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FROM THE DIALECTIC OF SPIRIT TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREEDOM: BERDYAEV'S ENGAGEMENT WITH HEGEL UP TO 1922

Abstract

The article explores Nikolai Berdyaev's engagement with Hegel's philosophy from his early writings up to his exile in 1922, tracing how his initial admiration developed into a critical transformation. Through historical and conceptual analysis, it reconstructs the genesis of Berdyaev's view of Hegel within the broader context of Russian religious and philosophical thought at the turn of the twentieth century. The paper argues that Berdyaev reinterprets Hegel's dialectic of Spirit as a dialectic of Freedom, replacing the impersonal logic of the Absolute with the creative act of the person. This reinterpretation not only marks the birth of Berdyaev's personalism and philosophy of freedom but also illuminates the passage from German idealism to Russian existential thought.

Key words: Nikolai Berdyaev; G. W. F. Hegel; freedom; dialectic; German Idealism; Russian philosophy

VON DER DIALEKTIK DES GEISTES ZUR PHILOSOPHIE DER FREIHEIT: BERDJAJEWS AUSEINANDERSETZUNG MIT HEGEL BIS 1922

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel untersucht die Auseinandersetzung von Nikolai Berdyaev mit der Philosophie von Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel von seinen frühen Schriften bis zu seinem Exil im Jahr 1922 und zeichnet nach, wie sich seine anfängliche Bewunderung

zu einer kritischen Transformation entwickelte. Durch eine historische und begriffliche Analyse rekonstruiert die Arbeit die Genese von Berdyaevs Hegel-Verständnis im breiteren Kontext des russischen religiösen und philosophischen Denkens um die Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert. Der Aufsatz argumentiert, dass Berdyaev Hegels Dialektik des Geistes als eine Dialektik der Freiheit neu interpretiert, wobei er die unpersönliche Logik des Absoluten durch den schöpferischen Akt der Person ersetzt. Diese Neuinterpretation markiert nicht nur die Entstehung von Berdyaevs Personalismus und seiner Philosophie der Freiheit, sondern beleuchtet auch den Übergang vom deutschen Idealismus zum russischen existenziellen Denken.

Schlüsselwörter: Nikolai Berdyaev; G. W. F. Hegel; Freiheit; Dialektik; Deutscher Idealismus; Russische Philosophie

Introduction

The approach of Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948) to the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) can be examined through two distinct periods of his intellectual development. Although Berdyaev did not fundamentally change his overall attitude toward the great German philosopher, he gradually distanced himself from him. The first period encompasses Berdyaev's thought up to his exile from Russia in 1922, while the second begins during his emigration, when he established himself as a thinker of international significance rather than merely a Russian philosopher, and continues until his death. In other words, one may speak, in a conditional sense, of an early period and a mature (or late) period in the creative development of Nikolai Berdyaev. Berdyaev's early life and work were marked by intellectual debates on Populism (*Narodnichestvo*, народничество) and Marxism, which gradually led him toward religious thought, and subsequently toward personalism – a philosophical current that places the human person at the center of reflection. In Berdyaev's thought, personalism was not merely a theoretical framework; it also inspired a number of personalist movements that emerged in France during the 1930s, centered on the ideas of human dignity and freedom, with Berdyaev becoming one of their major sources of inspiration and spiritual leaders.

Often referred to as “the philosopher of freedom”, Berdyaev understood this designation as an expression of his central philosophical concern – freedom as the essence of the human spirit – regardless of his intellectual evolution from Populism, through Marxism and Neo-Kantianism, to existentialism and Christian personalism. In his numerous writings, he sought

not to construct a rigid system, but to develop a comprehensive philosophical vision grounded in the idea of human freedom and creativity. During his law studies in Kyev, Berdyaev began to engage more systematically with philosophy and became involved in the social-democratic movement, advocating Marxism. As a result, he was arrested in 1898 and expelled from the university. He then joined the so-called “legal Marxists”,¹ a group of thinkers who operated within the limits of Tsarist censorship, led in Russia at the time by Petr Berngardovich Struve and Mikhail Tugan-Baranovsky.

In his late work *Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography* (*Самопознание. Опыт философской автобиографии*, 1949), Berdyaev unites personal confession with a philosophy of spirit and freedom. This is not a conventional autobiography, but rather a philosophical confession—the author contemplates his own life as a path of spiritual awakening and creative realization. Berdyaev reflects on his childhood, the revolution, exile, and his intellectual activity in emigration, yet he perceives all these experiences through the symbolism of dream and reality—the dream as an expression of spiritual truth, and reality as its limitation. The work embodies his personalist and existential philosophy, in which freedom and creativity form the bridge between the human being and God. The book stands as a philosophical life narrative, a testimony to the inner birth of the spirit of freedom in spite of historical and social constraints. In this work, Berdyaev states that he “grew up with Hegel”. As he recalls, at the age of fourteen he was already reading the *Phenomenology of Mind*² and wrote: “I could understand Schopenhauer, or Kant, or Hegel when I discovered their universe of discourse within myself.” (Berdyaev 1962, 48) So deeply was he captivated by Hegel that, as he himself admits, he “copied quotations from Hegel’s *Phenomenology* into his cousin’s album”. (Berdyaev, 1962, 91–92) Nevertheless, despite his early fascination, Berdyaev soon began to distance himself from Hegel. Unlike Hegel, the foundation of his thought became the primacy of freedom over all else: “Freedom is not, as Hegel maintained, the creature of necessity; just the reverse: necessity is the creature of freedom, or,

¹ In the scholarly literature, the origin and meaning of the term “legal Marxism” have been interpreted in various ways, but one of the more widely accepted explanations is that the “legal Marxists” published their works in periodicals that appeared legally under Tsarist rule. Later Marxists interpreted this to mean that the representatives of “legal Marxism” wrote in such an abstract manner that, precisely because of this excessive abstraction, their writings were able to pass through the filters of Tsarist censorship.

² Berdyaev refers to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*, corresponding to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

to put it differently, a certain tendency or orientation of freedom”. (Berdy-
 aev 1962, 57) From this arises his enduring rebellion against any totalization
 of the universal over the personal. He admired “Belinsky’s revolt against
 Hegel’s World Spirit” and situated his own philosophy “in opposition to
 all monistic tendencies”, defining it as a form of “radical personalism”.³
 (Berdy-
 aev 1962, 100) For Berdy-
 aev, German idealism after Kant represent-
 ed a “betrayal of Kant”, which culminated in the “triumph of the World
 Logos... in monism, pantheism, and evolutionism”. (Berdy-
 aev 1962, 98)
 He did not, however, dismiss Hegel’s genius; he believed that Hegel had
 introduced dynamism into logic and had transformed logic into ontology.
 Berdy-
 aev acknowledged that “Hegel’s monistic philosophy is redeemed by
 his vision of a dialectic and a struggle of opposites at the heart of existence”.
 (Berdy-
 aev 1962, 93) Yet it is precisely here that he draws the line: a dialectic
 without the person turns into objectification that destroys the uniqueness
 of the individual. Thus, Berdy-
 aev insists that he is not a Hegelian: “But I
 am no Hegelian who identifies religion with philosophy and makes the best
 of two worlds.” (Berdy-
 aev 1962, 171) Although Berdy-
 aev maintained that
 it is impossible to philosophize at all without passing through the problems
 of Kant and Hegel, and regarded Hegel as one of those thinkers who transcended
 their own century and were, in essence, “creators of the twentieth
 century”, (Berdy-
 aev 1962, 172) the central thread of his thought remained
 unchanged: truth and knowledge must be born out of freedom and the
 personal spirit, not from an “objective scheme” that turns the human be-
 ing into a “means of abstraction”. These reflections may be understood as
 Berdy-
 aev’s final judgment on Hegel—a recognition of his genius, yet at the
 same time a firm rejection of any idea that threatens the personal freedom
 of the spirit.

To fully understand how and why Berdy-
 aev arrived at such a position
 toward Hegel, it is necessary to analyze the development of his thought on
 Hegel in its genesis. This article focuses precisely on Berdy-
 aev’s early peri-
 od, when the fundamental intellectual premises of his later philosophical
 personalism and his understanding of freedom were formed. We examine
 the period from the late nineteenth century, when Berdy-
 aev published
 his first reviews and critical essays—often unsigned or written under a

³ Berdy-
 aev uses the term “radical personalism” to emphasize the metaphysical primacy of
 freedom and personality over any system or objective order. His conception should not
 be confused with the later French personalism of Emmanuel Mounier and his circle. See
 Emmanuel Mounier, *A Personalist Manifesto* (London: Longmans, 1938).

pseudonym—in Russian philosophical and literary journals, up to his expulsion from Russia in 1922.

In the intellectual climate of his time, Hegel held in Russia an almost sacred philosophical status (cf. Walicki 1979, 115–134; Zenkovsky 1953, 238–269) — his thought represented the ultimate measure of systematic depth and coherence, and every serious philosophical reflection began or ended with a dialogue with Hegel. In this spirit, many Russian Hegelians believed, following Hegel’s own remarks about Russia as a land of “unprecedented potential”, that it might one day become the next bearer of world history. (Hegel 1956, 399–400)⁴ Berdyaev’s departure from such an authority was therefore not merely a matter of theoretical disagreement, but also an expression of spiritual independence and philosophical courage.

In examining these aspects, the article combines a historical-philosophical approach with a conceptual analysis of Berdyaev’s early texts, aiming to reconstruct the evolution of his attitude toward Hegel within the broader intellectual context of Russian thought at the turn of the century.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part covers the period up to 1910, when Berdyaev primarily acted as a critic and commentator — author of reviews, essays, and shorter articles—in which one can already discern the tension between idealist and existential approaches. The second part examines the period after 1910, when Berdyaev emerged as an independent philosopher and began publishing his own books, in which his reflection on Hegel took on a deeper, more systematic, and more personal character.

