it is potentiality without, but longing for form; it is dynamic by its will to acquire form and by its longing for a vis-à-vis. God and his creation come to self-consciousness in the course of this dynamic; hence God's being and consciousness emerge from God's own potentiality by a kind of self-motivated creativity.<sup>16</sup> This dynamic of the *Ungrund* Berdjaev calls 'meontic freedom': 'meontic freedom' generates the creative act by which being is created out of 'not-yet-being' (*me on*). This creative act is the task both of God and even more of the being made in God's image and likeness: the human person:

"If man does not bring his creative gift to God, if he does not participate actively in building the Kingdom of God, if he shows himself to be a slave, if he buries his talents in the earth, then the creation of the world will receive a check and the fullness of the divine-human life conceived by God will not be realized" (Berdyaev 1935, 213).

In other words, God becomes dependent on His creation.

Berdjaev can be clearly distinguished from Boehme by the fact that, according to Berdjaev, the *Ungrund* is not 'a dark side of God' anymore, but an autonomous principle, totally independent from God's being: "Creativeness presupposes non-being, *me on* (and not *ouk on*) which is the source of the primeval, pre-cosmic, pre-existent freedom of man. The mystery of creativeness is the mystery of freedom. Creativeness can only spring from fathomless freedom, for such freedom alone can give rise to the new, to what had never existed before" (Berdyaev 1945, 127). Paradoxically, it is Berdjaev's 'meontic freedom' determining being, what Idinopulos has called an "ontology of the spirit," which contradicts Berdjaev's own intention to subordinate being to freedom in order to avoid ontological determination (Idinopulos 1969, 90). Though Berdjaev denies Bulgakov's aforementioned 'existentialism' in his last book *The Russian idea* (1946), one could entertain some doubts about Berdjaev's own 'existentialism' too. His system should rather be called a 'meontology'.

What is more, the *Ungrund* becomes Berdjaev's 'solution' of the problem of theodicy, of God's responsibility for evil, because *me on* is not only the source of God, but also of evil. Therefore, evil must be eternally fought by creation, which is realized in the interrelation of freedom, God, and the human person (Litchfield 2007, 87). Hence, "creativeness and a creative attitude to life as a whole is not man's right, it is his duty. It is a moral imperative that applies in every department of life" (Berdyaev 1945, 132). "Create or die"—that is how Elena Gercyk fixed Berdjaev's central idea of the necessity of creation (Gercyk 1991, 368). The assumption of a principle independent of God, the *Ungrund* as a *me on*, makes Berdjaev clearly a dualist and gnostic thinker—considering that the Christian teaching of *creatio ex nihilo* arose in the second century deliberately in order to distinguish itself from the gnostic doctrine of a pre-existent (evil) matter. Against this teaching the early Church postulated God as creator *ex nihilo* of all things

<sup>16</sup> With regard to Berdjaev the relation between the *Ungrund* and God remains undefined, a circumstance criticized by many scholars (see McLachlan 1992, 137; Scaringi 2007, 199).



without presupposition and by his sovereign will (May 1978, 173). That is why many recent scholars claim that Berdjaev failed to develop a sound *Christian* ethics of creation, because in its quality as a permanent struggle against evil it is not free and cannot create anything beyond this struggle (Scaringi 2007, 197; Evlampiev 2000, 336; Losskij 1991, 287).

Despite the use of the same source, Bulgakov's reception of Boehme is quite different: while Berdjaev chose to develop the principle of *Ungrund* as fathomlessness, as an eternal drive into an abyss, Bulgakov chose to develop the principle of *Sophia* as an eternal lifting into divine spheres, embracing the world in the highest structure of wisdom (Okeanskaja and Okeanskij 2007, 33). Certain passages from Bulgakov's work *The Bride of the Lamb* (1939) can be read like a direct reaction to Berdjaev's theory of the *Ungrund*:

“It is impossible to imagine that, before creation, there ‘was’ a nothing that was like a kind of emptiness, a sack into which, later, upon creation, all the forms of being were poured. [...] Nothing ‘before’ creation simply never existed, and any attempt to begin creation with a nothing that supposedly preceded it degenerates into a contradiction” (Bulgakov 2002, 44).

Bulgakov is using the notion of *me on* too. But in contrast to Berdjaev it is not an absolute source of being, but exists only in correlation with being:

“The guiding and self-evident principle here is the consciousness that the absolute nothing, *ouk on*, does not exist at all, that it is only a negative gesture of thought, a minus as such, abstracted from every concrete application. Only the relative nothing, *me on*, exists. This nothing is included in the state of the relative being of creatures, in the context of this being, as a kind of half-shadow or shadow in the latter. In this sense, one can, following Pseudo-Dionysius, say that God also created nothing. And the analysis of the idea of creation necessarily includes this notion of the ‘creation of nothing’ as a characteristic feature of the creative act” (Bulgakov 2002, 44).

