

**ALL-UNITY ACCORDING
TO V. SOLOVIEV AND S. FRANK.
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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Abstract. In this article I will present and analyze the concept of all-unity of the two most famous Russian philosophers – Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) and Semyon Frank (1877-1958). As will be argued, the concept of all-unity is part of an old philosophical tradition. At the same time, it is an original idea of the Russian thought of the Silver Age (the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries).

SOLOVIEV’S CONCEPT: THE TWO-POLAR ABSOLUTE

Both Soloviev and Frank taught about the existence of a structure called all-unity which embraces all beings and guarantees their organic connection. Soloviev claimed to be the author of the Russian term *vseedinstvo* (“all-unity”)¹. Nevertheless, in the history of philosophy we can find analogous expressions, i.e. in the thought of Nicholas of Cusa who defined God as *unus et omnia* and *omnia uniter*² or Schelling who used the term *Allheit und Einheit*.

We can find the roots of the concept of all-unity in Greek philosophy, in the pre-Socratics, and even deeper – in the old religious thought of China

¹ Soloviev’s Letter to S. A. Vengerov (1892.07.12) in: *Pis’ma Vladimira Sergejevicha Solovieva*, Brussels 1970, vol. II, p. 321. Frank also stressed that Soloviev enriched the Russian language with the word *vseedinstvo* (S. L. Frank, *Duchovnoe nasledije Vladimira Solovieva* in: D. K. Burlaka (ed.), *Vladimir Soloviev: pro et contra. Lichnost’ i tvorcestvo Vladimira Solovieva v otsenke russkikh myslitelej i issledovatelej. Antologija*, Saint Petersburg 2002, vol. 2, p. 955).

² *De docta ignorantia*, I, XXIV in: Nicolai de Cusa, *Opera omnia*, Lipsiae 1932, vol. I, p. 48.

and India. Soloviev intentionally referred to the philosophical and religion tradition. In his first work entitled *The mythological process in the ancient paganism* (1873) he noticed that the ancient gods were understood as an expression of all-unity (το παν)³. In his later papers the Russian thinker used in this context Heraclitus' term *έν και παν* ("one and all")⁴. No doubt, Soloviev is not only an excellent metaphysician, but also a brilliant historian of philosophy.

Soloviev distinguishes all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) and all-one (*vseedinoe*) – properly the second and the first Absolute. The first Absolute is the Absolute *in se* which is "liberated" (according to the Latin word *absolutum*) from all beings and which is their fundament (*υποκειμενον*). It is so called the "positive potency". In Soloviev's opinion, the first Absolute is a *super-being*: *Superens* or *υπερόυσιος*/ν⁵. He identifies the Absolute with God and in his „non-academic" works *La Sophia* and *The Philosophical Foundations of Integral Knowledge* denotes it by the Kabalistic notion *en-sof* ("non-something")⁶. Since the first Absolute is not "being", Soloviev called it "nothing". In the tractate *La Sophia* he introduced the term "non-being", which "had been used even by the orthodox theologians", also, in *Lectures on Godmanhood* he introduced the ancient notion *μη ον*⁷, but in *A Critique of Abstract Principles* he denied these definitions and replaced them by the term "nothing". This word does not express any "content" of the Absolute, but indicates its transcendental character. Hence we can find the elements of negative theology in Soloviev's works. For example, Plato,

³ V. S. Soloviev, *Mifologicheskij protsess v drevnem yazychestve* in: *Polnoe sobranie sochinenij i pisem v dvadtsati tomakh* [PSS], Moscow 2000-2001, vol. 1, p. 34.

⁴ V. S. Soloviev, *La Sophia* in: PSS, vol. 2, p. 90/91; *Filosofskie nachala tsel'nogo znaniya* in: PSS, vol. 2, p. 253; *Kritika otvlechennykh nachal* in: PSS, vol. III, p. 277. In the conclusion of *The Crisis of Western philosophy* Soloviev quoted the famous statement of Heraclitus: *συνάμειξ όλα και ουχ όλα, συμφερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συναδον διαδον, και εκ πάντων έν και εξ ένος πάντα* (*Krizis zapadnoj filosofiji (protiv pozitivistiv)*) in: PSS, vol. 1, p. 138). Cf. *Istoricheskije dela filosofiji* in: *Sobranie sochinenij Vladimira Sergejevicha Solovieva* [SS], Brussels 1966-1970, vol. II, p. 403: „All is one' is the first word of the [Indian] philosophy". Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 8, 4; Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, 1. See S. Khoruzhij, *Idea vseedinstva ot Geraklita do Bakhtina* in: idem, *Posle pereryva. Puti russoj filosofiji*, Saint Petersburg 1994, p. 32-66.

