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The Revival of a Person in the Interpretation of Nikolay Berdyaev: Explanation of the Idea of Sobornost' on the Example of Kabbalistic Concept about Adam Kadmon

In our essay we propose to clarify the vision on human in the light of personalistic philosophy developed by the Russian thinker Nikolay Berdyaev. The goal of the thinker is to give an interpretation of the destiny of man, then to show his way of a person. Berdyaev's interpretation of this issue has specific features that distinguish it from the personalistic ideas emerged in the 20th century due to his Trinitarian conception of man and the idea of conciliarity as the spiritual unity

of men. In order to describe this issue more accurately, firstly, an attention is drawn to the distinction between an individual and a person as it described by Berdyaev. Also, what kind of relationship and entity a person and an individual could create will be shown, and that gives

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a deeper understanding of the data. After all a key moment in Berdyaev's personalistic view is to show up a perfect unity of mankind. For this two topics to be explained, the idea of Adam Kadmon and a conception about sobornost' is used.

1. Through “personalistic revolution.” Berdyaev's formation of the idea of person

The problematic intentions about the idea of person were always a matter of discussion during the centuries. The question about who is a person appeared already in the Ancient time but only in the Modern Time was put on the philosophical field as evidenced the appearance of personalistic school. The word πρόσωπον that is a Greek equivalent of *persona* had been used in the Ancient Theatre borrowed by the Roman law in Latin translation and further were developed by the Church Fathers. Still, about the philosophical interpretation of person we can speak only in the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. This historical time was admitted by the arising of the industrial and social revolution, wars, secularization, which globally pushed humanity to different crises all over the world. As consequence, the appearance of such a school as existentialism, Marxism, “philosophy of life,” philosophy of mind, and many others try to give an answer to who man is, his destiny, etc. Among those who came to this answer most closely became the personalistic school.

After Dostoevsky, whose existential philosophy opens a door for the mystery of human, one of his most prominent followers, Nikolay Berdyaev endeavors to develop a personalistic vision of man.¹ Even being the Russian thinker, his ideas drew attention in the Western world² where he had been living for many years after his exile from Russia to the

¹ Here I use the word a “man” (rus. *cheloviek*) as a general word for a human being while Berdyaev whose thoughts we follow uses in his philosophy exactly this word.

² From 1924 till his death in 1948 Berdyaev was living in France where the personalistic movement was widespread.

Western Europe in 1922. Due to the historical course of events, the philosopher finds himself in France, a cradle of personalistic flow, nevertheless, one can safely assert that his intentions differ from the Western thinkers which were evolving their view in this area and became an integral part of the tradition of Russian religious philosophy.

Having an experience with a readjustment of society in different parts of the world, Berdyaev admits that “Spiritual life of man fell into slavery of material life.”³ The thinkers considers that the problem with the “social terror” in the 19th and 20th century. in the modern world rooted in the manifestation of collectivism which makes human a slave. He calls collectivism an idol which sacrificed human for the sake of the collective.⁴ And this is exactly the sphere where an individual is born.

Overlook the degradation of spirituality of people, the Russian thinker all his life was asked a question about the calling of man and his destiny, devoting many of his works to this issue. The vision of man in his works has a dynamic character and even a century after his death a new researches are written devoted to his personalistic intentions. For instance, a contemporary researcher Antoine Arjakovsky finds in Berdyaev’s philosophy so called “mythology of person.”⁵ He admits, that in 1931 y Berdyaev goes through “personalistic revolution”⁶ and during this time he writes a work *The Destiny of Man*. Further, beginning from 1933 when he is armed with an existential philosophy his personalistic outlook got a clearer formation.⁷ First of all, in his personalistic views it is necessary to draw attention to the distinction between an individual and a person, on which we will emphasize in the first place.

³ N. Berdyaev, *Filosofiya neravenstva. Pis'ma k nedrugam po sotsyal'noj filosofii*, Berlin 1923, p. 202.

⁴ Cf. N. Berdyaev, *Filosofiya neravenstva*, p. 80.

⁵ A. Arzhakovskij, *Zhurnal "Put" (1925–1940). Pokolenie russkikh religioznykh myslitelej v emigraczii*, Kiev 2000, p. 336.

⁶ A. Arzhakovskij, *Zhurnal "Put" (1925–1940)*, p. 336.

⁷ Cf. A. Arzhakovskij, *Zhurnal "Put" (1925–1940)*, p. 336.