The scholarly significance of such an approach lies in the fact that, although Berdyaev was not a systematic interpreter of Hegel, he was a profound connoisseur of Hegel’s philosophy, and integrated Hegel’s thought into his own philosophical horizon as an indispensable background to his intellectual development. An analysis of his early period allows us to better understand the inner dialectic between idealism and personalism, and to trace the transformation of Hegelian motifs—such as dialectic, spirit, and freedom—into the existential-personalist framework that characterizes his later work. In this way, we gain a deeper understanding not only of Berdyaev’s relationship to Hegel, but also of the broader process of the reception of German idealism in Russian philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century.

⁴ In this section, Hegel refers to the “great Slavic nation” of Eastern Europe, noting that it had not yet appeared as an independent force in the development of world spirit, but suggesting that it might do so in the future.

1. The Early Period (1898–1910)

In the final years of the nineteenth century, Berdyaev published his first works in the journal *The World of God* (*Мир Божий*), consisting mainly of short book reviews and critical notices. This journal was one of the central venues in which the ideas of Russian religious idealism and cultural criticism were formed, and it was there that Berdyaev began his publicistic and philosophical career. *The World of God* published the works of prominent writers and thinkers such as Leo Tolstoy, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Vasily Rozanov, and others. At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the journal became an important forum for discussions on religious renewal and philosophical issues that led to the so-called “religious-philosophical renaissance” in Russia. In 1898, Berdyaev published an unsigned review of Johannes Rehmke’s *Philosophy of History*. He valued Rehmke’s clear exposition of philosophical ideas but criticized the neglect of French Enlightenment thinkers and modern nineteenth-century movements. He mentioned Hegel as “the greatest German philosopher after Kant”, observing that “Rehmke devotes considerable attention to Fichte; as for Hegel, the greatest German philosopher after Kant, he gives him only six pages, from which it is hardly possible to gain even an approximate idea of Hegelian philosophy”.⁵ (Бердяев 1898a, 76)

In his 1898 review of Wilhelm Kronenberg’s *The Philosophy of Kant and Its Significance in the History of the Development of Thought* (*Философия Канта и её значение в истории развития мысли*), Berdyaev discusses Kant’s system and briefly turns to Hegel. He argues that Kant’s philosophy of pure and practical reason lacks a unified worldview: “In the attempts to find and establish such unity, German philosophy, through Fichte and Schelling, arrives at Hegel, in whose teaching one finds precisely the idea of development that it is useless to look for in Kant: ‘in his eyes knowledge, morality, and religion represent something firmly established and complete, not something that continues to develop’”.⁶ (Бердяев 1898b, 76–77) Berdyaev concludes that the connection between Kant and Hegel remains

⁵ “Довольно внимания Ремке уделяет также Фихте, что же касается Гегеля, этого величайшего после Канта философа Германии, то ему посвящается всего шесть страничек, из которых вряд ли можно вынести какое-нибудь понятие о гегельянской философии.”

⁶ “В усилиях найти и установить это единство немецкая философия через Фихте и Шеллинга достигла Гегеля, в учении которого нашла как раз ту идею развития, которую тщетно искать у Канта: ‘в его глазах познание, нравственность, религия

evident, showing how deeply Kant inspired the spirit of free and critical inquiry.

Writing in 1899, Berdyaev observed a renewed fascination with Spinoza, whose philosophy, he noted, had captivated poets and thinkers such as Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller through its pantheistic spirit. Spinoza gained further prominence with Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, who embraced his monistic conception of reality. As Hegel famously stated, “to become a Spinozist means the beginning of all philosophizing”.⁷ (Бердяев 1899а, 93) Berdyaev argued that this insight profoundly shaped later thought about the unity of being and reason. He also noted Schopenhauer’s acknowledgment of Spinoza’s influence, seeing in it proof of the enduring vitality of monism in modern philosophy.

In a 1899 review of Théodule Ribot’s study on Schopenhauer, Berdyaev reports Ribot’s view that German pessimism originated in Kant’s philosophy, from which all later speculative thought developed. According to Ribot, Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* poses a dilemma: either remain within the bounds of experience or attempt to transcend them through absolute idealism. Since this attempt failed with Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, the only option left was to abandon the idea of the absolute and accept that the “thing-in-itself” is ultimately inaccessible to human knowledge. (Бердяев 1899b, 78–79)

In his 1899 review of the Russian translation of Plato’s works by Vladimir Solovyov, Berdyaev writes that idealism has always been connected with Plato: “All the creators of idealistic systems—be it Kant, Schopenhauer, Hegel, or any other—have undoubtedly borrowed something from him.”⁸ (Бердяев 1899c, 88) Berdyaev emphasizes that from this point of view, Plato has always proven to be exceptionally important for the study of the history of philosophy.

In 1900, Berdyaev published an article on Friedrich Albert Lange and critical philosophy in relation to socialism in the Marxist journal *Die Neue Zeit*, edited by Karl Kautsky. Still within the Marxist milieu, he sought to connect Kant’s critique with Marxist theory. In this essay, Berdyaev reflects

-- являются чем-то прочно установленным, законченным, а не продолжающим развиваться’.”

⁷ “По словам Гегеля, напр[имер], ‘сделаться спинозистом’ есть начало всякого философствования: необходимо окунуть душу в эфир единой субстанции, в которой растворено все, что до сих пор считалось за истину.”

⁸ “Все построители идеалистических систем, будь то Кант, Шопенгауэр, Гегель или кто-либо другой, что-нибудь да позаимствовали у него.”

on dialectics, idealism, and materialism, criticizing Marxist materialism yet acknowledging its roots in the German philosophical tradition from Kant to Hegel. He concludes that the future belongs to neither idealism nor materialism, but to a new, spiritual philosophy that transcends both. (Berdjaev, 1900, 207)

In his 1900 review of the book by university professor of philosophy A. N. Gilyarov, Berdyaev observes that in Russia the intellectual movements of Western Europe are often received with considerable delay and, one might say, in an officially distorted form. He notes that university courses—both in the history of philosophy and in the history of the philosophy of law—devote only the final few hours to thinkers such as Hobbes, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel. (Бердяев 1900а, 106–107)

Nikolai Berdyaev began his vast philosophical oeuvre with the book *Subjectivism and Individualism in Societal Philosophy* (*Субъективизм и индивидуализм в общественной философии*, 1901), a critical study of the Russian publicist and sociologist Nikolai Konstantinovich Mikhailovsky. Written at a time when Berdyaev was still close to Marxist circles, the work already reveals clear signs of his philosophical departure from orthodox Marxism. The book offers a critique of individualistic and subjectivist tendencies in Western social philosophy, particularly those rooted in liberalism and empiricism. Berdyaev examines the relationship between subjectivism, morality, and social solidarity, arguing that a genuine understanding of society cannot be grounded either in abstract individualism or in materialist collectivism. Although he still employs Marxist terminology, the book already displays a spiritual dimension that would later define his thought—the emphasis on freedom, personality, and the spiritual meaning of history. Among other points, Berdyaev notes that Friedrich Engels, drawing on Hegel's philosophy, developed a remarkable doctrine of the unity of freedom and necessity, describing the transition from necessity to freedom and asserting that *freedom is the recognition of necessity*. This conception, popularized in Russia by N. Beltov (the pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin), became the traditional Marxist interpretation of the relation between freedom and necessity in the historical process. Berdyaev, however, takes issue with this view: “We, however, are not adherents of Hegelianism nor of the philosophy of dialectical materialism, and we believe that the views of Engels and

Beltov, as well as the terminology they employ, contain serious epistemological and, more broadly, philosophical shortcomings.”⁹ (Бердяев 2008, 151)

Berdyayev's further departure from Marxism was marked by his participation in the renowned Russian philosophical collection *Problems of Idealism* (*Проблемы идеализма*), which represented a turning point in the development of Russian religious and philosophical thought at the beginning of the twentieth century. Published in Moscow in 1902, the volume brought together a young generation of Russian philosophers and intellectuals who sought to overcome the limitations of positivism and materialism and to renew philosophy as a discipline of idealism and spiritual values. Among the contributors were Nikolai Berdyayev, Sergei Bulgakov, Semyon Frank, Pavel Novgorodtsev, Bogdan Kistiakovsky, and others. Their essays were directed toward a critique of positivism, empiricism, and Marxism, and a return to the metaphysical and ethical dimensions of thought. *Problems of Idealism* is often regarded as the manifesto of the “Russian religious-philosophical renaissance”, an intellectual movement that profoundly shaped Russian culture at the turn of the century and influenced many major philosophers, including Berdyayev himself. His “apostasy”, like that of the so-called “legal Marxists”, stemmed from a recognition of the necessity of a religious and metaphysical foundation for the values of human freedom and dignity. At this stage, Berdyayev turned toward metaphysics and gradually moved away from positivism, ceasing, in the philosophical sense, to be a Marxist. In his essay “The Ethical Problem in the Light of Philosophical Idealism” (“Этическая проблема в свете философского идеализма”), Berdyayev discusses the idea that the moral life of the individual is not an isolated one: each person, when acting morally, becomes a channel through which the universal moral order is realized. On the personal level, we do what is right; yet on a deeper, metaphysical level, this is the manifestation of something greater — the universal good or the world spirit. (Berdyayev 2003, 176) In a footnote, he explains that this is, broadly speaking, Hegel's metaphysics, and in particular his philosophy of history, which, as Berdyayev writes, “in essence has never been refuted”. He further notes that Kant offers no indication of how the moral law can or must be realized in human life. By

⁹ “Мы не сторонники гегельянства и философии диалектического материализма и полагаем, что взгляды Энгельса и Бельтова и терминология, к которой они прибегают, имеют крупные гносеологические и вообще философские недостатки. Великие стремления и традиции германского идеализма в марксизме не осуществились, а погибли, оборвались.”

contrast, “Fichte and Hegel was a big step forward, for it advanced the question about the realization of the moral good in history”. (Berdyaev 2003, 178) Berdyaev argues that raising this question leads toward a philosophy of progress, which Kant had only superficially suggested. In this way, the individual moral problem becomes a social problem. Nevertheless, the essay as a whole shows that Berdyaev regarded Hegel’s conception of the ethical principle—as the rational expression of the universal spirit—as one that results in an abstract and collectivist ethics, neglecting individual freedom and moral responsibility. According to Berdyaev, Hegel’s dialectic, which seeks the reconciliation of contradictions within the abstract mind, cannot encompass true freedom of will or the moral autonomy of the individual. This perspective laid the groundwork for Berdyaev’s later philosophy, which emphasizes freedom, personal responsibility, and spiritual autonomy as the key elements of ethical life.

