ADAM DROZDEK

Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Defying Rationality: Florensky and Frank

Przezwyciężyć racjonalność: Florenski i Frank

What should be the basis of knowledge in theological matters? The question has been pondered upon by theologians for centuries and not a few proposals were made. One of these was made by the Orthodox priest and scientist Pavel Florensky in *The pillar and ground of the truth* (1914) considered to be the most original and influential work of the Russian religious renaissance[1], marking "the beginning of a new era in Russian theology"[2] and even "one of the most significant accomplishments of ecclesiastical thinking in the twentieth century"[3]. Proposals made in a work deemed to be so important certainly arrest attention.

I. THE LAW OF IDENTITY

A centerpiece of rationalism, according to Florensky, is the law of identity, $A = A$, which is the source of powerlessness of rational reasoning. "The law $A = A$ becomes a completely empty schema of self-affirmation" so that "$I = I$ turns out to be ... a cry of naked egotism: 'I!'" For where there is no difference, there can be no con-

---

[1] R. Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky: a metaphysics of love*, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1984, 22.

[2] N. Zernov, *The Russian religious renaissance of the twentieth century*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1963, 101.

[3] M. Silberer, *Die Trinitätsidee im Werk von Pavel A. Florenskij: Versuch einer systematischen Darstellung in Begegnung mit Thomas von Aquin*, Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag 1984, 254. It is also worth mentioning that "Eisenstein and Florensky are the only two Russian figures in the twentieth century who have seriously been compared to Leonardo da Vinci," Rosamund Bartlett, The circle and the line: Eisenstein, Florensky, and Russian orthodoxy, in Albert J. LaValley, Barry P. Scherr (eds.), *Eisenstein at 100: a reconsideration*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press 2001, 66.

nection" (P 23)[4]. But does "I = I" really proclaim that "there is no difference"? It would have been, if reasoning about 'I' had been entirely bases on the law of identity, which Florensky does not indicate. And it is certainly unwarranted to pass immediately from the form of the law of identity to the statement that "outside of itself, I hates every I, since for it this I is non-I; and hating, I strives to exclude this I from the sphere of being" (P 23). It is quite mystifying how one can see in the pronouncement, I = I, that I hates everything outside itself and strives for annihilation of every non-I.

To acquire any meaning, the law of identity should be grounded in absolute Truth, the Truth being a self-proving Subject "that is absolute Lord of itself" (P 34). "A is A because, eternally being non-A, in this non-A it finds its affirmation as A. More precisely, A is A because it is non-A." This is a "higher form of the law of identity" that Florensky found in the yet unpublished writings of one Archimandrite Serapion Mashkin (P 36).

First, the philosophical problems with the law of identity are far from new. Investigating paradoxes concerning the One, Plato says, "if the One is to be the same as itself, it will not be one with itself, and thus it will be one and not one. But this surely is impossible, therefore, the One cannot be either different from another or the same as itself" (*Parm.* 139e). In the *Sophist*, Plato discusses the relation between the idea of identity and the idea of difference and their mutual manifestation in the world. Also for Hegel, identity is necessarily associated with difference. According to him, A = A is an abstract idea and "no consciousness thinks according to this law." A statement like "a planet is a planet ... is entirely correctly considered to be an absurdity" (*Encyclopedia* §117). "Equality is some sort of identity, but only such things, which *are not same things*, are not mutually identical" (§118).

Second, Florensky says that he has to ground the law of identity in the self-proving Subject, but he does not. He introduces a higher form of the law of identity and only now does he say that "from this it is clear what the nature of the self-proving Subject is" (P 36). The heightened law of identity determines the nature of the Subject, even the triune nature of the Subject. And the proof itself? The Subject is A and non-A. After defining B to be non-A, and thus non-B as A, Florensky obtains identity of A and B whereby A is merely "a simple, naked A." To move to a real equality, "A is A, for A is non-A," Florensky introduces C to designate non-B, "for the

---

[4] The following abbreviations will be used:

MS – S.L. Frank, *Man's soul: an introductory assay in philosophical psychology*, Athens: Ohio University Press 1993 [1917].

P – P. Florensky, *The pillar and ground of the truth*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997 [1914].

PZ – С.Л. Франк, *Предмет знания. Об основах и пределах отвлеченного знания*, Санкт-Петербург: Наука 1995 [1915].

