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Tikhon Vasilyev

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ARTICLE



Aspects of Schelling's influence on Sergius Bulgakov and other thinkers of the Russian religious Renaissance of the twentieth century

Tikhon Vasilyev 

Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the appropriation of Schelling's ideas by Sergey Bulgakov, one of the most renowned twentieth century Orthodox theologians. Bulgakov's appropriation of Schelling's themes is sometimes mediated through his Russian predecessors Vladimir Soloviev and Pavel Florensky. Moreover, Bulgakov was in constant dialogue with other contemporaneous Russian thinkers influenced by Schelling, in particular with Nikolai Berdiaev. Brief sketches of Schelling's presence in the thought of such important Russian thinkers as P. Florensky and N. Berdiaev will set the historical context of Bulgakov's works.

Both Schelling and Bulgakov have attracted considerable interest in recent scholarship. Despite the fact that Bulgakov provides a fair number of references to the German philosopher in his works and draws on his ideas extensively, no single study exists dedicated entirely to Bulgakov's appropriation of Schelling. This paper aims to fill this gap in modern scholarship and offer a detailed analysis of Bulgakov's texts in regards to their dependence on Schelling's ideas. This seems particularly telling in the light of the ongoing re-evaluation of Bulgakov's sources.

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The establishment and early development of universities in Russia is associated with the significant presence of German academics, who contributed enormously to the formation and further development of a number of scientific branches. This is also true for philosophy as an academic discipline. This fact explains the immediate and enduring influence of German philosophical tradition on the Russian philosophical thought. This influence can be traced not only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also in the twentieth century, when it became less immediate and complicated on account of rich Russian literary heritage of the previous decades.

Schelling's influence on the Russian philosophical and theological thought was considerable in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially on its Sophiological strand, developed mainly by Soloviev, Florensky and Bulgakov.¹ This article will look at the presence of Schelling in three first-rank Russian thinkers representing the so-called Russian Religious Renaissance²: Pavel Florensky, Sergey Bulgakov and Nikolai Berdiaev.

P. Florensky (1882–1937) was one of the brightest Orthodox thinkers in the first part of the twentieth century in Russia. Educated in Mathematics at the Moscow University, he had encyclopaedic knowledge in a number of scientific disciplines as well as in the humanities. His major theological work *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914) provoked much discussion and became a turning point for many among the Russian intelligentsia.³

S. Bulgakov (1874–1944) can be said to be the most influential representative of Orthodox theology in the West. Bulgakov experienced probably the most profound and enduring influence of Schelling among other Russian thinkers in the twentieth century. This is the reason why his thought is the main focus of our research.

N. Berdiaev, another foremost Russian *fin de siècle* thinker and Bulgakov's lifelong friend⁴ (1874–1948), unlike Florensky and Bulgakov, did not develop sophiology, but concentrated on the problem of human freedom. Schelling's thoughts on freedom were important for Berdiaev and exercised considerable influence on his personalistic philosophy.

One might argue that it was Schelling's polemic with Hegel and rationalism as well as his personalistic stance, which was particularly appealing to these Russian thinkers. In fact, all of them experienced a period of 'rationalistic captivity' before they turned to Christianity. Florensky was brought up, in his own words, in the 'prison' of rational and scientific thinking, being fenced off from the Church and religion by his parents. In their young years, both Berdiaev and Bulgakov were materialists and Marxists. In Schelling, they found an inspiration and sufficient intellectual resource for overcoming their past. His holistic approach was manifested in the teaching about Wisdom, which was mainly articulated in his late *Philosophy of Revelation* (1831–1844). Schelling argues in this work: 'The etymology of the word "sophia" can come from "σοφία" – whole, unharmed, undamaged. Therefore true philosophy deals with the whole, and aspires to restore consciousness in its wholeness and integrity'.⁵

Soloviev, being himself influenced by Schelling, gave a philosophical and theological formulation of the Wisdom of God introducing sophiology as we know it in the Russian context. Although Soloviev's influence on Bulgakov in general is beyond any doubt and is recognised by Bulgakov himself,⁶ most authors do not speak about any direct influence of Soloviev's sophiology on him.⁷ Through Soloviev, Sophia became one of the main cultural themes in Russia in the very beginning of the 20th century. However, his Sophia was not purely Christian. Thus, according to Bulgakov, Soloviev's doctrine of Sophia is decisively syncretistic being 'far from the Orthodox conception of Sophia'.⁸ That was precisely the task that Bulgakov reserved for himself: to formulate and elaborate on 'the Orthodox conception of Sophia'.

Bulgakov points out that it was Florensky who first 'puts the problem of sophiology in an absolutely Orthodox setting'. Indeed, Florensky defended his work on Sophia as his Master's thesis at the Moscow Theological Academy (1914), where he became a tutor afterwards. For the sophiologists such as Florensky and Bulgakov, the intuition of the all-unity and the idea of integral knowledge became the essential principles, which had a deep resonance with the ideas of Schelling. We will start, however, with the brief analysis of Berdiaev's dependence on Schelling.