⁵ V. S. Soloviev, *La Sophia*, p. 88/89.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 92/93; *Filosofskie nachala...*, p. 263. See K. Burmistrov, *Vladimir Soloviev i Kaballa. K postanovke problemy* in: M. A. Kolerov (ed.), *Issledovanija po istoriji russoj mysli. Yezhegodnik za 1998 god*, Saint Petersburg 1998, p. 7-104.

⁷ V. S. Soloviev, *La Sophia*, p. 88/89; *Chtenija o Bogochelovechestve* in: SS, vol. III, p. 135.

Plotinus, Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Nicholas of Cusa⁸ treated the Absolute as *ὑπερόν* and *ὑπερόύσιος*, as a reality superior to essence (*ἐπέκεινα του οντος*).

At the same time, the transcendent God needs the world in order to express His nature. The first Absolute as a positive potency of being supposes the existence of the empirical world. Soloviev writes that “God is not satisfied with the eternal contemplation of ideal essences, (...) but by an act of His will He focuses on each of them (...) and establishes it as an independent being”⁹. “The absolute substance necessarily and eternally divides itself into two poles: one as the principle of absolute unity, affirmed as such, the principle of liberty towards any form, any manifestation and any being, and the other one as the principle or the productive form of the multiple beings and of the phenomenal forms”¹⁰.

In this way Soloviev describes the second Absolute which is the principle of all things. It is denoted – in contradistinction to “nothing” – by the term “all”, because besides the divine element it contains a material one (Plato’s *materia prima*). As a result, God is “nothing” and “all” – “nothing”, for the reason that He is not “something particular”, and “all”, because He cannot be deprived of anything¹¹. This definition wasn’t new, on the contrary, it was well-known in the mystical tradition.

Soloviev describes the first Absolute as the Spirit, whereas he describes the second Absolute as Logos: it is the eternal foundation of the ideas that emerge in time in the shape of the empirical beings as the World Soul (*anima mundi*) or *κόσμος νοητός*. Referring to Plato’s dialogue *Timaeus*, Soloviev calls it “the second God”.

As we remember, all-unity (*materia prima*) is a “negative potency” or *potentia proxima essendi*. This means that all-unity has a tendency towards the actualization of the ideas. Consequently, the second Absolute is in permanent development, in the process of becoming (according to Soloviev the theory of evolution partially explains this process)¹². “The idea of

⁸ See i.e. Plato, *The Republic*, 509b: the Good is “beyond being”; Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, VII, 1: “The Good must, then, be the Good not by any Act, not even by virtue of its Intellection, but by its very rest within Itself” and V, V, 6: “the First cannot be thought of as having definition and limit”; Nicholas of Cusa, *On learned ignorance*, I, VI: “‘being’ (or any other name) is not a precise name for the Maximum”.

⁹ V. S. Soloviev, *Chtenija o Bogochelovechestve*, p. 137-138.

¹⁰ V. S. Soloviev, *La Sophia*, p. 92-94 (trans. by M. De Courten, *Sophia and the Longing for Unity*, „The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies” 3-4 (2007), p. 248.

¹¹ V. S. Soloviev, *Filosofskie nachala...*, p. 262; *Kritika otvlechennykh nachal*, p. 277.

¹² V. S. Soloviev, *Opravdanije dobra* in: *SS*, vol. VIII, p. 218-219. This motive of Soloviev’s philosophy anticipates Teilhard de Chardin’s thought. See K. V. Truhlar, *Teilhard und*

reality as a creative life, as manifesting its essence creatively, reminds us of German idealism, of Fichte, Hegel and Schelling”¹³ and the various theories of emanation. As a result,

there is no essential difference between God and the world. In other words, the “essence” of God and world are the same. (...) God himself endows each point of being with the power of self-consciousness – apart from which the whole of manifold reality could not become external to God. (...) The world is *consubstantial* with God¹⁴.