In other words: Only God, the absolute divinity, is the source of being, but he is also the source of *me on*, the nothing as potentiality and source for creation. Hence, only God is capable of *creatio ex nihilo*, and *me on* is the *given* potentiality which in Bulgakov's terms corresponds to the *created Sophia*.

### The meaning of human creativity

A ‘given’ ground for creation is what vexes Berdjaev with regard to freedom. He accuses Bulgakov of being a mere follower of Christian Platonism, according to which man cannot add anything *new* to creation, which turns world history into an unnecessary comedy:

Every creative act, in essence, is creation out of nothing: the production of new forces rather than the changing or rearrangement of the old. In every creative act there is absolute gain, something adds. [...] The world was made

not only created but [created] creative. [...] Man is called to enrich divine life (Berdyaev 1955, 129–130).

But one could cast some doubt on Berdjaev's concept of creativity, too, because his notion doesn't work with regard to 'this world' but only to some 'other world':

In the creative act man passes out from this world and enters another world. The creative act is not an arrangement of 'this world', but in it another world, a real cosmos, is set up. [...] Any justification of the 'the world' or 'the things of the world' is a compromise with sin, for 'the world' is not true being, it is fallen being and must not be confused with the divine cosmos (Berdyaev 1955, 162–163).

In the course of time, Berdjaev tempered his position, supposing a kind of necessary relation between undetermined freedom and "gifts bestowed upon man the creator by God the Creator" and even some material "borrowed from the world created by God" (Berdyaev 1945, 127). As to the 'material', Berdjaev continued to disparage the value of realized products, which are always disappointing because they don't correspond to the primordial idea. He even cites and adapts Goethe's Mephistopheles' saying: "Dear friend, life is all grey. And the golden tree of theory is green." In contrast to Bulgakov's 'Platonism' this means, that according to Berdjaev human creativity would enrich the world of ideas, but not the 'real' given world.

Later on Berdjaev even limits the power of human creativity, because "that other world cannot be established by human strength only, but also it cannot be established without the creative activity of man" (Berdyaev 1944, 254). Moreover, in his late book *Slavery and Freedom* (1939), 'the other' world finally becomes part of 'this' world, and human creativity is not intended to build another world, but to change the structure of 'this' world:

The Kingdom of God denotes not only redemption from sin and a return to original purity, but the creation of a new world. Every authentic creative act of man enters into it, every real act of liberation. It is not only the other world, it is this world transfigured. It is the liberation of nature from captivity, it is the liberation of the animal world also, for which man is answerable. And it begins now, at this moment. The attainment of spirituality, the will to truth and right, to liberation, is already the beginning of the other world. And with it there is no estrangement between the creative act and the creative product; the creative product is to be found, so to speak, in the creative act itself; it is not exteriorized; the very creative power itself is incarnation (Berdyaev 1944, 266).

This is similar to Bulgakov's vision of created Sophia, but Berdjaev is not very consistent with his ambivalent relationship to 'this' world. He finally can't accept Bulgakov's 'justification' of this world, because according to his cosmological concept it is always in danger from the negative forces roaring in the *Ungrund*—its evil potential can never be destroyed, neither by God nor by human persons. Therefore, paradoxically, assuming an absolute, 'meontic freedom', human persons

still depend on some God-given presuppositions, and they are desperately in need of divine strength to be able to struggle permanently against evil and create something new.<sup>17</sup>

As a matter of fact, Bulgakov was definitely trying to justify the ontological quality, the noumenal (sophiological) foundation of ‘this world’ by means of the Christian teaching of God’s creation of the world. In his concept, often suspected of pantheism, the world’s noumenal core is divine. But instead of drawing simplifying conclusions, one could speak in Bulgakov’s case of a ‘negative theology with regard to this world’ directed against extreme scientific positivism (Hallensleben 2003, 58). According to Bulgakov, Kant’s doctrine of the unknowability of the *Ding an sich* was a continuation of the theological tradition of the *via negativa*, of negative theology in modern philosophy (Seiling 2008, 246). Hence, the world’s noumenal foundation is given and divine, and man cannot create anything ontologically new: “Only God can create from nothing, whereas the created world, including man, is not absolute and therefore incapable of metaphysical originality. In fact, man is free – and in this sense capable of originality – only in choosing the direction his activity takes” (Bulgakov 2000a, 146). But man is able and called to shape the world’s (phenomenal) aspect: “Creaturally freedom, as a modal freedom, does not create the world with its givenness. [But it *shapes* the world, *performing its task*]<sup>18</sup> in one way or another, by one path or another, with reference to unchangeable foundations of being” (Bulgakov 2002, 233). Man is limited, but nevertheless, and in contrast to Berdjaev, Bulgakov’s assumption of a given foundation enables human persons to be free and autonomous actors in shaping their own culture. Of course evil will disturb their efforts, but the struggle against evil is not the very meaning of creativity, even though this struggle became an important task after the Fall. The meaning of creativity according to Bulgakov is to exercise a given capacity and to perform a task, it is not about *what* is going to be created, but *how* this will be done: The created world is the “combination of creative variations on the theme of the Divine Sophia” (Bulgakov 2002, 84). But—in contrast to Platonism—the world is not just an imitation of divine ideas, it is the human ‘re-creation’ of a “new, artificial world, the world of culture” (Bulgakov 2000a, 144).<sup>19</sup> That is where the notion of human freedom and self-determination come into play: by overcoming obstacles they can grow in power and effect:

