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## THE RUSSIAN “ANTI-PHAEDO” ON SOME RECEPTIONS OF PLATO'S “PHAEDO” IN RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE OF THE 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES

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**Аннотация.** Диалог Платона «Федон» вошел в европейскую культуру прежде всего философскими аргументами в пользу бессмертия души, а также утверждением, что истинный философ должен не только не бояться смерти, но, напротив, стремиться к ней. Эти воззрения неоднократно воспроизводились в христианской теологии с поправкой на библейскую эсхатологию. Однако в христианстве, в том числе и в православии, всегда были и есть богословы, отрицающие платоновский дуализм как совершенно чуждое Священному писанию мировоззрение. Причем критика «Федона» никогда не сводилась лишь к метафизическому вопросу о монизме или дуализме в понимании человека, но оборачивалась определенной моральной философией, в которой главной те-

мой становилась тема отношения к смерти. В книгах Ветхого и Нового завета смерть никогда не видится тем прекрасным освобождением от телесного бытия, к которому должен стремиться философ, но только ужасом. Автор статьи предлагает рассмотреть эту проблематику отношения к смерти на трех уровнях: метафизическом, феноменологическом и синтаксическом. С синтаксической точки зрения, смерть — это то, что придает нашей жизни характер логической последовательности, превращая совокупность «атомарных фактов» в Судьбу. Образы судьбы наполняют смыслом наше существование во времени, тем самым становясь экзистенциальной феноменологией конечности нашего существования. А Вечная жизнь от времени не зависит, она не может быть ни «до», ни «после», и, следовательно, она присутствует в каждый бесконечно малый момент настоящего. Таким образом, «синтаксис судьбы» определяет феноменологию смерти, а феноменология смерти определяет метафизику Вечности.

**Ключевые слова:** Платон, «Федон», христианство, эсхатология, смерть, жизнь, вечность, страх смерти, метафизика, феноменология, синтаксис.

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## THE RUSSIAN “ANTI-PHAEDO” ON SOME RECEPTIONS OF PLATO’S “PHAEDO” IN RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE OF THE 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES

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**Abstract.** Plato's “Phaedo” has taken up its position in European culture primarily thanks to its philosophical arguments for the immortality of the soul and the statement that for a true philosopher it is not enough to be free from the fear of death: one should strive for it. Christian theology adjusted these views so that they correspond to biblical eschatology and repeatedly reproduced them. However, there have always been and are Christian theologians (including Orthodox ones) who deny Platonic dualism as a worldview completely alien to the Holy Scripture. It should be noted that the criticism of the “Phaedo” was always wider than the metaphysical question of monism or dualism in the comprehension of human nature; it gave rise to a certain moral philosophy focusing on the attitude to death. In the Old and New Testament, death is never represented as some wonderful liberation from bodily existence that a philosopher should strive for: it is always horrible.

The author of the article considers this problem of attitude to death in three dimensions: metaphysical, phenomenological, and syntactic. Syntactically, death imparts a character of logical sequence to our life, turning the totality of “atomic facts” into Fate. The image of fate makes our existence in time meaningful, and therefore becomes an existential phenomenology of the finitude of our existence. But the Eternal life does not depend on time, it is neither “before” nor “after”, and, hence, it is here in every tiniest moment of the present. Thus, the “syntax of fate” determines the phenomenology of death, and the phenomenology of death determines the metaphysics of Eternity.

**Keywords:** Plato, “Phaedo”, Christianity, eschatology, death, life, eternity, fear of death, metaphysics, phenomenology, syntax.

## Preface

In the Soviet era, religiosity was a form of freethinking — the manifestation of an independent mind, capable of the internal struggle against the official ideology. That is why in those years many generally irreligious people, who were interested in so-called “humanitarian problems”, often felt sympathy for the Church and members of the clergy. It was, probably, this sympathy that once led me, a Komsomol member and a third-year student of the Faculty of Philosophy, to the church of the Theological Academy.

I was on the stairs of the Academy when a relatively young hieromonk approached me. He asked if I am an enrollee? I was not an “enrollee”, but we talked up a storm. The hieromonk turned out to be a graduate of my *alma mater*, the Leningrad University; a physicist, at that time he had already become a lecturer at the Leningrad Theological Academy. “Come and visit us on Wednesday evenings,” the reverend father said. “At that time, our rector conducts exegetical talks and everybody is welcome”.

We, — my course mate, with whom I was then on friendly terms, and me, — together began to attend these talks of the former rector of the Leningrad Theological Academy. After the talks, we with our new acquaintance strolled around the garden near the Academy and talked about paganism and the Renaissance, Freud and Nietzsche, phenomenology and existentialism. The hieromonk told us about things we had never heard at our faculty of philosophy. The reverend father began to give us books that he borrowed from the academic library: first, the pieces of religious journalism of Fr. Alexander V. Men, then “a kind of ecclesiastical” philosophy (V.S. Solovyov, N.A. Berdyaev, etc.), then “ecclesiastical philosophy in the full meaning of the word” (S.N. Bulgakov, P.A. Florensky), then theology (V.N. Lossky, O.G. Florovsky), then patristic literature, and finally — the cornerstone, “Fountain of Knowledge” by St. John of Damascus. It was a whole system of Christian education. “One can come to Christianity by any of various paths,” our new acquaint-

ance said, “you can get there from Marxism, from positivism, from existentialism, perhaps, even from some kind of Nietzscheism. But there is no way back.”