The following scheme illustrates the metaphysical conception of Soloviev:

The first Absolute	The second Absolute
All-one	All-unity
Positive potency	Negative potency / <i>potentia proxima essendi</i>
“Nothing” (“ <i>En Sof</i> ”)	“All”
God	<i>Materia prima</i>

Soloviev claimed that the two-polar concept of the Absolute allows him to explain the changing of the world without falling into pantheism which identifies the first Absolute with the second one (God with the world)¹⁵. Nevertheless, in Frank’s opinion Soloviev’s philosophy of all-unity is clearly of a pantheistic character¹⁶, although most correctly it could be described as panentheism.

This position has significant epistemological consequences. Namely, Soloviev accepts the possibility of direct, intuitive cognition of things, because they are rooted in the second Absolute. At the same time he declares that we could not express the first Absolute (God) adequately, for the reason

Solowjew. Dichtung und religiöse Erfahrung, Freiburg-München 1966.

¹³ F. Ch. Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia. From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev*, Notre Dame 1986, p. 222.

¹⁴ V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. II, trans. by G. L. Kline, London 1953, p. 500-501.

¹⁵ V. S. Soloviev, *Kritika otvlechennykh nachal*, p. 285-286.

¹⁶ S. Frank, *Russkoje mirovozzrenije*, trans. by G. Franko in: idem, *Duchovnye osnovy obshchestva*, Moscow 1992, p. 497. Cf. L. J. Shein (eds.), *Reading in Philosophical Thought*, The Hague 1968, p. 26; J. Novotný, *Vladimir Sergejevič Solovyov (1853–1900)* in: P. Ambros (eds.), *Vladimir Soloviov and United Europe: International Conference on the 100th Anniversary of V. Soloviov’s Death (1853–1900)*, Olomouc 2000, p. 45: “The metaphysics, a global unity is formed in the form of a neopantheism in the monistic line of Spinoza-Schelling”.

that He “cannot be the subject of any definition”¹⁷. According to Soloviev, the Absolute is both transcendent and immanent. This ambivalence is conditioned ontologically. No doubt, Soloviev’s metaphysics is not dualistic *sensu stricto*. Rather the thinker intended to construct a synthetic system and to connect “the ideal element with the material one, the principle of unity with the radical plurality of essences”¹⁸.

Frank also paid attention to the transcendent and immanent character of the Absolute, but justified his position in another way. I will present Frank’s concept in the next section.

FRANK’S POSITION: THE ABSOLUTE AS THE UNKNOWNABLE

In his *The Philosophical Foundations of Integral Knowledge* Soloviev maintained that the two-polar concept of the Absolute is only “the fruit of the discursive character of our thinking”¹⁹. Hence we can consider his position “rather as a heuristic trick which allows us to know the nature of the Absolute”²⁰. However in other works of Soloviev we can read that the distinction between the first and the second Absolute has a cosmological basis as well: the Russian philosopher, like Schelling, stated that the empirical world had fallen away from God. The Universe (*unum versum* – “the opposite unity”²¹) is a disorder of all-union’s elements. On the one hand, Soloviev tried to reconcile the unchangeable nature of God (the first Absolute) with the development of nature (which is established in the second Absolute). On the other hand, he did not harmonize the static aspect of the Absolute with the dynamic one. It is one of the weakest points of Soloviev’s concept of all-unity.

¹⁷ V. S. Soloviev, *Kritika otvlechennykh nachal*, p. 279.

¹⁸ Cf. V. S. Soloviev, *Metafizika* in: *SS*, vol. X, p. 243.

¹⁹ V. S. Soloviev, *Filosofskie nachala...*, p. 268.

²⁰ N. F. Utkina, *Tema Vseedinstva v filosofiji Vl. Solovieva*, “Voprosy filosofiji” 6 (1989), p. 63.

²¹ V. S. Soloviev, <*Chernovik o Schellinge*> in: *PSS*, vol. 2, p. 180. Zob. *Rossija i Vselenskaja Tserkov’*, trans. by G. A. Rachinskij in: *SS*, vol. XI, p. 293: „what is non-divine [nature – T.O.] is transposed or reverse [*transposé ou renversé*] Divinity”; Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 31: “All that proceeds from any principle reverts in respect of its being upon that from which it proceeds”; prop. 33: “Thus all things proceed in a circuit, from their causes to their causes again”; prop. 34: “Everything whose nature it is to revert reverts upon that from which it derived the procession of its own substance”.

