

The Tragedy of Cosmogonic Objectivation in the Valentinian Gnosis and Russian Philosophy

Vladimir Solovyov, Lev Karsavin, and Nikolay Berdyaev

Aleksey Kamenskikh

ABSTRACT The subject of this paper is a specific form of cosmogony—the conception of cosmogonic objectivation, interpreted as a tragedy or cosmogonic fall. This conception is examined on the basis of the evidence furnished by two sets of materials: firstly, the original texts and paraphrases of the Valentinian Gnostics of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD (Irenaeus *Adversus haereses*, 1.1.1–1.1.10; *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, compiled by Clement of Alexandria; and *The Gospel of Truth* from the Nag Hammadi Library), and secondly, the writings of the Russian philosophers Vladimir Solovyov, Lev Karsavin and Nikolay Berdyaev. The research reveals a series of specific features common to both of these: in particular, the conception of cosmogonic objectivation appears to be connected with the doctrine of the absolute person's fall, and with the motive of self-alienation.

KEYWORDS Berdyaev, Nikolay; Clement of Alexandria; Cosmogonic objectivation; *The Gospel of Truth*; Irenaeus; Karsavin, Lev; Russian philosophy; Solovyov, Vladimir; Valentinian Gnosis

На исходе Второго тысячелетия вновь слышится эхо падения
Рая Романа и мученических родов человечества: тогда ещё за-
мысла, выговариваемого безумными словами.

Mikhail Gefter¹

Something in Gnosticism knocks at the door of our Being and of our
twentieth-century Being in particular.

Hans Jonas²

In recent years, a number of works concerned with the problem of the relationship of Gnosticism to Russian religious philosophy have been published.³ Certainly, we should not accept any categorical judgments about

the latter as a special historical form of Gnosticism—not least because the question of the nature and historical boundaries of Gnosticism itself is, to date, far from reaching any final resolution.⁴ However, the interest in the ancient Gnostic systems shown by many representatives of Russian philosophy at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries is undeniable. Naturally, one may wonder about what lay behind this interest.

In this paper, I aim to shed some light on this problem by taking a look at just one of the points where these cultural and historical phenomena encounter one another. I will focus on a conception that is, I think, of considerable interest, and which is probably best referred to as the *tragedy of cosmogonic objectivation*. It should be emphasized, though, that the subject of this paper is neither the question of the origins, nor that of the essence, of Gnosticism. Neither shall I be discussing, here, problems pertaining to the development of, and demarcation between, various “schools” of Gnos-

1. “Near the end of the Second millennium the echo of Pax Romana’s downfall and painful parturition of the humanity was heard again. At that time, the echo was only an idea, articulated in mad words.” Mikhail Ya. Gefter, “Istoriya — pozadi? Istorik — chelovek lishnii?,” *Voprosy filosofii* 9 (1993): 4.

2. Hans Jonas, “A Retrospective View,” in *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism, Sponsored by Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, Stockholm, August 20-25, 1973*, ed. Geo Widengren and David Hellholm (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell International, 1977), 13.

3. One can mention here, for instance Maria Carlson, “Gnostic Elements in the Cosmogony of Vladimir Soloviev,” in *Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard F. Gustafson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996); Natal’ya K. Bonetskaya, “Russkaya sophiologiya i antroposofiya,” *Voprosy filosofii* 7 (1995); and Aleksey A. Kamenskikh, “Tragediya kosmogonicheskoy ob’ektivatsii v valentinianstve i v russkoy religioznoy filosofii,” in *Rossiia i Gnozis: Materialy konferentsii, Moskva, VGBIL [Russian State Library of Foreign Literature], 21–22 aprelya 2003 g.*, ed. Tatyana B. Vsekhsvyatskaya (Moscow: Rudomino, 2004); also Aleksey P. Kozyrev, *Solovyov i gnostiki* (Moscow: S. A. Savin, 2007); Aleksey P. Kozyrev, “Smysl lyubvi v filosofii Vl. Solovyova i gnosticheskoye paralleli,” *Voprosy filosofii* 7 (1995); Aleksey P. Kozyrev, “Vladimir Solovyev i Anna Shmidt v chayanii ‘Tret’ego Zaveta,’” in *Rossiia i Gnozis* (Moscow: Rudomino, 1996). One may turn reader’s attention to the fact that Natal’ya Bonetskaya considers the representatives of the “Russian Spiritual Renaissance” themselves to be Gnostics, either theorists or practitioners. See Bonetskaya, “Russkaya sophiologiya i antroposofiya,” 91 in particular.

4. Cf., for example, Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973); Aleksey A. Kamenskikh, “Gnostitsizm v kul’turnom kontekste pozdney antichnosti,” *Religiovedeniye* 3 (2002).

ticism in late Antiquity, or connected with the historical ways in which “Gnostic” influences may have asserted themselves on and gained acceptance within Russian religious and philosophical thought. In this paper, I just wish to draw the reader’s attention to the sheer fact of a similar, and quite peculiar, conception being present in each of these two corpora.

Cosmogonic objectivation *tout court* is a notion that crops up fairly frequently in the history of philosophy. It consists, essentially, in the embracing of an absolute principle responsible for generating the entire objective universe. The universe is produced by the power of, and through, the principle’s thought (and sometimes also by its feelings), as if the principle was going out of itself. Rooted in ancient mythology, it was revived and reworked philosophically in late Antiquity, before somehow persisting through the entire period of the Middle Ages, so that it would still sometimes show up in the work of thinkers of the modern era. It came to be interpreted either as a doctrine of creation realized *by the will* of the absolute subject,⁶ or as an emanative generation of new levels of being that somehow occurs “naturally,” without the involvement of anyone’s will. It is this last version that was undoubtedly prevalent in late Antiquity. The text that Plotinus puts into the mouth of Nature, the lowest part of the World Soul, is most remarkable in this regard:

That what comes into being is what I see, a silent contemplation, the vision proper to my nature, and that I, originating from this sort of contemplation have a contemplative nature, and my act of contemplation makes what it sees, as the geometers draw their figures while they contemplate. But I do not draw, but as I contemplate the lines which bound bodies come to be as if they fell from my contemplation.⁷

It is important to note that the bulk of Hellenistic philosophical texts that contain the conception of cosmogonic objectivation describe it as a *naturally determined* cosmic process. In this process, there is no tragedy,⁸ no

6. Paul Florensky says, in this respect, “God thinks in things.” Pavel A. Florenskiy, *Stolp i utverzheniye istiny*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Pravda, 1990), 326. My translation.

7. Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.8.4.5–10. Translation of Arthur H. Armstrong. See Plotinus, [*Complete works*] in *Seven Volumes*, trans. Arthur H. Armstrong, ed. Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer, 7 vols (London: Heinemann / Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966). The adduced text may be considered as reflecting a special “cosmogonic” variant of the doctrine of creative objectivation, widespread in Antiquity. Here, Plato’s words about the soul becoming pregnant because of contemplation of the Good, and giving birth to the arts and sciences (cf. Plato, *Symp.* 208d–209d, 212a), are taken to refer to the Soul of World, which, in contemplating the Mind, gives birth in silence to the beautiful cosmos.

question about a person. On the other hand, we encounter a fundamentally different interpretation of this notion in the Gnostic systems of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

GNOSTICISM: COSMOGONIC OBJECTIVATION AS TRAGEDY

In one form or another, the concept of cosmogonic objectivation is present in the bulk of the texts traditionally considered to be Gnostic. *The Apocryphon of John*,⁹ the Mandaean *Ginza*,¹⁰ the treatise called *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, might all be mentioned here, among others, but this doctrine is most clearly present in the systems associated with the name of Valentinus (approx. 100–160 AD). Here I have in mind, first of all, the systems recorded in: (1) the famous exposition of Gnostic teachings presented in the first book of *Adversus haereses*¹¹ by Irenaeus of Lyons as belonging to “the disciples of Ptolemaeus, whose school may be described as an outgrowth from that of Valentinus” (1.pro.1.39–40), (2) *Excerpta ex Theodoto*—summaries of the writings of a Valentinian Gnostic of the 2nd half of the 2nd century AD, compiled by Clement of Alexandria,¹² and, especially, (3) *The Gospel of Truth* from the Nag Hammadi library.¹³

8. We may observe in them only a feeling of *possibility* of such tragedy: so, according to Eusebius (*Praeparatio Evangelica* 11.18.3.2–5.3), Numenius of Apamea recognizes that the ordering principle of the cosmos, being the lowest and immanent to the world aspect of the demiurgic intellect, can—because of his love to matter (“ἐπορεξάμενος τῆς ὕλης”)—forget and lose itself.

9. See *The Apocryphon of John* 9.25–11.25.

10. See *Ginza*, fr. 457, where “Mana of the great Life” (the Mandaean analog of Sophia) says: “Who has thrown me into the suffering of the worlds, who has transported me to the evil darkness? So long I endured and dwelt in the world, so long I dwelt *among the works of my hands*.” Translation quoted from Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 56.

11. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.1. Hereafter quoted from the translation *Against heresies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, American ed., vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913).

12. Clement of Alexandria, *Extraits de Théodote*, ed. François Louis Marie Matthiew Sagnard (Paris: Cerf, 1948). Hereafter quoted in English from the translation *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria*, ed. Robert P. Casey (London: Christophers, 1934).

13. The text, also known by the Latin title *Evangelium Veritatis*, and hereafter cited via its Latin abbreviation, is preserved in Nag Hammadi codices I.3 and XII.2. The facsimile edition with English translation, used hereafter, is *The Gospel of Truth*, trans. Harold W. Attridge and George W. MacRae, ed. Harold W. Attridge and George W. MacRae, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Leiden: Brill, 1985).

In all of these texts, cosmogonic objectivation is depicted as a kind of tragedy—a result of the self-disintegration of its subject. As opposed to philosophical models, in which all lower levels of being, right down to the material world, successively emanate from the higher ones, in these Gnostic systems we may note a moment of “tragic discontinuity”¹⁴: the material world arises as a result of a primordial error, a fall; the fallen reality cannot independently restore its original state and needs help from above.

The Valentinian Cosmogony according to Irenaeus of Lyons

(*Adversus haereses*, 1.1.1.1–1.1.10.55)

In Irenaeus’ paraphrase of Gnostic “Ptolemaic” texts, the prime cause of the cosmogonic process is an illicit desire of the aeons of the *pleroma*¹⁵ to cognize the entirely immeasurable depths of the highest deity, the Father. This audacious desire appears in the lowest aeon, Sophia, which leaves its¹⁶ place in the hierarchy of the *pleroma* and dares to engage in direct contemplation of the Father. Since this impulse endangers the entire or-

A brief bibliography relating to *The Gospel of Truth* might include the following works: Henri-Charles Puech, Gilles Quispel, and W. C. van Unnik, *The Jung Codex: A Newly Recovered Gnostic Papyrus, Three Studies*, edited and translated by F. L. Cross (London: Mowbray, 1955); *Evangelium veritatis*, ed. Michel Malinine, Henri-Charles Puech, and Gilles Quispel (Zürich: Rascher, 1956); Hans Martin Schenke, *Die Herkunft des sogenannten Evangelium Veritatis* (Berlin: Evangelischer Verlag, 1958); Robert M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 128–42; Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 309–19; *L’Évangile de vérité*, ed. by Jacques E. Menard (Leiden: Brill, 1972); Ragnhild B. Finnestad, “The Cosmogonic Fall in Evangelium Veritatis,” *Temenos* 7 (1971); Barbara Aland, “Gnosis und Christentum,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978*, vol. 1, *The School of Valentinus*, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980); Robert McL. Wilson, “Valentinianism and *The Gospel of Truth*,” in Layton, *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. 1; William R. Schoedel, “Gnostic Monism and *The Gospel of Truth*,” in Layton, *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. 1; Aleksey A. Kamenskikh, “Evangeliiye istiny: v poiskakh tochnoy interpretatsii,” *Religiovedeniye* 4 (2003); Aleksey A. Kamenskikh, “Evangelium Veritatis — Yevangelie istiny,” *Schöle. Ancient Philosophy and the Classical Tradition* 2, no. 1 (2008). See, also, the bibliography for the treatise for the years 1996–2006 in David M. Scholer, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography, 1995–2006* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 144–45.

14. A term of Barbara Aland. See “Gnosis und Philosophie,” in Widengren and Hellholm, *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism*, 73.

15. In Gnostic systems, the *pleroma* (πλήρωμα, meaning “fullness,” “plenitude”) is the fullness of divinity in its inner self-disclosing. “Aeons” (αἰῶνες) are certain aspects of this self-disclosing, qualitatively determined *modi* of being and—at the same time—living divine persons.

16. Or, more exactly, *her*: aeons are treated in Gnostic texts not only in “conceptual” but also in “personal” mode.

der of the *pleroma*, Sophia's move was stopped by a force called the Limit (Ὁρος), which divides the Father from other aeons. She was returned to her designated place and cleansed of her intention (ἐνθύμησις) and passions; these intention and passions themselves were thrown out from the *pleroma* (1.1.1.1–3.21).

Just here, in the non-being void (κένωμα), is the beginning of the cosmogonic process in the proper sense. Objectivated and alienated, these intentions and passions on the part of Sophia became the matter of the world: "And hence they [Gnostics] declare that material substance had its beginning in ignorance and grief, fear and bewilderment" (1.1.3.11–13). By mercy of an aeon, called Christ or the Limit (Horos, Ὁρος), who touched them from the *pleroma*, they—originally shapeless—received not only substantial, but also personal existence (by receiving, in Christ's touch, a form, μορφή, 1.1.7.9), and became a spiritual feminine essence of its own kind—Achamoth.¹⁷

There then occurs a "second-order objectivation": being by nature herself an objectivated thought and passion, Achamoth, incapable of reaching the *pleroma*, is described as overwhelmed by her own passions:

And when she could not pass by Horos on account of that passion in which she had been involved, and because she alone had been left without, she then resigned herself to every sort of that manifold and varied state of passion to which she was subject; and thus she suffered grief on the one hand because she had not obtained the object of her desire, and fear on the other hand, lest life itself should fail her, as light had already done, while, in addition, she was in the greatest perplexity. All these feelings were associated with ignorance. (1.1.7.24–29)

In the next stage of the cosmogonic process, Sophia-Achamoth is cleansed of her thoughts and passion by "the Paraclete, that is, the Savior," sent forth to her by Christ (1.1.8.32–42). As a result of this process, these objectivated thoughts and passions become the material and psychic substance of the world:

[F]rom [her desire of] returning [to him who gave her life], every soul belonging to this world, and that of the Demiurge himself, derived its origin.