Berdiaev and Schelling: uncreated freedom

The central theme in Berdiaev's philosophy was the idea of freedom and its primacy over being. 'Freedom is the baseless foundation of being: it is deeper than all being'.⁹ Although in his major works Berdiaev provides plentiful references to the German mystical thinkers M. Eckhart and J. Boehme, he considered the ideas of Schelling to be the creative development of their thoughts in the field of philosophy. Berdiaev held a very high opinion of Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809). One of Berdiaev's contemporaries, renowned Russian thinker L. Shestov recalled that Berdiaev referred to this work by Schelling as 'the best that philosophy has contributed on the theme of freedom'.¹⁰ Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations* can be said to be the key source for Berdiaev's elaboration of his own teaching on freedom as the first principle and the most fundamental category of reality.¹¹ The main postulates of his philosophy of freedom are found throughout his oeuvre: in his pre-revolutionary *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (1916) as well as in his last book *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar* (1948). 'There is a sort of freedom which is, in some kind of way, the mysterious source of life, the basic and original experience, the abyss which is deeper than being itself and by which being is determined ... Man feels within himself this irrational and unfathomable freedom ... and it is closely bound up with his potential energies'.¹² The idea of freedom in Berdiaev is close to Boehme's *Ungrund* and to *the dark root* of God in Schelling. The German philosopher understands freedom as 'the capacity for good and evil'.¹³ Neither Schelling nor Berdiaev want to ascertain that the source of evil is in God. Following the German philosopher, the Russian thinker places the source of evil and of freedom in 'the dark root of God'.

'Since nothing is prior to, or outside [ausser], God, he must have the ground of his existence in himself. All philosophies say this; but they speak of this ground as of a mere concept without making it into something real [reell] and actual [wirklich]. This ground of his existence, which God has in himself, is not God considered absolutely, that is, in so far as he exists; for it is only the ground of his existence'.¹⁴ Schelling develops his thought by placing the root of all things in the ground of God. Things have 'their ground in that which in God himself is not He Himself, that is, in that which is the ground of his existence'.¹⁵ He notes that 'evil ... is first awoken in the original revelation of God by the reaction of the ground'.¹⁶ In God this evil is completely transfigured into good. Though coming from the dark, God is light in the absolute degree. Man is not equal to God, because there is a high degree of duality in man. Man has a freedom of choice between the absolute light of God and the primal darkness. This Schelling's teaching is completely accepted by Berdiaev. The Russian philosopher employed the terminology of the German mystics, but dramatically raised the role of the primal darkness, or the primordial nonbeing, and correspondingly – the power of freedom.

'Out of the Divine Nothing, the *Gottheit* or the *Ungrund*, the Holy Trinity, God the Creator is born. The creation of the world by God the Creator is a secondary act. From this point of view it may be said that freedom is not created by God, it is rooted in the Nothing, in the *Ungrund* from all eternity ... Man is the child of God and the child of freedom – of nothing, ... non-being freely accepted being ... God the Creator is

all-powerful over being, over the created world, but He has no power over non-being, over the uncreated freedom, which is impenetrable to Him'.¹⁷ In his article on Boehme, Berdiaev links the experience of fire in Heraclitus with the fiery mysticism of Jacob Boehme, and also he links the mysticism of Boehme and the philosophy of Schelling. 'Schelling, in his book, *Philosophische Untersuchungen ueber das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* [*Philosophic Investigations Concerning the Nature of Human Freedom*], moves along the lines of Boehme's ideas concerning the *Ungrund* and freedom, although he does not always correctly understand Boehme. Clearly echoing Boehme resound the words of Schelling: "Alle Geburt ist Geburt aus Dunkel ins Licht" ["All birth is a birth from darkness into light"]. The initial primal creation is nothing other, than a birth of light, as a surmounting of darkness. In order that there be the good from darkness, from a potential condition that should pass over into an actual condition, freedom is necessary. Being for Schelling is will. He is the first in German philosophy to develop Boehme's voluntarism. Things possess their ground not in God Himself, but in the nature of God. Evil is possible only because, that in God there is that, which is not God, which is an ungroundedness in God, a dark will, i.e. the *Ungrund*. Nature both for Schelling, and for Boehme, is an history of spirit, and for Schelling everything, which is examined within nature, within the objective world, leads forth through the subject'.¹⁸

A recent researcher of the Russian religious thought A. Ermichev suggested that there are three different freedoms in the thought of Berdiaev. The first one is the dark foundation of being which is prior to being; the second freedom is the freedom of choice which can lead to God, and the third freedom is freedom in society. According to Ermichev, Berdiaev freely uses the ideas of Boehme and Schelling. It especially concerns the first type of freedom, or the dark root of being.¹⁹

L. Shestov wrote: 'Berdiaev takes his philosophical genealogy from the renowned German mystic Jakob Boehme and, through Boehme, from German idealism'.²⁰ Lower in the same article Shestov underlines: 'In the universe there is both something and nothing. The nothing is not absolute. Berdiaev distinguishes, again following Schelling, *mê on* from *ouk on*. Non-being is *mê on*, that is to say, although it is nothing, it is a kind of nothing to which enormous power is given over everything – both over God and men. In the face of Nothingness – which is also freedom – even the omnipotence of God must be limited'.²¹ According to P. Gaidenko, when Berdiaev affirms that human freedom in its origin is independent from God his thought is much more radical than that of Boehme or Schelling, who never affirmed such a radical independence. Berdiaev is convinced that 'man is not only above creatures but also above God: because man being impersonation of freedom, or nothing, is not only before God, but also above God. The primacy of freedom over being ultimately means not only the primacy of man over the world, but also over God'.²² One can find here parallels with Schelling's idea of the central position of man, though expressed in a much more moderate way than in Berdiaev: 'Only man is in God and capable of freedom exactly through this Being-in-God [in-Gott-sein]. He alone is a being of the *centrum* [ein Centralwesen] and, for that reason, he should also remain in the *centrum*. All things are created in it just as God only accepts nature and ties it to himself through man'.²³ In Schelling man is free because and as soon as he exists in God, and Berdiaev emphasises freedom, which is coeternal with God, and comes to existence independently from God. This difference can be explained by more systematic character of

Schelling's thought, despite his affinity with the poetics of romanticism. By contrast, Berdiaev repeatedly admitted the non-discursiveness of his own philosophy. We will now turn to Florensky, who relied on Schelling extensively and picked up a number of different themes from him.

