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THE SYNTHESIS OF MYSTICISM AND RATIONALISM AS A PARADOX OF RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract.

Aim. To carry out a comparative analysis of the rationalistic, phenomenological and mystical methods of knowledge practiced by Russian religious philosophy in their synthesis.

Methodology. The study is based on the fundamental principles of historical and philosophical research: the principle of historicism, which makes it possible to obtain a truly scientific assessment of the phenomena under study only when they are analyzed in the context of a certain era and theoretical system; the principle of ideological and theoretical continuity, which makes it possible to consider the development of the methodological process within the framework of Russian religious philosophy as an integral phenomenon, a consistent, coordinated connection between different stages of the theoretical development of religious and philosophical thought; the principle of concreteness, which requires tracing the refraction of the methodological trends of different stages of Russian philosophy in the concepts of individual philosophers.

Results. Though Russian religious philosophers interpreted mystical experience as the experience of the transcendent, as a method of understanding the highest truth, they did not only oppose this method to rational thinking but combined and synthesized both into a paradoxical unity. Such authors as V. Solovyov, P. Florensky, S. Bulgakov and N. Lossky argued that rational and empirical knowledge, which forms the basis of science, is insufficient and, based on the idea of total unity (vseedinstvo), they proposed to obtain pure, undifferentiated and existentially reliable knowledge through religious experience.

Research implications. The study of the methodological layer of Russian religious thought can expand a conceptual framework for further development of religious and philosophical knowledge, and the conclusions drawn from the research can help in understanding the ways of modern science development.

Keywords: method, phenomenology, rationalism, mystical knowledge, faith, revelation, religious experience

СИНТЕЗ МИСТИЦИЗМА И РАЦИОНАЛИЗМА КАК ПАРАДОКС РУССКОЙ РЕЛИГИОЗНОЙ ФИЛОСОФИИ

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Аннотация.

Цель. Осуществить сравнительный анализ рационалистического, феноменологического и мистического методов познания, практикуемых русской религиозной философией в их синтезе.

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Процедура и методы. Работа выполнена с учётом базовых принципов историко-философского исследования: принципа историзма, позволяющего получить подлинно научную оценку изучаемых явлений только тогда, когда их анализируют в контексте определённой эпохи и теоретической системы; принципа идейно-теоретической преемственности, позволяющего рассматривать развитие методологического процесса в рамках отечественной религиозной философии как целостное явление, как последовательную, согласованную связь между разными этапами теоретического развития религиозно-философской мысли; принципа конкретности, требующего проследить преломление методологических тенденций разных этапов отечественной философии в концепциях отдельных философов.

Результаты. Несмотря на то, что русская религиозная философия трактовала мистический опыт как переживание трансцендентного, как метод познания высшей истины, всё же не противопоставляла его рациональному познанию, объединяя и синтезируя их в парадоксальное единство. Такие авторы как В. Соловьев, П. Флоренский, С. Булгаков и Н. Лосский доказывали, что рациональное и эмпирическое знание, составляющее основу науки, недостаточно и, основываясь на идее всеединства, предлагали добывать чистое, недифференцированное и экзистенциально достоверное *знание посредством религиозного опыта.*

Теоретическая и / или практическая значимость. Исследование глубинного, методологического пласта русской религиозной мысли расширяет теоретические возможности дальнейшего развития религиозно-философского знания, а выводы, сделанные в результате анализа синтеза рационалистического, феноменологического и мистического методов познания, возможно, помогут в осмыслении путей развития современной науки.

Ключевые слова: метод, феноменология, рационализм, мистическое познание, вера, откровение, религиозный опыт

Introduction

The phenomenological and existential methods of Russian philosophy turn out to be closely related to mystical experience recognized by religious thinkers as the basis of true knowledge. Mystical experience is defined in Russian philosophy as the experience of the transcendental, not reduced only to subjective feelings. Sacred awe, joy, revelation of unconditional truth are aimed here at something radically different from the mental life of the subject and from the entire empirical world [3]. The content of mystical experience lies in the gravitation of the human spirit to direct communication with the Divine, as the absolute basis of all that exist, and all mystics (regardless of the nature of religion) consider the overcoming of the "phenomenal" side of their being to be the direct path to this goal.