This antinomy of creativity is not a logical contradiction, which can and must be overcome. It expresses the very character of creaturely freedom. Freedom as self-determination—from itself, although in the given—is *power*. But, as having before itself the given, which limits and determines it, freedom is

<sup>17</sup> See Zwahlen (2010, 254, 268).

<sup>18</sup> I adapted the translation here, because I am not very happy with the original translation of this passage as “But it informs the world, fulfilling the plan for the world.” (russ. “*ne tvorit mir v ego dannosti, no ego obrazuet, osuščestvljaja ego zadanie tak ili inače*”).

<sup>19</sup> See Bulgakov (2000a, 88): “Neither Platonism nor Neoplatonism, viewing the body as an envelope for the soul or as a dungeon for it, nor the new idealism, which turns flesh into a subjective image, can know the unity of spirit and flesh that Christianity teaches. This is the basis for the doctrine that the human incarnation of God brought about a divinization of the flesh.”

*powerlessness*. Power is the manifestation of freedom as self-determination, and power is capable of increasing. Increasing power signifies man's humanization, his mastering of his own given, or nature, through freedom or creativity. In power, there is a certain synthesis of freedom and the given (necessity), their harmony (Bulgakov 2002, 134).

According to Bulgakov, the possibility of self-determination is the determining category of created life, because even God, although the source of any freedom, is not free to restrict self-determination: “the freedom of the person remains inviolable and impenetrable even for God” (Bulgakov 2002, 226). This is so because God *loves*—and this goes beyond any notion of freedom and necessity (Bulgakov 2002, 128–129). But “the life of the creaturely spirit is really determined both by the free self-positing of personal being and by natural givenness, which is overcome in the personal being” (Bulgakov 2002, 30). And, we have to add, it is determined by Bulgakov's teaching of universal salvation according to which follows “the inevitable conclusion of his system that no matter how much evil is actually committed in history, all will be saved in the end” (Gavrilyuk 2006, 132), because according to Bulgakov, in the end everyone will be *persuaded* by God's love. But this still doesn't mean that personal self-determination is without an impact on an individual's life and human history—which in Bulgakov's ‘system’ continues beyond the boundary of the “resurrection of the dead” (Bulgakov 1995, 28). Quite the opposite.

Above all, personal beings are free to accept or refuse possibilities—except that of destroying God's image—personality—in themselves, which in fact is not a possibility, because personality is the ontological basis of self-determination. Therefore the abstract notions of personal freedom and self-determination exist in a multitude of concrete images and steps constituted by different given elements, personal relations, and reactions. Using the notion of ‘modal freedom’. Bulgakov distances himself from a maximalist pathos of creation, thereby laying the foundations for a philosophy of action in which human beings shape and change the world. Bulgakov is convinced that human creativity is able to gain access to the noumenal core of the world, and especially to the noumenal core of *matter* or *nature*, which has to be taken seriously and justified as part of God's creation.<sup>20</sup> ‘Modal freedom’ is the ‘talent’ God has given man in order to shape the phenomenal world.

But why can't human beings create anything new? How free is man even in choosing different ways, is there anything ‘new’ for God who created all things anyway? Here we have to refer to Bulgakov's concept of God's antinomic being: on the one hand, there is the eternal Absolute, on the other hand, there is God the loving creator of this world:

“This antinomic self-determination expresses a *kenosis* of the Absolute, which becomes the Creator and God. The Father of eternity voluntarily limits

<sup>20</sup> Matter and its consumption and production lie at the very core of Bulgakov's *philosophy of economy*. Commenting Berdjaev's book “*I and the world of objects*” (1934) he still criticizes Berdjaev for separating the spiritual ‘I’ from ‘the world’ and its ‘nature’ Zwahlen (2010, 329).

Himself by positing non-absolute being, that is, the life of creation, and condescends, so to speak, to co-participation in its temporality and becoming” (Bulgakov 2002, 230).