U – S.L. Frank, *The unknowable: an ontological introduction to the philosophy of religion*, Athens: Ohio University Press 1983 [1939].

sake of clarity." And now, "in non-C, A finds itself as A" because "A receives itself mediately ... not from the one with which it is equated, i.e., from C," and it receives itself as proved and established. It is difficult to see what the significance is in this tortuous reasoning. Why should A receive itself from C if C was introduced merely for the sake of clarity? Also, the introduction of C does not suspend the already established identification of non-B as A, that is, the simple, naked identity of A is not abolished and hardly can be abolished by introducing a new symbol into the reasoning. This operation on symbols is hardly a convincing proof of the triune nature of the Subject. And yet Florensky is certain that "the self-provenness and self-groundedness of the Subject of the Truth, I, is the relation to He through Thou" (P 37)[5]. A play with symbols A, B, and C introduced "for the sake of clarity" results abruptly in an ontological certainty of the structure of the reality of the highest order: "Truth is the contemplation of Oneself through Another in a Third: Father, Son, and Spirit" (P 37), in the conviction of the number three being "immanent to the Truth" and the truth being one essence with three hypostases. The greatest mystery of the Christian religion, discussed through centuries by theologians and ultimately accepted by faith, is resolved by Florensky with the simple A, B, C. Eventually, Florensky states that to understand the possibility of Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity is beyond rational grasp: "from itself, reason could never have arrived at the possibility of this combination. Only the authority of the One Who has Power can be the point of departure for such efforts" (P 45; Mt. 7:29). This means that any attempt to rationally derive the structure of the Trinity from the higher form of the law of identity is doomed to failure, which contradicts Florensky's efforts to do just that. Eventually he states that faith is the source of higher understanding and applauds the formula *credo quia absurdum* and the principle *credo ut intelligam* (P 46, 47). Rationality is secondary; it is only as effective as it is enlightened by faith. Reliance on rationality, he says, is tantamount to atheism since rational faith does not accept the fact that God is suprarational, by putting oneself in place of God (P 48).

According to Florensky, there are two forms or states of rational capacity of man, intellect (*рассудок*) and reason (*разум*)[6]. Intellect is a lower form – analytical and logical, earthly, scientific. Reason is a higher form of rationality. "Reason desires

---

[5] "With an unmediated transfer of gnoseological schemas into ontology, Florensky omits an important differentiation. When the scholastics understand God as 'per se ens', it is not thereby stated that God can also be understood by us 'per se'", Silberer, *op. cit.*, 139.

[6] In his brief remarks about the intellect and reason, Florensky implicitly alludes to the distinction made already by the Greek Fathers, who made a distinction between *dianoia* and *nous*, which corresponds to Florensky's distinction between *rassudok* and *razum*. Florensky mentions *dianoia* to be an autonomous human reason (P 55). See also M. Azkoul, *The teachings of the Holy Orthodox Church*, Buena Vista: Dormition Skete Publications 1986, 26-28. Borukhov rightly denies the link to Kant's categories of *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, but he sees only an influence of Solovyov on Florensky's understanding of rationality, Б.Л. Борухов, *Мышление живое и мертвое: "рассудок" и "разум" в философии П. Флоренского* (по книге *Столп и утверждение истины*), in *Логический анализ языка. Ментальные действия*, Москва: Наука 1993, 135-136.

salvation, i.e., in other words, it perishes in its existing form, in the form of intel-
lect"[7]. However, "reason ceases to be sickly, i.e., to be intellect, when it gets to know
Truth, since Truth makes reason reasonable"[8]. Left to its own rational devices, intel-
lect cannot break out from its human form, from what can be grasped of its own
strength, from what is limited and finite. By blossoming to the level of reason, hu-
man rationality reaches the level that surpasses the limitations of the human mind.
Intellect is incapable in dealing with the concept of the Trinity, although the concept
is indispensable for its proper functioning. Only "self-overcoming, faith" in the word
of Christ can make reason reasonable because "reason, its 'how,' is determined by
its 'what,'"[9] and because the nature of reason is defined by its object, by its content.
This means that the existence of the divine object of reason, the existence of the Trin-
ity, has to be assumed before a claim of the possibility of lifting rationality to a high-
er level can be stated. Ontology before epistemology. Florensky, however, deduces
"the nature of the self-proving Subject" from reason's enriched law of identity. The
object of reason is supposed to determine reason, but it turns out that reason decides
what the nature of its object is. Epistemology before ontology. Rationality is sup-
posed to be possible through the object of its thought (P 347), but rationality con-
jures up this object through its reasonable law of identity. "The Trihypostatic Unity"
is supposed to be the root of reason (P 347), but rationality decides what this root is.
Although Florensky says that his is only "a kind of attempt at a deduction" of the
triune nature of the Trinity – not a true deduction because such a true deduction is
"the essential impossibility" (P 420) – his circuitous attempts at deriving the nature
of the Trinity from the rational law of identity indicate that for Florensky this kind
of deduction is much more than a mere theoretical embellishment. What he proves is
that it is quite true that such a deduction is the essential impossibility and – as ob-
served by Khoruzhii – that the idea of Truth being the Trinity is really accepted be-
fore proofs begin[10].

