

Semyon Frank: An Apotheosis of Democracy in the Name of Personal Service

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ABSTRACT This essay introduces Semyon Lyudvigovich Frank as a philosopher who deservedly may be called a revolutionary thinker: he introduced a remarkable social ontology that foregrounds *service*. His oeuvre presents service as the supreme principle of personal and hence social life. The singular personality is seen as being there to creatively serve itself: his view of man focuses on the human soul as being there to bring forth creative action—to serve those who will come after, the community, society, and the Christian Churches. Service, then, is the source for freedom as a derivative principle. Consequently, and in opposition to the fundamental idea of the “Charter of Human Rights,” freedom in Frank has no absolute value, but only a functional one. It is justified by the ontological principle of service. All governmental organization is, ideally, the organization of freedom, the planned, systematic formation of free, spontaneous cooperation. Spontaneous cooperation makes up part of his concept of *sobornost’*, the empirical substrate of social culture. Frank would have agreed with Karl Popper’s notion of the “open society,” yet he would have certainly added that accessibility and transparency, be they spiritual or social, emanate from the principle of the universality of service. The true ontological meaning and the true source of democracy is, in his eyes, not the rule of all, but the service of all.

KEYWORDS Cusanus, Nicolas; Dilthey, Wilhelm; Frank, Semyon Lyudvigovich; service; social ontology; soul creativity; democracy

Semyon Lyudvigovich Frank’s American translator, Boris Jakim, correctly states in his *Preface* to the *The Spiritual Foundations of Society: An Introduction to Social Philosophy* (1930),¹ that it introduces two crucial ideas that could serve as a foundation for future social thought, namely those of *sobornost’* and *service*, the latter denoting the “highest normative prin-

ciple of social life.”² This essay concurs with Jakim’s view, and sets out to show that Frank would have certainly agreed with Karl Popper’s famous notion of the “open society.” Yet, and this bears on Frank’s main point, he certainly would have added that accessibility and transparency, be they spiritual or social, emanate from the “principle of the universality of service” (FF, 160). The true ontological meaning and the true source of democracy is not the rule of all, but the service of all. “The only primordial right of every man is his right to participate in the common service” (FF, 148). This essay represents a *tour de frappe* through Frank’s entire philosophical work, conducted in order to elucidate the central place of service in his social philosophy and/or in his philosophical psychology.

The social philosophy he presented in fact has the appearance of an ontology of principles. Yet, I hold that his *Foundations* is incomprehensible when read without taking into careful account the basic tenets of other major works that prepare or complete this important work. Chronologically, this investigation therefore starts with *The Object of Knowledge* (1915),³ and ends with *The Light Shineth in Darkness: An Essay in Christian Ethics and Social Philosophy* (1949).⁴ Between 1915 and 1949 the style of his thought changed decisively. The *Light*’s foreword expresses Frank’s fear of possibly being mistaken for a theologian,⁵ in that his discourses by that time had become increasingly religious.

Already, in 1885, Nikolay Grot (1852–1899)—one of the creators of the “Psychological Society” in Moscow (1885–1917) and initiator of the journal *Questions in Philosophy and Psychology* (*Voprosy Filosofii i Psikhologii*)—and Frank had agreed that philosophy’s guiding norm should not be theoretical omniscience but the sensible interpretation of life’s meaning. Philosophy should integrate psychological factors into the scope of its ob-

1. Semyon Frank, *The Spiritual Foundations of Society: An Introduction to Social Philosophy*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens, OH; London: Ohio University Press, 1987; originally published as *Dukhovnye osnovy obshchestva: Vvedenie v sotsial’nyu filosofiyu*, 1930). Hereafter cited as FF.

2. Cf. Boris Jakim, “Translator’s Preface,” in Semyon Frank, *The Spiritual Foundations of Society*.

3. Semyon Frank, *Predmet znaniya: Ob osnovakh i predelakh otvlechyennogo znaniya*, in *Predmet znaniya: Ob osnovakh i predelakh otvlechyennogo znaniya; Dusha cheloveka: Opyt vvedeniya v filosofskuyu psikhologiu* (Sankt Petersburg: Nauka, 1995). Hereafter cited as FPZ.

4. Semyon Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness: An Essay in Christian Ethics and Social Philosophy*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens, OH; London: Ohio University Press, 1989; originally published as *Svet vo t’me: Opyt khristianskoy etiki i sotsial’noy filosofii*, Paris: YMCA-Press 1948). Hereafter cited as FL.

5. Cf. *ibid.*, xix.

servations and, at the same time, transcend all limits of personal experience.⁶ In line with Wilhelm Dilthey, philosophical psychology is taken to emerge scientifically from the methodological application of *living knowledge* (*zhivoe znanie*) through the postulating of an “eidetic” recognition of self.⁷ Like Gustav Shpet and Aleksey Losev—the most prominent interpreters of Edmund Husserl’s *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology* (*Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie*, 1913)—Frank, too, drew on the Platonic concept of the *eidos*, which he understood as content.⁸ But how, then, did he translate the Platonic idea of the *eidos* into his system of cognition?