During the transitional period from his Neo-Kantian and Marxist interests to religious and philosophical themes, Berdyaev wrote in 1903 a review of Arthur Kenyon Rogers’s *A Brief Introduction to Modern Philosophy*. He argued that Rogers discussed in greater detail only the systems of Kant and Hegel, yet interpreted both incorrectly. Berdyaev notes that Rogers criticizes Kant’s and Hegel’s philosophies for their alleged individualism, but at the same time he recognizes that Rogers understands Hegel’s philosophy as an unfolding of the meaning of individual experience through its successive development. According to Berdyaev, such a reproach of “individualism” toward Hegel is entirely misplaced, since the concept of the individual in Hegel’s system appears only within the totality of the system itself, and never as an independent philosophical principle. (Бердяев 1903, 91–93)

In his 1903 essay “Critique of Historical Materialism”, Berdyaev develops his early critique of Hegel and Marx, arguing that both thinkers subordinate freedom and personality to the “necessity of the historical process”. Among other things, Berdyaev writes: “The monistic tendency of our cognition with regard to the historical process can be satisfied only by a philosophy of history, which is a part of metaphysics, not of scientific sociology. And here idealism strongly asserts its rights. If Marx has contributed much to sociology, then Hegel can contribute far more to the philosophy of history. Only on the basis of metaphysical idealism can empirical diversity be overcome and understood as the visible manifestation of a unified spiritual reality. But sociology must be positive and realistic, like every science, and therefore historical materialism must abandon its monistic pretensions

— only then can valuable data for sociological science be drawn from this doctrine.”¹⁰ (Бердяев 2002, 124–125)

In essence, Berdyaev here exposes the limitations of both Hegel and Marx: Hegel is metaphysical, yet offers insight into the meaning of history; Marx is more scientific, but when he aspires to metaphysics, he lapses into dogma. Berdyaev’s aim is to establish a balance — science should remain empirical, while metaphysics, or the philosophy of history, should address the spiritual unity of reality.

In 1904, Berdyaev published his article “On the New Russian Idealism” in the journal *Вопросы философии и психологии* (*Questions of Philosophy and Psychology*), one of the most prestigious Russian philosophical and scientific periodicals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The journal served as a central forum for Russian academic philosophy and psychology, featuring contributions from many leading thinkers such as Vladimir Solovyov, Lev Lopatin, Sergei Bulgakov, Semyon Frank, and others. Intellectually, it represented a synthesis of Russian idealism and scientific inquiry, playing a crucial role in the religious-philosophical renaissance that marked early twentieth-century Russian thought. “On the New Russian Idealism” is one of Berdyaev’s key early essays, in which he articulates his own philosophical position within the so-called “new Russian idealism”—a circle of thinkers who sought to revive metaphysical thought in the spirit of freedom and spirituality, in opposition to positivism and Marxism. Berdyaev argues that the fate of metaphysics, and indeed of philosophy as a whole, depends on overcoming two strongholds: that of Kant and that of Hegel—the former representing epistemological idealism, rationalistic despite its critical intent, which pervades modern German philosophy; and the latter representing absolute, abstract idealism, the culmination of Western thought that has led it into a dead end. He insists that this path has been

¹⁰ “Монистическая тенденция нашего познания по отношению к историческому процессу удовлетворяется только философией истории, которая, есть часть метафизики, а не научной социологии. И тут громко заявляет свои права идеализм. Если Маркс много дал социологии, то для философии истории гораздо больше может дать Гегель. Только на почве метафизического идеализма можно преодолеть эмпирическое многообразие, можно понять его как видимое проявление единой духовной реальности. Но социология должна быть позитивна и реалистична, как и всякая наука, и потому исторически материализм должен отбросить свои монистические претензии, только тогда из этого учения можно извлечь ценные данные для социологической науки.” Николай БЕРДЯЕВ, “Критика исторического материализма.”

exhausted and that new directions must be sought: “The Hegelians, in their efforts to find a substratum, that which truly is, and in their desire to escape the stifling atmosphere of abstract concepts, have passed into materialism; in this striving to find firm grounding in matter there was a deep inner logic. Yet, for us, there is no place there.”¹¹ (Бердяев 2002, 177)

Berdyayev maintains that original Russian philosophical thought has provided the deepest and most brilliant critique of Hegelianism and of rationalism in general. The new Russian idealism, as he conceives it, aspires to a metaphysical realism, a concrete spiritualism, and a renewal of integral experience, in which being is immediately given. He sees in this a seed from which Russian philosophy will grow, destined to make its own contribution to world culture. In this context, Berdyayev points out that Boris Nikolaevich Chicherin, the Russian philosopher and jurist, a follower of Hegel, is not close to him, whereas Aleksei Stepanovich Khomyakov, philosopher and poet, is. Berdyayev writes that Khomyakov “offered a brilliant and profound critique of Hegelianism, a critique of rationalism—the original sin of almost all European philosophy—and clearly recognized the necessity of moving from abstract idealism, which turned being into nothingness, to concrete spiritualism.”¹² (Бердяев 2002, 177) It is precisely these beginnings of concrete spiritualism, according to Berdyayev, that make Khomyakov the founder of an independent Russian philosophy—a thinker to whom Berdyayev would later devote several articles and an entire monograph.

In his 1904 article “A. S. Khomyakov as Philosopher” («А. С. Хомяков как философ»), published in *Mir Bozhii*, Berdyayev highlights Khomyakov’s critique of Hegel: “the root of Hegel’s general error lies in the error of the entire school, which took reason as the whole of spirit. The entire school failed to notice that, by taking the concept as the sole foundation of all thought, it destroys the world: for the concept turns every reality subordinated to it into pure, abstract possibility.”¹³ (Бердяев 2002, 219)

¹¹ “Гегельянцы в своих исканиях субстрата, подлежащего, сущего, в желании выйти из удушливой атмосферы абстрактных понятий перешли к материализму, и в этой попытке твердо опереться на материю была глубокая внутренняя логика. Но нам тут нечего делать.”

¹² “...дал блестящую и глубокомысленную критику гегельянства, критику рационализма, этого изначального греха всей почти европейской философии, и ясно сознал необходимость перехода от абстрактного идеализма, превращавшего бытие в ничто, к конкретному спиритуализму.”

¹³ “Корень же общей ошибки Гегеля лежал в ошибке всей школы, принявшей рассудок за целость духа. Вся школа не заметила, что, принимая понятие за единственную

Berdyayev credits Khomyakov with recognizing the dead end of rationalistic and abstract thought, which transforms the world into a “shadow of a shadow.” He agrees with Khomyakov that Hegelianism inevitably leads to materialism, a process that actually unfolded within German philosophy and revealed its inner crisis. Khomyakov, he writes, understood that the so-called Hegelian school inherited only “the factory process of thinking and terminological patterns,” while losing the true spirit of Hegel’s philosophy. Berdyayev notes that the same struggle continues among the new Russian idealists, who, like Khomyakov, sense the futility of rationalism in all its forms: “The only difference is that we now criticize not so much Kant as the Neo-Kantians, not so much Hegel as the Neo-Hegelians, and that we have experienced an even greater number of disappointments.”¹⁴ (Бердяев 2002, 222) He sees in Khomyakov a forerunner of Solovyov’s “mystical perception” and of later efforts to move beyond rationalism and empiricism: “All German criticism, the entire philosophy of the Kantian school, has still remained at the level on which Kant himself placed it.” Berdyayev concludes with a warning that Russian thought must avoid repeating those paths that end in desolation: “Such are the paths of rationalism — the path of Kantianism, which inevitably leads to Hegelianism, and this, in turn, ends in nothingness or in illusory matter.”¹⁵ (Бердяев 2002, 223)

Kuno Fischer, the German philosopher and historian of philosophy, is best known for his monumental *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*, which traces modern thought from Bacon and Descartes to Hegel. In 1905, Berdyayev reviewed Fischer’s work, focusing on his method of combining historical narrative with systematic idealism. He recognizes in Fischer a characteristic expression of the German idealist tradition and especially underscores the close connection between Hegel and Fischer. While admiring Fischer’s erudition and coherence, Berdyayev criticizes his rationalistic interpretation and argues that the history of philosophy must also convey the living, creative spirit that animates ideas. (Бердяев 1905a, 92–95)

In his 1905 review of Franz Jodl’s *Ludwig Feuerbach: Sein Leben und seine Lehre*, Berdyayev reflects on Feuerbach’s role as a transitional figure between

основу всего мышления, разрушает мир: ибо понятие обращает всякую ему подлежащую действительность в чистую, отвлеченную возможность.”