Frank radically transformed Soloviev's doctrine, believing that the Absolute has a totally simple (non-composite) nature. In *An object of knowledge* we can find the following theses:

The absolute being is not a being-for-other, but being-for-itself. It is the being-for-itself which precedes the difference of subject and object. It is total unity (...), life which experiences itself. Consequently it is immanent for itself and for us, because we directly participate in it²².

Where Soloviev makes a distinction between the first Absolute and the second Absolute, that allows us to show the difference between the divine and the natural element, and precisely characterizes them, Frank claims that "'true unity' (...) is *absolute unity* or *all-unity*"²³ (or else "all-one"). The particular qualities of empirical beings are not something ontologically different from the Absolute (substantially or – as Soloviev seems to say – "topologically", as a result of falling away from the primordial unity), but they are only the product of their cognitive identification. A concrete object exists just "for us", but as such it participates in the absolute unity, so it is not subject to any specification.

Nevertheless Frank like Soloviev pays attention to two aspects of the Absolute. Firstly, the Absolute itself is a total unity, an entirety (in Soloviev's thought the first Absolute, or all-one expresses this feature). Secondly, the Absolute in its relation to the world is a plurality and a foundation of the particular attributes, so it could be compared with the second Absolute of Soloviev. As a result, the Absolute is "free" from any things and at the same time embraces all of them.

Yet a comparative analysis points to an important difference between Soloviev's and Frank's positions. Namely, contrary to Soloviev's opinion, Frank's Absolute is a perfect unity. The author of *An object of knowledge* does not make any ontological (even conventional) distinctions in the Absolute, but he only demonstrates the variation in its cognition. Both all-unity *ad extra*, considered in its relation to the world, and all-unity *ad intra* – in its relation to the divine sphere – are not two separate polarities, but just the *modi* of the same absolute reality.

According to Frank, all-unity as such is not subject to the principle of identity which strictly defines an object as "this" and "not that". This is the reason that Frank describes all-unity as "a metalogical unity". The Absolute is the base of all predicates, but as such it is a "transdefinite" being (in

²² S. L. Frank, *Predmet znaniya. Ob osnovakh i predelakh otvlechnogo znaniya* in: idem, *Predmet znaniya. Dusha cheloveka*, Saint Petersburg 1995, p. 157.

²³ Ibidem, p. 219.

this context Frank adds that the same thought was expressed in the Upanishads which represented the transcendent reality as *neti-neti* – “neither this nor that”²⁴. As Frank wrote,

The sphere of “the unity” in essence is *above* the sphere of categories of identity and difference. Its relation to the domain of knowledge, which is expressed by the system of the definitions, is not subject to these categories, but it should be understood in another fundamental way²⁵.

The sphere of the Absolute is beyond the logical principle of identity and no definition or opposition (*A* and *non-A*) expresses it. Frank characterizes the Absolute as *coincidentia oppositorum* (the coincidence of opposites). The Russian thinker refers to an old philosophical tradition: The Upanishads, Heraclitus, Plato, Neo-Platonism, the medieval mystics, German idealism and especially Nicholas of Cusa²⁶. Let us quote *De docta ignorantia*:

I give the name “Maximum” to that for which there cannot be anything greater. But fullness (*abundantia*) befits what is one. Thus, oneness – which is also being – coincides with Maximality. But if such oneness is altogether free from all relation and contraction (*respectu*), obviously nothing is opposed to it, since it is Absolute Maximality. Thus, the Maximum is Absolute One which is all things. And all things are in the Maximum (for it is the Maximum); and since nothing is opposed to it, the Minimum likewise concedes with it, and hence the Maximum is also in all things²⁷.

The next name which Nicholas of Cusa applies to the Absolute (under the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Eriugena) is *non-aliud* – “not-other”. In his commentary, the Russian philosopher explains that this notion means that the Absolute precedes the distinction between *idem* and *aliud* – “this” and “other”. In this way Frank, following Cusanus, tries to overcome the dualistic tendency which, for instance, we can find in Soloviev’s thought. Frank admits that the Absolute is a totally simple being or – in Nicholas of Cusa’s term – the precise Equality (*aequalitas praecisa*). Although Soloviev made an effort to show the unity and indivisibility of the Absolute, nevertheless his attempt concerned mainly the “first

²⁴ S. L. Frank, *Nepostizhimoe* in: idem, *Sochinenija*, Minsk – Moscow 2000, p. 459. Cf. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, III, 9, 26; IV, 2, 4.