Hence, according to Bulgakov, the Absolute’s self-determination as Creator corresponds to the *kenosis* of the Absolute, which is going to be completed by the incarnation in Christ (Sergeev 2006, 101; Gavriilyuk 2005, 251). According to this antinomic self-determination of the Absolute, on the one hand

“all the possibilities of creaturely being, having their roots in the Creator’s knowledge, are open to this knowledge, since they belong to the world created by Him and are included in this world’s composition [...]. In this sense, creation—in both the spiritual and the human world—cannot bring anything ontologically new into the world; it cannot surprise or enrich the Creator Himself” (Bulgakov 2002, 238).

But what the creator in his kenotic existence in relation to his creation doesn’t know in advance is *which* possibilities and ways men are going to choose. Therefore

the very choice and creative actualization of these possibilities, that is, the domain of modal freedom, remain entrusted to creation and to this extent are its creative contribution. Although creation cannot be absolutely unexpected and new for God in the ontological sense, nevertheless in empirical (‘contingent’) being, it represents a new manifestation for God Himself, who is waiting to see whether man will open or not open the doors of his heart. God Himself will know this only when it happens (Bulgakov 2002, 238).

In other words: God kenotically blinds himself to certain human choices. The same is true for human creativity and history: God will know it only when it happens.<sup>21</sup> According to Bulgakov, ‘providence’ is not, first of all, God’s steering of human history but rather waiting for human choices and answering and reacting to them by persuasion. Hence history is the realm, where real godhuman cooperation can take place in ‘this’ world in its phenomenal outlook.

## Trinity

The relation between the human person and the Holy Trinity

According to Berdjajev’s concept, humanity is *an essential part of* the Holy Trinity, in fact Christ as the second Hypostasis *is* the divine humanity in God (Berdyajev 1955, 79). After the Fall, humanity is separated from God, it literally “falls out” of the Trinity and loses its divinity. It must be concluded that only “thanks to the Fall” each human person has her own free life. Berdjajev indeed confirms that the

<sup>21</sup> There is a long-standing discussion about whether God knew in advance that man will opt for sin. The topic came up in the context of the accusation of heresy leveled against Bulgakov in 1935. In Bulgakov’s view, the possibility of sin is a presupposition of freedom as God’s gift to creation, and God’s incarnation in creation is part of God’s ‘plan’ whether man would opt for sin or not (Zwahlen 2010, 99f.).

Fall was not only a humiliation of mankind, but as much an appreciation of each person in her freedom (Scaringi 2007, 72), which confirms that Berdjaev is a gnostic thinker. At the same time, the creation of mankind is a product of the inner *tragedy* of the Trinity: God as a lover longs for a beloved partner and therefore creates the free human who is expected to sacrifice his/her freedom, the same as God sacrificed His freedom for the sake of love (Berdjaev 1935, 190–191). Berdjaev doesn't make clear, why God in his perfect Trinity really *needs* another partner outside himself. Neither does he mention the role of the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup> Regarding personality Berdjaev's concept of the Trinity is not very convincing: If man finds his way back to Divinity by becoming one with Christ, he/she will give up freedom and melt within the Holy Trinity. In Berdjaev's concept, personality is a *means* to get back to divinity and not—as he always postulated—an 'end in itself'. As for Berdjaev's notion of 'Godmanhood', this means that in the beginning and in the end God and man are the same and that Berdjaev's 'anthropodicy' dissolves in another theodicy.<sup>23</sup>

Within Bulgakov's concept of God's antinomic being, God as the eternal Absolute does not need mankind, but God who is the creator of this world creates man, as He is love and it is proper for love to love beyond itself. In other words, God creates man because he is free and has the power to do so. Therefore the creation of mankind is not a tragic 'fall out of the Trinity' but God's decision to "posit the world outside of Himself, as it were, [to] release[s] it from Himself into divinely extra-divine and even non-divine being" (Bulgakov 2002, 50). Therefore, creation in Bulgakov's terms is not a tragedy but a *kenosis* of divine being.

Humanity is God's creation and is given a life in *structural analogy* to the Holy Trinity. The structural analogy between God and his creation relates to each person as well as to interpersonal relations. In his works of the late 1920s, inspired by Martin Buber and others (Bulgakov 2001, 102–106), Bulgakov develops a "personal grammar": A person's self-realisation is only possible by confronting other persons. Face to face with another human, an individual experiences—in linguistic terms—her status as a *first*, *second* and *third* person: A human being is an 'I' marking off his/her individuality from others, it is 'Thou' in its face to face relation to another, and it is 'He/She' when noticing the existence of many other, unknown persons. Only in confronting 'Thou' and 'He/She' does the 'I' get to know itself as an 'I'. Hence, Bulgakov's personality is constituted by a dynamic self-reflection as a triangle 'I- Thou-He/She' (Bulgakov 2001, 59–60),<sup>24</sup> which is an

<sup>22</sup> See Scaringi (2007, 187): "In some sense the Trinity becomes a binity, as it is difficult to detect in [Berdjaev's] work the Spirit being a Trinitarian Person."