¹⁴ “Разница лишь в том, что мы критикуем теперь не столько Канта, сколько неокантианцев; не столько Гегеля, сколько неогегельянцев, и пережили еще большее количество разочарований.”

¹⁵ “Таковы пути рационализма, путь кантианства, с роковой неизбежностью ведущих к гегельянству, упирающемуся в ничто или призрачное вещество.”

German idealism—especially Hegel—and nineteenth-century materialism and humanistic atheism. He sympathizes with Feuerbach’s affirmation of human dignity but criticizes his reduction of humanity to mere biological existence. For Berdyaev, Feuerbach was a symptom of his time rather than a philosophical model. He stresses that Feuerbach’s thought can be understood only in relation to Hegel’s system, though Berdyaev ultimately follows neither Hegel’s nor Feuerbach’s path. (Бердяев 1905b, 132–134)

Not only in his literary but also in his organizational activities, Berdyaev gradually distanced himself from the Marxist narrative and drew ever closer to the philosophical and religious milieu. In 1904, he joined the editorial board of the journal *New Way* (*Новый путь*), which was one of the centers of the so-called *religious-philosophical revival* in early 20th-century Russia. The journal brought together thinkers who sought to unite Christian spirituality with philosophical reflection, while simultaneously criticizing positivism and Marxism, then dominant in intellectual circles. Within this atmosphere, Berdyaev began to shape his fundamental ideas about freedom, spirituality, and personality — concepts that would later define his philosophy. From 1905, together with Sergei Bulgakov, he edited the journal *Problems of Life* (*Вопросы жизни*), which deepened this line of religious and philosophical inquiry. Although short-lived, the journal became an important center of the new Russian idealism and a vibrant forum for dialogue on the relationship between faith, science, philosophy, and society, leaving a lasting mark on the spiritual climate of pre-revolutionary Russia.

In the article “The Catechesis of Marxism” («Катехизис марксизма»), published in the journal *Problems of Life* in 1905, Berdyaev criticizes Marxist dialectics, “which arose from Hegelian dialectics and bears its fatal imprint.”¹⁶ (Бердяев 2002, 267)

In his 1905 review, Berdyaev examines Avenarius and Lunacharsky’s attempt to make his work accessible to a broader audience. He analyzes three approaches to the synthesis of empiricism and idealism: Avenarius’s theory of “pure experience,” Lunacharsky’s interpretation, and Holzapfel’s “panidealism.” Berdyaev emphasizes that *The Critique of Pure Experience* imposes demands on the reader that are almost greater than those of Hegel’s *Logic*, which helps explain why efforts emerged to render Avenarius’s teachings more accessible and comprehensible to a wider readership. (Бердяев 1905c, 110–112)

¹⁶ “Марксистская диалектика родилась от диалектики гегельянской и носит на себе ее роковую печать.”

Discussing S. N. Bulgakov's 1907 pamphlet "Karl Marx as a Religious Type", Berdyaev observes: "Marx was a passionate rationalist, a materialist rationalist, and in this he inherited much from Hegel; but he diminished Hegel's great reason, turning it into a small reason. The great aspirations and traditions of German idealism were not realized in Marxism—they disappeared, they were broken off."¹⁷ (Бердяев 2008, 325) He explains that the limit of rationalism reached by Hegel became the starting point of Marxism, whose voluntarism remained imbued with faith in the rationality of the material and social process. Berdyaev notes that what spiritually links Marx to Hegel is the rationalistic schematization of history—the "logization" of material life. Yet, as he writes, "in his philosophical spirit, Hegel stands many heads above Marx—for in him one feels the breath of eternal idealism. But the impasse of Hegelianism, which had lost its real substratum, found one of its outlets in Marx's pan-logical materialism"¹⁸ (Бердяев 2008, 325) Berdyaev concludes that Bulgakov was right to reject any attempt to establish a true continuity between Marx and Hegel.

In *The New Religious Consciousness and Society* (1907), Berdyaev adopts a critical stance toward Marxism, viewing it as a form of rationalistic faith and a distortion of Hegel's approach. He writes: "Marxism believes in the logic of matter, relies on the rationality of the development of material productive forces, materializes Hegel's panlogism, but rejects the Logos, turning its gaze away from the meaning of the world."¹⁹ (Бердяев 1907, 90)

Reflecting on P. B. Struve's *Great Russia* (1908), later included in *The Spiritual Crisis of the Intelligentsia* (1910), Berdyaev notes that Struve's analytical and modern method is nevertheless inspired by Hegel's deification of the state as the expression of the Absolute Spirit. This Hegelian pathos, he argues, leads Struve toward an apology for modern imperialism—an illusion transparent to those who have spiritually overcome the temptation of power. Berdyaev therefore asks: "Struve is, by his moral, philosophical,

¹⁷ "Маркс был страстным рационалистом, материалистическим рационалистом, и в этом многое получил от Гегеля, но умалил большой разум Гегеля, превратил его в малый."

¹⁸ "По философскому своему духу Гегель многими головами выше Маркса, в нем чувствуется дыхание вечного идеализма, но безысходность гегельянства, потерявшего реальный субстрат, нашла себе один из исходов в марксовском панлогическом материализме."

¹⁹ "Марксизм верит в логику материи, полагается на рациональность развития материальных производительных сил, материализует гегелевский панлогизм, а Логос отрицает, от Смысла мира отворачивается."

and probably religious convictions, an extreme individualist, and it is very unclear how he reconciles his individualistic faith with the Hegelian deification of the state.”²⁰ (Бердяев 1910, 122)

In the article “Philosophical Truth and the Justice of the Intelligentsia”, originally published in 1909 in the collection *Landmarks (Вехи)*, Berdyaev adopts a critical stance toward Hegel’s rationalism and abstract idealism, which he sees as the final yet exhausted stage of Western European philosophy. In contrast, he regards Russian philosophy as more fruitful and profound, since it aspires to concrete idealism, mystical ontology, and the union of knowledge and faith. Berdyaev emphasizes: “But German idealism stopped at the stage of ultimate abstraction and ultimate rationalism, which Hegel brought to completion. Russian philosophers, beginning with Khomyakov, sharply criticized Hegel’s abstract idealism and rationalism, and turned not to empiricism, not to neo-criticism, but to concrete idealism, to ontological realism, to the mystical supplementation of the reason of European philosophy, which had lost its living being.”²¹ (Бердяев 1910, 188) Incidentally, in the famous anthology *Landmarks (Вехи)*, the Russian intelligentsia was sharply criticized for its revolutionary political tendencies and was called upon to reconsider its spiritual and philosophical orientation. The publication sparked an intense public debate; within just a few months, *Landmarks* went through five editions, and the warnings expressed in the collection proved to mark a turning point in modern Russian intellectual history.

Already in this period, the radical left wing of the Russian intelligentsia — the increasingly powerful movement gathered around Lenin’s *Iskra* and other socialist publications — completely rejected Nikolai Berdyaev and the thinkers of the Russian spiritual renaissance. Lev Davidovich Bronstein, better known as Leon Trotsky, had already in 1901, in his article “Two Literary Souls in the Power of the Metaphysical Devil” (“Две писательские души во власти метафизического беса»), delivered a sharp and sarcastic

²⁰ “Струве по своим морально — философским и, вероятно, религиозным убеждениям крайний индивидуалист, и очень неясно, как он соединяет свою индивидуалистическую веру с гегелевским обоготворением государства.”

²¹ “Но германский идеализм остановился на стадии крайней отвлеченности и крайнего рационализма, завершенного Гегелем. Русские философы, начиная с Хомякова, дали острую критику отвлеченного идеализма и рационализма Гегеля и переходили не к эмпиризму, не к неокритицизму, а к конкретному идеализму, к онтологическому реализму, к мистическому восполнению разума европейской философией, потерявшего живое бытие.”

critique of the return to metaphysics and the “spiritual rebirth” of the Russian intelligentsia after its disillusionment with liberal positivism. Trotsky mocked their attempt to rediscover “eternal truths” and “the meaning of life” through metaphysical philosophy, viewing it as an intellectual escape from reality and as a disguise for social passivity under the mask of moral language. He portrayed Berdyaev as a self-proclaimed prophet of transcendental consciousness, hiding behind lofty rhetoric to avoid responsibility and real social engagement. The clearest expression of Trotsky’s disdain for Berdyaev can be found in the following passage: “He projects his own moral judgment onto the canvas of ‘transcendental ethical consciousness’ and presents himself not as an independent evaluator acting at his own risk, but as a mere acolyte in the temple of objective truth.”²² (Троцкий 1926b, 198) With this biting irony, Trotsky made it clear that he regarded Berdyaev as a hypocritical idealist, who, instead of confronting real social conflicts, fled into metaphysical abstractions and moral posturing. In his later essay “The Idealistic Spectrum” (“Идеалистическая гамма”, 1903), Trotsky attacks the contemporary Russian intelligentsia, which, instead of engaging in social struggle, indulged in a “spiritual revival”. Philosophers such as Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and Merezhkovsky were, for Trotsky, symbols of reaction — figures who preached humility to the people while offering the ruling classes justification in the form of “Christian theosophy”. He was particularly scathing toward Berdyaev, whom he ridiculed as an idealist proud to have “moved forward — in the direction of metaphysical idealism and spiritualism”. Trotsky quotes Berdyaev’s own words: “Exactly like Mr. Berdyaev, who teaches us that one must not surrender ‘one’s right to the image and likeness of divinity’ for any goods of this world, nor for happiness and satisfaction, nor for power and fame in life”.²³ (Троцкий 1926a, 62) Trotsky uses this quotation with deliberate irony — as evidence that Berdyaev’s “spirituality” was nothing more than an escape from reality. In the conclusion of the essay, Trotsky mocks the entire idealist movement as a “complete idealistic scale” that ultimately serves the social order: “This is the full idealistic scale. [...] And the World Spirit looks down from the

²² “Он проецирует свою личную моральную оценку на полотно ‘трансцендентального этического сознания’ и рекомендует себя при этом не как действующего за свой собственный счет и страх оценщика, а как простого послушника в храме объективной истины.”