Later our mentor became the most famous biblical scholar, exegete, and professor at the Saint-Petersburg Theological Academy, the head of the New Testament Department at St. Andrew’s Biblical Theological Institute in Moscow, Archimandrite Ianuarij (Ivlijev) (1943–2017).

But there was something strange in fr. Ianuarij line of reasoning — something completely incompatible with our “Marxist” ideas about religion. We have been taught that at least all three Abrahamic religions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — assume a dualistic interpretation of human nature (of course, this interpretation was “erroneous, idealistic, reactionary”, etc.). A person consists of a body and a soul. The body is mortal, perishable, but the soul is eternal, and after physical death departs to another world, where “it stands before the Lord”. Socrates’ reasoning in Plato’s “Phaedo” represented the classical philosophical demonstration of the immortality of the soul. If you ask any Christian, Jew, or Muslim about the posthumous fate of a person, then 90% will probably answer very similar to Plato’s “Phaedo”: the immortal soul will leave the body and go to some other world. However, fr. Ianuarij vehemently denied that the texts of both the Old and New Testaments contain any mentions about either the immortality of the soul or even of the soul itself as a special, independent of the body, part of a person. All these ideas, he assured, are the result of later Hellenistic influence. Although in the Bible we can find many places where the terms soul or spirit are used — נֶשְׁמָה [nshama], רוּחַ [ruakh] in Hebrew (Old Testament), or ψυχή [psychē], πνεύμα [pnévma] in Greek (New Testament) — there is nothing for it but breathing, which, in turn, symbolizes *life*. If there is no life, there is no breath, if there is no breath, there is no soul.

Even more important, according to fr. Ianuarij, is, so to say, “psychological” difference between the biblical attitude towards death and that of Socrates in Plato’s work. When Echebrates asked how Socrates accepted death, Phaedo testified: “... the man appeared happy in both manner and words” (Plato 2002: 95). Sure! According to Socrates, a true philosopher concerns himself only with dying and death. It is only earthly people, who entertain

themselves with drink, food, or carnal delights, are afraid of death, while a philosopher seeks to free himself from bodily needs and contemplate the Truth and the Good. Now let's compare this way to expect death with that of Jesus Christ: he "began to be greatly distressed and troubled" (Mark 14:33). "Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save him from death," says the apostle Paul (Heb 5:7). "Can you imagine Socrates weeping, or, even more so, wailing at the thought of impending death?" fr. Ianuarij asked us. Of course, no. For Socrates, death is a person's friend; for the Christian, it is the last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:24). And in the history of world culture, there is nothing more different from the Christian attitude towards death than such an attitude in Plato's "Phaedo".

In the Bible death is not the separation of soul and body, but immersion into nothingness, into Non-Existence, into the dark waters of the sea (in the Bible, the sea always symbolizes death), in Sheol, there is neither life nor God. Mentioned in the Old Testament, Sheol is inhabited not by souls, but by the shadows of people. And, according to fr. Ianuarij, this must be taken literally: Sheol is the place for some remnants of people who, however, sometimes crawl out into the world of the living to scare or prophesy. But this is neither heaven nor hell.

*"For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun. <...> Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going."* (Ecclesiastes 9:5–6, 10).

"Here is the classic biblical teaching about the afterlife. A living soul is a life, and Sheol is a grave, a place of residence not for the living, but for the dead," said Archimandrite Ianuarij in his most recent lectures [9]. The New Testament changes nothing in this interpretation of death and just counterposes *bodily Resurrection* to it. If death is the waters over which the "Spirit of God hovered" at the beginning of the world, then the victory over death does not imply that the God should be plunged into these "waters", that the Ex-

istence should be immersed into Non-Existence; it implies "walking upon water", "walking on the sea". The symbol of this, for example, is the passage of the people of Israel, fleeing from the Pharaoh's troops, into the midst of the sea on dry ground: the Red Sea parted before them and then closed over the Egyptians (Ex. 14–15). This is foreboded by the "walking upon water" which Jesus showed to his disciples (John 6:16–21, Mark 6:47–51, Matthew 14:22–33), saving them from a storm that threatened to plunge them into the depths of the sea. Death, Non-Existence, "darkness over the face of the deep" is not swept away by God, since it is independent of Him: Resurrection overcomes it.

Of course, fr. Ianuarij instructions haven't made us *religious* in the traditional, confessional meaning of the word. But I am convinced that religiosity *per se* does not really change our attitude towards death. And now, more than forty years later, I will try to give a philosophical interpretation of the aforementioned exegetical ideas. I will try to carry out this interpretation at three levels: *metaphysical*, *phenomenological*, and *syntactic*, — referring mostly to Russian philosophy and literature.