Arguing against soulless “empirical psychology,” Frank conceived of “philosophical psychology” as being aimed at the observation of ontological aspects of human consciousness.¹⁰ Next to Wilhelm Dilthey, Frank also referred to Franz Brentano,¹¹ as they both drew on the soul’s active, intentional gaze.¹² Frank’s “Tasks of a Philosophical Psychology” (“Zadachi filosofskoy psikhologii,” 1916), his *The Human Soul and Attempt at an Introduction to Philosophical Psychology* (*Dusha cheloveka: Opyt vvedeniya v filosofskuyu psikhologiyu*, 1917), and his “On the Nature of the Soul’s Life” (“O prirode dushevnoy zhizni,” 1927) all discuss the soul’s intentional gaze aimed at phenomena. Referring to the German Neokantian philosophers Wilhelm Windelbandt and Heinrich Rickert, he also proposed the re-establishment of philosophy as a science that should be expected to pay attention to the psychological aspects of cognition. Philosophical psychology entails recognition of the self, scientifically investigating possible paradigms of the fulfillment of this Socratic postulate. Philosophical Psy-

6. Cf. Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, *Sergei N. Trubetsky: An Intellectual among the Intelligentsia in pre-Revolutionary Russia* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1976), 66–70.

7. Cf. Semyon Frank, *Dusha cheloveka: Opyt vvedeniya v filosofskuyu psikhologiyu*, in *Predmet znaniya*, 445. Hereafter cited as *FD*.

8. For this translation into Russian by Frank cf. Semyon Frank, “O prirode dushevnoy zhizni” [On the Nature of the Soul’s Life], in Semyon Frank, *Po tu storonu pravogo i levogo: Sbornik statey*, ed. V. S. Frank (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1972), 225. Originally published in 1927. Hereafter cited as *FP*.

9. Cf. *ibid.*, 201–14.

10. Cf. Semyon Frank, “Zadachi filosofskoy psikhologii” [Tasks of a Philosophical Psychology], *Russkaya Mysl’* 37, no. (book) 10 (1916). Hereafter referred to as *FZ*. The same text appeared in *FD*, 421–47. Here it is titled “O ponyatii i zadachakh filosofskoy psikhologii.”

11. Cf. *FP*, 224, for Frank’s reference to Franz Brentano’s work *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte*. Frank credits Brentano with the honor of having laid down the foundations for Edmund Husserl’s notion of “intentionality” as presented in the latter’s *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*. Cf. also *FD*, 443, first footnote on this page.

12. Cf. *FD*, 441–446, and cf. *FZ*.

chology is thus concerned with “defining the soul’s place within the general system of Being and the soul’s inter-relationships within other realms of existence.”¹³

Frank, who supervised the translation of Edmund Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, Part One (*Logische Untersuchungen*, Bd. 1, 1909), into Russian, mentions him in *The Human Soul* and in *The Spiritual Foundations* several times. All such references are similar in content. Referring to Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy, Frank explains: “In addition to being non-material, social being is supra-individual and supra-personal and thereby differs from psychic being. We shall call this objective non-material being an idea in the sense of the spiritual (but not psychic) objective content of being” (FF, 76). Consequently, these “ideas” may not be confused with regulative, abstract ideas in the Kantian sense. In Frank, ideas are “prototypical,” for they bear “teleological force” and thus act upon human consciousness—namely, upon the will, in the form of that which “should be” (FF, 78). Evidently, we encounter an analogy between the arguments here: “eidetic” recognition and ideas are both “directed” and “meet” each other in human consciousness. Hence we need to examine how it is, exactly, that consciousness acquires shape. In order to detail his ideas I will briefly examine his intellectual biography.

From 1898 to 1901/02 Frank (together with Sergey Bulgakov, Nikolay Berdyaev, and quite a number of other famous persons) adhered to “legal Marxism,” nourished by Neokantianism. His total break with Marxism, which followed soon after, was mainly a result of his encounter with Friedrich Nietzsche’s works, which offered him new insights into the reality of the human spirit. In the wake of this Frank then lived through, philosophically speaking, a phase of vague “idealism,” merged with pantheism.¹⁴ In 1912, after he had gone through a long interim period due to his suspicion of being institutionally bound to a particular confession, he was baptized into the Russian Orthodoxy,¹⁵ yet he did not wish to become a theologian—rather a free philosopher (FL, 159). Platonism,¹⁶ especially

13. FD, 445. Cf. also FZ, 47.

14. Cf. Philip Boobbyer, *S. L. Frank: The Life and Work of a Russian Philosopher; 1877–1950* (Athens, OH; London: Ohio University Press, 1995), 23–33. Boobbyer covers comprehensively the influence of German idealism on Frank. He records that Frank’s early interest in philosophy arose thanks to Baruch Spinoza’s *Ethics* and Kuno Fischer’s *History of Modern Philosophy*. Frank was deeply affected by Spinoza’s “intellectual love of God,” his “contemplative pantheism,” the idea of a “divine total unity.”

15. For details concerning Frank’s conversion to the Russian Orthodoxy in 1912, cf. *ibid.*, 72–81.

16. Cf. Frances Nethercott, *Russia’s Plato: Plato and the Platonic Tradition in Russian Edu-*

its two greatest representatives, Plotinus and Nicolas Cusanus, determined the horizons of his religious philosophy.¹⁷ He even acknowledged Cusanus as his only philosophical teacher, for the Cardinal Cusanus had presented the highest philosophical interpretation of “Christian Humanism.”¹⁸ The Neoplatonists were in general essentially right in proclaiming Ideas to be the contents of a universal reason—as it were, eternal thoughts or designs of God (FR, 10).