17. This term is considered to be derived from Hebrew word —"חכמה" *chakmah* (in Modern Hebrew reading, *chokmah*), wisdom. This is why Achamoth is also called Sophia, as her mother.

All other things owed their beginning to her terror and sorrow. For from her tears all that is of a liquid nature was formed; from her smile all that is lucent; and from her grief and perplexity all the corporeal elements of the world. For at one time, as they affirm, she would weep and lament on account of being left alone in the midst of darkness and vacuity; while, at another time, reflecting on the light which had forsaken her, she would be filled with joy, and laugh; then, again, she would be struck with terror; or, at other times, would sink into consternation and bewilderment. (1.1.7.34–44)

“The Savior” and, following his example, Sophia-Achamoth, transform these “incorporeal passions into the incorporeal matter” (1.1.8.51–52) of the two natures of the world: the material nature of the passions of Achamoth, and the psychical nature of her thoughts about the light of the *pleroma*. Then these two natures are supplemented with the third, spiritual one, born by Achamoth herself from the Savior’s angels (1.1.8.50–9.8).

In the third stage, the cosmogonic process is completed by the Demiurge. Achamoth has formed him of mental elements originating in her conversion to the light (“ἐκ τῆς ἐπιστροφῆς αὐτῆς ψυχικῆς οὐσίας,” 1.1.9.7). The Demiurge has, in himself, a spiritual spark, but does not know about it—he knows neither about the *pleroma*, nor about his mother Achamoth, who continues, in secret, to direct his actions, shaping the world according to the images of the *pleroma*.¹⁸ Considering himself the only God, he separates and combines the psychic and corporeal elements and completes the shaping of the world.¹⁹ Also, in this third stage of cosmogony, one can notice a moment of objectivation: secretly impelled by Achamoth, the Demiurge breathes out a spiritual element that has remained within him into his creation, Adam (1.1.10.29–55). The cosmogonic process as presented by Irenaeus is thereby completed.

It must be kept in mind that the Sophia-Achamoth of this text was originally “the Enthymesis” —the intention of the aeon Sophia to know the Father and become similar to him in respect of independently producing a universe. The productive power of the Father is actualized in the emanative unfolding of the *pleroma*, the divine fullness. The productive power

18. Cf. Iren., *Adv. haer.* 1.1.9.17–23: “For they say that this Enthymesis, desirous of making all things to the honour of the Æons, formed images of them, or rather that the Saviour did so through her instrumentality. And she, in the image of the invisible Father, kept herself concealed from the Demiurge. But he was in the image of the only-begotten Son, and the angels and archangels created by him were in the image of the rest of the Æons.”

19. It should be noted here that the author (or compiler) of the writings paraphrased by Irenaeus in *Adv. haer.* 1.1.9.23–10.55, evidently has in mind the first chapters of Genesis.

of Sophia is actualized in the *kenoma*, a non-existent emptiness, through her objectivated intention (Sophia-Achamoth) and with the merciful help of the *pleroma*, symbolized by “the Savior.” Paradoxically, these are objectivated thoughts and passions of Sophia herself: the matter in which this very intention is realized—i.e. the physical and psychical matter of the sensible world. (Outside of the *pleroma* there is nothing at all except these objectivated thoughts and passions of an absolute subject.)

Valentinian Cosmogony According to Clement of Alexandria

(*Excerpta ex Theodoto*, 2.29–3.53)

Excerpta ex Theodoto is a kind of “sourcebook,” a collection of extracts made by Clement of Alexandria from some Valentinian writings. The broad view of historical developments in and out of the *pleroma* described in this text is close to the report of Irenaeus examined above; indeed, some passages in the two texts coincide almost literally.²⁰

As a thorough analysis of the problem of objectivation in the *Excerpta* would demand a separate investigation, I will here note only the principal moments.

- 1) As far as the fragmentary and compilatory character of the text allows us to assert, there is no “duplication of Sophia” in the *Excerpta*. The immediate subject of cosmogonic objectivation here is not Sophia-Achamoth, the objectivated “intention” of the aeon Sophia, which had been thrown out of the *pleroma* and had then received a personal existence through the grace of the aeon Christ, but the fallen aeon Sophia herself. The name “Achamoth” is not mentioned in the text. While the passage of *Adversus haereses* 1.1.8.32–56 describes the meeting of Achamoth and “the Savior,” its parallel in the *Excerpta*, 3.43.2.1–47.1.2, refers to the Savior, who is identified with Christ, and to the aeon Sophia. Moreover, according to the *Excerpta*, this meeting takes place not in the *kenoma*, but in the *pleroma* itself. The *kenoma*, as something external to the *pleroma* (“τὰ ἔξω”), emerges only as a result of the purification of Sophia from her passions and their being expunged from the *pleroma* (3.45.1.1–3.4).

Nevertheless, *Excerpta* 2.31.3.4–4.2 may be considered evidence for the *kenoma* being interpreted not merely as a kind of place, but also in terms of a theory of cognition. The *kenoma* becomes a condition of “lacking knowledge” (“κένωμα Γνώσεως”), of “ignorance and form-

20. Cf., e.g., *Adv. haer.* 1.1.8.32–56 and *Exc. ex Theod.* 3.43.2.1–47.1.2.

lessness,” and, at the same time, “a shadow of the Name” (“σκιὰ τοῦ Ὀνόματος”).²¹

- 2) This onomatology, or rather onomatodoxy, is a very important element of the theology of the *Excerpta*,²² and deserves separate discussion. Briefly, the “name of the Father” is interpreted there as the essence of the *gnosis*, primarily concealed in the Father’s depths. Successive unfolding of the *pleroma* in a series of aeons is described as “distribution of the Name” (“τὸ κατὰ μέρος ὄνομα τῶν Αἰώνων,” 2.31.4.3–4): i.e. its articulated expression. However, this results in loss of the *pleroma*’s fullness in each subsequent unfolding—in the “loss of the Name” (“ἀπώλεια τοῦ Ὀνόματος,” 2.31.4.4). The self-willed attempt of Sophia “to grasp that which is beyond knowledge” produces the erroneous image of the *pleroma*: i.e., the *kenoma*. Of these two, the former is the expressed Name of the Father, the latter “the shadow of the Name,” “σκιὰ τοῦ Ὀνόματος” (ibid.).

The second act of this “inner theophany” (or “onomatophany”) to the aeons is the revelation of the *gnosis* through Christ, “the Only-Begotten Son,” who himself is called “the Name,”²³ and may be understood as the *pleroma* under the aspect of its unity.²⁴ To each aeon, Christ opens up knowledge concerning the structure of the *pleroma* and the destiny of each of its elements.²⁵ The coming of Christ to the fallen aeon Sophia, described in 3.43.2.1–47.1.2, may thus be interpreted as the completion of his mission to enlighten the *pleroma*.

Understanding the *kenoma* as a kind of place does not contradict its epistemological significance. On the contrary, the empty space is an authentic expression of the *kenoma*, as the principle of dispersion, separateness, and metaphysical alienation—i.e. of all that is opposite to unity, wholeness, and concentration. The Demiurge of the *kenoma* himself is called, in a non-obvious way, “the Place” (or “the Space”)—“ὁ Τόπος.”²⁶ Any kind of activity within the *kenoma* tends

21. “But the Aeon which wished to grasp that which is beyond knowledge fell into ignorance and formlessness. Whence it effected an abstraction of knowledge which is a shadow of the Name, that is the Son, the form of the Aeons.”