Florensky and Schelling: truth is antinomy and contradiction in god

In *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914) Florensky shows his acquaintance with both early and later Schelling's works. When criticising rationalism in philosophy and theology, Florensky uses the same metaphors, which also were employed by Schelling, such as living organism versus dead mechanism. Florensky approves of Schelling's critique of Spinoza, which is found in his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809). He draws on the etymological analysis the German philosopher suggests in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (1842). Florensky praises Schelling for his deliberations on the problem of infinity in the dialogue *Bruno* (1802) and refers to his theory of colours expounded in Schelling's early treatise *On the World Soul* (1798). Overall, Schelling is one of the most frequently cited modern authors in Florensky's major treatise.

It is noteworthy that Florensky refers to Schelling in connection with the idea of the unity of space and time: 'According to Schelling, space and time are not different, but one, though in different directions. It means that rhythm in time and the system of isolations in the space of the cult are one. One needs to deduct from one origin the necessity of the rhythmic division of the cult in time and systematic isolations in space'.²⁴ He mentions somewhere else that 'Schelling was the first to point out that time and space are not two, but one form of perception'.²⁵ The issue of space and time relationship preoccupied Florensky for many years and is reflected in his diaries as well as in publications on art and iconography.²⁶ It is also remarkable that Florensky adopts terminology coined by the German philosopher and employs for his own purposes Schelling's methodological division between theoretical knowledge (or negative philosophy) and practical knowledge (or positive philosophy).

It might be argued, however, that the most significant reference to Schelling is found in Letter 6 of *The Pillar*, where Schelling is only briefly mentioned among other philosophers who in their philosophies made use of antinomies and contradictions. Although philosophers have employed contradictions and antinomies from the very beginning of the Greek philosophy, antinomies in a methodological way were dealt with by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). In a paper that he gave at the General Meeting of the Council of Moscow Theological Academy in 1908,²⁷ Florensky thoroughly examines Kant's four cosmological antinomies and substantiates his own vision in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* published in 1914.²⁸ He argues that Kant's antinomies are not really 'the antinomies of pure reason', but demonstrate only the contradictions between different functions of reason. He concludes that Kant's idea of the possibility of antinomies is 'the deepest and most fruitful'²⁹ but his arguments appear to be insufficiently substantiated. For Florensky 'truth is an antinomy'.³⁰ He expounds his own understanding of the antinomic structure of human reason and offers 'a formal logical theory of antinomy'.³¹ The antinomial approach is especially appropriate when it comes to religion. He writes:

‘The mysteries of religion are not secrets that one must not reveal. They are not the passwords of conspirators, but inexpressible, unutterable, indescribable experiences, which cannot be put into words except in the form of contradictions, which are “yes” and “no” at the same time. They are mysteries that transcend meaning. That is why, when it is expressed in church hymns, the rapture of the soul is inevitably enveloped in the shell of a distinctive play of concepts. The whole liturgy, especially the canons and stichera, is full of this ceaselessly exuberant wit of antithetic juxtapositions and antinomic affirmations’.³²

Although Florensky collocates together, via a comma, Hegel and Schelling, without highlighting any difference in the role of contradictions in their respective philosophies, one can argue that there is a significant difference between the two.³³ Whereas for Hegel contradictions seem to be merely part of the movement of logic in the thinking of life, or thinking of being, for Schelling contradiction is at the heart of all life, and indeed the language of contradiction is appropriate for speaking about God:

‘And the law of contradiction, which says that opposites cannot be in one and the same thing and at the same time be that which has being, here, at last, finds its application. God, in accordance with the necessity of its nature, is an eternal No ... But the same God, with equal necessity of its nature, although not in accord with the same principle, but in accord with a principle that is completely different from the first principle, is the eternal Yes, an eternal outstretching, giving, and communicating of its being. Each of these principles, in an entirely equal fashion, is the being, that is, each has the same claim to be God or that which has being. Yet they reciprocally exclude each other. If one is that which has being, then the opposed can only be that which does not have being. But, in an equally eternal manner, God is the third term or the unity of the Yes and the No’.³⁴

For Schelling, as is also true for Florensky, contradiction can never be reduced to a dialectic of concepts. Life is contradiction, it is a play of forces, which can never be logically resolved.

‘Since each of the three principles has an equal claim to be that which has being, the contradiction cannot be resolved through one of the principles somehow becoming that which has being at the cost of the others. But since the contradiction can also not remain, and since it does so because each of the principles wants to be that which has being for itself: thus no other solution is thinkable other than that they all communally and voluntarily ... sacrifice being that which has being and hence, debase themselves into simple Being ... Space opens up and that blind necessity of reciprocal inexistence metamorphosises into the relationship of a free belonging together’.³⁵

One can see from the above citations that Schelling and Florensky sometimes employ similar expressions to speak about contradictions in life and thought. However, there are also significant differences in their respective approaches, which P. Gaidenko has pointed out in her article ‘*The Antinomic dialectic of P.A. Florensky versus the Law of Identity*’.³⁶ We shall now proceed to the works of our main protagonist Sergius Bulgakov.