In 1913 Frank decided to evolve his entire thought on the basis of his special COGITO THEOREM: “cogito, ergo est esse absolutum.”¹⁹ In *The Object of Knowledge* he explains that St. Augustine had replaced the Platonic world of ideas by a God who is no “object,” but rather an all-embracing, absolute “living Truth” (*zhivaya Istina*) that denotes the “living potential of knowledge or consciousness” (FPZ, 381).²⁰ This is in spite of the fact that this Truth concerns, philosophically, a *Ding an sich* (a thing in itself)—for, indeed, it is true on a basis different from Immanuel Kant’s.²¹ Kant took the “world to be, so to speak, a picture that we ourselves create by imposing upon the sensuous material the forms inherent in our consciousness” (FR, 5). In Frank, objective Truth, truth *an sich*, is fathomed not “*sub specie cognoscendi*, but *sub specie essendi*” (FPZ, 165). Therefore Frank describes that which is subjectively understood through the prism of *objective non-knowledge*: God Himself, *für sich*, remains as the “Unknown.” He is the “Primordial Ground”²² that is discursively grasped by means of what Plato has

cation, Science, and Ideology (1840–1930) (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 86–95, on the Neokantian recovery of Plato in Russia.

17. Cf. Semyon Frank, *Reality and Man: An Essay in the Metaphysics of Human Nature*, trans. Natalie Duddington (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), xiv. Hereafter cited as FR.

18. Cf. Semyon Frank, “O nevozmozhnosti filosofii: Pis'mo k drugu” (Letter to a friend “On Impossibility of Philosophy,” 13 August 1994), in *Russkoye mirovozzreniye* (Sankt Petersburg: Nauka, 1995), 97. Hereafter cited as FO. Frank refers to Cusanus in a similar manner in many other places throughout his works.

19. Cf. Boobbyer, S. L. Frank, 83.

20. Cf. also FR, 20, where Frank refers to St. Augustine’s *Confessions*. Cf. also Semyon Frank, “Absolyutnoe,” trans. A. Vlaskina and A. Ermicheva, in *Russkoye mirovozzreniye*, 66–69. Originally published in German. Similar references to St. Augustine may be found in many other places in his work.

21. On the Russian philosophical tradition of *primum vivere deinde philosophare*, cf. Semyon Frank, “Sushchnost’ i vedushchiye motivy russkoy filosofii” [Nature of and the Leading Motives in Russian Philosophy], trans. A. Vlaskina and A. Ermicheva, in *Russkoye mirovozzreniye*, 169. Originally published in German. Hereafter cited as FS.

22. Cf. Semyon Frank, *The Unknowable: An Ontological Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens, OH; London: Ohio University Press, 1983; first published as *Nepostizhimoye: Ontologicheskoe vvedenie v filosofiyu religii*, Russkaya nauchnaya

called *logismos nothos*,²³ a sort of illegitimate speculation (*FU*, 32). By simple logic, there can be no identity between what is “grasped” and the object in question. If there is no identity between the recognized and the object in question—which is the central Kantian point about making a qualitative difference between things *an sich* and *für sich*—how does Frank justify his special COGITO THEOREM in greater detail?

The Unknowable: An Ontological Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (1939), forms the high point of Frank’s output; this great work expounds the boundaries of reason and discusses the reality of *The Unknowable* that, in multiple respects, permeates human existence.²⁴ The introductory remarks to this work clarify that he uses Cusanus’ *Docta Ignorantia* in looking at spheres of being: first, the surrounding world that is phenomenologically present before us and which Frank explores in its roots and foundations. Secondly, he looks at man’s being as it is revealed in terms of the “inner life,” relating it as much to the “inner life of other people” as to “the more profound, spiritual ground of our psychic life” (*FU*, xxii). Last but not least, Frank investigates that sphere of reality which, as the “primordial ground and total unity, somehow unifies and grounds the diverse, heterogeneous worlds of 1 and 2” (*ibid.*).

In a manner analogous to Georg Hegel’s dialectics, which culminates in a synthesis in its third stage (*FU*, 82), Cusanus’ negated negation also leads to a new third sphere. Frank agreed with Cusanus that separate determinations pertain to the Absolute neither in the form of “either-or,” nor in the form of “both” the one and the other (*FU*, 81). Consequently, the third negation defines the Unknowable as an ineffable unity of conjoined separate determinations and their disjunction. This paradoxical unity embraces the diversity of existence from outside like something new and alien to it, but at the same time in such a way that it and acts within in the diversity itself (*FU*, 83, and *FR*, 44–54). This “synthesis,” the “third or highest stage,” is expressible neither in judgments nor concepts (*FU*, 98). Human reality thus transcends the opposition between the absolute and the relative, between transcendence and immanence, for it is an ineffable unity,

bibliyoteka 1, Paris: Dom Knigi i Sovremennye Zapiski, 1939), 13–20. Hereafter cited as *FU*. The original version of the *Unknowable* was written in German, as *Das Unergründliche: Ontologische Einführung in die Philosophie der Religion*. However, in 1937 it was impossible to publish this work in Germany. The Russian version turned out to be much more comprehensive, the text is about one third longer.

23. Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 52b2.

24. Cf. Alexander Haardt, “Einleitung,” in Semyon Frank, *Das Unergründliche. Ontologische Einführung in die Philosophie der Religion* (Freiburg; München: K. Alber, 1995), 11.

the coincidence of opposites. Diametrically opposite to Hegel's concept of the absolute that reveals itself merely to itself, Frank, as we may grasp from this passage, believed that the absolute made up an intrinsic part of personal reality, a sphere we shall be examining below.

What counts for Wilhelm Dilthey as "understanding" (*Verstehen*) corresponds to "living knowledge" for Frank. Understanding is a primordial and, at first glance, purely subjective form of knowledge of existence, which Frank calls "primary knowledge," covering the spheres of the Unknowable. Our glimpses of it reflect an "explicit, clearly illuminated mystery" and penetrate human consciousness, even if this cannot be in a "distinctly conscious" manner (*FU*, 29). In modern Western philosophy, "living knowledge" comes close to Blaise Pascal's notions of the "logic of the heart" and the "sensitive brain," Friedrich Jakobi's "sensitive intuition," and the late Friedrich Schelling's philosophy, which has been especially attractive to Russian thinkers. Frank's confrontation with the German so called "philosophers of life" (especially Wilhelm Dilthey, Friedrich Nietzsche, Georg Simmel),²⁵ and with Henri Bergson,²⁶ persuaded him to draw epistemologically upon concrete life, concrete experience, and intuition, as determining reference points for his philosophical discourse: "подлинное внутреннее наблюдение," real introspection, in fact constitutes the primary basis of his philosophical psychology.²⁷ "Abstract knowledge"²⁸ is secondary, for it denotes merely deductions of intuitively understood ideas. Thus the ensuing part of my investigation here will deal with the formation of human consciousness and other basic tenets of Frank's philosophical psychology, before finally going into his transcendental social psychology, his Phenomenology of Spirit.

Detailing his ideas on "Godmanhood," Frank wonders where the soul ends and where the spirit begins. Spirit is "neither transcendent nor immanent in relation to the soul, but stands in some other, ineffable relation to it." We thus encounter another coincidence of opposites: the principle of the unity of separateness and mutual penetration (*FU*, 170). The human

25. From 1899 to 1901 Frank stayed in Berlin where he attended lectures by Georg Simmel and intensively studied the works of the Neokantians Alois Riehl and Wilhelm Windelband.

26. In fact, Bergson is mentioned in many of Frank's major writings; see, for example, *FO*, 89.

27. Frank develops this idea comprehensively in *FZ*. In this context, cf. footnote 12, also see *FD*, 444.

28. For the use of this terminology by Frank, cf. *FU*, xii. It is repeated at many other places.

soul *in itself* does not bear the property of being, for it needs to be revealed to itself: this revelation stands midway in the trans-rational gap between immanence and transcendence, for as Frank asserts, the “deepest layer of our psychic being (i.e., of immediate self-being) that reveals itself to our self-awareness is already spiritual.” The converse of this is also true, in that “spirit in its immediate action on the soul’s being is already ‘soul-like’” (*FU*, 169). Consequently, revelation is both: namely, the soul’s immanent revelation to itself and, simultaneously, the revelation of the spirit’s transcendent reality. In *On the Nature of the Soul’s Life* Frank therefore agrees with Henri Bergson that the soul’s spirit-like action is creative action by definition.²⁹ Spirit denotes vital energy: it is not anything ready-made, not “substance,” and “creative life” is not the spirit’s property, state or attribute, but its very “essence.” The conceptions of life and of living, of creativeness and creator coincide (*FR*, 82). Man is not only a servant of God (*FL*, 165), a higher will (*FF*, 111; 135), but simultaneously a “co-partner in God’s creativeness.” He granted His creatures a share in His own creativeness. “Human spirit is a created entity to which God as it were partly delegates His own creative power” (*FR*, 156).

Frank’s philosophical psychology thus grasps the Unknowable in acknowledging the transcendent-immanent relation between spirit and soul, which is why spirit belongs in the realm of psychological phenomena. Psychological phenomena, then, in part answer to transcendent tasks, tasks that are absolutely independent from the individual but are given from above—from God, who emanates spirit. The spirit’s reality in man’s lives is, by definition, a creative reality. By discussing Frank’s conception of, so to speak, transcendent-immanence, which describes the relation between spirit and soul, we have arrived at his conception of human consciousness. Frank says that spiritual being is the ground and the roots of the reality of immediate self-being as a deep, solid, rooted, massive reality, and as a genuine “inner being”: when we have a clear revelation of our own “soul,” psychic being is then given to us not in its isolation, but precisely in its rootedness in the ground of spiritual being (*FU*, 163).

The Frankian ontology of the human soul, which, as we have seen, emphasizes man’s potential for co-creativeness, is, moreover, intrinsically linked to Frank’s ontology of community. Man’s “deification” corresponds to the “ultimate goal of social life,” because the latter marks “the realization of life itself” (*FF*, 126). At the same time, this “realization” corresponds to his idea of godmanhood (*bogochelovechestvo*).