22. See in particular passages 3.25.5–6, 26.1–2, 2.31.1–4, 80.3, 86.2; see also 27.1–5, 43.1.3, 3.54.3, 3.76.3, 82.1. It should be noted that theology of name in the *Excerpta* has close parallels in other texts of the Valentinian tradition, and above all in *The Gospel of Truth*.

23. Cf. Clement, *Exc. ex Theod.* 1.26.1.4–5: “the Name, which is the Only-Begotten Son.”

24. Cf. ibid., 2.31.4.3: “Son, the form of the aeons.”

25. Cf. ibid., 2.31.3.1–3: “For then they knew that they are what they are by the grace of the Father, a nameless name, form and knowledge.”

26. Cf. ibid., 2.34.1.4, 34.2.2, 38.1.2, 38.2.1, 38.3.4, 39.1.4.

- to be granted an individual and independent existence. Interestingly, not only the divine Sophia, but even a human being, may count there as a subject of objectivation. For example, in 3.51.2–53.1, which offers some instruction on how to deal with the passionate part of the soul, we encounter, amongst others, the warning that improper treatment may lead to this part “gaining some existence of its own” (3.52.2.5–6.)
- 3) As the entire “image of the *pleroma*,” Christ in the *Excerpta* is not only “the One-Begotten Son” of the ineffable Father, but also a result of objectivation. He is said to be the elder child of the fallen Sophia, and the image of the *pleroma*, generated by her mind (“ἐξ ἐννοίας προελθόντα τῆς Σοφίας, εἰκόνα τοῦ Πληρώματος”)²⁷ and then objectivated: “After he had been begotten from his mother’s thought,” he “fled that which was foreign to him and was drawn into the *pleroma*” (2.33.3). Only in the next stage of the “theo-cosmic process,” Christ (or “the Savior”) returns to his mother, enlightens her by the knowledge of the *pleroma* and cleanses of her passions.²⁸
 - 4) Before Christ’s return, Sophia, longing for him, produced “from the passion of desire” (2.33.4.2.) “the ruler of the dispensation”—the future Demiurge of the sensible world. The irrational, passionate nature of the second child of Sophia is particularly emphasized in the text (2.33.3.3–4.4).
 - 5) The description of the further cosmogonic process in the *Excerpta* is close to Irenaeus’ account. The “incorporeal” passions of Sophia are transformed by the Savior into “incorporeal matter.” Then Sophia forms the Demiurge out of her “passion of desire.” In the Demiurge, this “*pathetical cosmogenesis*” is completed: the Demiurge

divided the refined element from the coarse, since he perceived the nature of each, and made light. ... And the material elements he made one out of grief, which gives substance to the “spiritual things of evil with whom is our contest,” and another he made from fear, the wild beasts, and another from terror and need, the elements of the world. (3.48.1–3.)

This process is completed by creation of Adam, who brings together within himself three natures: the irrational or corporeal, the

27. Ibid., 2.32.2.2. Cf. 2.32.2–33.1.

28. It is necessary to note that this Christ should not be confused with “the psychic Christ,” the son of the Demiurge.

rational, and the psychic (the latter nature being identical to that of the Demiurge). However, Adam also possesses “the spiritual seed” secretly inserted into humanity by Sophia.

- 6) This “spiritual seed,” which is a spiritual church—i.e. the totality of the Gnostics or the spiritual part of humanity—is said not to have originated from objectivated passions as the Demiurge did. It is consubstantial (ὁμοούσιος) with Sophia and Jesus; moreover, it is interpreted as the collective body of Sophia.²⁹

Cosmogonic objectivation in The Gospel of Truth

*The Gospel of Truth*³⁰ is one of most interesting monuments of early Christian Gnosis. Conceptual and stylistic similarities allow us to consider this treatise a Valentinian one, so that even the possibility of the treatise being written by Valentinus himself has been considered.³¹ This text offers many interesting points in its presentation of cosmogonic objectivation, making its discussion a matter of the utmost relevance to the current paper.³²

In *The Gospel of Truth*, the aeons, who are considered to be *the primordial humankind*,³³ and to whom Ptolemaeus’ Sophia corresponds,³⁴ dwell initially in the divine Logos³⁵ as its total notional content.³⁶ However, after they were “uttered” (37.9–18) or emanated³⁷ by the Father, their desire to comprehend, i.e., to qualitatively determine the infinite God “who surpasses every thought” (17.9) makes the aeons leave the dwelling places

29. Clement, *Exc. ex Theod.* 2.42.3.3–4. Cf. 1.26, 2.41.1.1–2.2, 41.2.3–8, 3.59.1. Passage 1.26.1.1–3.3 is the most interesting here: “The visible part of Jesus was Wisdom and the Church of the superior seeds and he put it on through the flesh. . . . But the invisible part is the Name, which is the Only-Begotten Son. Thus, when he says ‘I am the door,’ he means that you, who are of the superior seed, shall come up to the boundary where I am. And when he enters in, the seed also enters with him into the Pleroma, brought together and brought in through the door.”

30. In Codex I of the Nag Hammadi library, this treatise is not inscribed with a title. It has become known in modern scholarship by its incipit, “The Gospel of Truth.” The genre of the treatise is not a gospel (i.e. a narration about the life, mission, death and resurrection of Christ, or—as in the case of the apocryphal gospels—a collection of secret sayings of the “living Christ,” told to one of the apostles), but rather a kind of *homily* on the themes of the gospel and Paul’s epistles. On the composition of the text, its genre, and linguistic specifics, see Harold W. Attridge and George W. MacRae, “Introduction [to *The Gospel of Truth*],” in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Leiden: Brill, 1985).

31. Cf. Wilson, “Valentinianism and *The Gospel of Truth*,”; Attridge and MacRae, “Introduction [to *The Gospel of Truth*],” 76.

32. The ensuing analyses are based on the following studies: Kamenskikh, “Evangeliye istiny: v poiskakh tochnoy interpretatsii”; Kamenskikh, “Evangeliium Veritatis — Yevangelie istiny.”

designated for each of them, and undertake a search for the Father.³⁸ This search inevitably gives rise to *the error* (πλάνη).

Becoming an independent demonic power, the error captures the divine emanations and forms, taking from their objectivated tortures and horror a false image of the truth—the material world:³⁹

33. The interpretation of the “aeonology” of *The Gospel of Truth* as an *anthropology* is, first of all, based on the constant combination of the two planes of the homiletic narrative—a “pleromatic” one, made up of the history of the fall and the salvation of the divine aeons, and an “ecclesiastical” or “terrestrial” one. Cf., for example, *Ev. Ver.* 24.9–25.20, where the narration about the revelation of the Father to the aeons is followed by the words: “If, indeed, these things have happened to each one of us. . . .” Due to this combination of perspectives, the author’s audience themselves turn into participants of the universal drama of the fall and the salvation of the divine aeons—the drama of God’s self-disclosure and self-cognition, in which the whole history of the sensible world is only a transient moment.

34. The main difference between the version of the theo-cosmic process presented in the *Gospel of Truth* on the one hand, and in other Valentinian systems (such as in *Adversus haereses* 1.1.1.1–10.55, or in *Excerpta ex Theodoto*) on the other, is that the subject of cosmogonic fall and cosmogonic objectivation in *The Gospel of Truth* is not only the aeon Sophia, but the *entire totality* of emanations—the revealed All (or “the totality,” in Attridge and MacRae’s translation). In other words, the version of the narrative about the “cosmogonic fall” presented in the *Gospel of Truth* can be interpreted as a development of the themes implied, for example, by *Adversus haereses* 1.1.2.1–13 and *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 31.1–4: namely, of the themes of (1) the total desire of the aeons to cognize the Father, (2) their total confusion because of the impossibility of any such cognition, and (3) the restoration of the *pleroma*, which occurs thanks to the revelation of God’s Name by “the One-Begotten Son.”