II. LOVE

The road Florensky is taking to the trihypostatic nature of the root of reason
through the reason's reasonable law of identity is not successful. However, starting
with the nature of God is more promising.

---

[7] П.А. Флоренский, *Разум и диалектика*, in his *Сочинения*, Москва: Мысль 1996, v. 2,
136. See also Епископ Анатолий (Кузнецов), *Миросозерцание священника Павла Флоренского
и наша современность*, in Michael Hagemeister, Nina Kauchtschischwili (eds.), *П.А. Флоренский
и культура его времени*, Marburg: Blaue Hörner Verlag 1995, 477.

[8] П.А. Флоренский, *Разум и диалектика*, 137.

[9] П.А. Флоренский, *Разум и диалектика*, 136.

[10] С.С. Хоружий, *Миросозерцание Флоренского*, Томск: Водолей 1999, 73, and thus his
formal proofs have no demonstrative power, p. 72. Florensky's proof is termed a heuristic proof,
a trial demonstration, and a quasi-deduction by Slesinski, *op. cit.*, 118-119.

Florensky begins with apostle John's statement, "God is love," which means that "love is God's essence, His own nature" (P 54). This starting point dissolves the problem of the existence of God which could not be established rationally. The certainty about His existence is not obtained through a rational proof but through faith, and "faith is always successfully attained" (P 55).

"The metaphysical nature of love lies ... in the going out of oneself" (P 67), in connecting someone with someone else (P 58). "Love is a substantial act going from the subject to the object and having support in the object" (P 57). God loves His creation, but what was the object of His love before He created the world? It must have been Himself. To avoid slipping into the identity A = A, a dyad must be introduced in God: Father and Son, Subject and Object of love. Although Florensky writes about the third I that is "breaking through the shell of this dyad's enclosedness within itself" to create a triad (P 68), he writes about members of the Church, i.e., created subjects, and it is not certain whether the remark should also be used in reference to God[11]. The Holy Spirit is the crowning of the love of the Father and the Son (P 72), but this is hardly a theologically convincing argument; the remark is rather a comment on the already made assumption of the trihypostatic nature of God. Love as the nature of God could be used as a theological argument about the non-uni-hypostatic nature of God, but it would be far from sufficient to arrive at His trihypostatic nature[12].

God is Truth, proceeds Florensky, therefore, the Truth can be known "only through the transubstantiation of man, through his deification." Furthermore, "knowledge of the Truth is revealed by love," which is one side of the same act of "God's entering into me as a philosophizing subject and my entering into God as the objective Truth." X's knowledge of God when seen by Y is love of Y, i.e., this knowledge manifests itself as love, as love characterized by good. But if Z sees X's love of Y, it is beauty to Z, Florensky seems to say ("contemplated objectively, by a third, love of another is beauty," P 56). All of this not only accounts for the Platonic triad of love, good and beauty as being three aspects of "one and the same spiritual life seen from different points of view," but also for the fact that the triad of Truth, Good, and Beauty, is "not three different principles, but one principle" (P 56). My relationship, even in the deified state, to God immediately translates into the nature of God and

---

[11] Although Silberer, *op. cit.*, 182-183, seems to think so.

[12] It is said that Florensky constructs a trinitarian worldview by always starting "with duality (two worlds, the two members of an identity, I and Thou, the Father and the Son, and so on) and demonstrates the metaphysical inadequacy of the duality. The two members of the duality simply reflect each other and offer no chance for movement to a higher state. A third member is always needed to transcend this *aporia*, and the result is the completeness of trinity: I-Thou-Other, Father-Son-Spirit, and so on," Steven Cassedy, P.A. Florensky and the celebration of matter, in Judith D. Kornblatt, Richard F. Gustafson (eds.), *Russian religious thought*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press 1996, 108. It is, however, difficult to see how Florensky demonstrates the metaphysical inadequacy of this duality and what is the higher state to which the Father and Son duality would accede.

the principal identity of the elements of the Platonic triad. God's nature is thus determined by how man relates to God: a theologically daring step.