2. Individual vs. person

Touching the issue about an individual and a person, Berdyaev claims that an individual is created by social reality what is confronted to the nature of person created by God. Speaking more precisely, the individual is rather a social construct which, what is important, can be changed overtime, instead the life of a person is rooted in spirit having a dynamic character. Having a unity with divine the human in his relation to personalistic sphere cannot be categorized by outer secular influences but transformed in spirit.

Berdyaev underlines that in a society human meets obstacles which interfere in disclosing himself on personalistic level. In the social frame human seeks his own behalf as well as he should follow precise rules which usually suppress his vocation and turn him to the slavery position. This outer life is defined by the social reality which Berdyaev calls the objectified world or, in other words, the world of necessity that is artificially constructed and based on agreement presupposing a temporary worthy comfort and benefits, and it works under the laws. Into such social institutes marked by necessities the Russian philosopher includes the state, as well as different institutions, groups, etc. Berdyaev finds these entities to be a social compulsory system made due to the process of objectification or, so to say, alienation of spirit. Again, socially constructed life arises as a consequence of human fall, still, this necessity has a good side as well, while it holds human from a residual decline in this reality.⁸

If we take a look at the meaning of the term individual, it comes up also as the phenomenon separated from the society. Still, the sharpest point which varies it from a personalistic character of human is that individual determines himself from outside while private encroachments are taken into account. Due to these encroachments do not anticipate any spiritual recognition, they have picked up selectively from the social atmospheres and narratives, authorized as own even taken from the

⁸ Cf. N. Berdyaev, *Smysl tvorchestva (Opyt opravdaniya chelovieka)*, Moskva 1916.

social construct. The ground for individual serves the external factors and, as a modern thinker Simondon admits, individualization is an ongoing process in the social world.⁹

Berdyaev states that individualism is essentially hostile to Christianity while it accepts freedom as an alien notion to oneself. This exteriorization makes freedom constructed from outside approving artificiality of individuality that, as consequence, makes his kind of self-confinement unit. But each individual separated from the other, what his biological and sociological essence proved. Individual is often assigned a status of an atom – a separate organism which is not subjected to division. The presence of an external biological definition approves once more that this term is compelled to the external factors and has an earthy and perpetual character. Equally important that this is an individual who aims to be preserved and in contrary a human on the way to disclose himself as a person finds his purpose in self-sacrifice and self-development.¹⁰

3. Society vs. community

For better understanding of differences between personalistic and individual spheres,¹¹ it is worth to take into account the entities they form. Then, the individualistic formation based on atomistic state also is called *Gesellschaft* or society which is opposite to *Gemeinschaft* or community. The former is deterministic, artificially constructed and presupposes an external constraint in a form, for instance, of a social contract. The latter marked by holistic attitudes, inherent to the traditional communities and can be called a natural one. *Gemeinschaft* stands on the inner

⁹ Cf. D. Scott, *Gilbert Simondon's Psychic and Collective Individuation. Critical Introductions and Guides*, Edinburgh 2014.

¹⁰ Cf. N. Berdyaev, *O naznachenii cheloveka. Opyt paradoksal'noj etiki*, Moskva 1993, p. 63.

¹¹ Ferdinand Tönnies differs between a person and an individual, but as a sociologist he does not use any metaphysical explanation for the clarification of his view, what for Berdyaev is not enough. Then, the Russian thinker continues to develop the explanation proposed by Tönnies.

relations including emotional inclination and acknowledge of traditional language which postulate the consciousness of spiritual intimacy.¹²

Mentioned above approach was proposed by a German sociologist and a philosopher Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936) who for the first time in the Western world expressed doubts about the progressiveness of the nature of the changes, therefore, assumed that the urbanized industrial society lost its spirit of community and only one way to keep it from collapse is to use an external, compulsory methods. According to Tönnies, by the time the communion or *Gemeinschaft* is degenerated to *Gesellschaft* which can gain a variety of forms, and in the Modern era this mutation was integrated into such social system as socialism, capitalism, or communism.¹³ The pathos they brought promised to design a utopian institution but engenders totalitarianism in the frame of which a possibility to recognize own-self first of all as a person seems to be a difficult task – as Berdyaev admits, that any type of state is infected by sin: it is full of passions, tyranny, and violence.¹⁴ Then, the society and precisely the modern society breaks the relation with the spiritual center – around which all humanity has a calling to be united – and loses its spiritual or positive freedom substituting it by utilitarian one. Berdyaev expresses this statement in such words: “The society seems to tell people: you are my creation, all the best you have belongs to me, so you belong to me and have to give yourself entirely to me.”¹⁵

As in the case of Berdyaev, Tönnies tried to separate ethics from sociology and politics, but the thinkers had a different reason for that. The Russian thinker for whom indication a metaphysical level of ethics is important, which is different from its social and normative types. Tönnies does not have an attempt to create a metaphysical approach. But, what is worth to mention is that posing a difference between these two entities, Tönnies develops an idea about two kinds of wills, essential and

¹² Cf. F. Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, Cambridge 2001.