Bulgakov and Schelling: in the shadow of Hegel

Bulgakov appropriates Florensky’s understanding of antinomies and their role in the structure of reason.³⁷ He writes in the *Tragedy of Philosophy*:

'Reason necessarily comes up against antinomies, determining its structure and objectives ... The antinomies which tear apart reason – they themselves build it up and determine it'.³⁸

He argues that antinomies are indispensable to human reason. Their presence points to the damage and illness of the whole human nature which come from the Fall and hereditary sin.³⁹ And human reason alone without support from faith is unable to overcome its existing impairment. Moreover, reason often does not even perceive its limits and does not know where one should put a stop to its systematising activity. Antinomies are therefore, on the one hand, the punishment and the ill fate of reason. On the other hand, they are its medicine and an effective means to make reason realise its own state and come to reality. Although antinomies make impossible for reason the construction of an absolute philosophical system, they not only allow but encourage philosophising:

'Philosophising is the tragedy of reason which has its catharsis'.⁴⁰

One must accept all contradictions, not annihilate them. Bulgakov states that the resolution of antinomism can be neither in eclecticism, when all contradictions are fused and lose their own identity, nor in dialectics when contradictions are sublated and 'explained', but in the philosophical turn to religion and theology.⁴¹ The history of philosophy is a tragedy. On the one hand, human reason cannot cease making attempts to embrace the world, to explain everything logically, somehow appropriating everything. This activity is natural and wholesome for reason. On the other hand, the world is not reasonable in its ultimate sense, as reason is neither the source of itself nor the only architect of the world and there is a place for mystery in its origin. Bulgakov introduces the notion of wisdom which 'demands self-consciousness from reason' to perceive its real boundaries.⁴² In the above mentioned ideas of Bulgakov one can notice the influence of Schelling, either direct or mediated through Florensky.

The scope of this article does not allow us to analyse all Bulgakov's works on the subject of their dependence on Schelling and only some instances of this influence can be demonstrated here. We will look at Bulgakov's three works: *Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household* (1912), which is known as his first serious engagement with theological problematic and his first exposition of sophiology. *The Tragedy of Philosophy* (1927) is said to be the most philosophical of Bulgakov's works where Schelling's influence is very noticeable and manifold. Finally, *Jacob's Ladder* (1929) is taken as an example of a work written in his latest 'theological period'.

A fundamental limitation for Schelling's influence on Bulgakov, which is also true for Florensky, can be said to be the teaching and tradition of the Orthodox Church. Bulgakov would not appropriate any of Schelling's opinions that in his mind stood in contradiction to the teachings of the Orthodox Church.⁴³ It is not accidental that Bulgakov's works abound in references to the Biblical texts. He considered the Holy Scripture to be the primary and universal source of faith above any sort of tradition. That said, it must be emphasised that the Biblical and liturgical sources influenced Bulgakov in an unsystematic way, providing him with a supply of a variety of insights and ideas. Yet, he looked elsewhere for a systematisation of these thoughts, drawing on a proliferation of ancient and modern non-Orthodox thinkers, including Schelling. His views on the guardian angels and on God as Sophia are instances of this approach. Thus, in his *Philosophy of Economy* he avers:

‘Our ideal images (the guardian angels we all have) exist before time in the spiritual world while we realise their likeness through our life and thus – by virtue of our freedom – come to resemble them or recede from them ... The theory of man’s ideal preexistence in God as Sophia and of his creation on the basis of freedom ... begins to assert itself already in the ancient world – in Plato ... and with complete philosophical clarity in Plotinus. In the Christian mind it finds clear expression in the works of Origen, in St. Gregory of Nyssus and Maxim the Confessor, in Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, in J. Scotus Eriugena, and in the mystical theology of Jakob Böhme and Franz Baader; contemporary philosophy owes a particular debt for developing this idea to Schelling’s profundity ... and he is joined here by Vladimir Soloviev. Curiously, all his rationalism notwithstanding, Kant, too, comes very close to this theory ...’⁴⁴

This lengthy citation is an example of Bulgakov’s method whereby he draws on Christian material while also bringing in modern philosophical ideas in a manner that suited his own philosophising at this point of his philosophical thinking. Building on the Biblical idea of the ministering angel, Bulgakov then ascribes to ancient and modern Christian theologians the development of the philosophical and theological foundations of the concept of Sophia. Moreover, as the above-mentioned quotation demonstrates, Bulgakov provides us with the names of those who apparently produced the most influence on his systematic thought and his understanding of Sophia in particular. The significance of Schelling is greatly emphasised.

The entire work *Philosophy of Economy* can be seen as a continuation of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*.⁴⁵ Bulgakov avers:

‘The philosophy of economy, as a philosophy of objective action, must necessarily be a conscious continuation of Schelling’s enterprise. Naturally, it must be free of any Schellingian dogmatism; it merely takes Schelling’s basic idea as a theme or task for contemporary philosophy. We cannot, however, neglect the fact that it was Schelling who, with his philosophy of identity, laid the foundation for the philosophy of economy, although we must add that he himself not only did not investigate this aspect of his own problem but apparently was not even conscious of it’.⁴⁶ Through Schelling, Bulgakov transforms Marx’s non-personal philosophy of economics into a mystical metaphysical personalised cosmology. In the article ‘*Marx as a religious type* (1906), Bulgakov criticised Marx and Feuerbach for their lack of the dimension of the person and of any Christocentric principle as the principle of unity of the humankind.