Features of Christian mysticism

Christian mysticism, characterized by the same tendency, differs from non-Christian one – firstly, by a close connection of mystical experience with Christian doctrine; secondly, by a

personalistic view of the Divine; thirdly, by the understanding of deification, i. e. the transformation of human nature as assimilation of one's personality to the divine hypostasis; fourthly, by imparting to catharsis the character not so much of a metaphysical detachment from material existence as of an ethical transformation of addiction to it; fifthly, by achievement of union with God not so much directly as through the mediation of Christ the Logos [1; 2; 12].

Russian religious philosophers noted another feature of mystical knowledge – it has not only an objective, but also universal character, for not only great mystics, but also ordinary people striving for absolute values experience it at least once in their life, at least to a small extent. Such an introduction to the Superworld principle is usually free from conclusions that logically prove the existence of God, since this being becomes self-evident [11, p. 262].

It should be noted that experimental-mystical knowledge as a method of cognizing God, nature, man and the meaning of history, is traditional for Russian philosophical and theological culture and reveals itself at its ear-

liest stages. Thus, Russian medieval philosophy is an internal, intuitive, mystical knowledge of existence, its hidden depths, expressed not in concepts and definitions, but only «in a symbol, in an image, through imagination and inner life mobility» [10, p. 71].

The tradition of experimental-mystical knowledge was particularly strengthened by the spread of hesychasm in Russia and turned into a special form of knowledge – «philosophy of the heart». «Visions» of Sergius of Radonezh, the first Russian mystic, theoretical development of hesychasm in the works of Nil Sorsky, Artemy Troitsky, Maxim the Greek, Paisiy Velichkovsky, the establishment of the direction called «heart theology» (Kirill Bogoslovsky-Platonov, Moses Antipov-Platonov, Macarius Glukharev, Theophan Govorov-Recluse) contributed to launching the method of cognition in which the tension of inner life created conditions necessary for comprehending the divine reality.

Mystical knowledge is understood not as an intellectual procedure, but as a leap into a different order, taking place in the heart, which does not at all oppose «heart» and intellectual knowledge, but unites them into a kind of integrity. This thought turned out to be close to Russian religious philosophy of late 19th – early 20th centuries: in the heart, a person comes into contact with something that is inaccessible to his sensory and intellectual knowledge, but this happens only if mind and heart are united. «Heart», as S. L. Frank writes, is not, as it is often accepted to think of, some separate instance, opposed to «reason»; it is precisely the core of an integral all-embracing inner being, one of the radiations of which can be «mind». Only the «pure» mind, detached from the core, is opposed by the «heart» as an all-unity. For «pure», i.e. the unnaturally self-enclosed mind, the reality of the Divine remains inaccessible. Since the "mind" draws its strength and its light from the potency of the «heart» and thus acquires the ability to transcend beyond itself – ... it can accompany the living grasp of the Divine, participate in it and thereby give it even greater clarity» [15, c. 460]. P. A. Florensky, quoting the Gospel of Matthew: «Blessed are pure in heart, for they

will see God» (Matthew 5; 8), was also convinced that the heart is an organ for perceiving the upper world, through which the «primordial root of personality» is contemplated – Sophia, and through her – God-Love.

Somewhat earlier, Vladimir Solovyov also argued the need for mystical knowledge as the basis of true philosophy, substantiating the insufficiency of rational and empirical knowledge. Thinking, in his opinion, should fill its content through faith and ideal contemplation, i.e. through mystical experience, for in order for our «natural» (empirical) knowledge and speculation to have a true, objective meaning, «they must be connected with that mystical knowledge that gives us not the external relations of the object, but the object itself in its internal communication with us» [13, c. 737]. However, Vladimir Solovyov did not consider mystical experience in isolation from empirical and rational methods, since taken by itself, it does not form a system of true or synthetic philosophy – what the philosopher calls integral knowledge. For the greatest completeness a mystical experience in the form of inner unconditional confidence should, on the one hand, be subjected to reflection of the mind, i. e. to get «justification of logical thinking», and on the other – to be confirmed by empirical facts [16].