35. Logos is the Mind of the Father (*Ev. Ver.* 37.10.13) and his “One-Begotten Son.” The Neo-Platonic Νοῦς is the nearest philosophical analogue to this “personologically-interpreted” notion.

36. Therefore, the image of the Mind-Logos is a paradise, in that all potencies of future “worlds” (i.e., aeons) grow as “the words of his meditation” (*Ev. Ver.* 37.3, cf. 36.36–7, 41.16–19).

37. The author of *The Gospel of Truth* readily uses terms and imagery typical of the philosophical “emanative vocabulary” of that time. See, for example 22.37, 26.25, 26.29, and 27.11, for words’ being identified with emanations of the Father, and also 41.15–19, where all emanations of the Father are *pleromas*, rooted in the Father through the Logos.

38. Cf. 22.22–34: “. . . their places, from which they had moved away, since it was on account of the depth that they received error, the depth of the one who encircles all spaces, while there is none that encircles him. It was a great wonder that they were in the Father, not knowing him, and (that) they were able to come forth by themselves, since they were unable to comprehend or to know the one in whom they were.”

39. Πλάνη of *The Gospel of Truth* may be compared to the Demiurge, but even more to Yaldabaoth of the so called “Sethian” Gnostic treatises, such as the *Apocryphon of John* or *On the Origin of the World*. Like the Demiurge and Yaldabaoth, πλάνη is the objectivated “thought” of divine beings, longing for knowledge of the absolute principle. It performs an analogous function in the cosmogonic process: using the objectivated passions of the

When the totality went about searching for the one from whom they had come forth—and the totality was inside of him, the incomprehensible, inconceivable one who is superior to every thought—ignorance of the Father brought about anguish and terror; and the anguish grew solid like a fog, so that no one was able to see. For this reason, error became powerful; it worked on its own matter foolishly, not having known the truth. It set about with a creation, preparing with power and beauty the substitute for the truth. (17.4–21)

Thus, the status of human beings, i.e., of the aeons fallen into this world, is determined by ignorance, fear, separation and yearning for being in truth.

With the revelation of Christ-Logos, knowledge of their own existential deeps returns to humans. By finding themselves, and by being simultaneously delivered from the products of false objectivation (24.33–25.19), which make up the matter of this world, they regain each other, i.e., the totality of the noetic cosmos, and also God. This is the restoration of the *pleroma*.⁴⁰

Concluding Remarks on Gnosticism

In general, when considering the doctrine of cosmogonic objectivation in Gnosticism, the following points should be noticed. Firstly, in spite of indubitable links with Hellenistic philosophical doctrines,⁴¹ what we are encountering here is the expression of an entirely different, by no means Hellenistic, experience. The subject of cosmogonic objectivation in Gnosis is not a generalized impersonal principle of life, the World Soul, but an ideal person, Sophia, Mana, Ennoia,⁴² or, as in *The Gospel of Truth*, a

fallen subject (in *The Gospel of Truth*, subjects) as a kind of matter, it forms the sensible world out of these passions. But while the Demiurge in *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, or in the texts of Ptolemaeus (for example, in his *Letter to Flora*), is not evil, but instantiates justice—although when he turns to the *pleroma* and the highest God, he is ignorant—*πλάνη* of the *Gospel of Truth* and Yaldabaoth of the “Sethian” texts are active evil powers, striving to retain the “spiritual seed” in their captivity.

40. Cf., for example, 41.14–42.37, 43.2–23. It is worth remarking that when describing the restored *pleroma* of the aeons, the author of the treatise identifies it with his own desired “resting-place” (43.1) and the aeons with his own “true brothers” (43.5).

41. Let me note here a single parallel: as in Neo-Platonism, each posterior emanation generates a new one in the process of intellectual contemplation of the superior level (the Mind, filled by contemplation of the One, generating the World Soul, which in contemplation of the Mind generates the cosmos), so the Gnostic aeons generate new levels of being in contemplation and in praise of higher levels. See, for example, *The Apocryphon of John* 5–9, or Irenaeus’ *Adv. Haer.* 1.1.1–2.1).

42. Ennoia is an analogue of Sophia-Achamoth in *The Apocryphon of John*.

universe of ideal persons—the totality of spiritual humankind. My point here would be that the Platonic κόσμος νοητός thus turns into the celestial church.

Secondly, the whole theogonic and cosmogonic process within the Gnostic systems is clearly divided into two stages, separated by the event of the *cosmogonic fall*⁴³—a tragic accident that initiates cosmogony. Two different *types of expression* correspond to these stages. In an initial, necessary state of communication with the “Father of everything and the true brothers” (43.4–5), knowledge of truth is identical with the very being of truth, and with the expression of truth, i.e. with its subsequent disclosure and glorification as a new spiritual being. Following on from this, in the cosmos after the fall, where this is characterized as κένωμα and ἄγνοια (emptiness and ignorance), each single expression is *alienated from its subject*, and the subject is disintegrated into a multitude of isolated elements which become the matter of our world. Thereby the eternal ὕλη of philosophers gives way to the objectivated passions of the fallen divine aeons—to their fear, despair, and torture—which automatically vanish when the aeons get to know God. From this, then, follows the specific “historicism” and tense-eschatologism of the Gnostics. Hence, we may conclude that cosmogonic objectivation in Gnosticism was not a naturally determined cosmological process, as it was in Hellenistic philosophy, but a *tragedy of the absolute person*.

COSMOGONIC OBJECTIVATION IN RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

I now wish to focus on the doctrine of cosmogonic objectivation in the interpretations of two prominent Russian thinkers: Vladimir S. Solovyov (1853–1900) and Nikolay Berdyaev (1874–1948).

The Views of Solovyov in the Period of the “Sophia” Manuscript and The Lectures on Godmanhood, 1875–1881

The notion of cosmogonic objectivation is most clearly put forward in Solovyov’s writings in *The Lectures on Godmanhood*.⁴⁴ In Lectures 7 and 8, we find the doctrine of Christ as the primordial divine—or, to be more precise, theandric—organism. In Christ, Logos is the active, consolidating

43. A term of Ragnhild Finnestad. See his paper “The Cosmogonic Fall in Evangelium Veritatis.”

44. Vladimir S. Solovyov, *Chteniya o Bogochelovechestve*, in *Sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Sergey M. Solovyov and Ernest L. Radlov, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg: Prosveshcheniye, 1912). Hereafter cited as *LG*. Lectures 7 and 8 can be found on pages 103–128.

principle, whereas Sophia is the expressed, actualized idea of God, “the body of God” or “the matter of God imbued with the principle of the divine unity.”⁴⁵ Sophia is interpreted further as “an ideal or normal human,” the eternal recipient of the divine act, “the ideal, perfect humankind, eternally included in the whole divine being, or Christ” (*LG*, 121). “Each of us, each human being, is actually and essentially rooted and participates” in this ideal Godmanhood (126–7).