¹³ Cf. F. Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*.

¹⁴ Cf. N. Berdyaev, *O naznachanii cheloveka*, p. 173.

¹⁵ N. Berdyaev, *Czarstvo Dukha i Czarstvo Kesarya*, Moskva 1995, s. 307.

selective, which lay in their basis. In the *Gemeinschaft* the essential type of will prevail, the *Gesellschaft* is dominated by the selective type. The point that Tönnies seems to want to draw in his analysis in *Community and Civil Society* (published in 1887 as *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*) is the reason to explicate the relation between people and the preferences in these entities. So, in the first type the primordial value belongs to a whole community, and in the second type the dominant position is given to particles what in fact establishes a problem for reaching an inner balance, thus demands an external constrain.¹⁶ Even including the idea of will, Tönnies does not have an aim to go deep into the sacred sphere. However, Berdyaev, being familiar with a separation on two types of entities, grasps and sustains this idea underlying that when he speaks about such notion as a community, he refers exactly to *Gemeinschaft*.¹⁷ In his book *Slavery and Freedom* Berdyaev notices, that “we in our existence are community, communication, communauté, not a society.”¹⁸ In society there is no place for a human person, but only for a so called atomic unit, an individual.

In any way, apart from natural and social reality human belongs to the higher one – human is an intermediary of the earth and heaven, he is a son of God who has a natural, visible part and undetermined by invisible spiritual essence.¹⁹ Berdyaev accepts the Trinitarian conception of human as a unity of spirit-soul-body. Soul and body are the temporal side of human given by natural determined world. But spirit signs his belonging to the higher reality and cannot exist without God. Tragedy of the world, thinks the philosopher, concerns the revival of person.²⁰

It is good to admit that Berdyaev creates his vision on the field of mystical Orthodox Christian tradition having an aim to bring into light the idea of transfiguration of human. In the frame of this tradition

¹⁶ Cf. G. Osipov, *Istoriya socziologii v Zapadnoj Evrope i SShA*, red. G. Osipov, Moskva 2001, p. 8.

¹⁷ Cf. N. Berdyaev, *O naznachenii cheloveka*, p. 35.

¹⁸ N. Berdyaev, *Czarstvo Dukha*, p. 62.

¹⁹ Cf. N. Berdyaev, *O naznachenii cheloveka*, p. 78.

²⁰ Cf. N. Berdyaev, *O naznachenii cheloveka*, p. 63.

he improves the achievability of human transfiguration during the earthy life. That is why, human is an enigma and non-determining being. Proving the impossibility to define a man fully, the Russian philosopher comes to the idea about the spiritual essence of human. Being an existentialist philosopher, the thinker proves that human acknowledges himself as a person in the process of spiritual development. Even more, he admits that one of the higher qualities of person is freedom – the inner power which contradicts to the necessity human meets in natural reality. But still, the question is whether human can fully reveal freedom in this earthy life and discover himself as a person.

The Russian thinker underlines, that human has a personalistic quality because first of all he is a bearer of the image of his Creator, still, because of fall of man this image is obscured and the nature is damaged.²¹ So, human needs some kind of spiritual restoration in order to discover himself as a person. Additionally, the values of belong neither to the material world, nor to nature but to spirit. In the review on Berdyaev's personalism written by Richard A. Hughes we can find the next assumption: "Personality is social but not determined by social class. Personality determines itself from within."²² From this standpoint we can admit that human as a person endures potency which has to be realized.

4. Berdyaev's kabbalistic references. The transcendental man

Berdyaev's reflections about the idea of person directly send the reader to the mystical texts. He criticizes the Christian approaches in anthropological sphere, in particular because of an inability to cross the Old Testament anthropological interpretations.²³ Instead, he finds more appropriate interpretation of human mystery in the Kabbalistic tradition which represents a man inclusively and is described as a universal man,

²¹ Cf. N. Berdyaev, *O naznachanii cheloveka*, p. 56.

²² R.A. Hughes, *Nikolai Berdyaev's Personalism*, "International Journal of Orthodox Theology" 6.3 (2015), p. 68.