<sup>23</sup> See Scaringi (2007, 195): "Thus even though he states that the divine and human natures of the person must be preserved to avoid a 'monistic' perspective, it becomes difficult to understand what value Berdjaev sees in the person's human nature. His emphasis on the divine nature of the person creates the impression that ultimately he is not really that concerned with the humanity and bodily form of the person. This is a regrettable turn in his thought, especially considering his constant references to the humanity of Christ." See also Gajdenko (1994, 166), Evlampiev (2000, 304).

<sup>24</sup> It would be interesting to compare this with Jürgen Habermas' conception of communicative rationality: "Indem Ego eine Sprechhandlung ausführt und Alter dazu Stellung nimmt, gehen beide eine interpersonale Beziehung ein. Diese ist durch das System der wechselseitig verschränkten Perspektiven von Sprechern, Hörern und aktuell unbeteiligten Anwesenden strukturiert. Dem entspricht auf

analogy to God's Trinity in unity. Thus, according to Bulgakov, the Trinitarian dogma justifies man's ontological need for personal relations. The aim of communion with God and human beings is not indistinct unity but unity in diversity.

Hence, in Berdjaev's concept, human beings aim to return to the divine being and become one with God's 'I'. In Bulgakov's concept human persons relate to God as 'Thou' and remain ontological persons outside of, but in a close personal relationship to the Holy Trinity.

### Trinity as the source of creation

Both Berdjaev and Bulgakov relate to the Trinitarian economy, meaning the common act of creation and salvation by the Holy Trinity (Bobrinsky 1986, 10). The 'mystery of creation' in Berdjaev's concept corresponds to the inner life of the Trinitarian divinity, in which man should take part (Meerson 1998, 104, 114–115). Even after the Fall the process of creation goes on in the life of mankind, but its realization will always fail within the boundaries of 'this world'. Only in relation to Christ can human creativity be reintegrated within divine creation (Berdyayev 1955, 79). On these grounds Berdjaev's claim that human persons are able to create 'ex nihilo' is not to be understood as a rebellion against God, because it will be only possible after the reunion with God. There is nothing fallen human creativity could add to divine creation. Again we have to suspect that in Berdjaev's concept 'this world' is not God's creation but is a product of the divine tragedy and the Fall of humanity. Creation 'in this world' aims to overcome it in order to make the reintegration within the divine process of creation possible at a future time called the "third epoch of the Holy Spirit."<sup>25</sup> Again, this concept is distinct conceptually from the Christian teaching of God's image and likeness, because the person for Berdjaev has to become one with God and is not meant to be personally akin to God (Gajdenko 1994, 166).

In Bulgakov's concept there is no identity between divine and human creation, but again he works out a concept of *analogy*. Creation, in Bulgakov's terms, corresponds to the on-going reciprocal relationship between spirit and nature (Bulgakov 2000b, 90). Within the Holy Trinity this relationship corresponds to the personal relationship between the three hypostases on their common ground, the *ousia*, their nature. Human creation works in the same manner as God's creation, but it is limited by time and space. While the dynamic synthesis of spirit and nature in the Holy Trinity is a transparent fact, in human creation it is a task and a goal to achieve by free creativity. In *analogy* to the Holy Trinity, all human persons are called to live in a joyful relationship of creation on their common ground, which is

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Footnote 24 continued

grammatischer Ebene das System der Personalpronomina. Wer in dieses System eingeeübt ist, hat gelernt, wie man in performativer Einstellung die Perspektiven der ersten, zweiten und dritten Personen jeweils übernimmt und ineinander transformiert" (Habermas 1985, 346–347).

<sup>25</sup> Berdjaev adhered to the teaching of Joachim de Fiore, endorsed by Dmitrij Merežkovskij, about the coming age of the Third Testament of the Holy Spirit (after the First Testament of the Father, and the Second Testament of the Son). According to Bulgakov, the revelation of the Holy Spirit has already taken place by its reception by the Mother of God (Zwahlen 2010, 309).

the created world. This model relies on an analogical structure of God and man: The created persons live in created nature *like* the divine persons live in divine nature. This is why the whole created cosmos should be understood as man's body (and beauty). This concept remains the same after the Fall, the latter causing "only" difficulties and hard labour instead of joyful creativity.<sup>26</sup>

In both Berdjajev's and Bulgakov's concepts, creation is a crucial faculty of the human person as the Creator's image and likeness. But Berdjajev's person should strive for integration within the *divine* process of creation, while Bulgakov's person is given the task to choose between many given possibilities and realize them. In Bulgakov's view each man is able to act and create, because *ontologically* he is God's image and likeness whether he knows or acknowledges it or not. But of course man will strengthen his power by relating his own work to that of other persons and especially with God. This process of interpersonal creation lies at the very core of Bulgakov's *Philosophy of Economy* as well as his model of the *synergy* of God and mankind: God gave man a garden—together they will create a city, the New Jerusalem.