## 1. Metaphysics

In 1767, Moses Mendelssohn, the famous figure in the history of German education, published the book "Phaedo: or On the Immortality of the Soul". In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this book became a kind of bestseller: in subsequent years it was reprinted ten times only in Germany and translated into almost all European languages. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the book has been published three times in Russia (in different translations).

As for the genre, this book can be defined as translation/interpretation. It completely reproduces the plot of Plato's "Phaedo" (Socrates speaks with his disciples in his dying hours), but the famous arguments for the immortality of the soul are formulated in the terms of rationalistic (mainly Wolfian) philosophy of the modern age, and even reconciled with the Protestantism. That means that in this book there is no idea of metempsychosis, specific to Hellenism and some branches of Judaism; Mendelssohn also eliminated



all the hints at the Catholic Purgatory or the Orthodox “aerial toll-houses”. Mendelssohn himself went down in history as an ideologist and propagandist of the so-called the Haskalah, i.e. the Jewish Enlightenment, during which the Jews, who had hitherto lived an isolated national life, began to “leave” their ghettos, get a European education, and participate in European cultural life. Mendelssohn remained an adherent of Judaism but believed that the secularization of European states and the rationalist reformation of Judaism could push aside all barriers between Jews and Christians, and any time soon the German Jews would turn into “Germans of the Jewish faith”. The book “Phaedo, or On the Immortality of the Soul” was meant to demonstrate how modern rationalistic philosophy blurs the lines between religions, leaving the most crucial elements: the faith in the one God and immortality of the soul.

In fact, Mendelssohn makes barely noticeable amendments to Socrates’ arguments; however, these amendments radically change the whole picture of the universe. For example, Mendelssohn replaces the Socratic argument that everything arises from its opposite and, therefore, a soul passes from this world into the afterlife and vice versa, with the doctrine of continuous development, where nothing disappears, but only transforms. Mendelssohn replaces the argument of knowledge as a recollection (*ἀνάμνησις*) with the belief in innate ideas: “intellectual intuition” providing an immaterial and insensitive soul with all the necessary knowledge. The argument that, unlike the *eidos* of the body, the *eidos* of the soul presupposes something constant and unchanging, is replaced by the doctrine of the indivisibility of the unextendable soul: all the material things change while falling apart, but this is impossible for an ideal soul. Finally, the argument that the soul is the eternal and unchanging *eidos* of life is replaced by the reasoning that it is impossible to imagine the limit to the movement of rational beings towards the perfection: such a limit would contradict the “world order”. Having demonstrated this, Mendelssohn’s Socrates draws moralistic conclusions (quite in the spirit of Plato’s Socrates) that the posthumous fate of the soul directly depends on our earthly virtues and vices [12].

Thus, the rationalistic philosophy of the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries turned out to be quite consistent with the Christian ideas of "mortal body" and "immortal soul". In his article "The 'Immortality' of the Soul", fr. Georgy Florovsky, the prominent Orthodox theologian, illustrated an astonishing situation with the specific examples: during the Enlightenment, only the adherents of Orthodox Christianity defended the idea of the mortality of the soul, while the proponents of the Enlightenment advocated the immortality of the soul. "In fact, it was rather what one should have expected. The belief in *natural* Immortality was one of the few basic 'dogmas' of the enlightened Deism of that time. A man of the Enlightenment could easily dismiss the doctrines of Revelation, but could not afford any doubt on the 'truth' of Reason" [7, p. 215].

Challenging the philosophical belief in the immortality of the soul, Florovsky cites an example from St. Justin's "Dialogue with Trypho". In search of truth, St. Justin first came to the philosophers and for some time was completely satisfied with the views of the Platonists. He greatly admired Plato's doctrine of "the incorporeal things". Then he met a Christian teacher, an elderly and respectable man. They discussed a lot of problems including the nature of the soul. The Christian contended: We should not call the soul immortal, for if it were immortal, then it also would have been unbegotten. This is the Platonic idea. According to Christian doctrine, God alone is "unbegotten" and indestructible. The world, on the other hand, "has a beginning", and souls belong to the world. And that means they are not immortal, because the world itself has a beginning. The soul *per se* is not life: it only "participates" in life. God alone is life; the soul can but *have* life. Thus, it can be "immortal" not by *nature*, i.e. not by itself, but only by "God's will", i.e. *by His grace*.

According to Florovsky, almost all early apologists, that is, those Christians who had not yet succumbed to Hellenistic philosophy, had similar views on that problem: among them Irenaeus, Tatian, and Athenagoras of Athens. In his work "On the Resurrection of the Dead", the latter argued that God bestowed independent existence and life not upon a soul *per se* or a body *per se*, but rather upon people consisting of soul and body so that both parts of a human being achieve a common goal at the end of earthly life. A human being will disappear if the integrity of this ligament is

destroyed because in this case the destruction of personality also occurs. It is a human being (and not the soul *per se*) who is the entity having intellect and reason. Therefore, a human being must forever remain composed of soul and body.