III. ANTINOMIES

Florensky says that reason relies on the law of identity that each A is A, or A = A; on the other hand, when explaining A, reason states A is B, i.e., it goes from A to B which is non-A. Reason needs both time the law of identity and the law of sufficient reason. The two laws, however, are, according to Florensky, incompatible: "Norms of reason are necessary, but they are impossible. Reason turns out to be thoroughly antinomic – in its subtlest structure"[13]. There is no antinomy here. Explanation: "A is B," can mean that A is in category B, i.e., "A $\hat{1}$ B" (e.g., A is a triangle, or, A is an element of the set of triangles), or A is a subcategory of B, i.e., "A $\hat{1}$ B" (e.g., a triangle A is a polygon, or, the set A of triangles is a subset of the set of polygons), which in no wise contradicts the statement A = A. In particular, "A is B" can also mean A = B, as, for example, the set of equilateral triangles = the set of equiangular triangles, which does not stand in conflict with A = A, either. If a necessary antinomic nature of reason is a reality, it is not based on the clash between the law of identity and the law of sufficient reason as claimed by Florensky.

Florensky states that knowledge about the Truth is truth (P 107): "In heaven, there is only one Truth. But here, on earth, we have a multitude of truths, fragments of the Truth, noncongruent to one another" (P 117). Therefore, contradictions are inevitable. This is what sin caused: the fragmentation of the world and impossibility to put all its truths into one coherent whole.

Are these contradictions inevitable? Is earthly truth necessarily a contradiction? Is it really true that "truth is an antinomy"? Without these contradictions, reason "would not see extrarational objects" and thus would not be led toward faith (P 109). If different truths are fragmented reflections of one Truth, contradictions should be avoidable; if "we look at one and the same thing from different points of view" (P 118), we are not bound to arrive at antinomies. It does not have to be the case that "reconciliation and unity are higher than rationality," as claimed by Florensky (P 118), and that only "genuine religious experience apprehends antinomies" (P 120). The fact that different points of view are at play may be sufficient to reconcile and unite antinomies quite rationally.

At the end of ch. 7 of *The pillar* (letter 6), Florensky gives thirteen examples of dogmatic antinomies, e.g., concerning Divinity, the thesis states its consubstantiality,

---

[13] П.А. Флоренский, *Космологические антиномии Иммануила Канта* [1908], in his *Сочинения*, Москва: Мысль 1996, v. 2, 32. It is said that for Florensky, antinomic means contradictory in respect to sinful character of man, E.H. Трубецкой, *Свет Фаворский и преображение ума* [1914], in К.Г. Исупов (ed.), *П.А. Флоренский: pro et contra*, Санкт-Петербург: Русский Христианский Гуманитарный Институт 1996, 297.

the antithesis, its trihypostatic character. But different things are stated in the two parts of the alleged antinomy: God is one in essence, not in persons, and three in hypostases (persons), not in essence[14]. Also, it is difficult to see a contradiction between the statement that Christ will be the judge during His second coming and the statement that God judges all people through Christ. Sometimes the dogma has a very strong antinomic color (e.g., the dual nature of Christ or the problem of free will vs. predestination), but it may very well be that there is a problem with our inability to comprehend things rather than the presence of a genuine contradiction[15]. Even science is not free from this problem. How can we reconcile the fact that light has both a corpuscular and undulatory nature? Who can comprehend the requirement of the string theory that our world has eleven dimensions? Truth does not have to be inherently antinomic, and the presence of antinomy is not necessarily a sure indicator of the presence of truth. Furthermore, the contradictory nature of truth does not have to lead reason toward faith, toward a vision of extrarational objects. Reason can, and should, persist in its efforts to remove contradictions without setting its gaze on what exceeds its boundaries. Moreover, the lack of contradictions and the existence of harmony in the universe have frequently been considered a sign of the existence of the Divine. The way toward the Divine can just as surely lead through the noncontradictory nature of the truths of reason as it does, according to Florensky, through its presumably necessarily contradictory nature. When he later opts for Origenism[16], that is, for universal salvation, and, at the same time, decides for the reality of eternal torments, Florensky says that such a view is antinomic and "this indeed is the best proof of its religious validity" (P 186)[17]. This may lead to a conclusion that the religious validity of a view can be guaranteed by its contradictory character regardless of how absurd the view may be. Such a view, to be sure, requires faith, and great deal of it, because "it is both 'yes' and 'no'" (P 186). But as Trubetskoi reminds us, as to the antinomic character of revelation, Paul says that there is no room in Christ for yes and no (2 Cor. 1:19-20). This view cannot be reconciled with Florensky's claim that religious mysteries can be clothed in word only with contradiction, which

---

[14] Cf. Maximus the Confessor, *Two hundred texts on theology* 2.1; Трубецкой, *op. cit.*, 298; Silberer, *op. cit.*, 103-104.