²⁵ S. L. Frank, *Predmet znaniya*, p. 196. See P. Modesto, *Un filosofo russo contemporaneo. Semjon Ljudvigovič Frank*, „Rivista di Filosofia neo-scolastica”, vol. 50 (1958), p. 523-524.

²⁶ S. L. Frank, *Predmet znaniya*, p. 204.

²⁷ Nicholas of Cusa, *On learned ignorance*, I, II.

Absolute”. A non-different *non-aliud* corresponds with Soloviev’s Absolute *in se*, but not with the “Absolute-for-us” which is expressed in the form of empirical beings. No doubt, “the Father of the Russian doctrine of all-unity” (Soloviev) was close to Cusanus’ concept according to which “all is in God” (*omnia in deo*)²⁸, but judged his view as “very daring”²⁹. Soloviev – as we have mentioned – tried to overcome the radical pantheism characteristic of Nicholas of Cusa, and distinguished all-one from all-unity.

At first Frank did not agree with Soloviev’s solution. In *An Object of knowledge* he motivated his concept of the absolute being from the epistemological perspective, basing it mainly on the analysis of cognition. In this work, he did not reflect on the origin and the nature of the world. Yet in the latest papers Frank also considered the problem of the existence of evil in the world, putting forward the hypothesis that it is a result of an enigmatic “fissure” in the all-unity³⁰. In his philosophical notebook, which Frank wrote during the Second World War, we can find some remarks that resemble the two-polar concept of Soloviev:

The first principle as Absolute is beyond the category of “the one” and “the second”, “itself” and “its product”. The difference between “the first” and “the second” is involved for the first time in the act of creative embodiment. The first principle by its embodiment is differentiated into Creator and creation (...). This difference and origin of diversity from unity is, first of all, the self-manifestation of the One in the plurality of “the world of ideas”. (...) Besides the diversity, “dramatization” also becomes: the created activity spreads from the One to the plurality, on the “monads”. On the one hand, this activity creates the harmonic entirety, the organism. On the other hand, each element becomes free (creative), which involves the possibility and necessity of collision between them³¹.

The investigations pursued by Frank in the later period of his activity (like Soloviev) gradually proceeded in the direction of theodicy and theology. Frank leaves radical monism and makes a distinction between Creator and creation, although a bit weaker than the one Soloviev made. The concept of God as an Artist creating the world, and the idea of the strict connection between Creator and creation is deeply rooted in the German

²⁸ Cf. P. P. Gajdenko, *Nikolaj Kuzanskij i princip sovpadenija protivopoložnostej*, “Voprosy filosofiji” 7 (2002), p. 132.

²⁹ V. S. Soloviev, *Nikolaj Kuzanskij* in: *SS*, vol. X, p. 439.

³⁰ S. L. Frank, *Niepostizhimoe*, X, 3. See I. Krekshin, *Metafizika zla (Prolegomeny k teoditsei v filosofiji posdnego S. L. Franka)*, “Voprosy filosofiji” 12 (2001), p. 128-139.

³¹ S. L. Frank, *Mysli v strashnye dni* (1943.02.04) in: idem, *Neprochitannoe... Stat'i, pis'ma, vospominanija*, Moscow 2001, p. 351.

mystic tradition: in the thought of Angelus Silesius, J. Boehme, F. Baader, Schelling and – in Frank’s case – in the poetry of Goethe, Rilke and the Russian lyricist, F. Tiutchev.

One of the most important names of the Absolute is “the Unknowable” (*Nepostizhimoe*). In this context Frank distinguishes “the Unknowable-for-us” (which is incomprehensible in the process of cognition because of the limited character of the notions), from “the Unknowable itself” that we’ll never know. This distinction leads to several significant consequences. On the one hand, each act of cognition allows us to penetrate the sphere of the Absolute – “The Unknowable”. As Frank said, the absolute being

is not far for us (...). The reality as such – what is the most known, what surrounds us from all sides: the reality in which we live, move and exist – corresponds to the Unknowable. All that is understandable and comprehensible, all what we can express conceptually – is also rooted in the Unknowable and has sense only in connection with it³².

On the other hand, the only way to cognition of the Unknowable is the awareness of the impossibility of its cognition – learned ignorance, *docta ignorantia*. Although Frank tries – unlike Soloviev – to escape metaphysical dualism, nevertheless he confesses some kind of epistemological dichotomy. Frank – strongly accenting the connection of the empirical, changeable beings with the Absolute – calls his and Soloviev’s concept by the term “ideal-realism”³³. According to this, the ideal element is the foundation of the empirical reality.