The tragedy of philosophy

One can argue that Bulgakov had three main stages in his personal development – economic (or materialist Marxist), philosophical and theological.⁴⁷ All his works, therefore, can be divided into three categories: economic, primarily philosophical and primarily theological. However, this approach rather oversimplifies the problem. Indeed, Bulgakov considered himself to be a theologian, whereas his at one time spiritual son and disciple – and later his opponent and critic – George Florovsky, referred to him long after his death as ‘a Christian philosopher, rather than a theologian’.⁴⁸

In order to elucidate Bulgakov’s position, let us look at his preface to *The Tragedy of Philosophy* (1927). He writes:

‘Although this work appears to be a sort of summing-up in the field of philosophy judging from its content ..., its inner guiding question ... is about the nature of the relationship between philosophy and theology, or the religious- intuitive origins of *any* philosophising’.⁴⁹

What Bulgakov is pointing out here is that, while his essay is focusing on philosophy, he nonetheless at the same time – and less evidently – is performing theological tasks. It can be gathered from this that the essay’s theological gist is more important for Bulgakov than its philosophical content. He does not reject philosophy but claims that theology is a more fundamental reality upon which alone philosophy can be constructed. Even more, he opines a little further on:

‘The history of modern philosophy can be seen in its genuine religious nature as Christian heresiology and the tragedy of thought’.⁵⁰

Some authors argue that Bulgakov inherited both the definition of heresy and more broadly his ‘heresiological approach’ from Schelling.⁵¹

There are three parts to *The Tragedy of Philosophy*. Bulgakov argues in Part 1 of ‘The types of philosophical constructions’ that the nature of our judgement expressed in the form of a sentence defines the nature of our thought. He points to the three constitutive parts of judgement: (1.) Hypostasis, person (or ‘I’); (2.) Nature, predicate; (3.) Interdependence or self-awareness (the verb ‘to be’). Different systems of modern philosophy, says Bulgakov, can be classified in accordance with this tripartite approach to judgement. Further, in Part 2 the Russian theologian develops his own ‘philosophy of threeness’. One can say that Bulgakov tries to apply the Christian dogma of the three Persons of the Godhead to philosophy and to deduct from this dogma a kind of general rule or logic of ‘threeness’. In other words, Bulgakov claims that Christian dogmas, and in particular the dogma of the Trinity, can have a philosophical meaning. He leads his argument with this assumption in mind. Finally, Part 3 of *The Tragedy of Philosophy* consists of three analytical essays dedicated to Kant (1724–1804), Hegel (1770–1831) and Fichte (1762–1814).

Although Bulgakov mentions in the course of his work all the main figures of German classical philosophy, first including Kant, Fichte and Schelling, he pays particular attention to Hegel, because in Hegel’s philosophy, according to Bulgakov, the ‘philosophical system as such has its classical and supreme expression’.

Bulgakov asks: ‘What is the result of this observation of the philosophical heresiology? All [philosophies] are wrong, ... and at the same time all are right. None of them can cede or give up its essential philosophical finding. This is a paradoxical and difficult conclusion, which makes thought accept all three possibilities and apparently deny each of them in its particularity’.⁵² Bulgakov constructs his own ‘super-system’, a kind of ‘super-judgement’, which does not only systematise, but also combines all the philosophies as the moments of this ‘judgement’ without eclecticism employing the principle of antinomism. Similarly, he calls not only the fathers of the Church, but also the heretics who were condemned by the Councils, theologians. Theology becomes a dialogue or engagement with important topical questions, which inevitably had to be raised, as to raise questions is the distinctive feature of human reason and it is therefore ‘almost imperative to reinterpret the dogmas according to the philosophy of the day’.⁵³

We can see that Bulgakov gives a much broader meaning to theology than, for instance, Florovsky. If Bulgakov would give the name ‘theologians’ to the fathers and

the heretics, as well as philosophers, Florovsky was unwilling to call Bulgakov himself a theologian. The above-mentioned Bulgakov's ideas are very close indeed to Schelling's analysis of heresies as necessary moments to the truthful doctrine.⁵⁴

Bulgakov was attempting to rid himself of his Hegelian-Marxist heritage engaging in polemics both with Hegel and V. Soloviev whose theology appeared to be rather Hegelian in its essence. Although many of Bulgakov's ideas seem quite original, in his critical perception of Hegel in *The Tragedy of Philosophy*, he is also greatly indebted both to Florensky and Schelling. Nevertheless, there can be found some genuinely original criticisms based on Bulgakov's deeply personalistic stance.