[15] "It seems that intellect is not antinomical in itself but when confronted face to face with the Christian doctrine of Tri-unity etc., and only with it," Еп. Феодор [А.В. Позднеевский], review of Florensky's О духовной истнне [1914], in Исупов, *op. cit.*, 232.

[16] Origen, *On principles* 2.10.8, 3.6.4-5. Origenism was condemned in Constantinople in 543, Slesinski, *op. cit.*, 162. Cf. И. Андроник (Трубачев), *Теодицея и антроподицея в творчестве священника Павла Флоренского*, Томск: Водолей 1998, 31.

[17] Cf. Silberer, *op. cit.*, 110. It is said that "theology is antinomial in both its essence and its form. In its essence, theology is mystery: 'We see through a mirror in a riddling, enigmatic way' (1 Cor. 13:12)," Alexei V. Nesteruk, *Light from the East*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2003, 88. The mysterious character of theology is not tantamount to its antinomial character, as it is here suggested. We see imperfectly now what will be seen face to face later, but what we see does not have to be antinomial.

is yes and no. If this is true for *all* religious mysteries, then we can say that God exists and does not exist.

In the end, Florensky failed to show the barrenness of the law of identity (just as Hegel was not quite successful in that respect); he failed to show the inescapably antinomic nature of reason; and he failed to show reason's ability to argue in favor of the triune nature of its own root, the Truth.

IV. THE UNKNOWABLE

A far subtler attempt to deal with the incompleteness of rational thinking and with the reality of antinomies is presented by Siemion Frank, one of the greatest Russian philosophers. However, the attempt is not entirely uncontroversial.

According to Frank, being is a union of interconnected entities (U 26). Cognition is the conceptual grasp of this unity and thereby a separation of entities from the web of relations. A certain concept is concentrating of a portion of being and extracts from it its part, purifies this part from existing connections thereby impoverishing it and presenting it as it really is not, but as it can be grasped. The human cognitive apparatus is too limited to grasp any entity along with all the relations of which it is a part because it would amount to a superhuman knowledge of everything at the same time. Logic is a way of arriving at conceptual knowledge and thus everything touched by logic, says Frank, results in an inherently limited understanding of reality. Therefore, a true grasp of reality is of extra-conceptual nature; it is extrarational, and true being in its all-unity is of a metalogical nature.

V. LAWS OF LOGIC

Basic logical principles are included among tools that lead to limited knowledge. These principles are, as phrased by Frank, the principle of identity (A is A)[18], the principle of contradiction (A is not non-A), the principle of excluded middle (whatever is not non-A, is A, or: there is no third beyond A and non-A) (PZ 197-199, U 25-26). According to Frank, these principles, to be meaningful, require that concepts are used in them, that they rely on "the separation of a continuous whole into a series of separate determinations ... A, B, C....," therefore, the undivided unity of being from which these concepts are separated cannot be a subject of these principles; this unity transcends logical laws forming a metalogical unity (U 26) "in which the whole is not a specific determination, but it is something that precedes any determination" (PZ 218). This is Kantianism in a new guise. There is a thing in itself, which we know that is a continuous union (and yet it will be claimed that we know

---

[18] "A is A" should mean "A is identical to A" (PZ 198), i.e., A = A.

nothing and cannot know anything about it). Through the cognitive process, the thing is splintered into separate entities grasped through conceptual knowledge. Rational knowledge is but a product of the human mind which does not give justice to the unfathomable unity of being. Because the thing in itself, the real reality, is assumed to be indivisible, true conceptual knowledge is but an oxymoron. Logic, a stronghold of conceptuality, has only limited validity and cannot reach beyond what the mind manufactures. But even if we agree that logical principles refer to separate determinations, why can reality as a whole not become such a determination? In hundreds of pages of his books Frank discusses, in one way or another, this unity of being and yet he considers it something beyond reach to such an extent that even a variable A in a principle of logic cannot refer to it (cf. U 77, 211).