INTUITION AS A WAY OF COGNITION OF THE ABSOLUTE

According to Frank, the Absolute as such (or the first Absolute in Soloviev’s conception) is unknowable. Nevertheless, it is the very Absolute that enables the cognition of things. How is this possible? Soloviev and Frank (and other Russian philosophers of the Silver Age) claimed that both the subject and the object of cognition are rooted in the all-unity. There is an immanent, ontological relationship between the subject and the object. Several times Frank and Soloviev illustrated their position using the metaphor of a tree (borrowed from Plotinus’ *Enneads*):

³² Ibidem, p. 391.

³³ S. L. Frank, *Nepostizhimoe*, p. 381.

The branches of the tree cross and combine in different ways. The branches and leaves touch one another by their external side. This symbolizes external knowledge [i.e., empirical knowledge – T.O.]. But the same branches and leaves are connected by their common trunk and roots which deliver vital juices to them. This is mystical knowledge or faith³⁴.

According to the Russian thinkers, we can perceive the object of knowledge in the act of “faith”, “mystical intuition” (Soloviev), “intuition of all-unity” or “intuition of an integral being as such” (Frank) which is an immediate experience of the absolute reality. This means, that

To know – in all spheres of cognition – means (...) to join the empirical data of experience with the all-unity, i.e. to perceive the traces of the system of the all-unity in the sense-data. (...) “To know” something means to find its place in the eternal, all-embracing unity of being³⁵.

As Georges Florovsky wrote, “faith” (“intuition”) in Russian philosophy

has an obvious existential priority; it gives the true assurance of existence (...). Soloviev used the concept of “faith” in a very wide sense, in which it denotes almost the same basic “insight” into existence as the “intuition” of Bergson³⁶.

Kant considered only two causes of the “meeting” of the subject and object of cognition:

There are only two possible ways in which synthetical representation and its objects can coincide with and relate necessarily to each other, and, as it were, meet together. Either the object alone makes the representation possible, or the representation alone makes the object possible³⁷.

Soloviev and Frank proposed the third solution. In their opinion, the intimate relationship between subject and object in the Absolute is the cognition of the process of knowledge. Hence other Russian philosophers – Fr. Pavel Florensky and Nikolai Losski – called this concept “the philosophy of homoousians” (ὁμοουσιότης).

³⁴ V. S. Soloviev, *Kritika otvlechennykh nachal*, p. 296; S. L. Frank, *Predmet znaniya*, p. 193; *Dusha cheloveka* in: idem, *Predmet znaniya. Dusha cheloveka*, p. 601. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, III, 8, 10.

³⁵ S. L. Frank, *Dusha cheloveka*, p. 560-561.

³⁶ G. Florovsky, *Reason and Faith in the Philosophy of Solov'ev*, in: E. J. Simmons (ed.), *Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought*, Cambridge 1955, p. 286.

³⁷ I. Kant, *Critic of Pure Reason*, trans. by J. M. D. Meiklejohn, New York 1990, p. 72-73.

THE CONCEPTION OF UNIVERSALS IN THE LIGHT
OF ALL-UNITY

According to Soloviev and Frank all-unity is a hierarchic organism. The ideas of genus contain the ideas of species. For example, the idea of “animal” includes the name of the species (“man”, “dog”), proper nouns (“John”, “Max”) etc. Therefore the content of a singular thing is proportional to the content of its genus (and species). If the thing has a bigger extension, the intension of its idea is bigger as well. We should add that in the debate on universals Soloviev and Frank (like most Russian philosophers) shared the position of concrete universals elaborated by Hegel and especially by the British neo-Hegelian idealists – B. Bosanquet and F. H. Bradley. According to this concept, the common in the different things (*unus versus alia*) is their foundation, the concrete (from *concreescere* – “grow together”) entirety. In Hegel’s opinion,

The concrete and true, and all that is true is concrete, is the universality (...). But absolute universality is not to be thought of either as the universality of reflection, which is a kind of consensus or generality, or, as the abstract universality and self-identity, which is fashioned by the understanding, and keeps aloof from the individual. It is rather the concrete, self-contained, and self-referring universality, which is the substance, intrinsic genus, or immanent idea of self-consciousness. It is a conception of free will as the universal, transcending its object, passing through and beyond its own specific character, and then becoming identical with itself³⁸.