To summarise, a simplified model of Bulgakov's anthropology would start with the main Christian dogma: the triune God is defined as the unity of three individual hypostases in one ousia, one nature. In God's image and likeness human beings constitute a multitude of hypostases, united in one nature, namely the 'created world'. In this world and because of their common nature, human beings are able and supposed to live in the same complex and loving relationship as the three divine hypostases without losing their autonomous individualities.

I turn now to the different concepts of autonomy in Berdjajev's and Bulgakov's works.

## Autonomy

In Berdjajev's opinion, "man is free, when he need not choose" (Berdjajev 1945, 80). In Berdjajev's system, there are four modes of freedom: slavery (the absence of freedom), heteronomy, autonomy, and theandric/godhuman freedom, the latter of course being the highest form of freedom, which means: God and man are one and there will be no doubt about choices or possibilities. Becoming one with God is the highest form of self-determination. Autonomy is *necessary* for each person to achieve godhuman freedom which is to be understood as a personal relationship and not as subordination (Scaringi 2007, 64f.). Berdjajev's notion of freedom is, first of all, freedom from external determination, a kind of never-ending struggle against external forces, which, in the end, all come from the *Ungrund*, the first principle of existence, against which even God always has to defend his freedom.

<sup>26</sup> Bulgakov's Trinitarian concept can be related to Giorgio Agamben's model of economic theology, according to which economical management, *oikonomia*, is the theological solution to the problem of God's *unity*: *oikonomia* is the *way of God's being*, it is his *own practice* of trinitarian being, and such is the task or the duty to manage a household, which God entrusted to man (Zwahlen 2011b). See Josephien van Kessel in this issue.



Bulgakov's concept of autonomy is totally different. As we have seen, according to Bulgakov, the idea of man as God's image and likeness is the ontological basis of every human being as 'end in itself'. This should not be understood in the sense of a determined and complete set of properties but as an "infinite series of different possibilities, among which human freedom chooses" (Bulgakov 2002, 135f.). The idea of God's image and likeness does not say much about the specific conditions of the 'image' or the 'likeness' but it describes the *act* of realizing the given image or becoming God's likeness in a free, autonomous way (in a perpetual tension with givenness). This is what Bulgakov writes in *The Bride of the Lamb*:

The image of God in man is not merely a 'resemblance' or a 'property'. It is a higher reality, a spiritual reality, an energy of God-likeness and God-likening. The union of 'image and likeness' is the realization of the image in life, the transition from statics to dynamics, from potentiality to energy. But at the same time the character of the image creates an indissoluble connection between it and the Proto-image, whose copy it is (Bulgakov 2002, 202).

While Berdjajev's person *needs* autonomy in order to reunite with God, Bulgakov is drawing the apparently paradoxical conclusion that the inseparable connection to God *provides* true autonomy to the person:

Freedom in creation is, first of all, connected with the personal principle. As *autonomous being*, the person is synonymous with freedom, as actuality or self-positing. Without this, the person does not exist. [...] The freedom of the person remains inviolable and impenetrable even for God. [...] His omnipotence does not destroy the ontological barriers, as Christ Himself says about Himself: 'I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me' (Rev. 3:20). This door is creaturely freedom, the source of the originality and reality of creation in correlation with the Creator. (Bulgakov 2002, 127, 226)

Hence, to become God's likeness does not mean to become an identical copy of God or to fuse with the divine substance<sup>27</sup> but *to act, live, and create in a godlike manner* and to become God's *partner* in creation:

Freedom is the ontological *privilege* precisely of creatures. [...] The most general precondition of freedom is spontaneity of movement, autonomy of life. [...] *Ontologically*, man cannot get rid of freedom even if he so desires, for it is the mode of the very being of the creaturely spirit. [...] If God created man in freedom, in His own image, as a son of God and a friend of God, a god according to grace, then the reality of this creation includes his freedom as creative self-determination not only in relation to the world but also in relation to God. To admit the contrary would be to introduce a contradiction in God, who would then be considered as having posited only a fictitious, illusory freedom (Bulgakov 2002, 129, 132, 234, 237).

<sup>27</sup> This would be the case in Berdjajev's concept: "There is no formal autonomy in the inmost depths of spiritual freedom, for there is no distinction there between autonomy and 'theonomy'" (Berdyaev 1935, 147).