There are a number of texts that might be thought to offer the closest parallels with, and to count as possible sources for, this teaching. They are, for example, a group of New Testament texts, including Paul’s teaching on the Church as the Corpus Christi (Eph 5:23, Col 1:18), and the Revelation of John, which describes the appearing of heavenly Jerusalem as a saved humankind—i.e. the celestial Church united with Christ (Rv 21). One might also point to chapter 16 from the 12th book of Augustine’s *Confessions*, which contains the doctrine of the heavenly Jerusalem interpreted as an eternal fatherland in which Augustine finds “the first fruits” of his spirit and the source of his certainties.⁴⁶ However, the most striking resemblance to this conception of Solovyov is furnished by *The Gospel of Truth*, where the doctrine of an ideal humankind representing the total noetic content of the divine Logos is developed in much the same way.⁴⁷

Certainly, it is entirely out of the question that Solovyov could have been acquainted with *The Gospel of Truth*. The tradition of Valentinian Gnosis was known to him, first of all, through Irenaeus’ *Adversus haereses*. This is the text that Solovyov uses as the principal source in his article “Valentinus and the Valentinians” [“Valentin i valentiniane”], for the *Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary*.⁴⁸

I myself am inclined to explain the conceptual convergences between *The Gospel of Truth* and Solovyov’s writings through an appeal to the

45. “София есть тело Божие, материя Божества, проникнутая началом божественного единства.” *LG*, 115. All translations from writings of Russian philosophers are mine.

46. “[P]rimitiae spiritus mei, unde mihi ista certa sunt,” Augustine, *Conf.* 12.16.23. I am paraphrasing the English translation of Henry Chadwick: Augustine, *Confessions*, edited and translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

47. Let us note a difference: in Solovyov’s work the ideal humankind in Sophia is interpreted as the total *recipient* and *expression* of the divine ideas included in the Logos, whereas in *The Gospel of Truth* the aeons, as the total expression of God’s name, dwell in the Logos *in their own capacity* and thus *instead of* ideas.

48. Solovyov’s articles for the *Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary* were reprinted in vol. 10 of *Sobraniye sochineniy*. The article in question was published there as “Valentin i valentiniane,” in *Sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Sergey M. Solovyov and Ernest L. Radlov, vol. 10 (St. Petersburg: Prosveshcheniye, 1914).

common problematics and shared conceptual terrain inhabited by both of them, on the basis of which the ideas of both the ancient Gnostic author and this Russian philosopher evolved. However, along with moments of similarity there is an important difference, which lies in how the reasons for the cosmogonic fall are explained by Solovyov on the one hand, and by the Gnostic authors under scrutiny here on the other. Whereas the Valentinians believed that the reason for the fall was the audacious desire of a divine being (or beings, as in *The Gospel of Truth*) to grasp the immeasurable abyss of the highest deity, Solovyov finds it in the desire for independent existence.

The doctrine of cosmogonic objectivation proper is further explored in Solovyov's Lectures 9 and 10. Sophia emerges there as having her own will, potentially distinct from the will of God. In her desire for independent being, for an expression of her own content, she brings about her own disintegration into the multitude of isolated elements of the material world, corrupted by the thirst for *their own one*—that is, by evil and suffering. Solovyov emphasizes that both the world and humankind, in their current state, are just some “other, unnecessary *interrelation* [Solovyov's emphasis] of the same elements which also form the being of the divine world.”⁴⁹ The external, material being is only the result of the *subjective states* of these elements—states, that is, of evil and suffering. The aim of this natural and historical process is the restoration of the disturbed unity of the Theandric—of the organism of Christ-Logos and Sophia.

The problem of the relation of Solovyov's philosophy to the system of Valentinus, who in one place is called by the Russian thinker “the most significant Gnostic philosopher and one of the most brilliant thinkers of all times,”⁵⁰ deserves serious consideration in its own right.⁵¹ Here it will suffice for us to note that those parts of *The Lectures on Godmanhood* discussed in this paper, bear, to a large degree, the imprint of Valentinian Gnosis, and are an original interpretation and philosophical embodiment of some of the Gnostic doctrines.⁵²

49. “Тот мир, который, по слову апостола, весь во зле лежит, не есть какой-нибудь новый безусловно отдельный от мира божественного, состоящий из своих особых существенных элементов, а это есть только другое, недолжное *взаимоотношение* тех же самых элементов, которые образуют и бытие мира божественного.” *LG*, 132.

50. Solovyov, “Valentin i valentiniane,” 285.

51. For an attempt of this kind, cf. for example Carlson, “Gnostic Elements in the Cosmogony of Vladimir Soloviev”; Kozyrev, *Solovyov i gnostiki*.

52. It is worth mentioning here, however, that a very interesting statement of Solovyov can be found in “Valentinus and the Valentinians.” Although the author presents there a rather critical approach to both Valentinianism itself and Gnosticism more generally, he

Lev P. Karsavin

In the life of the brilliant Russian medievalist and philosopher Lev Karsavin there was a short but very significant period of intense enthusiasm for Gnostic topics, which immediately preceded his arrest and subsequent expulsion from Soviet Russia at the end of 1922. In the summer of that year, a series of texts by Karsavin on Gnostic themes were published. "The Depths of Satan"⁵³ was, in spite of its intriguing title (which was, actually, an allusion to Revelation 2:24), a piece of academic research on the Ophites and the Basilidian Gnosis. *Sophia, Terrestrial and Celestial* offered a semi-ironic mock-up edition of a piece of ancient Gnostic writing, complete with introduction and notes.⁵⁴ The *Noctes Petropolitanae* constituted an independent inquiry into the metaphysics of love, of both a poetic and a philosophical character, saturated with Gnostic themes and imagery.⁵⁵ A contemporary researcher of Karsavin's heritage may find it of great interest to observe the palette of nuances in Karsavin's relation to Gnostic materials and conceptions, reflected in his texts, which spans the full range from denunciatory rhetoric to engaged examination of Gnostic theologoumena, including the conception of cosmogonic objectivation. In respect of the latter, the most interesting is *Sophia, Terrestrial and Celestial*. The "Gnostic" part of the text is a complicated combination of Karsavin's paraphrases and translations of Gnostic materials (including, among others, passages from *Pistis Sophia*, the narration of Valentinian "aeonology," and of the myth of Sophia's cosmogonic fall according to Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, and the hymn of the Naassens according to Hyppolytus of Rome) with his own speculations, uttered in a poetic and semi-autobiographic form. I believe that his view of the process of cosmogonic objectivation is best shown through the repentant lamentations of Karsavin's Sophia:

clearly expresses solidarity with the Valentinian view about matter being a result of objectivation: "Ancient thought knew only two views of material being: either, as in Indian pantheism, and also in Eleatics, this being was believed to be only a subjective phantom, a delusion of our spirit, or, as in the rest of Greek philosophy, matter was ascribed an unconditionally independent reality. But in Valentinus' system, for the first time, material being is clearly determined in its true essence as that of a *conditioned reality*, namely, as the true result of psychic alterations" (Solovyov's emphasis). Solovyov, "Valentin i valentiniane," 288.

53. Lev P. Karsavin, "Glubiny sataninskiye" [The Depths of Satan], in *Malye sochineniya* (Sankt-Petersburg: Aletheia, 1994). Originally published as an article in *Fenix*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Kostry, 1922), 95–113.

54. Lev P. Karsavin, *Sophiya zemnaya i gornaya*, in *Malye sochineniya*.

55. Lev P. Karsavin, *Noctes Petropolitanae*, in *Malye sochineniya*. Originally published as a book, Petrograd: ASK, 1922.