In one of Schelling's final works *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (1833–1834) can be found some criticisms of Hegel, echoing Bulgakov's critique. In the first place, Schelling emphasises the tension between the 'merely logical nature of Hegel's philosophy', which was proclaimed by Hegel as his intention and promise, and the whole of the Hegelian system which, although pretending to have 'the most objective meaning', is seen as 'a stepping outside of the merely logical'. Bulgakov underlines the same tension in Hegel's logic, stating that 'Hegel as he declared himself in *Logic* is impossible according to Hegel himself'.⁵⁵ Both Schelling and Bulgakov cannot but refer to the Hegelian system as 'an episode'⁵⁶ or 'a piece of research'⁵⁷ in the history of philosophy. The following thoughts of Schelling are especially interesting in light of what has to be said about the role of *copula* both in Bulgakov's grammar philosophy and in his critique of Hegel:

'Hegel uses without thinking the form of the proposition, the copula, this *is*, before he has explained anything at all about the meaning of this *is*. In the same way Hegel uses the concept *nothing* as one that needs no explanation, which is completely self-evident'.⁵⁸

Here we can also see the helpful hint aspiring to analyse the concept of *nothing* which was fulfilled by Bulgakov in *The Tragedy of Philosophy*.⁵⁹

Finally and more generally, Schelling points out that Hegel 'had to deny the forms of intuition and yet continuously tacitly assumed them, whence it is also quite correct to remark, and not difficult to discover, that Hegel already presupposed intuition with the first step of his *Logic* and could not take a single step without assuming it'.⁶⁰ Bulgakov repeatedly latches on to the same feature in the Hegelian philosophy. He uses even stronger expressions in speaking of Hegel's 'pure thinking': "Panlogism" is nothing else than philosophical smuggling, because *volens nolens* "the world before its creature" is presupposed and implied despite the conscious willingness to create the world logically out of *pure* thinking, without any subject other than the need for self-developing pure thought'.⁶¹ Moreover, we can remember that the general purpose of the whole of Bulgakov's work is to substantiate 'the religious intuitive origins of *any* philosophising'. One can see now that not only the idea itself but its very formulation is quite Schellingian.

Bulgakov further accuses Hegel of impersonalism of a Spinozian kind, mentioning however that this claim contradicts Hegel's own words when he opposes Spinozism as impersonalism.⁶² The person in Hegel is the result of the development of the whole, its moment and self-affirmation. The development of logic goes from impersonal being through impersonal essence to the notion, which is defined by Hegel as subject, which is not convincing for Bulgakov.⁶³ Bulgakov is a genuine personalist. The idea of

personality is the foundation of his thinking. It is the bridge linking human and divine realities through ‘image and likeness’. The notion of the person, however, cannot be said to be central for Hegel, claims Bulgakov:

‘Hegel emphasises strongly the category of the person, without providing its metaphysical substantiation in ontology. The person in Hegel can be understood as a particular moment or a mode of being of the Absolute being, as a border of the overcoming of this particularity, but not as an unconditional and absolute centre, indissoluble and indispensable to the life of substance’.⁶⁴

The system of Hegel can be said to be fundamentally impersonalist, as its logical foundation is impersonal *pure being*. Scholars have here noted parallels with the Heideggerian critique of Hegel.⁶⁵

Again, parallels may be seen at this point with the Schellingian critique of Hegel as well. Schelling reproaches Hegel for ‘the lack of true life’ in his philosophy. ‘It is not the concept which fills itself, but rather the thought, i.e. I, the philosopher, can feel a need to progress from the empty to the full’.⁶⁶ Schelling does not elaborate on this subject. Following from his remarks, however, one might conclude that Hegel deprives philosophy of human personality, the ‘I’. Moreover, he notes that Hegel leaves for God nothing more than ‘the movement of the concept’, denying in this wise the living personality of God.

Some authors, and first and foremost Hegel himself, would not agree with such accusations. In fact, Hegel refutes Fichte’s criticism of God’s personality. He speaks about personality, and about God’s personality in particular, in Part 3 of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*:

‘If I say “one” [of God], I [must also] say this of everything else. But as far as personality is concerned, it is the character of the person, the subject, to surrender its isolation and separateness. Ethical life, love, means precisely the giving up of particularity, of particular personality, and its extension to universality ... The truth of personality is found precisely in winning it back through this immersion, this being immersed in the other’.⁶⁷

One cannot therefore say that Hegel ignores the theme of personality, but his understanding of it is different from that of Schelling or Bulgakov. They emphasise the mystery and uniqueness of personality⁶⁸ whereas the former underscores its ethical characteristics – freedom and love.⁶⁹

Grounding himself on the grammar-philosophical analysis of judgement, Bulgakov tries to substantiate the so-called ‘philosophy of threeness’. The author makes the following logical moves: First, he widens the sphere and significance of judgement from grammatical structures to the essence of the human spirit. He argues that it is there one should seek for the analogy between the Triune God and humans who were created after God’s image and likeness.⁷⁰ Then he shows the intrinsic antinomies of the moments of judgement relating them with the Persons of the Holy Trinity. He concludes this part by pointing to the idea of the Divine Sophia and the polyhypostatic unity embodied in the Church as the way to overcome the antinomies of human consciousness. According to Bulgakov, judgement is not only the necessary way of human reasoning. One can say that man is a developing and existential judgement: ‘I am something’. All other judgements are just reflections of this primordial ontological judgement. ‘The character of spirit, hypostasis and its nature, discloses and reflects itself in its every movement and most clearly in the act of self-consciousness, in judgement’.⁷¹

The idea of the Trinity as the universal grounding of everything was first expressed by Jacob Boehme in his *Aurora* (1612) and then expounded by Hegel in Part 3 of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1827)⁷² and by Schelling in his *Philosophy of revelation* (1858).⁷³ It appears, however, that Bulgakov was performing the programme of Florensky constructing his philosophy of threeness. Indeed, Florensky writes in *The pillar and ground of the truth*:

‘... The doctrine of Trinity must be, and half-consciously often has been, the foundation of philosophical thought’. He quotes then I. Kireevsky supporting the same thought and further mentions that ‘Schelling’s “philosophy of revelation” is one of the few attempts to realise a philosophical thought based on a conscious acceptance of the dogma of Trinity ...’