Florovsky believes that all these statements lead up to the different attitude towards death in Christianity, unlike that of Platonism or rationalist metaphysics: “Death is a catastrophe for man. It is his ‘last (or rather, *ultimate*) enemy’, *ἔσχατος ἐχθρός* (1 Cor. 15:26)” [7, p. 220]. Further, that means that “Christians, as Christians, are not committed to any philosophical doctrine of immortality. But they are committed to the belief in the General Resurrection” [7, p. 239].

But let us return to the Age of Enlightenment and examine the influence of Mendelssohn’s “Phaedo” on Russian culture. Almost all philosophical discussions about the soul of that time proceed from the classical idea of its eternity, which allowed the well-known Russian philosophy scholar, T.V. Artemyeva, to present “Russian Phaedo” as one of the most important archetypes of Russian culture [1, p. 73-74]. But, in my opinion, there are two most intriguing examples of Mendelssohn’s ideas adoption in Russia: Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov’s work “A Conversation on the Immortality of the Soul” (1788) and Alexander Radishchev’s treatise “On Man, His Mortality and Immortality” (1792).

Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov descended from an ancient princely family, supported the “aristocratic monarchy”, and defended the “noble honor”. These are the important points, as his discourse on death and immortality is closely connected with the dignified acceptance of one’s “death hour”. Before “A Conversation on the immortality of the soul” Shcherbatov had written a small essay “On the Death Hour”. In this work, he expressed his bewilderment at the fact that we study rhetoric, poetics, painting, various crafts, etc. and the only thing we do not study is “how to die fine and without fear” (though it is obvious that we all have to do this) [18, p. 296-308]. And “A Conversation on the Immortality of the Soul” gives us an example of noble behaviour at the face of death — and death “terrible and disgraceful” — execution by quartering.

In this work, Andrei Khrushchev — a real historical figure, a “virtuous and enlightened” person, sentenced to death for participation in an anti-government conspiracy during the reign of Empress Anna Ioannovna — acts as Socrates. He has a conversation with guard officer Nikita Kokovinsky, also a real historical figure and a “noble, reasonable, and compassionate” person. Alas! Russian “Secret Chancery” is unlike Athenian prison: the visits of friends and relatives are not allowed, and the condemned can communicate only with “judges, officers of the court, guards, and executioners”. That is why Khrushchev is talking with his own guard.

The dialogue reproduces Platonic arguments for the immortality of the soul as interpreted by Mendelssohn with several new, if you will, exegetical arguments. For example, when Khrushchev says that there have not been people who did not believe in the immortality of the soul, Kokovinsky responds that, in fact, the Jews, who gained divine Law from the Lord, were exactly such a people. Khrushchev objects: “All this is a plethora of words! First, God always says to the people, ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery’ (Ex 20:2). And He says this to people living after the actual rescue from Egypt. Therefore, here He speaks of the eternal rescue of the soul from the captivity of idolatry. Second, in the Bible, there are many places where God calls himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But if the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had disappeared with their bodies, would He has called Himself the God of those who no longer exist?” This objection directly refers to Jesus’ famous response to the Sadducees who denied the resurrection of the dead: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob “is not God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt 22:32)<sup>1</sup>.

But the main Khrushchev’s argument goes as follows: “All those who reject the immortality of the soul, no less than us strive to preserve their name even after their death; is not this a proof that, even against their will, their souls cherish the irresistible confidence in their immortality?” [18, p.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that these words of Jesus have been cited as the gospel testament to the immortality of the soul. Though in the interpretation of the majority of church fathers (Athanasius of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, John of Damascus, etc.) these words mean that there is no the past or the future for eternal God: He sees everything in the present.

296-308]. Thus, the very fact that rebellious Khrushchev is ready to give up his life for the political ideal proves immortality. It seems to me that if the problem is presented in such a way, the metaphysical discourse of the “immortal soul” is superseded with the phenomenology of individual death experience.

Addressing the immortality of the soul in his famous treatise, Alexander Radishchev is driven by seemingly more philistine motive: he is in exile, he is separated from his relatives and friends, he feels the approach of death, and wants to find some consolation, some reason for believing that death will not be the end of everything and that one has a hope to meet his loved ones in the afterlife. But here we should remember that Radishchev is the author of “Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow”: he was sentenced to death for the publication of this book; by Empress Catherine’s II grace, the death sentence was replaced by exile. Though Radishchev does not make any specific political statements in his treatise, he clearly refers to the image of “heroic self-sacrifice” as a way to defeat death.

It is well-known that in the first two books of his treatise Radishchev lists various pieces of evidence for the mortality of the soul, referring to Sensualism and natural philosophy of that time; he concludes this section with the statement: this is what “the fiercest tyrant, the furious barbarian, the cold-blooded hater of man” tells (16, p. 96)<sup>2</sup>. In the next two books, Radishchev looks for the evidence for the immortality of the soul. Here he recites Mendelssohn’s arguments, which to his taste are too “metaphysical”, that is, speculative: the arguments for the mortality of the soul and its general absence are based on experience, while the arguments for the immortality of the soul — on speculative reasoning. That gives him an impulse to look for the “empirical” or “scientific” evidence of the existence and immortality of the soul. In the list of these “scientific evidence” he puts various examples of the independence of a person’s intelligence from the state of his/her