In particular, Frank claims that the law of identity cannot be applied to the all-one reality, whereby this reality cannot be described as something in general, an all-embracing content (U 36), and so we apparently cannot meaningfully say "reality is reality," "the unfathomable is unfathomable," without compromising the ontological status of the metalogical reality. The reason for this is that reality is thereby endangered with a definition, and no definition of reality can be given; reality cannot be considered to be a *definite* whole, a strictly closed unity, a whole embracing a variety of things within rigid limits thereby becoming a strict unity, like a numerical unit, and a unit is inconceivable without a second something, a second unit (U 37). The argument turns into a philosophical wordplay. Because reality becomes strict unity, a numerical unit, then its all-unity is destroyed because one unit cannot be thought without another unit and hence all-unity is at least a duality. However, Frank sees no such danger in the use of the term all-unity, in which case apparently "all" engulfs "unity" so thoroughly that even if unity (unit, oneness) entails a second unit, the latter is automatically part of the all-unity. However, Franks seems to think that only strict unity, a definite whole, poses a danger of implying that there is something outside of such a unity. Considering this unity to be nondefinite and nonstrict dissipates the possibility of something other that the unity itself. The argument, however, is unconvincing. The rationale behind the argument is to show that true reality is so elevated above the natural reality that even laws of logic cannot be applied to it, including the identity principle. Frank thus does his best to elevate the true reality above the conceptual level at the cost of resorting to highly unpersuasive arguments. The statement that "reality is reality" hardly makes reality more definite than when refraining from such a statement; it hardly reveals anything about its essence and hardly amounts to conceptual destruction of the conceptually ungraspable.

Also, A, about which the principles speak, is some generality, some unity whereby the all-unity can also become an A (PZ 201, 223, 233)[19]. When Frank interprets the principle of identity as meaning, "A necessarily is" (PZ 201), then it may be acknowledged that the principle can also refer to all-unity, unless it is either stated that

---

[19] The A of the principles is also something separate, something not generally different, and something like this and not like that (PZ 201, 268), which can also be referred to all-unity.

all-unity unnecessarily is or that all-unity is above the category of necessity. A unity, a united whole, "is nondecomposably one, a determined content which, like any determination, is identical only to itself and different from anything else" (PZ 212).

The principle of contradiction, "A is not non-A" may also refer to the all-unity of being, in spite of Frank's opposition. One way to interpret it in this context is to say that non-A of all-unity, the negation of all-unity, is a nonexistent, nonbeing, and the reference to such nonbeing is not necessarily associated with bringing it to existence: because we speak about nonbeing does not mean that nonbeing exists. The concept of nonbeing is formed as what is left after all-unity is removed, which is pure nothingness. Whether we can imagine such nothingness is another issue. We cannot imagine many things and yet may refer to them as unclear, fuzzy, barely defined concepts. Also, non-A could be considered to be an existing negation of non-unity and, because there is nothing outside all-unity, non-A is merged with this all-unity. This may be considered a somewhat artificial ontology, but Schelling, when grappling with the problem of evil, did not shun such a solution, proposing another absolute that is a reflection of the absolute; this other absolute has its existence in the absolute and generates "the nothingness of sensory things"[20]. In a similar spirit, Frank himself states that the all-unity is unity of unity and multiplicity, a unity of the whole and the part[21], and thus all-unity is a unity of itself and its other, i.e., the system of determinations (PZ 280)[22]. When analyzing the relation between God and the world, he also claims that the world is wholly other than God, the world is God's other. The world, therefore, possesses autonomy, and yet this autonomy is a relationship that emanates from God and dwells in Him[23]. But, ultimately, the essence of God includes all that is other including the element of "not" which constitutes all otherness (U 275), and "not" affirms both the unity and separatedness of all, individualizes and unites at the same time (U 282). Also, when addressing the problem of evil, Frank says that evil originates in primary reality which is in God, the opposite of God, but is not God Himself; it originates in an abyss that is on the threshold between God and non-God (U 291). There is, thus, nothing contradicting the ineffable essence of the all-unity when referring to it through a "not" in a logical principle.

---

[20] F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie und Religion*, in his *Werke*, München: Beck 1927, v. 4, 30-31.

[21] PZ 232, 253, 290; U 80, 83, 114, 144. The primacy of all-unity even leads to a theologically questionable statement that God and material are a bi-unity, something like a male and female beginning, a luminous beginning and dark womb in the absolute, and the absolute unity divides itself into God and chaos matter and then forms the world, putting its stamp on the chaos, С.Л. Франк, *Мысли в страшные дни* [1943], in his *Непрочитанное*, Москва: Московская школа политических исследований 2001, 354, 382.

[22] In this we can hear echoes of Solovyov's ontological statement that the absolute can exist only through actualization in its other; the other cannot exist in separation from the absolute; it is pure potentiality, В.С. Соловьев, *Философские начала цельного знания* [1877], in his *Собрание сочинений*, Санкт-Петербург: Просвещение 1911-1914, v. 1, 355, 363.