Therefore, according to Bulgakov, subjective or personal autonomy is a God-given fact and *human condition*.<sup>28</sup> Even after death, each human person, according to Bulgakov, will still exist as an autonomous individual: “The spirit lives beyond the grave by the strength of its immortality, freedom is its salient characteristic and as such therefore creative self-determination” (Bulgakov 1987, 9f.). Hence, according to Bulgakov, autonomy is a God-given human capacity, *not* a political liberal value.<sup>29</sup> In Bulgakov’s view, autonomy is not an individual attitude, but a moral faculty of each person, which enables anyone to create and to be part of interpersonal relations. That is what I call the ‘enlightened’, not the romantic notion of autonomy.

### Conclusion and final remarks

To summarize, Berdjaev’s notion of autonomy seems to be a *means* for human beings to return to their fully divine existence within the Trinity before the Fall. Berdjaev’s thinking strives for godhuman unity and identity, and therefore the notion of ‘God’s image and likeness’ in Berdjaev’s concept doesn’t make much sense. Admittedly, Berdjaev’s person would be enabled with godlike meontic freedom and power to create, but she does so only within the divine realm of the Trinity, from which she has tragically fallen out, just because of using the given freedom, power and autonomy. Many of his other concepts not treated in this paper, like the myth of the human androgyny, his notion of ‘existential community’, godmanhood, and theurgical creation, can serve as examples for Berdjaev’s gnosticism.<sup>30</sup> Variety, individuality, and autonomy do not play a very positive role in his worldview, they are signs of a fallen world.

In contrast, in Bulgakov’s view, autonomy is not a means to salvation, but an ontological *condition* of creation. The possibility of salvation is God’s gift of grace and not a human task as it is in Berdjaev’s view. Bulgakov wants to show, why God could have *wanted* to create this world in all its variety and autonomy. In fact, Bulgakov developed a justification of individual personality as an answer to Marxism and he found this justification in an ontology of creation in God’s image and likeness. Analogically to the Holy Trinity, human life is all about interpersonal relations and dialogue between autonomous, individual partners called to take part in godhuman creation. Bulgakov’s concepts of the Trinitarian personality, of male and female personality, of the multipersonal humanity (*mnogoipostasnost’*) and godhuman synergy are all examples of this worldview. In other words, Bulgakov links the Eastern Trinitarian theology of interpersonal relationships with a Western, moral understanding of individual autonomy. Being God’s image and likeness

<sup>28</sup> “But this salvation of man, effectuated by Christ, the new Adam, in a free act, for all humanity— this salvation must be freely accepted by each particular man” (Bulgakov 1935, 129).

<sup>29</sup> Actually, Berdjaev wants to show that too: “The demand for freedom of religious thought in Christianity is far more profound than it is in liberal, humanist, and non-religious circles. Every form of coercion of the human soul in matters of faith is a betrayal of Christ, a denial of the very meaning of the Christian religion and of the nature of faith itself” (Berdjaev 1935, 153).

<sup>30</sup> The discussion of these concepts can be found in Zwahlen (2010).

means firstly to have a complex personality capable of self-realization, and secondly to need interpersonal relations to complete the task of creation. Self-realization is not possible without interpersonal relations and vice versa. That is why such an understanding of Trinitarian theology may be helpful to overcome the gap between individualism and communism.

My main reproach to Berdjaev is that he postulates the primacy of meontic freedom, because he doesn't put it past an absolute God to want to create an autonomous world and free human beings. Berdjaev's concept of freedom is about defending human freedom against divine omnipotence. It is freedom that grants dignity to the person in the first place, not her being God's image and likeness. Only in her revolutionary attitude against chaotic forces, Berdjaev's person acts in God's image and likeness. If a person is not struggling against these dionysic forces of the *Ungrund*, if she doesn't create, she will drown in it. According to Berdjaev, personality has to be *achieved* and will only be confirmed by the reunion within Christ's Godhumanity ('create or die!'). But in Berdjaev's concept not even God is absolutely free, because he exists in an eternal antagonism with another absolute principle, the *Ungrund*, the potentiality of evil. Berdjaev's creative ethics consists in respectable holy anger against evil, but therefore it remains a negative ethics of a hopeless struggle—hopeless, because the *Ungrund* as warrantor of freedom is invincible. Berdjaev wanted to free God from his responsibility for evil. In this way he deprived him of the possibility of salvation. As Berdjaev wanted to be a Christian philosopher, this philosophical gnostic solution is an unacceptable contradiction to Christian soteriology. At the same time he undermines his own goal: the justification of man, his anthropodicy falls behind and dissolves in this unsatisfactory theodicy. In short: if God can't struggle against evil, nor can man.

