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### Concept of Evil in Berdyaev

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**CONCEPT OF EVIL IN**

**BERDYAEV**

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**A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Philosophy  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity**

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**by**

**Paul E. Pfotenhauer**

**June 1952**

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This paper will be an attempt to describe evil as it is presented in the thinking of Berdyaev. It will not be its concern to give an objective criticism or evaluation of his concept of evil, but merely a presentation of the same. In doing this an attempt will at all times be made to remain within the framework of his thought. This approach will place several limitations on this paper. In the first place it will make it impossible to present it as a logical, integrated unity. In his examination of the various problems of life, Berdyaev is constantly faced with paradoxes that cannot be resolved and with mysteries that cannot be penetrated. Inconsistencies and contradictions also make their appearance in his thought. Although cognizant of these he does not attempt to remove them. He believes they are

...expressions of spiritual conflict, of contradictions which lie at the heart of existence itself, and are not to be disguised by a facade of logical unity. True integrality of thought which is bound up with integrality of personality is an existential unity, not a logical.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the very nature of evil as it is presented by Berdyaev makes any comprehensive, precise definition of it impossible. In the first place evil is a symbol that is to reflect to us ultimate reality.

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<sup>1</sup>Nicolas Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, translated by R. M. French (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 8.

It does this. But it does so vaguely and indistinctly.<sup>2</sup> At the same time evil represents the absolute limit of irrationality. It does not and cannot have any basis in reason because anything to which meaning can be attached ceases to be evil.<sup>3</sup> In addition, although Berdyaev recognizes evil as a universal, it is a universal that is to be found only in the particular or individual. As such it cannot be precisely defined, but can only be described as it is manifested in the particular or individual.<sup>4</sup>

In the presentation of this paper, the subject matter will be divided into three chapters. In the second chapter I will discuss the origin of evil in order to show both why evil made its appearance and also to indicate some of the categories into which Berdyaev subdivides it. In the third chapter various manifestations of evil will be described. The reason for this is to show how evil reveals itself in the outward world. In the fourth and final chapter the end of evil will be discussed. Here I propose to show the limitations of evil. These are to be seen in that the power of evil is never final, absolute, or complete. Evil is not only destroyed, but also overcome and transfigured.

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<sup>2</sup>Cp. Nicolas Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, translated by Natalie Duddington (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948), p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>Nicolas Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, translated by Oliver Fielding Clarke (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948), p. 163.

<sup>4</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 38.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ORIGINS OF EVIL

The answer one gives to the question of the origin of evil is dependent upon the primary questions of theology and anthropology. "Who is God and who is man?" In answering the former of these Berdyaev makes use of both positive and negative theology. God is first of all always God of the Trinity. As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit the Trinity is constantly being born out of what Jacob Boehme<sup>1</sup> calls the Ungrund and what negative theology usually refers to as the Absolute, the Gottheit, or the Divine Nothing. The Ungrund is primary even to God. It can be defined only in the terms of negative theology. It is meonic freedom, non-being, *to ni ee*. It is the nothing out of which God created the world and out of which He is constantly being born. It is an irrational mysterious void that is beyond the reach of logic.<sup>2</sup>

The theogonic process in God, taking place in eternity, does not signify the birth of a previously non-existent God, but a mystery play going on in the hidden life of God.<sup>3</sup> He is not a static principle completely self-sufficient and self-contained. God is not actus purus.

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<sup>1</sup>It is to Jacob Boehme that Berdyaev is chiefly indebted for his concept of the Ungrund, an indebtedness he constantly acknowledges.

<sup>2</sup>Cp. Nicolas Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, translated by Natalie Duddington (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948), p. 25 f; Freedom and the Spirit, translated by Oliver Fielding Clarke (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948), pp. 165, 194; Meaning of History, translated by George Reavey (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1949), p. 54 f.

<sup>3</sup>Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 29.

Quite the contrary, God is dynamic. There is constant movement within Him.

He has effective and emotional states, dramatic development in His inner life.... It is utterly unthinkable to ascribe to God the Creator self-sufficiency, self-satisfaction, and despotism as a characteristic of His inner life. It is more worthy of God to ascribe to Him longing for the loved one, a need for sacrificial self-surrender.<sup>4</sup>

To the objection often made that movement in God indicates lack of something Berdyaev answers with the counter objection that immobility implies lack of the dynamic quality of life. Within the life of God the tragic conflict of love is unfolding itself. And that is a sign of perfection and not of imperfection.

The Christian revelation shows us God in the aspect of sacrificial love, but sacrificial love far from suggesting self-sufficiency, implies the need of passing into its other. It is impossible to deny that the Christian God is first and foremost the God of sacrificial love, and sacrifice always indicates tragedy. Dramatic movement and tragedy are born of the fullness and not of the poverty of life. To deny tragedy in the Divine life is possible at the cost of denying Christ, His cross and crucifixion, the sacrifice of the Son of God.<sup>5</sup>

When we realize there is movement in God, the creation of the world and of man, the center of the world, becomes meaningful. It is not so when we think of God as completely self-contained. Then creation, because it has no inner relation to the inner life of the Creator, becomes something accidental and entirely meaningless.