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<sup>2</sup> Radishchev alludes to Archbishop Ambrosius of Moscow (Andrey S. Sertis-Kamensky), who was killed by the crowd during the Moscow plague riot of 1771, as well as Cornelis de Witt, a Dutch republican, who was killed in the jail in 1672 by a crowd incited by Orangists.

body as well as the cases of "spiritual" influence on the body. But the most important demonstration of the independence of soul from the body Radishchev finds in the human ability to commit suicide — its noble form, of course: not when a person takes his/her own life because of failures, illnesses, or spleen, but when somebody willingly faces certain death in the name of truth and freedom. "Think back to Ambrosius dying under the repeated blows of the Moscow crowd, furious and agitated with superstition. Absolve them, the Lord! — said this righteous man. — They know not what they are doing! Think back to Cornelis de Witt, singing Horatius' Hymn among the rebellious Amsterdam crowd" [16, p.123]. As for bodily suffering caused by diseases, Radishchev believes, the most credible answer is the ability to overcome pain with intellectual and creative efforts; he mentions J.-J. Rousseau, who "wrote many of his immortal works in the midst of an unceasing illness", Christian Grave, who "for a long time could neither read nor write, but overcame such a condition and wrote his elegant notes on Cicero", and, finally, Moses Mendelssohn, who "suffering for many years from an indescribable weakness of the nerves, could even in his old age rise again to the height of his youth thanks to his patience and intellectual efforts". In conclusion, Radishchev writes: "I don't dare to put my own example in this list, but it is true that time and space disappear ... when one catches a thought, when this thought invades one's whole soul, fully captivates it, and, so to speak, rejects all the bodily considerations ... The universe is too small, if you have one foot in the eternity" [16, p. 123].

In my opinion, these arguments about immortality can have a bearing not only on metaphysics but also on phenomenology.

## 2. Phenomenology

### *a) Phenomenology of spirit*

As early as in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century metaphysical "evidence" for the immortality of the soul was reserved only for the conservative, "scholastic" theology. Speaking about Radishchev's treatise "On Man, His Mortality, and Immortality", Alexander Pushkin notes with contempt: "His contemplations are vulgar, and style is blunt" [15, p. 216]. Of course, Pushkin himself

did not even try to find any “non-vulgar” arguments for the immortality of the soul; instead, he unambiguously stated:

*Ах! ведает мой добрый гений,  
Что предпочел бы я скорей  
Бессмертию души моей  
Бессмертие своих творений*<sup>3</sup>.

The literature and philosophy of that time answered the questions of life and death rather with the reflections on the meanings and values of individual spiritual experience than with the arguments of reason.

Probably, “Bobok”, a story by Fyodor Dostoevsky, is a kind of apotheosis of the Russian “Anti-Phaedo”. In this story, a tipsy writer strolls around the cemetery after the funeral of a distant relative and overhears a terrible and disgusting conversation of the not yet completely decomposed dead. Gradually falling asleep, the dead play cards, gossip, talk nonsense, swear, fawn over the bosses, lech ... The story mentions a completely decomposed dead man who, nevertheless, sometimes “wakes up” to say: “Bobok, bobok, bobok”. Thanks to the overheard conversation, the protagonist finds the explanation of this phenomenon: it is given by a certain “local Platon” — Platon Nikolayevich, — “our local home-grown philosopher, naturalist, and master of arts”, who is also buried somewhere nearby at the cemetery. Platon Nikolayevich has already almost irrevocably fallen asleep, but once a week he still mutters: “Get to the point, get to the point!” According to Platon Nikolaevich, what we consider death before the funeral is not an ultimate death. For about two or three months, a person is alive in the grave — as if by inertia ... But if the soul is an element of human nature, then it is just as susceptible to decay as the body: it also emits a kind of “bad spirit”. The dead complain about the odour of decay, though it is not bodily, but a

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<sup>3</sup> *Oh! my good genius knows,  
What I would rather prefer  
The Immortality of my works to  
The Immortality of my soul.*

kind of spiritual decay. And Dostoevsky constantly plays with the ambiguity of the concept of "spirit". A cemetery is a nice place! "But the spirit, the spirit. I would not want to be a local spiritual father," — the protagonist reflects [4, p. 341-359].

Of course, many considered Dostoevsky's work to be absolute blasphemy. In his book "Tragedy of Creative Activity: Dostoevsky and Tolstoy" Andrey Bely boils over: "Why somebody should print all this nastiness, devoid of any bit of artistry? The only reason is to scare, to offend, to rip off everything sacred. For Dostoevsky 'Bobok' is a kind of execution of the Communion, and the play on the words 'spirit' and 'spiritual' is a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" [2, p. 28]. Of course, Bely is right. "Bobok" is a deliberate offense of traditional Christian ideas about the soul. But if we carefully examine Dostoevsky's interpretation of the Christian doctrine of Salvation and Eternal Life, it will turn out that the story slanders not the Holy Spirit, but Platonism with its dualistic conception of a human being.