29. Cf. *FP*, 231–33, and cf. *FR*, 153–60.

Because every man is the image and likeness of God, all people are fundamentally equal. This equality touches man's relation to God, yet it in no way contradicts some correlative "inequality" (FF, 147). This inequality corresponds to the "principle of hierarchy," which represents an ontological cornerstone in society's life" (FF, 141). "Equality is the universal call to service, while service, as a moral activity, is based on human freedom" (FF, 147). The obligatory is a primordial category that expresses the subordination of human will to a higher, absolutely obligating, ideal principle. Service arises out of the Divine-human nature of social life and is "always present in the form of law and power" (FF, 87).

Immediate self-being always overflows the "the confines of my own self" (FR, 60–62). "Real transcending," as the self-embedding of immediate self-being into something other, or the assimilation by immediate self-being of this other, is possible only in relation to a reality that, in its essence, has a certain inner kinship with immediate self-being (FU, 160). Or, to put the same point in Frankian terms of another sort, "communion" is the expression of the people's rootedness in one "living whole." This "living whole" is Jesus Christ: "He that abideth in me, and I in him" testifies to the reality of Christ's invisible church, the "light of the Divine Logos" (FL, 73). As must be concluded, this Divine Logos is me-like and hence determines man's intuitive gaze, his eidetic attention.

Reflecting upon modern, Western European philosophy, Frank argues that the theory of communion, the encounter of two consciousnesses, has been rendered completely impossible by defining the "I" as fulfilling the role of an absolutely primordial principle (notable and rare exceptions to this false horizon of thought were, as he thought, Max Scheler,³⁰ Ferdinand Ebner, Martin Buber, and to some extent Georg Simmel, FU, 14). As reality perpetually transcends itself, the 'I' cannot have its own real being, its *non aliud*, except as part of the *aliud*. Communion bears the experience of reality as it simultaneously is "this" and the "other," the I and the non-I. In formal-logical terms, reality is accessible only to the *Docta ignorantia* (FR, 62), whereas in human life, communion is our link with that which is external to us and, at the same time, essential to our inner life.

Communion is ultimately disclosed in the phenomenon of love. The person we communicate with ceases to be an "object" and is no longer a "he"

30. Cf. Rupert Gläser, *Die Frage nach Gott in der Philosophie S. L. Franks*, Das östliche Christentum, Neue Folge 28 (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1975), 29–31. Cf. also Peter Ehlen, "Einleitung," in Semyon Frank, *Die geistigen Grundlagen der Gesellschaft: Einführung in die Sozialphilosophie* (Freiburg; München: K. Alber, 2002), 61, on Max Scheler's "personalism," and 58–60, on Martin Buber's "I-thou philosophy" and its impact on Frank.

but a “thou.” The “we” overcomes and simultaneously preserves the opposition of “I am” and “thou art” (*FR*, 60–69, and *FU*, 137–148). The “we” is a certain widening of the “I,” spreading beyond its primary and, so to speak, its natural limits. Consciously, the “I” can only be perceived beyond the “confines of my own self” (*FR*, 60–62). And so, the “we” denotes another coincidence of opposites in which I perceive the inner ground of my own existence in the unity of being “inside of me” and being “outside of me” which surpasses all rational thought (*FU*, 149).

Key points hence sound as follows: (1) The experience of the “thou” signifies the existence of an “impersonal personal” reality that denotes unity of the “we.” This experience is bound to transcendent immanence, to “real transcending” (*FU*, 122), which is why (2) this unity is revealed in a concrete-living way only in the phenomenon of love (*FU*, 148). It may be said that the potency of love is the very essence of human life (*FR*, 67, and *FL*, 148–152). *Sobornost’* lies at the base of society and is an expression of love as the action of inner supra-natural Divine truth which overcomes empirical nature (*FF*; 106). Last but not least, (3) Frank’s notion of Godmanhood basically consists of Frank’s idea of service. *Sobornost’* between people necessarily leads to the obligation to serve the *aliud*, the non-I, for if being is as much outside of me as it is inside of me, then by simple logic, there is little choice other than to cover the distance between the two either by domination and/or dictatorship, or by reconciliation with the help of service given to the non-I.

Frank’s reasoning about cognition had initially been inspired by the Slavophiles, especially Ivan Kireevskiy, whom he credits with having introduced the idea of “living knowledge”—bound up with the latter’s concept of *sobornost’*—into the discussion.³¹ The ontological unity of the “we” is what Frank also calls *sobornost’*: it lies behind “every mechanical, external relation between an individual and an association of individuals” (*FF*, 58). Fundamentally, there are three basic phenomena expounding this form of “mutual understanding”: first, the primary and fundamental form of it is “marriage and family,” the eternal foundation of every society (*FF*, 60). Secondly, *sobornost’* is realized in all forms of a socially shared “religious life” generating the intuitive feeling of the connection of the human soul with the absolute principle and “absolute Unity” (*FF*, 60). Thirdly, another form or expression of *sobornost’* is the “common fate and life” shared in any type of brotherhood. These three forms are merely abstractly isolated aspects or spheres of *sobornost’* spinning threads which genuinely pass through the

31. Cf. *FS*, 156.

souls of people, inwardly connecting them in the ontologically real unity of *sobornost'* (FF, 62): it, as it were, paraphrases the basis tenets of Frank's transcendental psychology, with its combining of ontological and psychological postulates. In formal logical terms, it allows one to say that all *obshchestvennost'*—in the sense of the entire system of human coalitions and social institutions and / or organizations (FF, 54–67)—is ontologically based on *sobornost'*, the “primordial organic unity of the ‘we’” (FF, 54–67). Social life (*obshchestvennost'*) is the outer expression or incarnation of soul-like spiritual life, viz. of *sobornost'*. In this sense the true foundation of social life is a “living idea” seeking realization (FF, 54–67).