²³ “Точь-в-точь, как и г. Бердяев, который учит нас, что ‘своего права на образ и подобие божества’ нельзя уступить ни за какие блага мира, ни за счастье и довольство, ни за власть и славу в жизни.”

temple upon the little, bewildered Mr. Berdyaev — and laughs ironically”.²⁴ (Троцкий 1926а, 63) A few years later, Trotsky, speaking on behalf of the Marxists, emphasized that mysticism was of no use to them, that they refused to believe in “Kyev witches,” unlike Berdyaev. As he wrote: “Mr. Berdyaev began from the lofty heights of mysticism, yet ended up believing in a witch — on her broomstick and with a tail — and now, together with the civil servant Lebedev (do you remember him from Dostoevsky?), he earnestly insists that disbelief in witches ‘is a French idea, a light-minded idea’.”²⁵ (Троцкий 1926b, 279) Berdyaev and religious consciousness were again the main targets of attack in Trotsky’s text “Aristotle and the Horologion” (“Аристотель и часослов”). For Trotsky, the “intelligentsia mysticism” to which Berdyaev belonged was the product of unfortunate historical circumstances, as he wrote: “Everything here is contrived, calculated, deliberate. Their faith is individualistic, conditional, fragile, purely verbal — entirely composed of aesthetic and philological combinations, Greek quotations, literary allegories, and Nietzschean aphorisms”.²⁶ (Троцкий 1926b, 288) Vladimir Ilyich Lenin likewise regarded Berdyaev as a “liberal renegade” and an ideologist of bourgeois idealism who undermined the Marxist worldview and compromised the revolutionary movement. In his 1909 article “Concerning Vekhi”, Lenin described the collection *Landmarks* as an “encyclopaedia of liberal renegacy”, accusing its authors of: 1. the struggle against the ideological principles of the whole world outlook of Russian (and international) democracy; 2. repudiation and vilification of the liberation movement of recent years; 3. an open proclamation of its “flunkey” sentiments (and a corresponding “flunkey” policy) in relation to the Octobrist bourgeoisie, the old regime and the entire old Russia in general. (Lenin 1977, 124)

²⁴ “Ето она полная идеалистическая гамма. [...] А Всемирный Дух смотрит на маленького, растерянного г. Бердяева — и иронически смеется.”

²⁵ “Вон г. Бердяев начал с больших мистических высот, а кончил все-таки верой в ведьму — на помеле и с хвостом — и нынче вместе с чиновником Лебедевым (помните, у Достоевского?) убежденно твердит, что неверие в ведьму «есть французская мысль, есть легкая мысль.”

²⁶ “Здесь все надумано, рассчитано, умышленно. Здесь вера индивидуалистична, условна, хрупка, словесна, целиком состоит из эстетических и филологических комбинаций, греческих цитат, литературных аллегорий, ницшеанских афоризмов.”

2. The Second Period (1910–1922)

The Philosophy of Freedom: An Essay in Christian Metaphysics (*Философия свободы: Опыт христианской метафизики*, 1911) is one of Nikolai Berdyaev's early yet seminal works. In this book, he for the first time systematically presents his own philosophical position, which he would continue to develop throughout his life — the idea of freedom as the ontological foundation of being, more primordial even than God Himself. For Berdyaev, freedom is not a socio-political concept but the primordial element of existence, from which both the world and God arise. The work is profoundly antideterministic, opposing every form of necessity and all systems that constrain human spiritual and creative freedom. At the same time, it is a work of Christian metaphysics, since freedom leads toward God — not through dogmatic theology, but through inner, spiritual experience. *The Philosophy of Freedom* is regarded as Berdyaev's first truly original book: before it, he had published collections of essays and collaborated in philosophical anthologies, but this work represents his first systematic and independently conceived philosophical treatise.

Berdyaev begins by asserting that philosophy is undergoing a deep crisis — reflective thought has reached a dead end, and the creative power of reason has dried up. Faith in philosophy has been shaken: “The last true believer was Hegel, perhaps the greatest philosopher in the proper sense of the word. In Hegelianism philosophy reached its self-deification — it was the unprecedented arrogance of abstract, self-sufficient reason. Hegel was the greatest and the last of the Gnostic rationalists. Instead of the living God, Hegel worshipped his own philosophical gnosis, his abstract reason. And when Hegel turned philosophy into an idol, philosophy was overthrown; it fell lower than ever before in the history of human self-consciousness. Materialism was the Nemesis of Hegelianism, God's punishment for the sin of idolatry and self-deification.”²⁷(Бердяев 1989, 17)

²⁷ “Последним подлинно верующим был Гегель, быть может, величайший из философов в собственном смысле этого слова. В гегельянстве философия дошла до самообожествления, гегельянство — невиданная гордыня отвлеченного философствующего разума. Гегель был величайшим и последним из гностиков-рационалистов. Вместо живого Бога поклонился Гегель своему философскому гнозису, отвлеченному своему разуму. И после того как философия была превращена Гегелем в идол, философия была свергнута, она пала так низко, как не падала еще никогда в истории человеческого самосознания. Материализм был Немезидой гегельянства, Божьей карой за грех идолосотворения и идолопоклонения.”

Berdyayev maintains that religion can exist without philosophy, but philosophy cannot exist without religion. Philosophy, he writes, “needs religion as nourishment, as the source of living water.” Religion is the vital foundation of philosophy, for “religion feeds philosophy with real being.” Philosophy, he continues, cannot aspire to total unity or self-sufficiency, as Hegel claimed; rather, it must remain a partial and organically subordinate sphere. Berdyayev also criticizes Vladimir Solovyov, arguing that he contributed to the misunderstanding that a universal philosophical synthesis or philosophical attainment of unity might be possible — an idea that, in Berdyayev’s view, reflects the lingering influence of Hegelianism in Solovyov’s thought. (Бердяев 1989, 20)

Berdyayev observes that concepts such as rational reality, rational freedom, and rational personality are merely “phantoms of abstract, self-sufficient thought”. Even German Idealism of the early nineteenth century — despite its creative force — failed to address the essential problems of philosophy: “Fichte and Hegel, as idealists and rationalists, denied reality; they recognized freedom only superficially and illusorily, and in their ontology there was no place for the concrete person.”²⁸ (Бердяев 1989, 22) In pantheistic idealism, he adds, “as in an ocean, both personality and freedom, as well as concrete reality, are drowned.”

Following the Protestant Reformation, Berdyayev argues, the human person felt separated from objective being, withdrawn into self-reflection and losing contact with the “sap of being.” On this foundation, the entire German philosophy developed: in Kant, it reached the height of subjective introspection; in Hegel, it turned into “false, rationalistic objectivity”; and in Schelling, it made an incomplete attempt to open itself toward the breadth of the world soul. Protestantism, by severing its link with objective being, “relocated man into the world of inner subjectivity and thus gave birth to an ultimate, abstract spirituality”. Berdyayev concludes: “The pathos of Protestantism is permeated with false spirituality”.²⁹ (Бердяев 1989, 34)

He further claims that confidence in absolute science has been undermined, and that few any longer believe in abstract philosophy. Once again he links this decline to Hegel: “Hegel was the last great Gnostic; he deified philosophy and turned it into a religion. The collapse of Hegelianism, that

²⁸ “Фихте и Гегель идеалистически и рационалистически отрицали реальность, утверждали свободу лишь призрачно и иллюзорно, в онтологии их не осталось места для конкретной личности.”

²⁹ “Пафос протестантизма полон ложной духовности.”

titanic arrogance of philosophy, was at the same time the crisis of abstract philosophy — the downfall of rationalism. Rationalism limits experience and opposes the divine reason. European thought has passed from the abstract rationalism of Hegel's type to materialism and empiricism, seeking in 'experience' the lost living being. Yet in that experience, being cannot be found. Materialism is the poorest form of ontology."³⁰ (Бердяев 1989, 67–68).

For Berdyaev, the dangers of psychologism and anthropologism threaten only those unable to perform the act of self-renunciation, through which a person unites himself with the universal reason. The Divine Logos, he writes, lives and acts "only in the Church, in its mystical and universal organism"; outside the Church there is no catholicity, no great reason. German Idealism, in his view, never penetrated this truth: though it exalted the idea of universal reason, it still bore the seed of Protestant individualism. "Even Hegel did not overcome anthropologism and psychologism, for his Logos was not ecclesial — his path of philosophizing was rationalistic. Even Schelling was too rational a Gnostic. Therefore, German Idealism, despite its great significance, revealed the impotence of dialectical thought in its final conclusions — it exposed the self-destruction of reason as a rationalistic principle."³¹ (Бердяев 1989, 74). In his critique of Hermann Cohen, the Neo-Kantian philosopher, Berdyaev remarks that for Cohen, "scientific vocation is being itself." This, he argues, drives Neo-Kantianism back toward Hegelianism, since "Hegel forever remains the model of demonic and titanic rationalism."³² (Бердяев 1989, 78)

³⁰ "Гегель был последним великим гностиком; он обоготворил философию, превратил ее в религию. Крушение гегельянства, этой титанической гордыни философии, было вместе с тем кризисом отвлеченной философии, поражением рационализма. Рационализм ограничивает опыт, и противится божественному разуму. Европейская мысль перешла от отвлеченного рационализма Гегеля к материализму и эмпиризму, искала в «опыте» утерянное живое бытие. Но в этом «опыте» нельзя найти бытия. Материализм есть самая несостоятельная форма онтологии."