²³ Cf. N. Berdyaev, *Istina i otkroveniie*, Sankt Petersburg 1996, p. 18.

or, in other words, as a unity of all mankind. He admits that in the Kabbalistic texts a human is shown as Adam Kadmon, that symbolically is pictured in the image of the Sephiroth tree. In particular, for the interpretation of the idea of Adam Kadmon the Russian thinker quotes next text from the book of Zohar:

He (Adam Kadmon, *N.P.*) is not only an image of the world, a universal being, which includes Absolute Being as well: he is also, and principally, an image of God, with the inclusion of all His infinite attributes. He is divine presence on the earth: he is the Heavenly Man who, emerging from the original darkness, creates the earthly Adam.²⁴

So, Adam Kadmon can be called the Universal Man or the Transcendental Man. He is not just an earthy human, but an archetype, the image of God in the full sense of this word. Berdyaev explains that Adam Kadmon or in other words, the Transcendental Man is a universal principle, the matrix of an ideal man. What is crucial is that Adam Kadmon represents a perfect unity of all people and this unity also is called a person. So, according to the Kabbalistic tradition a person is a universal principle and at the same time has an inclusive character representing all mankind.

Berdyaev referring to the Kabbalistic tradition underlines its positive moments in the explanation of the perfect unity of all beings, however, it does not mean that he proposes the same map for the Kingdom of God. His vision differs from the Kabbalistic descriptions especially when it comes about the idea of person. The philosopher takes an interpretation about Adam Kadmon as an example for the unity of mankind before human fall as well as its relation to God in the end of time. But the Russian thinker sees a person differently from an archetype. If according to Kabbalah a person is represented by a perfect unity that is Adam Kadmon, for Berdyaev in the unity at the time will come each human is a person. It is important for the thinker because, on the one hand, he wants to show that every man is a person what human realizes in the

²⁴ N. Berdyaev, *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 59.

unity with the other people, and on the other hand, to keep the ability to creativity of each one for it means that everyone is a creator as his Heaven Father.

5. Spiritual unity of all mankind

In general, the topic of the unity of mankind with God become an integral part of the Russian religious philosophical thought and based on the idea of sobornost' which means the spiritual unity of all mankind. It is hard to find at least one Russian religious thinker of 18–19th century who would not develop this idea. For instance, the Russian religious thinker Pavel Florensky explains, that sobornost' envisages not only the gathering of humanity in ecclesial unity, but also the “gathering of person in oneself.”²⁵ Florensky writes that a person “is for every “I” only an ideal, – the limit of aspirations and self-construction. As is the case with the vision about Adam Kadmon, for Berdyaev this view is insufficient. Exactly for a similar position Berdyaev criticizes Emmanuel Mounier who represents community, and hence the Church as a category of person.²⁶ The problem, Russian thinker believes, is that in such a view a man cannot open himself in a creative act, that presupposes that human is an image and likeness of God, the child of God, and therefore continues the work of God in this world. At the same time Berdyaev clearly states that in our fallen world people are separated and the realization of person looks impossible. Also, a person exists before being, belonging not to an ontological, but metaphysical reality. That is why he insists that: “No man can say to himself that he is entirely a person.”²⁷ Only sometimes for instance during a creative act human can transcend himself to the world of divinity recognizing his kinship with all people and with whole cosmos.

²⁵ A. Gromova, *Problema sobornosti v kontekste prostranstvennykh obrazov vremeni-pamyati P. A. Florenskogo*, “Vestnyk KGU im. Nekrasova” (2014) 2, pp. 226–227.

²⁶ Cf. A. Arzhakovskij, *Zhurnal “Put” (1925–1940)*, pp. 514–515.

²⁷ N. Berdyaev, *O rabstve i svobode cheloveka. Opyt personalisticheskoy filosofii*, Parizh 1939, p. 21.