The Church is of crucial importance, as the “ultimate source of social unity lies in the principle of service.” Ideally, the church, that is to say the “soul” of the world (FF, 112), is to represent “the sense of the obligatory, of the normative consciousness”: the Church unites and, ideally, guides social life. Frank continues this strand of thought by maintaining that even in the most secularized society, “law and other forms of power” take their legitimacy from the “truth in which society believes” (FF, 111). As the reader should understand from the foregoing discussions, I certainly do not agree with Sergey Khoruzhiy's assertion that besides Neoplatonism, pantheism was one of the pillars of Frank's social philosophy,³² for in formal-logical terms the *docta ignorantia* precisely excludes all ideas of identity between God and nature, and seeks to crystallize the paradoxical situation that God makes part of nature and, at the same time, does not do so. He does both at one and the same time, a situation that definitely excludes all ideas of identity. As has been shown, ontologically, the human soul is Spirit-like, yet there is definitely no identity between the Spirit and the individual soul: rather, there is a sort of personal integration by penetration that is consciously allowed for by the individual personality.

Hence, Frank's social and political concept of an all-encompassing unity comes down to the following formula: the “invisible church” forms the enigmatic essence of the living organism (FF, 66). Every society is necessarily grounded in the church as the nucleus and life-giving principle of society (FF, 106). This is why Hegel was not really wrong in defining the state as an “earthly god.” However, his *pantheistic* identification of the divine with the human is, of course, as Frank asserts, incorrect (FF, 102). There is by no means any identity. All we have to do with here is another “coincidence of opposites” for, again, the “ideal” and the “empirically real”

32. Cf. Sergey Khoruzhiy, *Posle pereryva: Puti russkoy filosofii* (Sankt Petersburg: Aleteya, 1994), 58.

in social life do not oppose each other as two concretely separate loci of power, but are inseparably fused (*FF*, 118).

Frank himself discussed neither conceptions of the visible Churches nor the political problem of the relationship between the Church and the State. The type of “Christian realism” he defended acknowledged the legitimacy of the Church’s total retreat from involving itself in any worldly affairs. Frank justified the early Church’s rejection of the world as having been partly due to its faith in the imminent end of the world, which made inessential all work towards improving the early structure of life (*FL*, 220). As times have changed, so, also, has the Church’s role in the world. Yet, from two of Frank’s late letters I conclude that he was highly suspicious of the existing Christian Churches, for they neither represented the *corpus mysticum* nor the *ecclesia militans* that was called for.³³ About twenty years earlier Frank had already expressed his fear that all attempts at the external, artificial, mechanically organizational absorption of the world by the Church are not only destined to fail, but lead to a result contrary to their goal, namely, to the secularization of the Church—of that very inner holiness by which society lives (*FF*, 112).

As it stands, he decisively rejected the Churches’ turn to politics or, to be more precise, the establishment of a political form of religion. By contrast, when it came to bridging the gap between the visible Church and atheists, Frank granted the utmost importance to the individual Christian personality.³⁴ This argument is perfectly in line with the nobility he ascribes to the individual, who is not permitted to narrow down his understanding of the consequential significance of his beliefs to some merely private spheres (*FL*, 144–147, and 220–222). “Christian Realism is sorrow in regard to the imperfection of the world” (*FL*, 181), and is nourished by normative principles that take their origin, as has been shown at length, from the soul-like actions of the Spirit. He acknowledges that to set out to perfect the world is really just to aspire to achieving the maximal adequacy of the concrete forms of human life to these unshakable, eternal normative conditions of the world’s being (*FL*, 202).

Moral perfecting—the idea we are dealing with at this point—is, once again, of a dual character: namely, on the one hand, essential moral perfecting in the sense of the introduction of good into human souls, their moral education—and, on the other, the perfecting of the order of life, in

33. Cf. Semyon Frank, “Pis’mo Vyach. Ivanovu” (Letter to Vyacheslav Ivanov, 7 May 1947) in *Russkoye mirovozzreniye*, 95.

34. Cf. *ibid.*, 97.

the sense of the norms and institutions effective in social life (*FL*, 218), and so of everything that belongs to the spheres of *obshchestvennost'*. Dismissing the idea of inevitable progress in history and denying all ideas of a kingdom of Man on earth, Frank apprehends history soberly as an educative process of mankind. Even though he enthrones the moral education of the singular individual by calling it the "royal road of the genuine Christian perfecting of life" (*FL*, 222), he does not discuss any of its particulars. From his point of view, as it stands, the task of accumulating human powers "as tools that serve the good" (*FL*, 211) is self-evident, and its achievements necessarily pour into the world (*FL*, 235). Education plays a part in Christian politics, entailing "the Christianization of life" through a "path from inside outwards." Frank decisively rejects all forms of political and social fanaticism (*FL*, 225). "Christian Realism" is based on the principle of the concrete effectiveness of our moral activity (*FL*, 132).