A detailed analysis of the origins and specific features of Dostoevsky's religious thought at the later stage of his career can be found in the book "Philosophy of Man in the Works of Fyodor Dostoevsky" by the famous historian of Russian philosophy Igor I. Evlampiev. Evlampiev traces Dostoevsky's religiosity back to the German philosophical tradition, and, above all, "The Way Towards the Blessed Life" (1806) by Johann Gottlieb Fichte. In this work, Fichte says that the true "teaching" of Jesus Christ consists not in the redemption of original sin, but in the identity of a human being and God. This approach means the reinterpretation of "life" and "death". Death is a special condition when a person does not realize his/her unity with God and tries to distance himself/herself from God; life, on the other hand, is a condition of genuine unity with God. If a person gains such unity, death loses its power over him/her. According to Evlampiev, these ideas became the final version of Dostoevsky's religious world-view. "Dostoevsky does not recognize any 'otherworldly' reality or any 'otherworldly' God; for him, God is possible only as a result of the historical development of humankind, as the final, transformed, and perfect condition of humankind" [5, p. 387]. Apparently, we can connect these ideas with the fact that sometimes Dostoevsky com-



pletely reconciles the “true” religious faith with the “faith in the people”, and ones in a while even completely replaces the first with the second.

In my opinion, such an interpretation of the sources of Dostoevsky's creative work is quite justified but needs some adjustment. To clarify, I will make a small digression.

Fichte's ideas had a huge impact not only on philosophy but also on subsequent Protestant theology, including the so-called “liberal theology” (Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von Harnack, Ernst Troeltsch), which had a lot of followers among Russian Orthodox theologians [3]. According to E. Troeltsch, liberal theology strives to turn “the old Christian idea of the miraculous healing of terminally stricken with sin humankind into the idea of a saving exaltation and liberation of the individual” [22, p. 93]. It is worth noting, that in the XX century National Socialistic German Christians had in some respects similar beliefs. Despite all the differences in political conclusions, the humanistic “liberal theologians” and the fascist “German Christians” advocated for the reduction of religious revelations to social and political ideas, the rejection of ideas about original sin and its redemption, and the elimination of the Old Testament as the source of “Jewish faith” into a transcendent God. As a result, both movements turned out to be an instrument of political struggle. As long as Christian theology “recognizes” the gospel truths in the images of the state, people, nation, or progress, Christian ethics remains the servant of certain political forces.

Of course, all this directly pertains to Dostoevsky. One has only to think about Ivan Shatov from the novel “Demons”, who believed in the Russian people as in the “Body of Christ” (i.e., that the people should take the place, which in traditional theology belongs to the Church), but at the same time found it difficult to answer, whether he believed in God. However, given the versatility and ambiguity of the writer's artistic images and narratives, it is impossible not to notice that there is another trend.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was an opposition to liberal theology in Protestant countries: the so-called “dialectical” or “crisis theology” (Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich). This theology not only returned the idea of the other world to the religious world-view but also argued that no

matter how perfect is the person during his/her life, in the face of an absolutely transcendent God one always remains "empty-handed". Here the problem of death and immortality also merges with the problem of acceptance/rejection of Christ. According, for example, to P. Tillich, the mainstream idea of immortality naively extrapolates earthly time to the transcendent sphere of being. One cannot count on entering the Kingdom of Heaven after one's death, for there is no time "after" our time. The Kingdom of Heaven is timeless, eternal, and, therefore, is available to a person at every moment of his/her existence in the "actual present" [21, p. 194]. But here we speak not about a person who has achieved some kind of perfection, but about an actual person: sinful, weak, mortal, insignificant. Otherwise, the idea of Salvation contradicts the idea of *kenosis*, i.e. God's deliberate acceptance of the most difficult *modus vivendi*, the adoption of the "image of a slave", and obedience to this image "up to His end and death on the cross". In other words, crisis theology is not about the *futuristic eschatology* of the future perfect human, but about the *actual eschatology*, which is accessible here and now.

In Russia, Victor Nesmelov, Michail Tareev, and some other theologians adhered to a similar world-view. I cannot say, which of these world-views — "progressive" or "pessimistic" one — is closer to the ideas of Dostoevsky. But, for example, Michail Tareev, a professor of moral theology, interpreted the writer's work in the second sense. Such images as Alyosha Karamazov or Fr. Zosimas testify not for the transformation of this world through Gnostic enhancement, but for the ability to live in this world, to accept and love it, retaining at the same time one's freedom from the world and ability to be guided by absolute values [20, p. 40]. The theologian emphasized that there is no word "hope" in the Gospel: it is deeply pessimistic. The "eternal life" and the "Kingdom of Heaven" described by Christ are given to an individual in the present as a deeply personal and intimate experience. To overcome the contradiction between what is and what should be is an individual problem, which should be solved by each person and in the depths of one's own soul; the reconciliation of what is and what should be is impossible outside the inner world of the individual. We can neither transform this world on the basis of

some absolutes, nor escape it. A person is doomed to live, as it were, between two worlds, and be guided by two systems of values.

*b) Existential phenomenology*

Without going into boring lengthy arguments about the difference between the “phenomenology of the Spirit” and modern phenomenology (or phenomenology of the XX century), I will say the following: the phenomenology of the Spirit assumes that this Spirit, at least, exists. For more recent phenomenology, this no longer matters.