³¹ "Даже Гегель не преодолел антропологизма и психологизма, потому что его Логос не был церковен, его путь философствования был рационалистический. Даже Шеллинг был слишком рациональным гностиком. Поэтому германский идеализм, значение которого огромно показал лишь бессилие диалектической мысли в конечных ее выводах, он обнаружил саморазложение разума как начала рационалистического."

³² "Гегель остается навеки образцом демонического и титанического рационализма."

Berdyayev adds that rationalistic abstraction afflicts not only Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hegel, but equally Kant, Hume, and the entire critical philosophy. (Бердяев 1989, 100)

In his critique of Neo-Kantianism, Berdyayev writes: “Kant is great, and his significance in the history of philosophical thought is immense — not because he gave rise to Neo-Kantianism, but because he gave birth to the philosophy of Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling.”³³ (Бердяев 1989, 101) He then goes on to emphasize: “The ultimate limit of the inner development of Kant’s philosophy is Hegel, not Cohen or Rickert.”³⁴ (Бердяев 1989, 101) Berdyayev thus rejects the Neo-Kantian attempt to revive Kant’s critical philosophy in a purely epistemological or scientific sense. For him, the true continuation of Kant’s legacy lies not in the formalism of the Marburg or Baden schools, but in the creative, metaphysical expansion undertaken by German Idealism—above all by Hegel, who represents the culmination, though also the exhaustion, of that inner philosophical trajectory.

Berdyayev published his book *Aleksei Stepanovich Khomyakov* in 1912. The work represents a kind of homage, but not in the form of a simple apologetic or ideological treatise. Rather, it is a philosophical and spiritual reinterpretation of Khomyakov and Slavophilism in the light of Berdyayev’s own personalist and spiritual-existential thought. Although Berdyayev himself was not a Slavophile, he believed that the Slavophiles creatively transformed, within the Russian national spirit, the intellectual movements that had arisen at the heights of European and world culture. According to him, they had, more successfully than the Westernizers, absorbed and reworked European philosophy — “they passed through Schelling and Hegel, those summits of contemporary European thought.”³⁵ (Бердяев 1912, 3) Berdyayev emphasizes that the main achievement of the Slavophiles did not consist in their supposed independence from Western influences or in any exclusive reliance on the Eastern tradition. Rather, it lay in the fact that they were the first to approach Western ideas creatively and independently, and that they “dared to enter the circulation of world cultural life”. He explains: “The significance of the Slavophiles is not to be sought in the fact that they did

³³ “Кант велик, и значение его в истории философской мысли огромно не потому, что он породил неокантианство, а потому, что породил философию Фихте, Гегеля и Шеллинга.”

³⁴ “Пределом спутренного развития философии Канта остается Гегель, а не Коен или Рикерт...”

³⁵ “...прошли через Шеллинга и Гегеля – эти вершины европейской мысли той эпохи.”

not wish to know of Hegel and Schelling, nor in the fact that they were uninfluenced by them, but rather in that they sought creatively to rework Hegel and Schelling, approached them independently, and thus spoke their own word in the development of philosophical thought.”³⁶ (Бердяев 1912, 3–4) Berdyaev therefore insists that one cannot deny the influence of Schelling and Hegel on the Slavophiles, nor can one overlook that Slavophilism belonged to the worldwide ‘Romantic’ reaction at the beginning of the nineteenth century against the rationalism of the eighteenth. According to Berdyaev, independent Russian philosophy begins with the critique of Hegel’s abstract idealism and advances toward concrete idealism — the original fruit of Russian thought. Overcoming Hegelianism, with its “titanic arrogance and titanic power of philosophy”, was the task undertaken by Kireevsky and Khomyakov. For Berdyaev, the overcoming of Hegel also meant overcoming every abstract and rationalistic philosophy, a challenge addressed to the very spirit of Western culture. Khomyakov saw in Hegel the spirit of Cushitism, a spirit that rejects free creativity: “Hegelianism is the summit of the entire Western path of development, the final stage — beyond it lies only an empty abyss”.³⁷ (Бердяев 1912, 117)

The collapse of Hegel’s philosophy, according to Khomyakov, signified a crisis of philosophy itself. “The general error of the whole school, says Khomyakov, which appeared dimly in its founder Kant and was sharply revealed in its completer Hegel, consists in having identified the ceaseless movement of the concept in the subjective sense with the movement of reality itself.”³⁸ (Бердяев 1912, 118) The root of this error, according to Khomyakov, lies in the misconception of the whole school that took reason to be the entirety of spirit.

As Berdyaev explains Khomyakov’s view, when the concept is taken as the sole foundation of thought, the world itself is destroyed: every reality subjected to the concept is reduced to pure, abstract possibility. Khomyakov,

³⁶ “Значение славянофилов нужно искать не в том, что они не хотели знать Гегеля и Шеллинга и не испытали на себе их влияния, а в том, что они творчески пытались переработать Гегеля и Шеллинга, самостоятельно к ним отнеслись и сказали тем своё слово в развитии философской мысли.”

³⁷ “Гегельянство – вершина всего западного пути развития, последняя ступень, дальше – пустая бездна.”

³⁸ “Общая ошибка всей школы, ещё неясно выдающаяся в её основателе – Канте и резко характеризующая её довершителя – Гегеля, состоит в том, что она постоянно принимает движение понятия в личном понимании за тождественное с движением самой действительности (всей реальности).”

he adds, foretold the inevitable transition of Hegel's abstract idealism into materialism.

Hegel did not live to see the dialectical materialism of Marx, although it was he himself who had engendered it. Khomyakov foresaw the emergence of Marxism, in which 'the factory process of Hegel's mind' would be preserved. The philosophical disgrace of dialectical materialism was the punishment for the sins of rationalism.

Berdyayev here shows how Khomyakov and Kireevsky opened the first genuinely Russian philosophical position, one that transcends the rationalism of the West; how they saw in Hegel the ultimate outcome of the 'philosophy of reason', which sought to construct the world from the concept but in doing so lost living being; and how they anticipated materialism and Marxism as the inevitable consequences of Hegel's unsubstantial rationalism.

Kireevsky and Khomyakov understood that German idealist philosophy was the product of Protestantism, that Kant represented one of the stages in the development of Protestant apostasy, and that Hegel was the consummator of Protestant rationalism. According to Berdyayev and these two Slavophiles, "this apostasy from the Church as ontological reality led to the fragmentation of the integral life of the spirit, to the separation of rational-logical thinking from integral reason".³⁹ (Бердяев 1912, 121)

Berdyayev also formulates the difference between Western and Russian thought as he sees it: "Western thought, after the collapse of Hegelianism, seeks being in matter, in sensibility, in positive science. Russian thought seeks being in mystical perception, in religious experience".⁴⁰ (Бердяев 1912, 123)

Berdyayev observes that in German rationalist philosophy, and in Hegel in particular, Khomyakov found neither will nor freedom, for there exists only static reason, not dynamic reason. Khomyakov's voluntarism is not irrational but spiritual and organic — in it, will and reason are one. The law of love is the highest expression of volitional reason; in this way, Khomyakov transforms metaphysics into spiritual ethics.

³⁹ "Отпадение от церкви как живого организма, как онтологической реальности, привело к рассечению целостной жизни духа, к отпадению рассудочно-логического мышления от целостного разума."

⁴⁰ "Западная мысль после крушения гегельянства ищет сущее в материи, в чувственности, в положительной науке. Русская мысль ищет сущее в мистическом восприятии, в религиозном опыте."

Berdyayev concludes: “In the time of Khomyakov, creative thought stood before the task of overcoming Kant and Hegel. Today, creative thought stands before the task of overcoming Neo-Kantianism and Neo-Hegelianism — gods of lesser stature, yet no less powerful”.⁴¹ (Бердяев 1912, 141)

In *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (*Смысл творчества*, 1916), Berdyayev develops his personalist and existential philosophy, arguing that creativity (*творчество*) is the highest expression of human freedom and humanity’s calling to participate in God’s act of creation. For Berdyayev, the human being is not merely a creature, but also a creator — a co-creator with God; it is precisely through free creative activity that man transcends necessity, evil, and death. The work had a profound impact on Russian religious philosophy and on existential thought of the twentieth century, and it continues to be regarded as a manifesto of spiritual freedom and human creative responsibility. Berdyayev observes that the dream of modern philosophy is to become a science — a goal shared by positivists and metaphysicians, materialists and critics alike: “Kant and Hegel, Comte and Spencer, Cohen and Rickert, Wundt and Avenarius — all of them wish philosophy to be a science, or at least to resemble one”.⁴² (Бердяев 1989, 262)

He particularly criticizes Hegel’s philosophy, which, though different from positivism, shares with it the same tendency to elevate philosophy above man: “Hegel thought differently, yet he too believed that philosophy was more real and more absolute than man himself. This philosophy that kills man is an expression of the titanic arrogance of the philosopher — not of man, but of the philosopher himself, and indeed of philosophy itself, of philosophical knowledge as such”.⁴³ (Бердяев 1989, 287) In this, Berdyayev perceives panlogism — the elevation of logic and its categories to the level of absolute being. Yet he also acknowledges that one must recognize in Hegel an enduring truth: for Hegel, knowledge is the development of being — it is ontological. In Hegel’s system, idealism transforms itself into realism.

⁴¹ “Во времена Хомякова творческая мысль стояла перед задачей преодоления Канта и Гегеля. Ныне творческая мысль стоит перед задачей преодоления неокантианства и неогегельянства, богов меньшей величины, но не менее властных.”