How could it be that, suddenly, my bitter sorrow becomes something alien to me, hard and coarse? How could it be that invisible tears suddenly flow as a visible river? Am I myself my own terror and trembling? Why do my terrible thoughts, that quiver and stretch their black wings, covering faces and moaning in wild horror, rush and spin in front of me, as autumnal leaves? O my Beloved, I smiled to you through my tears. But why, O why, having appeared through black clouds, does this smile shine, blazing as flames in innumerable drops hanging over the dark earth? I am divided, decaying and rotting; I am forgetting, losing myself. And it can no longer be said of my thoughts, feelings, and desires, that I am them. They, moreover, all surround and crush me.”⁵⁶

This text by Lev Karsavin offers, perhaps, the most striking example of just how deeply and intimately the Gnostic conceptions discussed here could be perceived and experienced in the context of Russian culture of “the Silver Age.”

Nikolay A. Berdyaev

The writings of Nikolay Berdyaev testify to the most extreme case in Russian culture of someone living through, or being deeply involved emotionally with, what we call “the problem of objectivation.” This attitude furnishes the greatest point of resemblance between Berdyaev’s perception of the world and that of the ancient Gnostics. Berdyaev avoids any “objectivating” mythology, including a cosmogonic one. Or, to be more precise, the philosopher’s ideas grow out of the same *existential positions* as those from which Gnostic mythology once originated. Those correspond to the feeling of being alienated from this “world of objectivation,” or “realm of Caesar,” which in turn gives rise to a specific sort of metaphysical radicalism. According to Berdyaev, what really exists is just person, or human spirit—free, creative, lonely, constantly resisting the forces of alienation,⁵⁷ “rooted in the inner aspect of existence, that is, in the spiritual world, in the world of freedom.”⁵⁸ Berdyaev emphasizes constantly that “the world of noumena . . . is the world of creative beings, not the world of ideas,”⁵⁹

56. Karsavin, *Sophiya zemnaya i gornaya*, 84–85.

57. To the efforts of the archons of this world, as a Gnostic could say.

58. Nikolay A. Berdyaev, *O rabstve i svobode cheloveka*, in *Tsarstvo dukha i tsarstvo kesarya* (Moscow: Respublika, 1995), 15. See also, on the same subject, Nikolay A. Berdyaev, *Opyt eskhatologicheskoy metaphiziki*, in *Tsarstvo dukha i tsarstvo kesarya*, part 1 ch. 2, 190–208. Similar ideas may be found, as discussed above, in the *Gospel of Truth*.

59. Berdyaev, *Opyt eskhatologicheskoy metaphiziki*, 197.

where one cannot help but be reminded by this of the personalistic interpretation of Platonic idealism set forth by the Gnostics (in *The Gospel of Truth*, *Zostrianos*, and a number of other treatises).

In the process of objectivation, the social and natural cosmos is generated—i.e. the social and natural elements of the person.⁶⁰ Like the author of *The Gospel of Truth*, Nikolay Berdyaev denies that the objective material world is true reality. Actually, there is only “the divine free world and the human free world.”⁶¹ The resemblance of Berdyaev’s world-view to the early-Christian Valentinian Gnosis emerges as especially striking in his statement that the whole material world is only “signs of events occurring in the spiritual world—events of dualization, alienation, throwing things into the state in which causal determination from without happens.”⁶²

The current state of things, in which any revelations of a person’s creative depths lose their spiritual independence and acquire the impenetrability of the material forms inherent in this world, is not the initial and necessary one. This state is only the manifestation of the person’s “fallenness.”⁶³ The corporeal world can, and must, take its leave of “the state of objectuality,” and turn to its own subjective depths—that is, enter into that spiritual state in which a human being dwells in communion with the whole spiritual universe.

CONCLUSION

The conceptual and terminological similarities exhibited by the systems of views discussed in this paper allow one to suppose that if an early-Christian Gnostic were to land up in the first half of the 20th century, they might well speak the language of Berdyaev’s philosophy. What, then, licenses us to say of conceptions encountered in religious and philosophical systems eighteen centuries apart that they are actually identical in some way? Let me enumerate the points of conformity:

60. Berdyaev, *O rabstve i svobode cheloveka*, 15. Let me point out that Berdyaev speaks not only about individual persons, but also about the universal person. This is analogous to Valentinian and Solovyov’s Sophia. Through a comparison with the sophiology of the late Ancient Gnosticism, one can discover in Berdyaev’s philosophy—in spite of his deliberate rejection of Paul Florensky’s and Sergey Bulgakov’s sophiological constructions—a hidden, but still intense, sophiological consideration.

61. Berdyaev, *Opyt eskhatologicheskoy metaphiziki*, part 1 ch. 2, 194.

62. *Ibid.*, 197.

63. Cf. Berdyaev’s statement about “fallenness” as an important epistemological category, in *ibid.*, 194.

1. Personalistic claims

- a. The doctrine that the subject of cosmogonic objectivation is *the absolute person*, which is both individual and universal

We can point to examples of such a conception of conjoined personhood in Sophia of the Ptolemaean cosmogonic myth, and in the parallel view of the aeons as the total spiritual humanity of *The Gospel of Truth*, while a close parallel to such a bifurcatory conception can be found in the writings of Solovyov.

- b. The personalistic interpretation of Plato's theory of ideas

This is a consequence of just these same extremely strong personalistic intuitions: κόσμος νοήτος turns into the heavenly Church.

2. The metaphysical fall of the absolute person

Both in the Gnostic systems and in the writings of the Russian philosophers scrutinized here, the reason for the cosmogonic objectivation is located *in the metaphysical fall* of the absolute person, the fall caused by the audacity of the absolute person, her ὕβρις. In Plotinus, the ὕβρις of the Mind, as it proceeds from the One, and the ὕβρις of the Soul, as it separates itself off from the Mind, or the Soul's τόλμα, can always be interpreted allegorically, because in Neo-Platonism the Mind and the Soul are quite impersonal and the cosmogonic emanation of the hypostases is actually necessary and naturally determined.⁶⁴ Turning to our case now, because the subject of the cosmogonic objectivation here is a true person, it is her audacity (ὕβρις) that brings about her real fall, through which she plunges herself and the world she generates into a state of "fallenness."

It is not by chance that the central figure of the Valentinian myth is Sophia—suffering, striving to escape from the world that she continuously generates through her unwittingly objectivated passions. Sophia strives for celestial holiness, but is possessed by her reckless thoughts. As a matter of fact, the figure of Sophia might be interpreted as a projection onto the universal level of the soul of the Gnostic himself (or herself).

3. The meaning of objectivation

Objectivation as such is a necessary moment in any act of *expression*: an expressed image of a thing is always something else, some-

64. For discussion of the meaning of "τόλμα" in Plotinus' cosmogony, see Giannis Stamatellos, *Plotinus and the Presocratics: A Philosophical Study of Presocratic Influences in Plotinus' Enneads* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 169–70, 74.

thing “outer” in relation to the “thing-in-itself.” But so long as an identity—even an imperfect one—between a thing and its apparent image is preserved, we may speak about *real expression*. For a Hellenistic philosopher, there is no insurmountable boundary between an εἶδος and its expression in the sensible world. In contrast, for a Gnostic, such real, true expression is possible only in πλήρωμα. In the cosmos, it is always distorted, defective. Here, every single thing is torn apart—a prisoner of the multitude of its partial manifestations, which are not consistent with one another and do not add up to one single image of the thing itself. Each such manifestation tries to act as if it were self-sufficient. Thus, for a Gnostic, everything being expressed in the world—by virtue of the world’s “fallenness,” which is its fundamental characteristic—is limited to *mere objectivation*. This expression is *only* alienation and self-destruction. Hence, there is a fundamental concept that really underpins the notion of objectivation in Gnosticism: *alienation*.