I have often heard the opinion that unbelievers usually exaggerate the importance of faith in overcoming the fear of death. “This is not such an effective remedy against fear,” — said Boris M. Engelhardt, a famous Russian literary critic and translator, — “If faith could really overcome the fear of death, do you really think there would have been a widespread collapse of religious consciousness?” [8, p. 447]. According to Lydia Ginzburg, who quotes these words, the faithful are afraid of death, because they comprehend eternal life only as something completely different from the earthly life. “If you understand the idea of eternal or even infinitely long existence fully, it will turn out to be unbearable” [8, p. 444]. Such a “different modality” is inconceivable and does not compensate for anything that we lose in the earthly life. It is no coincidence that Vasily Rozanov agreed to depart “to the next world” only with his handkerchief, that is, with all the specifics of his earthly existence. “I would like to ‘resurrect’, and not ‘for God’ in the theological sense, but so that to remember and to love all those whom I know and love now. In the last analysis, ‘the earth’ is everything for me: I know that because without the recollection of ‘the earth’ and ‘earthly people’ I definitely do not want to ‘resurrect’. I have no interest in such a ‘resurrection’” [17, p. 51].

However, religion can help to overcome the fear of death; it achieves that goal not by the promise of an “afterlife”, but by the formation of some transpersonal values, in the name of which a person is able to sacrifice his or her “earthly existence”. In this sense, any secular ideology and even the simple idea of some kind of social service can truly replace religion. But as soon

as one says it, he/she will hear the voice of some "skeptical psychology", which is much older than both "scientific psychology" and phenomenology.

There is a well-known aphorism by François de La Rochefoucauld: "Neither the sun nor death can be looked at without winking" [10, p.20]. According to La Rochefoucauld, some people demonstrate ataraxity in the face of death only because they are afraid to look "straight into its face". Heroic service to lofty ideals often turns out to be only a consequence of an unbearable fear of death. "Cato and Brutus each selected noble ones. A lackey sometime ago contented himself by dancing on the scaffold when he was about to be broken on the wheel. So however diverse the motives they but realize the same result" [10, p. 78-79].

In Russia, Lev Shestov had almost the same thoughts about Socrates as described by Plato. "How painful it is to read Plato's account of the last conversations of Socrates! The days, even the hours of the old man are numbered, and yet he talks, talks, talks ... at least one may spend one's last moments honestly, without dissembling or ostentation" [19, p.49]. Socrates talked so much, for otherwise he had to take hard look at his death.

Lydia Ginzburg called this attitude to death "distraction"; but, in her opinion, such an attitude is the fundamental feature of human existence *per se*. "There are many levels of human distractions — from gluttony to philosophy ... people are willing to be distracted, because otherwise they had to experience an unbearable, simply impossible, pure expectation of the end" [8, p. 287]. But the most important thing is that all people know and understand this. And "the conscious illusions are, perhaps, the most durable, because they cannot be exposed" [8, p. 287].

Many philosophers have condemned such a willingness to be distracted. Heidegger, for example, regarded this everyday flight from death as a mechanism for the transformation of a person into a thing, which he described with the help of the indefinite pronoun "Man". "But that 'Man' (general and impersonal), which gives us our language and culture, also makes it possible for us to live, knowing about death and having no faith in immortality. In the process of one's socialization (that is, learning from 'Man') a social individual adapts to this knowledge as well as to everything that interferes with life (if it is possible)" [8, p. 281].

It seems to me that such a “phenomenology of distraction” from death is the most optimistic. We can defeat the “last enemy” simply by “turning away” and not looking into its face.

### 3. Syntax

Nobody doubts that death is the inevitable end of our existence. It also hardly requires discussion that humans are afraid of death. But is it possible to subject death *per se* to some kind of axiology? Can we say, that it is something *bad* or *good*? For those, who do not believe in the possibility of some kind of conscious continuation of existence after death, the question seems meaningless. The famous Epicurean sophism that it is stupid to be afraid of death, as we never encounter it, can be considered as indirect proof. If something is not present in our lives, how can it be *bad* or *good*? However, there are philosophers who deny these seemingly obvious facts. In his book “Mortal Questions” (in the chapter entitled “Death”) Thomas Nagel writes: “I want to ask whether death is in itself an evil; and how great an evil, and of what kind, it might be. The question should be of interest even to those who believe in some form of immortality, for one's attitude towards immortality must depend in part on one's attitude towards death” [13, p. 1]. Generally speaking, Nagel's answer is that if death is evil, it is evil only inasmuch as it is irrevocable prevention of the *ability to achieve human potentialities*.