[23] U 270-271, 274; S.L. Frank, *Reality and man: an essay in the metaphysics of human nature*, New York: Taplinger 1966 [1956], 217-218.

VI. CONCEPTS

If we consent to the statement that a determination A is possible only through its relation to non-A (PZ 203, 290) and determining A presupposes the complex A + non-A, this does not automatically imply that this complex, as the precondition for determining A, is excluded from the scope of logical principles (PZ 204). This all-embracing complex is ultimately the all-unity which is the coincidence of opposites (PZ 204).

All-unity is a system of ideal places (PZ 232). All-unity is a unity of dependent unities, a system of systems, an organic whole (PZ 253). Only from the nature of general structure of all-unity does its division into layers into relatively independent spheres come (PZ 257). Frank never explains how this division occurs. Apparently, there are natural distinctions in all-unity between its parts, which can be partially known by imposing rational categories onto them. This imposition, however, is not arbitrary, so that there is a concept of a tulip and a rabbit, but there is no concept of an entity composed of a petal of a tulip and an ear of a rabbit. Such an entity is unnatural, counterintuitive and nonexistent in all-unity. Intuition, on the other hand, seems to indicate that the concepts of a tulip and of a rabbit adequately reflect the natural division existing in the womb of all-unity. Parts of all-unity are not contrived; they exist in all-unity, but they are never independent entities (PZ 279). Therefore, referring to these parts through concepts A, B, etc., does not necessarily violate the integrity of the all-unity.

An object is determined through intuition, which singles it out from the whole of all-unity, i.e., through "penetration into all-unity and contemplating the experienced immanent material in the composition of all-unity" (PZ 233). This act is accomplished through attention, which is directedness, "the differentiation of consciousness into subject and object" and concentration on an object (PZ 234). Attention is the actualization of potentiality and thus is an intellectual contemplation; that is, creative imagination (PZ 236). Creation is thus never creation of something that did not exist. In all-unity, everything already exists *in potentia*, and attention can only carve out something which is already there. Creativity is creativity of concentration on a specific part or moment of all-unity; it is creativity of directing light of attention on a particular aspect of all-unity; it is extracting one part and not the other, since attention is the transformation of psychic life into a bundle of rays directed outward (MS 183, 190, 220). Intuition is not a commonplace occurrence; it happens only for a fleeting moment. It is an act of overcoming "normal thinking conditions ... elevating consciousness to the height, on which it cannot stay for long" (PZ 269). It is a sudden illumination, an unexpected gift from above, a mental event in which "for a brief moment we have in front of us in one cognitive act and, consequently, as unity, infinite multiplicity" (PZ 270). Therefore, intuition does not touch being, being touch us and thus intuition is really another name for revelation[24].

---

[24] R. Gläser, *Die Frage nach Gott in der Philosophie S.L. Franks*, Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag 1975, 152.

It has been correctly observed that Frank's philosophy can be summarized in his conviction of priority of being over cognition[25]. The ontological status of metalogical being elevates it even over a possibility of cognition. However, how can that be? If subject and object are united, it is difficult to explain why there can be any problems in the process of cognition or how there can be anything unknown to us[26]. The all-unity turns against itself through its own unknowableness. And there is a paradox in that the subject can directly access reality through intuition but the real being remains unknown, even unknowable to the subject[27], because the absolute being is the unity of knowledge and being (MS 202) and even the most subjective content of psychic life indicates the rootedness in the unity of the all-embracing absolute being (MS 221), and thus potentially psychic life contains all in itself (MS 260). Potentially – it is quite another matter with actualizing these potentialities. The problem can be theologically explained by reference to the fall, to imperfect human nature as the result of sin. The fact of the existence of sin and evil seems to break the integrity of all-unity. But Frank simply deems this fact to be unknowable; he declares theodicy to be impossible through rational means (U 278), thus having an appearance of solution.