To be sure, there is nothing like a moral ideology, or any other type of ideology, in Frank. By "ideology" I mean an ethical social program based on linear moral calculations, in that it presupposes some intrinsic values pertaining to environmental circumstances that supposedly give birth to a specified type of social action that is, in turn, quite evidently bound up with a particular type of morality. To put the same point another way, the rejection of intentional and/or conceptual competition is, therefore, in principle one of the key signs of ideological commitment, for the ideal picture of the present and/or future is held to be absolutely relevant. Frank's Christian realism is in fact a kind of anti-utopia. As there is no dogmatic, no fixed concept of a "Christian order of life" (*FL*, 226), and because Christian politics demands a creative Christianizing of the general conditions of life (*FL*, 226), there will only be tentative outlines of an order—of one that counts as the optimum one in relative terms. These draw on Frank's ontological assertion that power and hierarchy, law, order, and conservatism must be combined with spontaneous innovation through the individual's creativity. Ontologically, the relatedness between conservatism and creativity is predetermined by the soul's spirit-like character: namely, by the priority of *service* in respect of a task that is ontologically configured.

Frank agreed completely with Kant that there is but "one innate right,"³⁵ namely "the right to serve" (*FF*, 146). He paid tribute to the "discovery of the categorical uniqueness of the ought" as "an immortal achievement" (*FR*, 70). Nevertheless, he radically disagreed with Kant's ethics, inasmuch as it had been constructed with the help of forms—namely, the categor-

35. Cf. Ehlen, "Einleitung," 67.

ical imperatives. By contrast, Frank maintained that the “ought” rather represents, in respect of man’s psychological reality, a reality that is self-revealing. The reality of man’s soul by definition carries certain trans-individual attributes, so that service then comes to signify an ontological, and a basic, necessity (*FR*, 72).

As the Christian religion is, in essence, a religion founded on the idea of grace, Christian teachings therefore transcend all juridical orders, so-called natural moral law included (*FL*, 174): fundamentally, “grace” nourishes Christian morality spiritually. Beyond grace, consciously or unconsciously present in the depths of our being, there is no moral life at all: no principle that, in forming, unifying, and perfecting human life, would give rise to social life (*FF*, 94). Perfectly in line with Thomas Aquinas, Frank defines natural law as part of eternal law (*FL*, 173). And yet, the imperfect relation between grace and natural moral law renders juridical law a necessity, for the world’s being is not yet illuminated to an extent sufficient to do without the latter.

Alas, Christian morality, and consequently Christian politics, must thus face up to a double imperfection. First, grace does not coincide with (natural) moral law, which, even so, is necessary and obligatory (*FL*, 175). Secondly, legal law, the outer realization of the obligatory, in turn never perfectly matches moral law. Only utopia transfers the function of salvation to juridical law and to measures of compulsion (*FL*, 167). Christian moral life must therefore bridge this *dual lack of conformity* by means of the “all-embracing principle of love” (*FL*, 149).

What Frank calls the “politics of love” entails a system of actions guided by a responsible understanding of both “politics” and “love.” It is to have a decisive significance for the genuinely Christian solution of problems in all domains of social and state life (*FL*, 150–152). Christian politics follows the motto “fais ce que tu dois, advienne ce que pourra” (“do what you have to do, come what may”), by harmonizing the tasks of essential salvation and external assistance to the world (*FL*, 154–158; 318–28). It turns out that the “relation between morality and law” is only derivative of this primary relation between the “life of grace” and “life according to the [moral] law” (*FF*, 96).

Service, the supreme principle of personal, and hence social, life, is the source of two derivative principles, namely, solidarity and freedom. Service, in Frank, has nothing to do with the satisfaction of forms of egotism (*FF*, 131–133). Service calls for freedom, i.e., a sphere that allows for individual presentations of co-creation, of active participation in personal and social life (*FF*, 135). Consequently, and in opposition to the fundamental idea of

the "Charter of Human Rights," freedom in Frank has no absolute value, but only a functional one. *Freedom is justified only by the ontological principle of service* (FF, 173). This is why all liberal, democratic, and socialist theories count as false when based exclusively on "rights" or the "will of the people." In Frank's eyes, they should all first acknowledge the basic idea of service (FL, 130).

In fact, service calls for centers of social activity that are separate from each other and legally protected (FF, 173). The Christian social ordering of life is most fruitful when it, as Frank maintained, consists of a "harmonious coordination" of many small unions and social groups. The latter are able to sustain to a maximal degree the proper characteristics of personal relations between people, whereas the all-powerfulness of larger unions and, in particular, of the state, is inevitably based on a soulless compulsion indifferent to the concrete needs of people. The family, neighborhood organizations, professional cells and unions of all sorts, philanthropic organizations, local forms of self-government, are all channels through which the life-giving spirit of personal relations between people penetrate into the various realms of general forms of compulsory social order. In other words, the creative action of the gracious powers of Divine-human truths pours into social life with the help of singular personalities that in turn communicate them to small cells of the general social organism (FL, 227, and FF, 134). Evidently, this "harmonious coordination" signifies "the unity of civil society as the empirical substrate of social culture," the latter requiring a system of civil law. All governmental organization is, ideally, "the organization of freedom, the planned, systematic formation of free spontaneous cooperation" (FF, 171). Man is, as we have seen, called to serve creatively himself, those who will come after, the community, society, and the Christian Churches. The concept of power, then, by simple logic, is defined quite unambiguously by Frank. "All power in essence comes not from below but from above" (FF, 158) and, alas, requires subordination. By definition, social life, a "hierarchical" (FF, 140) "multi-unity" (FF, 104), is confined to authority, ideally, to "the rule of the best" (FF, 144). As there are, in Frank, hardly any details concerning the ideal form of government, all that remains is for us to analyze why he vaguely favored democracy.