True knowledge is thus achieved in the synthesis of three methodological directions of philosophy – mysticism, rationalism and empiricism. Nevertheless, proceeding from the main goal of human existence – the achievement of absolute eternal life where philosophy plays only the role of a tool – it is only in true religion, in mystical experience where Vladimir Solovyov saw the possibility of connecting a person with the Absolute through liberation from «appearance», concluding everything in itself and having nothing outside of itself.

In the philosophy of Solovyov, it is important to distinguish between mystical and religious experience, where the former means the disconnectedness of the interpretation of mystical experiences within confessional and theological order. Religious experience, on the contrary, presupposes the interpretation of experiences in line with the accepted dogmatic system, in this case – Orthodoxy. In

Russian religious philosophy, these two levels of experience often form an indissoluble unity differing in greater or lesser emphasis, as, for example, in the epistemological constructions of P. A. Florensky and S. N. Bulgakov.

Thus, P. A. Florensky shifts the emphasis to personal religious experience, trying to extract from it everything that is necessary for his philosophical and theological system. In the search for the whole eternal Truth, the philosopher, like V.S. Solovyov, raises the question of an adequate method and comes to the conclusion that the truth can only be approached on the path of rapprochement of «rational intuition» and contemplation of the unity of being with the heart, for «the being of truth is not derivable, but only shown in experience» [14, p. 144]. However, unlike V. S. Solovyov and philosophers-intuitionists, P. A. Florensky did not carry out a thorough analysis of the content of «personal religious experience», his judgments about it are vague and, by his own admission, represent only «sketches» of thoughts about experienced feelings.

The philosopher described these feelings as «insights, moments and points of spiritual fullness – lightning flashes of complete knowledge» [14, p. 131] in which, nevertheless, Solovyov's idea of Truth as a unity, a reliable beginning is clearly hidden behind a fragmented world sounds. To comprehend this unity, the reason alone turned out to be insufficient, since, decaying in antinomies, it dies in its rational being, but comes to life, freeing itself from intellectual barriers and fragmentation, acquiring the ability to contemplate the rootedness of the world in God» [14, p. 323]. The mystical experience as the pinnacle of religious experience was understood by P. A. Florensky, especially at an early stage of his work, antinomically, in sharp opposition to reason, subordinate to formal logic: either narrow «logicism» or pure mysticism, polarly opposite and even hostile to each other. Such harsh antinomianism ignores flexibility and multi-dimensionality of the mind, its ability to acquire a multitude of norms and forms, for which religion is not hostile, but a harmonizing and transforming force.

In substantiating mystical experience S. N. Bulgakov also proceeded from the antin-

omy of thinking in its «free search for truth», which can only be discovered in revelation and only then receive «philosophical processing». For a philosopher, mystical experience is nothing more than a «direct experience of Truth» [5, p. 103], in which the separation of the real and the ideal, subject and object, is overcome, and the experience acquires «subjective-objective» features. Going deeper into the analysis of this experience, S. N. Bulgakov emphasized its individual character, the givenness of the feeling of God «not in general», but specifically for a particular person. This individuality provides the diversity of mystical experience, which became the subject of a special study by W. James [6], and to which S. N. Bulgakov devoted many pages in *Non-Evening Light: Contemplation and Speculation*.

Analyzing the content of mystical experience, S. N. Bulgakov opposed to calling this procedure of knowing God a «method», since, in his opinion, it is the transcendence of the deity that makes Him infinitely distant and alien to the world, that cuts off the possibility of any methodological paths to Him: «there is and cannot be any «spiritual knowledge» based on a method for cognizing God... For before absolute distance, before infinity, every finite value and every path is destroyed» [4, p. 25]. *God is Miracle and Freedom*, all knowledge is a method, a necessity, the philosopher argued. Therefore, Father Sergiy called «condescension» of God to man, which, in fact, becomes the essence of mystical experience, a «free and miraculous act», which, however, does not exclude the need for efforts on the part of man seeking God.