4. The experience of self-alienation

The strongest and most tragic emotions connected with self-alienation arise in those historical periods when the whole universe of values and meanings of a previous culture endures an acute crisis. A human remains alone with his or her soul, surrounded by an alien world. Hence comes the Gnostic feeling of “being thrown into that which is alien to one,” or of “searching for that lost native land, and for all things native.” Late Antiquity, and Russia through much of the 20th century, have both of them been historical periods of precisely this sort.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aland, Barbara. “Gnosis und Christentum.” In Layton, *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 1: 330–50. Leiden: Brill, 1980.
- . “Gnosis und Philosophie.” In Widengren and Hellholm, *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism*, 34–73.
- Attridge, Harold W. and George W. MacRae. “Introduction [to the *Gospel of Truth*].” In *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices*, edited by Harold W. Attridge, 55–81. Leiden: Brill, 1985.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. Edited and translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Berdyayev, Nikolay A. *O rabstve i svobode cheloveka*. In *Tsarstvo dukha i tsarstvo kesarya*, 4–162.

- . *Opyt eskhatalogicheskoy metaphiziki*. In *Tsarstvo dukha i tsarstvo kesarya*, 164–285.
- . *Tsarstvo dukha i tsarstvo kesarya*. Moscow: Respublika, 1995.
- Bonetskaya, Natal'ya K. "Russkaya sophiologiya i antroposofiya." *Voprosy filosofii* 7 (1995): 79–97.
- Brakke, David. *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Carlson, Maria. "Gnostic Elements in the Cosmogony of Vladimir Soloviev." In *Russian Religious Thought*, edited by Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard F. Gustafson, 49–67. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.
- Clement of Alexandria. *Extraits de Théodote*. Edited by François Louis Marie Matthiew Sagnard. Paris: Cerf, 1948.
- Exc. ex Theod. ———. *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria*. Edited by Robert P. Casey. London: Christophers, 1934.
- . *Evangelium veritatis*. Edited by Michel Malinine, Henri-Charles Puech, and Gilles Quispel. Zürich: Rascher, 1956.
- Finnestad, Ragnhild B. "The Cosmogonic Fall in Evangelium Veritatis." *Temenos* 7 (1971): 38–49.
- Florenskiy, Pavel A. *Stolp i utverzheniye istiny*. Vol. 1. Moscow: Pravda, 1990.
- Gefter, Mikhail Ya. "Istoriya — pozadi? Istoriya — chelovek lishniy?." *Voprosy filosofii* 9 (1993): 5–15.
- Grant, Robert M. *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1959.
- Adv. haer. Irenaeus. *Against heresies*. Trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, American ed., vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, 309–567. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913.
- Jonas, Hans. "A Retrospective View." In Widengren and Hellholm, *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism*, 1–15.
- . *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958.
- Kamenskikh, Aleksey A. "Evangelium Veritatis — Yevangelie istiny." *Schole. Ancient Philosophy and the Classical Tradition* 2, no. 1 (2008): 133–48.
- . "Evangelie istiny: v poiskakh tochnoy interpretatsii." *Religiovedeniye* 4 (2003): 63–76.
- . "Gnostitsizm v kul'turnom kontekste pozdney antichnosti." *Religiovedeniye* 3 (2002): 21–36.
- . "Tragediya kosmogonicheskoy ob'ektivatsii v valentinianstve i v russkoy religioznoy filosofii." In *Rossiya i Gnozis: Materialy konferentsii, Moskva, VGBIL [Russian State Library of Foreign Literature], 21–22 aprelya 2003 g.*, edited by Tatyana B. Vsekhsvyatskaya, 122–29. Moscow: Rudomino, 2004.
- Karsavin, Lev P. "Glubiny sataninskiye" [The Depths of Satan]. In *Malye sochineniya*, 58–75. Originally published as an article in *Fenix*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Kosty, 1922), 95–113.
- . *Malye sochineniya*. Sankt-Petersburg: Aletheia, 1994.

- . *Noctes Petropolitanae*. In *Malye sochineniya*, 99–203. Originally published as a book, Petrograd: ASK, 1922.
- . *Sophiya zemnaya i gornaya* [Sophia Terrestrial and Celestial]. In *Malye sochineniya*, 76–98.
- King, Karen L. *What is Gnosticism?* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Kozyrev, Aleksey P. “Smysl lyubvi v filosofii V. I. Solovyova i gnosticheskiye paralleli.” *Voprosy filosofii* 7 (1995): 59–78.
- . *Solovyov i gnostiki*. Moscow: S. A. Savin, 2007.
- . “Vladimir Solovyev i Anna Shmidt v chayanii ‘Tret’ego Zaveta.’” In *Rossiia i Gnozis*, 23–41. Moscow: Rudomino, 1996.
- L’Évangile de vérité*. Edited by Jacques E. Menard. Leiden: Brill, 1972.
- Layton, Bentley, ed. *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale New Haven, Connecticut, March 28-31, 1978*. Vol. 1, *The School of Valentinus*. Leiden: Brill, 1980.
- Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices*. Edited by Harold W. Attridge. Leiden: Brill, 1985.
- Plotinus. *[Complete works] in Seven Volumes*. Trans. by Arthur H. Armstrong. Edited by Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer. Loeb Classical Library 440–446. London: Heinemann / Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1966.
- Puech, Henri-Charles, Gilles Quispel, and W. C. van Unnik. *The Jung Codex: A Newly Recovered Gnostic Papyrus, Three Studies*. Edited and translated by F. L. Cross. London: Mowbray, 1955.
- Schenke, Hans Martin. *Die Herkunft des sogenannten Evangelium Veritatis*. Berlin: Evangelischer Verlag, 1958.
- Schoedel, William R. “Gnostic Monism and *The Gospel of Truth*.” In Layton, *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 1: 378–90. Leiden: Brill, 1980.
- Scholer, David M. *Nag Hammadi Bibliography, 1995–2006*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- LG Solovyov, Vladimir S. *Chteniya o Bogochelovechestve* [The Lectures on Godmanhood]. In *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Sergey M. Solovyov and Ernest L. Radlov, vol. 3: 3–185. St. Petersburg: Prosveshcheniye, 1912.
- . “Valentin i valentiniane.” In *Sobraniye sochineniy*, edited by Sergey M. Solovyov and Ernest L. Radlov, vol. 10: 285–90. St. Petersburg: Prosveshcheniye, 1914.
- Stamatellos, Giannis. *Plotinus and the Presocratics: A Philosophical Study of Presocratic Influences in Plotinus’ Enneads*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Ev. Ver. *The Gospel of Truth*. Translated and edited by Harold W. Attridge and George W. MacRae. In *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices*, edited by Harold W. Attridge, 82–118. Leiden: Brill, 1985.
- Widengren, Geo and David Hellholm, eds. *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism, Sponsored by Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, Stockholm, August 20-25, 1973*. Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell International, 1977.

- Williams, Michael A. *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Wilson, Robert McL. "Valentinianism and *The Gospel of Truth*." In Layton, *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 1: 133–45. Leiden: Brill, 1980.
- Yamauchi, Edwin M. *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences*. 1st ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973.