Firstly, he holds that civil society grows spontaneously from the inside of society, and can as little be planned as free creativity (FF, 172). Nonetheless, civil society presupposes the state as outside of itself (FF, 176). Again, as with Cusanus, we end up asserting that the ontological essence of society—which is what are dealing with in Frank—is both *spontaneous innovation*, generated by civil society, and planned stability, that is to say

conservatism, guaranteed by the state and its institutions. Secondly, it follows from the foregoing arguments that, moreover, civil societies depend on civil law, which is supposed to emancipate individuals with respect to both one another and the state and its diverse institutions. The Christian ideal of “freely loving others” calls for a form of social organization that will legally guarantee freedom to a “maximal” extent. The justice of an order consists in the principle of *sum cuique*, i.e., in the fact that the order ensures the natural rights of every human individual, controlled rights on private property included (FF, 172–175). Viewed from this standpoint, “Christian socialism” is a contradiction in terms.³⁶ Finally, even if there is no natural, unchanging form of rule and no unchanging form of organization for the economy, for property, or even for family life (FL, 172), there will still be some unchanging principles, the most important of which will be that of spontaneous and / or planned service, viz., service as an intrinsic part of politics.

In the *The Spiritual Foundations*, Frank mentions an “ontologically true politics” (FF, 153) that enhances distinct ways and means of government. “Ontologically true politics” aims at a politics of “spiritually free conservatism,” yet also constitutes a politics of “innovation” (FF, 153–70). Its implementation does not depend on the Church, the state, or any other institution, but depends on the individual’s “heroic activity” (FF, 236). I would like, at this place, to add to “heroic” the attributes *creative*, *innovative*, and *serviceable*.

Obviously, the individual is free to pass in their own way through the enigmatic territory lying between *legality* and *illegality*, *conformity* and *resistance*, *conservatism* and *innovation*, *planning* and *spontaneity*. This complex of undeniable truths is not discussed by Frank in any detail, though his idea of service, as the core notion of his ontology in general and his philosophical psychology in particular, certainly calls for a discussion of this difficult topic. As things stand, every single personality is called upon to carefully decide between these paradigms, not in terms of making some sort of a general decision, but in concrete living. The type of personalism he defended demands that the singular individual rely fully on their own personal awareness, enlarging its scope as far as they can with respect to any questions thrown up by individual, social, or, of course, political life.

Frank’s writings consider neither social nor political decision-making procedures. Instead they extend his ontology of the human soul. Never-

36. Cf. Semyon Frank, “Problema ‘khristianskogo sotsialisma,’” in Semyon Frank, *Po tu storonu pravogo i levogo*, 78. Originally published in 1939.

theless, his incomplete social philosophy, as I have tried to show, implicitly continues his early, premature idea of “spiritual democracy.” (Frank’s reflections on this idea were only in their infancy in 1917 and 1918).³⁷ He himself reports that his plan was disrupted by external circumstances connected with “Russia’s tragedy.”³⁸ Maybe he would have reissued this vision if he had been successful in composing a “trilogy” that would have related his cognitive theory to his ontology of the human soul and his social philosophy and/or transcendental psychology as introduced in *The Spiritual Foundations of Society*.³⁹

In times when no religious legitimacy is invested in constitutional monarchical power, such as would, ideally, guarantee faithfulness to the past, it is democracy that, in his eyes, best allows for the implementation of a “Christian politics.” This notion of a “Christian politics” is chiefly discussed in Frank’s *Light*, where he treats Christian principles as ontological principles. In 1929 he pointed to the American presidential democracy as, historically speaking, best realizing conservatism on the one hand and freedom and spontaneity on the other (*FF*, 159).

Frank might well have concurred with Karl Popper’s notion of the “open society.” Yet he would have certainly added that accessibility and transparency, be they spiritual or social, emanate from the principle of the universality of service. The true ontological meaning and source of democracy is, in his eyes, not the rule of all, but service given to all. The only primordial right of every man is his right to participate in such common service. If Frank had been successful in composing the above mentioned “trilogy,” he would certainly have reissued his early vision of a “spiritual democracy.” By simple logic, the notion of service would have had to have been its credo.

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37. Cf. Philip Boobyer, “The Two Democracies: Semyon Frank’s Interpretation of the Russian Revolutions of 1917,” *Revolutionary Russia* 6, no. 2 (1993): 208, doi : 10 . 1080 / 09546549308575604.

38. Cf. *FF*, “Preface” (by Frank), i. Cf. also *FD*, 419.

39. Cf. Wilhelm Goerdts, *Russische Philosophie: Zugänge und Durchblicke* (Freiburg; München: K. Alber, 1984), 647.

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