It seems to me that in his line of reasoning Nagel completely ignores the factor that people usually call “fate”. He ignores it because he does not believe in its existence. He does not believe in its existence since for him fate is predestination, and thus contradicts the idea of life as a set of potential possibilities. But fate is not predestination; it is the idea that there is some inner connection between events in time, and that the transition from one event to another is determined by some mysterious rules, which we cannot change. If it is possible to explain these rules of connection between events by the laws of physics, chemistry, or biology, we don't call them “fate” anymore and begin to speak about “natural necessity”. Even the ancient Greeks taught that Socrates' death is not his fate, since all people are mor-

tal according to the laws of nature. But Socrates' death in prison — the fact that he was sentenced to death and drank a cup of poison — is his fate, since this does not follow from any natural necessity. Are there any other connections in the world (besides the laws of nature)? There are also connections between meaningful linguistic expressions, which we call the laws of logic. The ancient Greeks also knew that these laws do not correspond to the laws of nature and do not follow from them. And yet the laws of logic are as inevitable and necessary as the laws of nature. Doesn't this mean that logic is the only way to a better understanding of our fate?

However, from the moment of its emergence logic itself has faced a problem: are the logical transformations of linguistic expressions consistent with any processes and relationships in the world of objective things, or are they just rules determining our operations with the linguistic signs, which cannot be interpreted ontologically? For about two and a half thousand years this has been a subject of philosophical discussions which will hardly ever come to an unambiguous conclusion. What is our life? Is it just a sequence of 'atomic' facts (events, situations, actions), which we link in our memory into a narrative, using some linguistic rules? Or is it an invariable chain of transformations, which, taken together, constitute some *history*?

The protagonist of Jean-Paul Sartre's "Nausea", Antoine Roquentin, who writes some adventurer's biography and, at the same time, keeps a diary, comes to the conclusion that the description of life, and even one day in the life, will inevitably turn out into a falsification. There are no "true stories". Human life consists of separate events and actions that lead nowhere, have no order, and are not connected in any way with each other, while any narrative exactly presupposes connection, order, and a certain teleology. Roquentin faces a dilemma: he should either write the truth (and then all events will be incomprehensible due to their "isolation" and randomness) or lie (and then he will write a completely meaningful and intelligible story).

A historian, who seeks to describe the collective fate of different peoples, faces the same problem. At the end of the XX century, a new idea has gained popularity in Western philosophy: the idea that the known history of humankind is not so much a description of the events that had taken place, as a narrative, a fiction, depending on various literary canons. Any histori-

cal research is based either on texts or on objects of material culture, which should be “read” as a text. Therefore, our image of the past depends on the literary laws and genres more, than on the laws of reality.

Thus, the problem of fate is the problem of narrative cohesion, that is, the problem of syntax, or rather a *logical syntax* since the connections here do not depend on the particular natural language of the specific narrative. Does this mean that, in fact, there is no fate? To answer this question, we should define the general meaning of the “reality” of human existence. A human being exists only inside the linguistic space. Everything we do — our dreams, memories, plans, beliefs, doubts, etc. — is a part of a certain narrative. There is no human behavior outside a narrative. Alasdair MacIntyre rightly notes that “Narrative is not the work of poets, dramatists and novelists reflecting upon events which had no narrative order before one was imposed by the singer or the writer; narrative form is neither disguise nor decoration ... man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal” [11, p. 211, 216]. That means that fate is the true reality of our existence, even if we admit that the logical connections organizing the text are only linguistic conventions.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Pavel Florensky noted that many synonyms of the term “fate” are etymologically connected with both the idea of *time* and the idea of *speech* [6, p. 530-534]. For example, in many Slavic languages the word “rok” has a temporal meaning: “rok” means “year” in Polish or Ukrainian, any definite period of time in Czech. (The Russian language retains the temporal meaning of “rok” in the word “s-rok”). At the same time, “rok” goes back to the Slavic “reshchi”, that is, it means something said or uttered. The same can be said about the Latin word “fatum”, which goes back to the root “fa”, meaning “to speak”; it also means some irreversible temporal order: one can speak of “fatorum ordo” or “fatorum series”. Thus, *fate is time expressed in speech*; it is a temporal sequence of events presented in the form of a specific narrative.

Florensky begins a fragment devoted to the etymology of the words “rok” and “fatum”, with the idea that existence in time is essentially dying. “Life equals dying. And Death is nothing else but a more intense, more effective,

more attention-drawing Time" (Florensky 1990: 530). What is the connection between the statement about the identity of time and death and the statement that fate is time expressed in speech? Even though Florensky does not explain this, the connection is obvious. Any textbook of logic or grammar defines a statement as a linguistic expression denoting a *complete* thought. A statement has meaning and sense only when it is complete. Narrative, too, is connected or meaningful only in the light of its completion, its final. And this means that without the concept of death successive events of our life cannot become a narrative and, therefore, have no connection with each other. From the point of view of syntax, it is death that gives our life the character of a logical sequence and turns the totality of "atomic" facts into Fate.

## Conclusion

Death is that gives our life the character of a logical sequence and turns the totality of "atomic" facts into Fate. Eschatology makes it possible to connect the facts of "collective life" with each other, turning them into History. In other words, both individual death and the "End of the World" give meaning to our existence in time, whereas the Eternal life does not depend on time: it can be neither "before" nor "after", and, therefore, it is present in every infinitesimal moment of the present. The syntax of life determines the phenomenology of death, and the phenomenology of death determines the metaphysics of Eternity.

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