Jacob’s Ladder: Bulgakov’s angelology

Although in *Jacob’s Ladder* Bulgakov mentions Soloviev only once and does not mention Schelling at all, one can argue that these authors influenced to a certain degree Bulgakov’s angelology, which is an integral part of his sophiology. One has to say that there are a number of aspects of such influence, but we will concentrate on one of them.

The creation of angels after the image of God is one of the accepted tenets in early Christian and patristic writings. However, there is no single opinion concerning the manner in which the image of the Holy Trinity is reflected in angels. Bulgakov correlates three three-partite orders of angels from the Dionysian hierarchy with the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

According to Bulgakov’s understanding the highest hierarchy of angels is related to the hypostasis of the Father.⁷⁴ The highest rank of angels serves as the foundation of the angelic world abiding entirely in the presence of God, receiving immediately from Him the most secret and sacred knowledge. The angels of the second hypostasis are called ‘minds’. This very Dionysian term is applied to the angels who bear the seal of the Son or the Logos. The angels of the Logos reflect God’s idea about the created world. They constitute as it were the ideal scheme of being. Finally, the angels of the third hypostasis are called the ‘blessed spirit-souls’. This name points to their role in the actual being of creation – life in its different forms. However, it is not just any life which can be observed in our fallen world, but life enlightened, which acquired its ideal meaning. In this way Bulgakov comes to the ideas of perfection and beauty.

Apparently, Soloviev’s *Chteniia o Bogochelovechestve* is the immediate contemporary source for Bulgakov’s nomenclature for the celestial hierarchy.⁷⁵ It is arguable that Soloviev in turn draws on Schelling’s *Potenzenlehre*, applying it to a ‘divine world’ unified by the active divine principle of unity, the direct manifestation of the Deity, which is the Logos. In his *Chteniia o Bogochelovechestve*, Soloviev differentiates the divine world into three spheres of what he calls substantial ideas, forces or potencies. The first sphere is pure spirits abiding in the bosom of the Father undifferentiated by the Logos from the Father’s all-one will and so identified with the will or the moral principle (the good). The second sphere is minds in an ideal unity with the Logos, forming a pleroma of divine determinate ideas in an ideal cosmos. It is only the last sphere, however, that has ‘real particularity’. This last sphere is the sphere of divine creation so it is identified with the content of feeling or the aesthetic principle (beauty).

There each mind is an independent and living entity/soul and can act freely upon the divine principle as it shapes its own form in autonomy.⁷⁶

To conclude, our brief analysis has demonstrated that Schelling's ideas can be traced in Bulgakov's works written in different stages of his life. Both Bulgakov's philosophical and theological views are influenced considerably by the German philosopher. On the one hand, the limitations of the influence of Schelling on Bulgakov are conditioned by Scripture and by Bulgakov's understanding of the dogmatic teachings of the Church. On the other hand, his understanding of the dogmatic teachings to a certain degree seems to be shaped by Schelling's ideas on the role of heresies in the history of the dogma. Bulgakov's appropriation of Schelling's themes is always creative, and sometimes mediated through his Russian predecessors Soloviev and Florensky. Whereas Berdiaev adopts and develops Schelling's thoughts about freedom, Bulgakov extensively draws on different Schelling's ideas in a bid to overcome his own Marxist- Hegelian heritage. On the whole, to Bulgakov Schelling meant a manner of the overcoming of Marx and Hegel. This is especially the case with *The Philosophy of Economy* (1912), where Bulgakov tried to construct a Sophiological metaphysics of economic life. Marx suggests a mechanistic view of human society and lacks the idea of the person. By contrast, Schelling was seen in the nineteenth century Russia as putting forward a picture of nature as 'alive', where cosmology itself is 'personalised'. Schelling is especially helpful in constructing the vision of nature as beautiful, *aesthetical*, as a temple, where the concept of art is applicable. In this way Schelling's holistic vision and his thoughts about Sophia in particular became significant not only for philosophers or religious thinkers, but also in wider Russian cultural context. The integral function of Sophia makes it one of the more noticeable symbols of the Silver Age and the epitome of the Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century.

Notes

1. Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov*, 19; Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 9, 125, 260; and Seiling, *From Antinomy to Sophiology*, 30, 31, 35.
2. See Zernov, *Russian Religious Renaissance*.
3. Bulgakov, *Sophia Outline of Sophiology*, 11; and cf. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 176–7.
4. Zwalen, "Berdiaev and Bulgakov," 334–424.
5. Schelling, "Philosophie der Offenbarung," 364.
6. Bulgakov, *Sophia Outline of Sophiology*, 10: 'I regard Soloviev as having been my philosophical "guide to Christ"'.
7. Vaganova, *Sophiologia protoiereya Sergia Bulgakova*, 260–2.
8. Bulgakov, *Sophia Outline of Sophiology*, 9.
9. Berdiaev, *Meaning of Creative Act*, 145.
10. Shestov, "Gnosis and Existential Philosophy," 1:7.
11. Cf. Martin, *Balthasar and Russian thought*, 245.
12. Berdiaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, 126.
13. Schelling, *Essence of human freedom*, 23.
14. *Ibid.*, 27.
15. *Ibid.*, 28.
16. *Ibid.*, 47.
17. Berdiaev, *The Destiny of Man*, 25.
18. Berdiaev, "Studies concerning Jacob Boehme," 68–9.