Berdyaev underlines that personalistic approach which he develops on the ground of the idea of sobornost' differs from the individualistic one.²⁸ The possibility to create such a unity people can through exaltation of spirit, and precisely by love which arises as a gift from God. This spiritual unity lifts humanity to the higher reality and when it gathered in a free act of love the earthy categories such as separation between people, from God and the world are overcome. And in this unobjectified unity each one reveals himself as an ideal man, as a person for whom all the cosmos is native. Then, the realisation of man as a person is possible because of his spiritual growing which human can test due to his spiritual exaltation, so to say creativity already during the earthy life but fully it is possible only in the future in the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, we can sum up, that Berdyaev's personalistic vision has certain nuances. In his philosophical interpretation we need to differ between individualistic and personalistic approaches. The former is an empirical category, which represents a human as an atomistic unit separated from the other, from world, and from God, while personalistic vision presupposes a spiritual, holistic, and unique reflection on human being. For this Berdyaev uses a difference between a society and a community, namely *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, where *Gemeinschaft* is declared by a spiritual unity, and *Gesellschaft* is organized by the social contract. But another issue represented in the philosophy of the Russian thinker refers to the idea of person as such. The person does not coincide with an earthy human and presupposes to be in a spiritual unity with the other people. In order to show an example of such a perfect unity, Berdyaev refers to Kabbala. In this tradition the unity of all people is represented by so called Adam Kadmon which also is an archetype, a universal model for a perfect man. Berdyaev uses this example as a model for the interpretation of initial unity of all people before human fall. But, unlike in the Kabbalistic tradition where Adam Kadmon is a person, Berdyaev insists that in the Kingdom of God each man in the unity with the others is a person. In the Christianity this topic is based on the idea

²⁸ Cf. N. Berdyaev, *O naznachenii cheloveka*, p. 151.

of sobornost' – conception about a spiritual unity of all mankind in eternity. Berdyaev underlines, that partially a man can taste being of personality already during the earthly life due to human ability to creativity. Fully conciliar unity of human where everyone is a person is possible in the Kingdom of God which has to come.

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Abstract

The Revival of a Person in the Interpretation of Nikolay Berdyaev: Explanation of the Idea of Sobornost' on the Example of Kabbalistic Concept about Adam Kadmon

The questions about how human can be seen and recognized as a person were asked throughout the centuries. The Russian thinker Nikolay Berdyaev as a representative of personalistic school answers this question through the prism of the calling of man. Thus, he distinguishes between a person and an individual, when the former is created by God, and the latter is a social construct. In this fallen world human exists rather as an individual, but his aim is to become a person. According to the thinker, human by his spiritual exaltation is able to reveal himself as a person, but finally he admits it is possible only along with other people. Berdyaev connects the topic about human becoming a person with the idea of Sobornost', which finds analogy in the Western theological literature in terms like "catholicity" or "conciliarity." In his explanation of this topic the Russian thinker refers to the Kabbalistic tradition takes its idea about Adam Kadmon as an example for a perfect unity of all beings. Still, Berdyaev develops his vision about the idea of unity of all creation on the basis of the idea of human creativity and his destiny. And in such a spiritual unity of all beings every human revealed himself as a person what is foremost vision of Berdyaev's personalistic sight.

Keywords

Berdyaev, person, individual, Adam Kadmon, sobornost'

Abstrakt

Odrodzenie osoby w interpretacji Nikołaja Bierdiajewa: wyjaśnienie idei „sobornosci” na przykładzie kabalistycznej koncepcji Adama Kadmona

Od wieków zadawane są pytania o to, jak można zobaczyć i rozpoznać człowieka jako osobę. Rosyjski myśliciel Nikołaj Bierdiajew, jako przedstawiciel szkoły personalistycznej, odpowiada na to pytanie przez pryzmat powołania człowieka. Rozróżnia człowieka i osobę, gdyż osoba została stworzona przez Boga, indywiduum zaś jest konstruktem

społecznym. W tym upadłym świecie człowiek istnieje jako indywidualność, ale jego celem jest stać się osobą. Według Bierdiajewa człowiek poprzez swoje duchowe wyniesienie może objawić się jako osoba, ale ostatecznie jest to możliwe wyłącznie razem z innymi ludźmi. Rosyjski myśliciel łączy temat stawania się osobą z ideą „soborności”, która znajduje swoją analogię w zachodniej literaturze teologicznej w takich kategoriach, jak „kolegialność” lub „soborowość”. W swoim wyjaśnieniu tego tematu zwraca się do tradycji kabalistycznej i posiłkuje się ideą Adama Kadmona jako przykładu doskonałej jedności wszystkich bytów. Bierdiajew rozwija swoją wizję idei jedności wszelkiego stworzenia w oparciu o ideę ludzkiej twórczości i przeznaczenia człowieka. Uważa, że w duchowej jedności wszystkich bytów każdy człowiek objawia się jako osoba, co jest przede wszystkim wizją personalistycznego poglądu myśliciela.

Słowa kluczowe

Bierdiajew, osoba, Adam Kadmon, sobornosc