⁴² “Кант и Гегель, Конт и Спенсер, Коген и Риккерт, Вундт и Авенариус — все хо тят, чтобы философия была наукой или наукообразной. Философия вечно завидует науке.”

⁴³ “Гегель по-иному, но тоже думал, что философия реальнее и абсолютнее человека. Эта человекоубийствен ная философия есть проявление титанической гордости философа, не человека, а философа, и даже не филосо фа, а самой философии, самого философского позна ния.”

Nevertheless, Berdyaev concludes: “Hegel’s great achievement lay in breaking with formal logic. In Hegel’s titanic attempt, philosophy reached its ultimate limit, and thereafter began its descent, its fall, the collapse of philosophy.”⁴⁴ (Бердяев 1989, 287)

The Fate of Russia (Судьба России, 1918) was written in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and stands as both a philosophical and prophetic reflection on the spiritual foundations and historical destiny of Russia. In this work, Berdyaev interprets the revolution not merely as a political upheaval, but as a profound spiritual crisis of the Russian people — the outcome of an inner rupture between spirit and matter, between freedom and collective necessity. Instead of calling for a return to ideology or violence, Berdyaev urges a spiritual renewal of Russia through the revival of the free and creative spirit of Orthodoxy. The significance of this book lies in its role in laying the groundwork for Berdyaev’s philosophy of Russian messianism — his vision of Russia as a nation with a special spiritual mission, yet also as a nation crucified between East and West. In this work, Berdyaev also reflects on a distinctive aspect of the German spirit, which, in its deepest essence, strives to recreate the world anew from within itself: the true, profound German always seeks, after rejecting the world as something dogmatically imposed and critically unexamined, to recreate it anew out of himself — out of his own spirit, will, and feeling. According to Berdyaev, this tendency of the German mind first took shape in the mysticism of Meister Eckhart, continued through Luther and Protestantism, and found its most powerful philosophical expression in the great German idealism — in Kant and Fichte, and, in a different way, in Hegel and Eduard von Hartmann. (Бердяев 1918, 169)

During the same period, Berdyaev compiled a collection of essays titled *The Spiritual Foundations of the Russian Revolution: Essays from 1917–1918* (Духовные основы русской революции. Опыты 1917–1918 гг.). The work was written immediately after the October Revolution, between 1917 and 1918. It was most likely never officially published as a public edition due to political circumstances and censorship, and is known primarily from manuscript and archival sources. Some parts of the text were later incorporated into Berdyaev’s subsequent works. In bibliographies, this collection is listed as a series of essays written in 1917–1918, which already

⁴⁴ “Великая заслуга Гегеля — его разрыв с формальной логикой. В титанической попытке Гегеля философия достигает предельной точки, и после этого начинается спуск, падение, крах философии.”

reveal the central themes that would come to define Berdyaev's mature philosophy — namely, the spiritual, religious, and moral roots of revolution. In these writings, Berdyaev seeks to interpret the Russian Revolution not merely as a political event, but as a spiritual phenomenon. He argues that the revolution was not only the result of social injustice, but also the consequence of the spiritual illness of the Russian intelligentsia, which had rejected God and absolute values. For Berdyaev, the revolution signified a spiritual catastrophe — the perversion of freedom into destruction. The Russian people, he claims, did not find liberation in the revolution, but rather a new kind of bondage — material and collectivist. The collection represents a spiritual and philosophical continuation of *The Fate of Russia* (1918) and a precursor to the anthology *From the Depths* (1918), sharing with them both the tone of self-criticism of the Russian intelligentsia and the tragic reflection on the meaning of revolution. *The Spiritual Foundations of the Russian Revolution* thus marks Berdyaev's first attempt at a religious-philosophical interpretation of revolution, a theme that would later become central to his thought in exile.

The essays clearly reveal Berdyaev's intellectual transformation — from a social philosopher to a religious existentialist. In one of them, discussing socialism within the context of the Russian Revolution, Berdyaev writes: “The Marxist theory of collapse (*Zusammenbruchstheorie*) was constructed according to the Hegelian dialectical scheme. Yet this theory still showed more respect for the fact of social evolution than did Mr. Lenin and most Russian Social Democrats, who essentially combine old Russian populism with old Russian rebelliousness”.⁴⁵ (Бердяев 1998, 26–27) The term “*Zusammenbruchstheorie*” (German for *theory of collapse*) refers to the Marxist idea that the capitalist system will inevitably undergo internal economic breakdown due to its own inherent contradictions.

The anthology *From the Depths* (*Из глубины*), published in 1918 in Moscow, was a collective work of Russian religious philosophers who sought to provide a spiritual and moral interpretation of the catastrophe of the Russian Revolution. Among its contributors were Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Semyon Frank, Georgy Florovsky, and others. The collection was

⁴⁵ “Марксистская *Zusammenbruchstheorie* была построена по гегелевской диалектической схеме. Но в этой теории было все-таки больше уважения к факту социальной эволюции, чем у г. Ленина и большей части русских социал-демократов, которые в сущности соединяют старое русское народничество со старым русским бунтарством.”

conceived as a “cry from the spiritual depths” — an attempt to discover the deeper meaning of the Revolution as a spiritual crisis of the Russian people and of civilization itself. Shortly after its publication, however, the book was banned. The Bolsheviks regarded it as a reactionary and counterrevolutionary work, since its authors criticized the spirit of the Revolution — its atheism, violence, and moral disintegration accompanying the revolutionary upheaval. In this anthology, published in 1918, Berdyaev contributed an essay titled “The Spirits of the Russian Revolution” (“*Духи русской революции*”), though in this particular article he does not refer to Hegel.

In his last article before exile, published in the anthology *Oswald Spengler and the Decline of Europe* (*Освальд Шпенглер и закат Европы*, 1922), Nikolai Berdyaev employs the figure of Faust — the symbol of Western man — to convey the spiritual crisis of European culture in the aftermath of the First World War. For Berdyaev, Spengler’s diagnosis of the decline of the West is merely a symptom of the end of an era. According to Berdyaev, culture is no longer a living spiritual reality, but rather “a flower that has already withered”. The “Faustian soul”, which for centuries had sought infinity and creation, has lost the light of the Logos and the Christian sun — it has lost its religious foundation. Spengler, Berdyaev observes, senses this deeply, yet he perceives only the downfall and the inevitability of cultural death, not the possibility of its transformation into a new spiritual reality. Berdyaev acknowledges Spengler’s great intuition and genius in discerning the crisis, but nevertheless calls him a “blind man”: Spengler sees decadence, but not the spiritual light that might overcome decline. In this context, Berdyaev compares him to Hegel, who still possessed a Christian philosophy of history, one imbued with a sense of purpose and a conscious subject of history, whereas Spengler is already immersed in a civilization without God: “Hegel still had a Christian philosophy of history — in his own way no less Christian than the philosophy of history of Blessed Augustine. It recognizes a single subject of history and the meaning of history. It is wholly permeated with the reflection of the Christian sun. Spengler no longer possesses these reflections. Hegel belongs to a culture that has a religious foundation; Spengler already feels himself to be part of a civilization that has lost its religious foundation.”⁴⁶ (Бердяев 1922, 32) The essay “The

⁴⁶ “У Гегеля была еще христианская философия истории, в своем роде не менее христианская, чем философия истории Бл. Августина. Она знает единый субъект истории и смысл истории. Она вся светится отсветом христианского солнца. У Шпенглера нет уже этих отсветов. Гегель принадлежит культуре, имеющей

Deathbed Thoughts of Faust” is not only a critique of Spengler, but also Berdyaev’s own philosophical meditation on the end of an epoch and the need for Europe’s spiritual resurrection. The article holds multiple layers of significance: in it, Berdyaev simultaneously anticipates his later existential and spiritual pessimism while affirming faith in the possibility of metaphysical renewal, articulates his fundamental conviction that a culture without a religious foundation is doomed to perish, and at the same time marks the transition between his Russian and émigré phases, having been written immediately before his expulsion in 1922.

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Berdyaev had already become suspect to the left-wing intellectual circles gathered around Lenin, who regarded him as a renegade from Marxism and an ideological adversary. After 1917, the conflict with the Bolshevik regime became inevitable. In 1922, the Soviet authorities carried out one of the most notorious ideological expulsions in modern Russian history — the so-called “philosophers’ ship” (*Философский пароход*). Acting on Lenin’s direct orders, more than a hundred Russian philosophers, theologians, and scientists were deported from the country for their “hostility to Soviet power”. This event was not merely a political act, but a symbolic end of an entire epoch of Russian spiritual culture — a time when philosophy still believed in the possibility of free and creative thought. Berdyaev’s exile marked the conclusion of the period characterized by his critical dialogue with Hegel and Marxism, and the beginning of a new, existential-personalist phase of his thought. In a letter to the Politburo in the spring of 1922, Lenin demanded ruthless measures against “reactionary professors and intellectuals”, calling for their deportation as a preventive step. (Gregory 2008, 84) The operation was executed by GPU⁴⁷ leaders Felix Dzerzhinsky and Lev Kamenev, while Leon Trotsky cynically referred to the act as an expression of “far-sighted humanity”: “Those elements whom we are sending or will send (abroad) are politically worthless in themselves. But they are potential weapons in the hands of our possible enemies. In the event of new military complications

религиозную основу, Шпенглер чувствует себя уже перешедшим в цивилизацию, утерявшую религиозную основу.”

⁴⁷ GPU (State Political Directorate, Государственное политическое управление) — formed in 1922 as the Main Political Directorate under the NKVD of the Russian SFSR. The successor to the *Свека* (*Всероссийская чрезвычайная комиссия*), the GPU was the main Soviet security agency in the early years of the Bolshevik regime, overseeing censorship, surveillance, and the deportation of intellectuals on the so-called “philosophers’ ship”.