VII. CONTRADICTIONS

Frank states that we cannot say about the unknowable, A is B or A is not B. From this, he concludes that we can only say it is both B and non-B but also that it is neither B nor non-B (U 93, 220). The conclusion, however, is unwarranted. If A is unknowable, we cannot say anything about it, whether it is B or not, i.e., whether it is B or non-B. And this is where a claim about unknowableness of the unknowable should end. We have to suspend our judgment about B-ness of A since the unknowable nature of A permits us to say nothing about it: our rational powers are too limited to know anything conceptually about the unknowable. This does not mean, however, that A is at the same time B and non-B and, at the same time, neither B nor non-B. If it were possible to determine whether A is B or non-B – and it should not be ruled out that God could do just that (cf. U 14) – then we can say that A is either B or non-B, but our limited cognitive abilities prevent us from ever being able to state which part of the exclusive alternative should be chosen. In the spirit of Brouwer's intuitionism, we could question the validity of the law of excluded middle and state that there are always three possibilities: B, non-B, and undetermined[28]. Allowing for the value "undetermined" would prevent us from an absurd permissibility –

---

[25] П.П. Гайденко, *Метафизика конкретного всеединства, или Абсолютный реализм С.Л. Франка*, „Вопросы Философии" 1999, no. 5, 118.

[26] Гайденко, *op. cit.*, 126.

[27] Гайденко, *op. cit.*, 129.

[28] The law of excluded middle is not really violated here; it is applied twice: first a division is made between the determined and the undetermined, and then, within the former, between B and non-B.

that a lack of knowledge means the necessity of admitting a contradictory statement that A is both B and non-B and, at the same time, contradict this contradiction by saying that A is neither B nor non-B. If Frank wanted to invalidate the supposition that the only true philosophy is the philosophical overcoming of rational philosophy (U 96), admitting a contradiction and then, at the same time, contradicting this contradiction would certainly be an assured way to do it.

For an analogy, consider the judgment, "a stone S is considerate." Is this statement true or false? It is neither; it is meaningless. The statement itself can have a logical value if its components can be interpreted. However, in the case of a stone, no meaningful interpretation of being considerate can be given, i.e., in the case of a stone, no reference can be given to the predicate "considerate." Because the semantics of the term cannot be established, we cannot go to the next phase and ask whether the judgment is true or false. It is inapplicable. Does it invalidate the law of excluded middle? Not really; the law simply does not apply here, but the reason for this inapplicability stems not from the law itself but from the preparatory phase before it can be applied, i.e., from the lack of an unfinished (unfinishable?) interpretation of the statement, in particular, its predicate. Truthfulness is a semantic concept and thus requires a proper semantic ground, i.e., establishing referents of elements of statements (judgments). But we should not infer from it that our stone S is both considerate and inconsiderate and, at the same time, that S is neither considerate nor inconsiderate. In the case of the unknowable, the situation seems to be quite similar. There can be predicates inapplicable to the unknowable and also predicates which could be applicable, but we will never know whether the statements about them are true of false. If we know nothing about the unknowable, as Frank says, we cannot even make a distinction between them, therefore, to cover the two, they can both be considered undetermined but possibly determinable by the absolute itself, which can distinguish between inapplicable and applicable and, within the latter category, between true and false. In any event, laws of logic do not turn into their contradictions.

However, Frank claims that the unknowable can be represented in the plane of judgment (we can think only in judgments) only through "the affirmation of the ineffable and unknowable but self-evident unity of the positive and the negative judgment, this unity transcending ... both the principle of 'both the one and the other' and the principle of 'neither-nor' as well as all possible combinations of these logical forms of conceptual connection." Like Florensky, who says that antinomy is a sign of truth, Frank states that transcendental thinking captures the unknowable through an antinomic knowledge, knowing ignorance, although such thinking is inadequate to the unknowable itself. The antinomic knowledge, these two contradictory judgments, can be expressed only through the hovering (U 94) between these logically unconnectable judgments. Transrational truth lies in an unspeakable unity between these two judgments (U 95).

Even assuming the validity of the claim that cognitive and conceptual knowledge is not the only knowledge, and assuming that intuition and mystical experience

are other ways of acquiring knowledge about reality, we need not inevitably conclude that intuition is contradictory to rationality and that transrational truth is a unity of contradictions. It is enough to claim that cognitive knowledge is incapable in arriving at the same knowledge as intuition, but this does not lead to a transrational dissolution of contradictions. Frank is fond of the island simile: a conceptually defined A is like an island surrounded by the ocean of the unknown (U 8, 11, 56). Conceptual knowledge holds on to islands, intuition is able to venture in rare moments to the ocean, but this does not mean that what rationality cannot say about the ocean holds and does not hold for the ocean. Rationality may have a limited hold on reality but does not become irrational because there are areas where its hold ends.

ABSTRACT

    Some philosophers and theologians state that there is a limit to rational reasoning beyond which experience or intuition should be used. Forceful arguments for the limitation of some logical principles are presented by Florensky and Frank. Some of their arguments are investigated in the present paper.