Mystical experience as awareness of God and living connection with Him, according to the philosopher, becomes possible due to person's «religious giftedness», as well as the existence of a «religious body» that perceives the deity. S. N. Bulgakov saw the main function of this «organ» in the ability to pray, which he defined as the main form of religious achievement of unity with the deity. Proceeding, on the one hand, from the transcendence of God (God is outside us), and on the other – from his immanence to the world (God is in us), S. N. Bulgakov interpreted calling to God, nam-

ing of God, as an intersection of two worlds, as a transcendental condition of prayer.

According to S. N. Bulgakov, the fact of prayer as an unceasing aspiration to the transcendental deity of the immanent consciousness must be understood and appreciated in a philosophical sense. At the same time, the philosopher warned against mixing a prayer with its «theosophical surrogates», such as concentration, meditation, intuition, dealing «not with God, but with the world». And this essentially distinguishes Bulgakov's ideas about mystical experience from the ideas of philosophers-intuitionists who saw in mystical intuition not just a «method», but some kind of higher knowledge – «meta-knowledge».

So, from the religious-philosophical outlook of N. O. Lossky, it follows that the mystical experience can contain knowledge as a revelation, which puts ordinary sensory perception on the same level with clairvoyance. The basis of such equalization, like that of V. S. Solovyov, was the principle of total unity emanating from universal immanence: knowledge is achieved equally both by sensory perception and intellect, and by mystical, meditative insight. Consequently, any types of mystical experience, such as clairvoyance, become the same sources of information as natural science.

The emerging problem of the truth of knowledge could not but worry N. O. Lossky as a thinker who was dominated by rational-logical methods of testing knowledge, and forced him to treat trans-rational cognition with some caution. Mystical visions of exalted personalities (hallucinations, ghosts, etc.), their spontaneity cast doubt on the reliability of irrational mystical experience. The philosopher saw a way out in excluding the irrational component of experience and introducing a rational, ordering element into it: «The great mystical philosophers», according to N. O. Lossky, «on the contrary, have a heightened sensitivity to the rational aspect of being. They enter the realm of the super-rational not only on the basis of mystical intuition, but also because the strict sequence of rational thinking obliges them to ascend into a higher sphere» [11, p. 281].

The connection between rational and irrational knowledge

From the works of these mystics (N. O. Lossky had in mind Plotinus, Proclus, Anselm of Canterbury, Nikolai Kuzansky, Schelling, Hegel, V.S. Solovyov, P. A. Florensky, etc.) connecting the superrational with the rational, it obviously follows that the philosophical systems based on mystical experience are not a collection of incoherent vague things, but, on the contrary, these systems achieve the greatest degree of consistency in the knowledge of the world, since, according to N. O. Lossky, they eliminate incoherence and gaps of one-sided rationalism. In this judgment, the philosopher relied on Hegel, who equated mystical and speculative knowledge: «the mystical, it is true, is mysterious, but only for reason and, moreover, simply because the principle of reason is an abstract identity, and the mystical (as equivalent to speculative) is a concrete unity of those definitions that the mind considers true only in their separation and opposition... Thus, everything that is reasonable should be designated at the same time as mystical, which, however, only says that it goes beyond the limits of reason, and not at all that it should be generally regarded as inaccessible to thinking and incomprehensible» [11, p. 281].

Based on *Areopagitics*, in which the main stages of mystical cognition are formulated, N. O. Lossky philosophically substantiated the sequence of these stages from the position of intuitionism. The first stage (preparatory, purifying), consisting of moral and ascetic exercises curbing sensuality and vicious passions, was interpreted by the philosopher as a phenomenological reduction in its pure form, i.e. as the removal of the «natural attitude» of everyday reality; the second stage (enlightenment) – prayer and meditation, concentration of thought and imagination on the otherworldly God – was interpreted as getting rid of subjectivity, when the meditator refrains from any judgments about reality; the third stage (unity) – as a goal of the previous exercises consisting in experiencing unity with God and described by N. O. Lossky as transcendental-phenomenological reduction, purification of «self», depriving it of its «world»

character and striving for a «pure stream of consciousness», in which the collapsed information about existence is seen.