19. Ermichev, *Three freedoms*.
20. Shestov, "Gnosis and Existential Philosophy," 1:4.
21. Ibid., 1:8.
22. Gaidenko, "Mystic Revolutionarism of Berdiaev," 16. In Russian. Translation ours.
23. Schelling, *Essence of human freedom*, 72.
24. Florensky, *Philosophy of Cult*, 450. In Russian. Translation ours.
25. Ibid., 582. In Russian. Translation ours.
26. See e.g. Florensky, *Analiz prostranstvennosti i vremeni*; Chase, *Florensky on space and time*, 105–118; Graham and Kantor, *Naming infinity*; and Granin, "Eskhatologia Florenskogo."
27. Florensky, "Kosmologicheskie antinomii Kanta," 596–625.
28. Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground*, 106–23; 411–4.
29. Cf. Schelling, "Immanuel Kant," 7: 'The old cheerful Parmenides, as he was described by Plato, and the dialectician Zeno, would have gladly recognised him [Kant] as their friend, had they seen his beautifully elaborated antinomies, these permanent triumphs over dogmatism and the eternal propylaea of true philosophy'. In German. Translation ours.
30. Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground*, 114.
31. Ibid., 110–14.
32. Ibid.
33. Bensussan, "La vie comme contradiction," 134.
34. Schelling, *Ages of the World*, 11.
35. Ibid., 22.
36. Gaidenko, "Antinomicheskaya dialektika Florenskogo," 175–8.
37. See Gallaher, "Antinomism."
38. Bulgakov, "Tragediia Filosofii," 327–8. In Russian. Translation is borrowed from Gallaher, *There is Freedom*, 75.
39. Ibid., 316.
40. Ibid., 354. In Russian. Translation ours.
41. Ibid., 387–388; and Cf. Ibid., 426: 'The dogma is the substantial way out for reason, salvation from its antinomies and aporias'. In Russian. Translation ours.
42. Ibid., 316.
43. See e.g. Ibid., 30.
44. Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy*, 205.
45. Evtuhov, Introduction, *Philosophy of Economy*, 16.
46. Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy*, 93.
47. Zander, *Bog i mir*, 27–28; and Cf. Reznichenko, "K metafizike subiekta Bulgakova," 219, 240.
48. Zaviyskiy, *Orthodox Trinitarian theology*, 257.
49. Bulgakov, *Tragedia Filosofii*, 311. In Russian. Translation ours.
50. Ibid. In Russian. Translation ours.
51. Hadot, «Philosophie comme hérésie trinitaire », 247–249.
52. Bulgakov, *Tragedia Filosofii*, 386. In Russian. Translation ours.
53. Zaviyskiy, *Orthodox Trinitarian theology*, 258–260. Cf. Bulgakov, 'Dogma and Dogmatic theology', 79.
54. See Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 201.
55. Bulgakov, "Tragediia Filosofii," 465.
56. Schelling, *History of Modern Philosophy*, 136.
57. See note 55 above.
58. Schelling, *History of Modern Philosophy*, 140.
59. Bulgakov, "Tragedia Filosofii," 475.
60. Schelling, *History of Modern Philosophy*, 143.
61. Bulgakov, "Tragedia Filosofii," 467. In Russian. Translation ours.
62. Ibid., 486.
63. Ibid., cf. Ibid., 357.

64. Ibid., 488–9. In Russian. Translation ours.
65. Reznichenko, “K metafizike subiekta Bulgakova,” 205.
66. Schelling, *History of Modern Philosophy*, 143.
67. Hegel, *Philosophy of Religion*, 427–8.
68. Seiling, *From Antinomy to Sophiology*, 166. Seiling points to the significance of personality in the Idealist movement in Russia.
69. ‘Personality is what is based upon freedom’. Hegel, *Philosophy of Religion*, 427.
70. Bulgakov, “Tragedia Filosofii,” 390–1.
71. Ibid., 397. In Russian. Translation ours.
72. Hegel, *Philosophy of Religion*, 428–32.
73. Schelling, *Philosophie de La révélation*, v.3.
74. Bulgakov, *Jacob’s Ladder*, 80.
75. Ibid., 80–6.
76. Soloviev, *Lectures on Godmanhood*, 170.

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Notes on contributor

Tikhon Vasilyev was born in St Petersburg in 1977. Being educated first in Economics, he received his second degree in Theology from St Petersburg Institute of Theology and Philosophy. In 2005 he took monastic vows in the Orthodox tradition with the name Tikhon, and in 2007 he became a priest at the Holy Dormition Monastery near Donetsk, Ukraine.

After receiving Master’s degree from the Postgraduate School of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow, he was admitted to do another Postgraduate degree at Oxford. He is at present in his final year of DPhil research at the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford, working on the theology of angels in the writings of Sergius Bulgakov. Since 2013 he has been the Assistant Director of St Theosevia Centre for Christian Spirituality in Oxford. In 2016 he was elected as a Member of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies (Cambridge).

ORCID

Tikhon Vasilyev  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5177-3562>

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