The main reproach to Bulgakov is his concept of 'doubling' Sophia, because he doesn't put it past God to create an autonomous world, which is able to stay ontologically good even when it falls. That is why in Bulgakov's concept God creates the world not out of nothing (as *ouk on*), because as we have seen, such a nothing doesn't exist: "Divine being is limitless. Nothing is by no means like an ocean that flows around this being. Rather, it is divinity itself that is an ocean without any shores" (Bulgakov 2002, 43–44). Hence God creates the world out of himself: He "*releases* [this divine world as His own nature] from the depths of hypostatic being into self-being, makes it the cosmos in the true sense, creates the world 'out of nothing', that is, out of Himself, out of His own divine content" (Bulgakov 2002, 48). Bulgakov's unity of divine and created Sophia is about defending God's omnipotence against human freedom and its potential to destroy creation. Furthermore, Bulgakov wants to ensure that every human being partakes of divinity, whether he/she knows it or not. Bulgakov's concept of human dignity is not only based on 'given autonomy' in self-determination, but also on a given consubstantiality of divine and human nature, a doctrine that has continually prompted the accusation of pantheism. But if God is able to create autonomous hypostatic being, human persons, in *principal analogy* to him, as God's image, why shouldn't he be able to create, by analogy, an autonomous nature? Wouldn't it be enough to postulate the *analogy* of divine and human nature in order to show that human nature and corporality are likewise creations willed by God (and not evil

matter)? If Bulgakov had been more consistent in defining his concepts of *co-imaginedness* (russ. *soobraznost'*), *creativity*, and *correlation*, which he opposed to causality (Thomas Aquinas) and emanation, then sophiology couldn't really have been accused of monism: "In general, the idea of the Creator and creation does not need to be translated into the language of mechanical causality, for it has another category, its proper one, that of *co-imaginedness*, since the creature contains the living *image* of the Creator and is correlated with Him" (Bulgakov 2002, 221).<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, Bulgakov remains true to his concept of personality as the main principle of being, which he defines as a permanent interplay between 'spirit' and 'nature'. According to him, personality is an ontological reality (according to the teaching of Trinity), which man doesn't have to achieve, but enables him to shape the world by virtue of his personal autonomy, by interrelation with other persons and, last but not least, by complex cooperation with his Creator.

Berdjaev longs for absolute solutions. Calling himself a philosopher of freedom, creativity, and "personalist socialism," he seems to be very afraid of the complexity and differences in interpersonal relations even if he claims to appreciate them. Bulgakov, in contrast, knows for sure that without complex interpersonal relations, we wouldn't know freedom and creativity at all. Creativity does not grow on simple solutions, but on complex, interpersonal, and *wise* decisions. Bulgakov's keyword is, as we all know, wisdom—Sophia. This is a crucial notion of his Trinitarian philosophy and it is very closely linked to the notions of personality, interpersonal-ality, and creativity. Even if Bulgakov's sophiology is, in the end, the "guarantee of a happy ending," it is a justification of variety, not of uniformity.

So finally we are able to understand the deeper sense of Gippius' observation cited at the beginning of this paper. Berdjaev and Bulgakov are like water and fire indeed. While Berdjaev is desperately trying to defeat evil, Bulgakov focuses on all possible variations of the good. But these are two sides of one coin. Bulgakov put that in words in a letter to Berdjaev in 1937:

"Closeness and distance are building the antinomic *And* that seems to stand between us. The *And* unites and divides, distinguishes and contrasts. Is it really amazing that during the formation of our individualities and after all those years both sides of the antinomy have grown deeper and sharper in expression? As for me I love antinomy, because I love its fire of life, which, as I think, is part of our *And*" (Struve 2000, 265).

Berdjaev and Bulgakov both became original thinkers, always united by some kind of *And*. Gippius' wish, that they rather engage in a duel than demonstrate unity, has become true and has generated sparks with a lasting effect.

<sup>31</sup> See Slesinski's critique of Bulgakov's interpretation of Thomas Aquinas: "For starters, with [Bulgakov's] reductivist understanding of causality in terms of 'mechanical causality' he can only skew traditional Christian, but especially scholastic, teaching on causality. Clearly, he does not understand that for the Scholastics creation as an 'action' is entirely *sui generis*; it bears *no* relation to mechanical, transitive action. In creation, there is no 'transference' of being; rather it comes about 'intransitively' or, in the understanding of Aquinas, it is a *relation without motion*. [...] it would seem Aquinas and Bulgakov are much closer to one another in thought than the latter would like to admit. Surely when he affirms that God is the 'ground' of the world, he is virtually saying the same thing as Aquinas when he states that the Creator is the 'principle' of the world's being" (Slesinski 2008, 448–449).

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