– and these, despite all our love of peace, are not ruled out – all these unreconciled and incorrigible elements will turn into military-political agents of the enemy. And we will be forced to shoot them according to the regulations of war. This is why we prefer in a peaceful period to send them away in good time. And I hope that you won't refuse to accept our far-sighted humanity and will take it upon yourself to defend it in the face of public opinion". (Chamberlain, 2008, 121) Two ships, *Oberbürgermeister Haken* and *Preussen*, carried from Petrograd to Stettin more than 160 intellectuals, among them Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Semyon Frank, Ivan Ilyin, and Pitirim Sorokin. The official Soviet announcement declared that "counterrevolutionary elements" had been expelled, but the true purpose was the elimination of all forms of independent thought. The expulsion of 1922 thus marked the culmination of a long ideological conflict. Berdyaev — whose philosophy of spiritual freedom and personal responsibility was irreconcilable with Marxist materialism — was sent into exile in Germany. In emigration he became a central figure of the Russian religious diaspora, and his works profoundly influenced twentieth-century European philosophy. The "philosophers' ship" became a lasting symbol of the Soviet persecution of free thought — the moment when Russia lost many of its most gifted minds, and ideological orthodoxy replaced intellectual freedom.

Lenin, on the other hand, valued Hegel as a great dialectician, but accepted him only partially — he adopted Hegel's method while rejecting his spiritual content. In the *Philosophical Notebooks* he wrote that "without understanding Hegel's logic, one cannot understand Marx's *Capital*", (Lenin, 1976, 180) yet he transformed idealist dialectics into materialist dialectics. In the Soviet Russia of the 1920s, any form of idealism was branded a bourgeois deviation, and philosophers who spoke of "spirit" or "the absolute" were silenced or exiled. Given that Berdyaev, as a spiritual heir to Hegel, was among those deported on the "philosophers' ship", one might say that Hegel himself, had he lived in Soviet Russia, would have been condemned as a reactionary idealist and shared Berdyaev's fate.

Trotsky's disdain for Berdyaev persisted even after his own expulsion from the Soviet Union. In his work "Their Morals and Ours" (1938), he offered an illustrative and revealing passage about his perception of Berdyaev and Hegel:

"At the end of the last century in Russia there arose a whole school of 'Marxists' (Struve, Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and others) who wished to supplement the teachings of Marx with a self-sufficient, that is, supra-class moral

principle. These people began, of course, with Kant and the categorical imperative. But how did they end? Struve is now a retired minister of the Crimean baron Wrangel, and a faithful son of the church; Bulgakov is an orthodox priest; Berdyaev expounds the Apocalypse in sundry languages. These metamorphoses which seem so unexpected at first glance are not at all explained by the ‘Slavic soul’ – Struve has a German soul – but by the sweep of the social struggle in Russia. The fundamental trend of this metamorphosis is essentially international.

Classical philosophic idealism in so far as it aimed in its time to secularize morality, that is, to free it from religious sanction, represented a tremendous step forward (Hegel). But having torn from heaven, moral philosophy had to find earthly roots. To discover these roots was one of the tasks of materialism. After Shaftesbury came Darwin, after Hegel – Marx. To appeal now to eternal moral truths signifies attempting to turn the wheels backward. Philosophic idealism is only a stage: from religion to materialism, or, contrariwise, from materialism to religion”. (Trotsky, 1938, 164)

This passage reveals Trotsky’s fundamental misunderstanding — and simplification — of both Berdyaev and Hegel. Trotsky presents Berdyaev, along with Struve and Bulgakov, as an example of the “decadent intellectual” who began with Marxism and ended in religion. He explains this not as a matter of philosophical development but as a result of class struggle and social transformation. Yet Berdyaev did not abandon Marxism out of “class opportunism”, as Trotsky suggests, but from a deep spiritual and philosophical critique of Marxist determinism and materialism. Throughout his life, Berdyaev insisted on the primacy of spiritual freedom, creativity, and personal responsibility — values he believed were suffocated by Marxist notions of historical necessity. Trotsky’s reading thus reduces Berdyaev’s thought to a sociological symptom, ignoring its inner philosophical logic. Likewise, his interpretation of Hegel is crudely materialist: Hegel, for Trotsky, represents merely an intermediate stage between religion and materialism — the philosopher who “secularized” morality and prepared the way for Marx. This is, however, a vulgar oversimplification. Hegel’s philosophy was not a “secularized idealism” awaiting its Marxist inversion. For Hegel, *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life) was not an alienated remnant of religion but the concrete self-consciousness of freedom realized in history — something that depends neither on transcendence nor on “material roots” in Trotsky’s sense. Trotsky, like many Marxists of his time, reads Hegel teleologically — as a prelude to Marx, rather than as a philosopher in his own right. In doing

so, he misses the deeper meaning of Hegel's concept of freedom and ethical life. His text is therefore not a philosophical analysis but an ideological pamphlet, seeking to prove that any moral philosophy not grounded in class struggle must inevitably end in religion. Within such a framework, there is no space for genuine understanding of either Hegel or Berdyaev.

Ironically, the very logic of revolutionary "purity" with which Trotsky once justified the expulsion of Berdyaev was later turned against him. Joseph Stalin merely carried to its extreme the idea Trotsky himself had theorized — that every opposition constitutes betrayal and must be physically eliminated. In that sense, Berdyaev and Trotsky can be seen as two figures within the same tragic drama: Berdyaev as the victim of the revolution from without, for rejecting its ideology, and Trotsky as its victim from within, for trying to reform and save it from its own degeneration. Trotsky's end — exile, isolation, and assassination — stands as a grim symbol of the revolution's self-destruction, the tragic moment when the revolution, like Kronos, devours its own prophets.

Conclusion

The development of Nikolai Berdyaev's thought from 1898 to 1922 can be understood as an extended and evolving dialogue with Hegel — one that moves from initial intellectual proximity to conscious transcendence. For Berdyaev, Hegel was never merely a historical figure; he represented the culmination of the Western philosophical spirit — rational, systematic, and confident in its ability to comprehend the totality of being through reason. In confronting Hegel, Berdyaev was in fact grappling with the entire legacy of European rationalism, asking whether philosophy could continue to exist after the exhaustion of the Hegelian system.

In his early period, Berdyaev still worked within the horizon of German Idealism. He acknowledged the grandeur and historical importance of Hegel's metaphysical synthesis, while already perceiving in it a fundamental danger: the subordination of freedom and personality to the logic of necessity. This initial criticism would become the cornerstone of his later philosophy. As his thinking matured — through works such as *Subjectivism and Individualism in the Philosophy of Society* (1901), his contribution to *Problems of Idealism* (1902), and *The Philosophy of Freedom* (1911) — Berdyaev's relationship to Hegel evolved from critique to transformation. He no longer opposed Hegel from outside, but sought to reconfigure his dialectic

from within. The Hegelian movement of Spirit, aimed at the reconciliation of opposites in an all-encompassing Absolute, is reinterpreted by Berdyaev as the creative drama of freedom — a process open to transcendence, without the closure of synthesis or the determinism of necessity.

In *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (1916), Berdyaev gives this transformation its full metaphysical articulation. There, Hegel becomes the emblem of philosophy's "titanic pride" — the attempt to grasp God through pure reason and to make the human spirit subordinate to thought itself. Yet, paradoxically, Berdyaev also sees in Hegel the last philosopher of faith: "the last true believer," as he calls him, for whom philosophy still reflected the light of the Christian Logos. It is precisely this duality that gives Berdyaev's reading of Hegel its depth — admiration for his creative power, and at the same time a recognition that the Hegelian synthesis marked both the summit and the exhaustion of Western rationalism. Beyond that summit, Berdyaev sees the necessity of a new, spiritual epoch grounded not in logic, but in freedom and creativity.

In his later pre-exilic writings — especially *The Fate of Russia* (1918) and "The Deathbed Thoughts of Faust" (1922) — Hegel reappears less as a systematic thinker than as a symbol of the dying rational culture of Europe. Berdyaev reads the crisis of European civilization after the Great War as the visible consequence of Hegel's inner collapse: reason, once illuminated by faith, has turned into an autonomous and lifeless force. "Culture", he writes, "has become a flower already withered". Yet unlike Spengler, who sees only decline, Berdyaev discerns the possibility of renewal — the rebirth of spirit through freedom and creativity. The end of the Hegelian epoch thus becomes, for him, the beginning of a metaphysical awakening.

Berdyaev's engagement with Hegel, therefore, is not a simple rejection, but a profound transfiguration. He preserves Hegel's dynamic vision of becoming, yet liberates it from the impersonal logic of the Absolute. What in Hegel was the dialectic of Spirit becomes, in Berdyaev, the dialectic of Freedom. The goal is no longer reconciliation within the Idea, but the affirmation of the personal, creative act as the highest expression of being. In this transformation, Berdyaev turns the metaphysics of the Absolute into a metaphysics of the person, replacing necessity with freedom and system with life.

Thus, the philosophical journey that began within the confines of Hegelian idealism culminates in a vision that moves beyond it. For Berdyaev, Hegel marks both the end of one era and the threshold of another. The collapse

of rational totality opens the path toward a personalist metaphysics — one that finds unity not in abstract reason, but in living spirit, freedom, and divine-human creativity. In this sense, Berdyaev’s early engagement with Hegel anticipates his mature Christian existentialism: a philosophy that transforms the dialectic of history into the drama of freedom and reaffirms the human vocation to co-create the world with God. Thus, Berdyaev’s exile in 1922 marked not only his physical departure from Russia, but also the metaphysical closure of the Hegelian age and the birth of his existential personalism.

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