Thus, for N. O. Lossky, mystical knowledge or mystical intuition is a way of experiencing the divine, «meta-logical» being in its apophatic aspect, i.e. understatement, non-verbalization and «no modes», without any certainties and images. By this method, according to N. O. Lossky, pure, undifferentiated and existentially reliable knowledge is achieved.

The credibility or truthfulness of mystical knowledge was substantiated by N. O. Lossky by entering the consciousness of the mystical personality of meta-logical being itself either in a phenomenal image (sensory visions), or «from within», in the imagination (imaginative visions), or without sensory images and is unimaginable (intellectual contemplation)... N. O. Lossky argued that intellectual contemplation as the highest stage of mystical experience can be interpreted as direct influence of meta-logical being on a person, prompting him to focus on the most transcendental, while keeping in mind his insensible essence or the insensible content of truth communicated from this sphere. In this influence of transcendental being, the philosopher saw the manifestation of symbolic realism, for many visions and contemplations contain the expression of such truths and sides of this being that cannot be given in an image otherwise than symbolically, through mediating sensory or imaginative effects. N. O. Lossky doubted their subjective origin, but assessed them as real symbols, symbolic phenomena of meta-logical being, as individual acts of human communication with the transcendental, «objectified in somatic imaginations». In this case, it becomes a part of the natural world as a visible image of the divine world, giving a mystical personality, on the one hand, «consolation, reinforcement, instruction», and on the other, through the same person, – «revelation to the whole world (for example, through the biblical prophets)» [11, p. 279].

However, from the point of view of N. O. Lossky, mystical intuition as a method successfully realizes itself in the knowledge of not only the divine, but also the human prin-

ciple: the human «self», interpreted by the philosopher, on the one hand, as a meta-logical principle, becomes the subject of mystical knowledge. And on the other hand, as possessing the fullness of total-unity. The epistemological task, in this case, is reduced by N. O. Lossky to penetration into the substantial content of the «self», the discovery of its super-quality creative potential, and is solved by abandoning phenomenal being and joining the divine principle. As a result of such involvement, the «integrity of the spirit», which is lost in everyday empirical life, is restored. As a result, mystical intuition discovers not only the aspects of the «self» that are expressed in concepts and accessible to intellectual intuition (supra-temporality, supra-dimensionality, ability to possess qualities), but also leads to the disclosure of such abilities that make him capable of freedom and creativity [9].

Here mystical knowledge approaches the apophatic aspect of being which is inexpressible in concepts and can only be designated by a proper name given in the symbolic form of myth. The knowledge thus obtained has a «curtailed» character, being a «cast» of reality, not subjected to verbal description. However, the need to identify the essence that forces the subject to clothe his mystical experience in the shell of a specific cultural tradition, refracting this experience in symbolism of myth, presenting knowledge in a wonderful image, an irrational plot of being. In this, according to N. O. Lossky, lies relativity of mystical knowledge.

Conclusion

Proceeding from insufficiency of the traditional epistemological tools presented in philosophy and conceptual theology, Russian thinkers turned to a mystical tradition with its apophatic knowledge («scientific ignorance») which brought them significantly closer to the patristic understanding of Orthodox energetism. It is in the teachings that substantiate the apophatic principle of cognition, which together with kataphatic cognition forms the principle of symbolic realism, that elements of energetic methodology are most clearly

manifested in Russian philosophy, and it is in the field of apophatic and symbolic-realistic cognition that Russian thinkers came closest to solving their main problem – construction of philosophical knowledge based on Orthodox experience [7; 8].

The solution of this problem required specific methods. Therefore, phenomenological, existential and experimental-mystical methods came to the fore in Russian religious and philosophical thought, through which, one way or another,

penetration into the «unknown beyond», lead to direct awareness of the unity of transcendental and immanent being. And if the phenomenological method to a greater extent met the needs of the philosophy of total-unity, then the experimental-mystical knowledge brought Russian philosophy into the sphere of Orthodox energetism, which, however, did not prevent Russian thinkers from synthesizing these methods.

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