Also, Bradley claimed that the “Absolute is, so far, an individual and a system”³⁹. In Soloviev’s and Frank’s case, “concrete entirety” is all-unity containing all beings.

On the other hand, adhering to the traditional scholastic theory of universals, Soloviev wrote that the root of the endless polemics between nominalism and realism is the identification of ideas and notions although they belong to the different types of universals. Namely, the ideas anticipate the empirical beings, so they are *universalia ante res* (“before things”, according to realism). At the same time, the ideas are expressed by the general notions. Because the general notions do not exist independently, they are

³⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T. M. Knox, New York 1967, § 7, 24.

³⁹ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay*, London 1897, p. 144. See H. B. Acton, *The theory of concrete universals*, “Mind”, vol. 45 (1936), p. 417-431; “Mind”, vol. 46 (1937), p. 1-13.

universalia post res (“after things”, in the terminology of nominalism)⁴⁰. Obviously, all-unity contains both all the ideas and the notions proper to them as well. Hence, from the realistic point of view all-unity is the supreme idea (Plato’s idea of Good), whereas from the nominalistic position it is the foundation of being and notions. Frank agreed that universals considered as ideas are “before things” (*ante res*), and realized that in time they are “in things” (*in rebus*)⁴¹. As a result, Russian thinkers tried to bring together realism and nominalism.

DIFFICULTIES WITH THE CONCEPT OF ALL-UNITY

The concept of an all-embracing universe proposed by the Russian philosophers and other idealists has some problems. Let us remember Russell’s criticisms of the Hegelian philosophy:

The view of Hegel, and of many other philosophers, is that the character of any portion of the universe is so profoundly affected by its relations to the other parts and to the whole, that no true statement can be made about any part except to assign its place in the whole. Since its place in the whole depends upon all the other parts, a true statement about its place in the whole will at the same time assign the place of every other part in the whole. Thus there can be only one true statement; there is no truth except the whole truth⁴².

Russell opposed the tenets of the Russian philosophers by stating that in order to know the individual thing (i.e. its quality) there is no need to know its relation to the whole. James also combated the holistic concept of cognition: “I left off by asserting my own belief that a pluralistic and incompletely integrated universe, describable only by the free use of the word ‘some’, is a legitimate hypothesis”⁴³.

Moreover, the rooting of the empirical world in the Absolute leads to the disappearance of the border between the natural and the supernatural order. The ontological consequence of this situation is pantheism. In its epistemological aspect this means the identification of the cognition of the world with the cognition of God. This opinion was also shared by

⁴⁰ V. S. Soloviev, *Filosofskie nachala...*, p. 238; *Chtenija o Bogochelovechestve*, p. 67.

⁴¹ S. L. Frank, *Realnost’ i chelovek*, in: idem, *S nami Bog. Realnost’ i chelovek*, Moskva 2003, p. 147.

⁴² B. Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, New York 1945, p. 743.

⁴³ W. James, *A Pluralistic Universe. Hibbert Lectures at Manchester College on the Present Situation in Philosophy*, EBook #11984, <www.gutenberg.net>.

Soloviev's contemporaries. For example, Aleksander Vviedensky criticized him for the "mystification of cognition"⁴⁴. The same statement concerns Frank who frequently repeated the famous Hegelian thought that "the Absolute, or God is the only object of philosophy"⁴⁵.

In conclusion, defending Soloviev's and Frank's position, we should say that the Russian philosophers consciously referred to the Platonic (and neo-Platonic) tradition in trying to express their religious belief. In addition, the concept of all-unity neither excludes the cognition of the particular elements nor exhausts the cognition of the Absolute that transcends the possibilities of reason.

⁴⁴ A. Vviedensky, *O misticizmie i kriticizmie v teorii poznanya Solovieva*, in: D. K. Burlaka (ed.), *Vladimir Soloviev: pro et contra*, p. 195-200.

⁴⁵ Cf. S. L. Frank, *Absolutnoe*, trans. by A. G. Vlaskin, A. A. Yermichev, in: idem, *Russkoye mirovozzreniye*, Sankt-Peterburg 1996, p. 58; *Filosofia i religia*, in: P. V. Alekseev (ed.), *Na perelome. Filosofskie diskussii 20-ch godov*, Moskva 1990, p. 321.