To the question, "Why did God create man?" Berdyaev answers God created man because He wanted to establish a relationship in which another would freely answer His invitation to love. God created man because He

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<sup>4</sup>Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

longed for another to make a creative answer to His call. He wanted man to create values, to take an active part in the creation. God as personality does not desire a man over whom He can rule and who ought to praise Him, but He desires man as a personality<sup>6</sup> who answers His call and with whom a communion of love is established.<sup>7</sup>

In answer to the question, "How did God create man?" Berdyaev says that God created man in His own image, that is, He called him to free activity. He did this by creating him out of nothing, that is, out of the Ungrund, meonic freedom. Consequently the source of man's life is both God and the Ungrund. Man's being is rooted in God, but his freedom is rooted in the Ungrund.

There ensues a series of insoluble paradoxes. Man's 'nature' is created by God, but his 'freedom' is not created, not determined by any being and prior to all being. Being springs from freedom and not freedom from being. That which is called the 'creature's nothingness' is precisely that which is uncreated in the creature--its freedom; and the rest of nature is created by God and therefore cannot be called a 'nothing.'<sup>8</sup>

This view of the Creator-creature relationship is opposed to the traditional Christian view, inasmuch as man's freedom is uncreated and not dependent upon God. Berdyaev feels that the traditional view with its tendency to belittle the creature because he is creature is an insult both to God and to man. It is an insult to man because it humiliates him and makes him a completely determined individual. It is an insult to God because man as creature is the image of God; consequently, anything

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<sup>6</sup>Personality for Berdyaev always implies freedom, non-determination.

<sup>7</sup>Cp. Nicolas Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, translated by R. M. French (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 40.

<sup>8</sup>Cp. Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 27.



that humiliates man also humiliates God. Man's humiliation does not lie in his being a creature. A work of art is not poor because it is created. Man's humiliation lies in the fact that he is a fallen creature, that he has perverted his createdness. Man's humiliation is connected with evil which came into existence with the Fall. This evil, however, is not a constituent part of man's nature, since it has not been created by God, but has its source in meonic freedom. Furthermore, Berdyaev claims the traditional view of createdness is unintelligible because it is "intended both to establish a gulf between man and his Creator and to make man utterly insignificant and entirely dependent upon the Creator."<sup>9</sup>

Because man was created out of the Ungrund, he had within himself the freedom of choosing between an infinite variety of possibilities, both good and evil. This freedom was not given him by God, nor was it created by God, but it is the part of man that is uncreated. It is the element in man which is born out of meonic freedom. God has no control over it whatsoever.<sup>10</sup> It antecedes even God. This uncreated freedom within man enables him either freely to accept or to reject God's offer of love. It also places the responsibility of evil outside God. Evil has its source neither in God nor in His creation, but has its source in the Ungrund, primal freedom.

The inner dialectic of freedom produces evil from within itself. The source of evil as well as the source of life is to be found in primal irrational freedom, infinite potentiality.<sup>11</sup>

It is at this point that Berdyaev again attacks traditional theology.

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<sup>9</sup>ibid., p. 30.

<sup>10</sup>Cp. Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 160.

<sup>11</sup>ibid., p. 161.

In answer to the question of the where-from of evil, traditional theology has stated that it is due to the abuse of the freedom with which God endowed His creatures. Berdyaev feels that this is a purely superficial answer. In the final analysis it makes God responsible for evil, inasmuch as the freedom which God gave His creatures was not strong enough to withstand evil. And God knew this before all ages; He saw the fatal consequences of freedom, but nevertheless went ahead with creation. Furthermore, in expecting an answer from His creation, God is expecting an answer from Himself. Berdyaev claims this viewpoint is a profound moral source of atheism and holds it to be completely untenable.<sup>12</sup> By placing the source of evil in meonic freedom, in the Ungrund, Berdyaev avoids making God responsible for freedom. God is justified and saved from the false conceptions that make theodicy necessary. He is justified through the mystery of freedom.

The interpretation of the mystery of evil through that of freedom is a superrational interpretation and presents reason with an antinomy. The source of evil is not in God, nor in being existing positively side by side with Him, but in the unfathomable irrationality of freedom, in pure possibility, in the forces concealed within the dark void which preceded all positive determination of being. Thus evil has no basis in anything; it is determined by no possible being and has no ontological origin. The possibility of evil is latent in that mysterious principle of being in which every sort of possibility lies concealed. The void (the Ungrund of Boehme) is not evil, it is the source of every kind of life and every actualization of being. It contains within itself both the possibility of evil and of good.<sup>13</sup>

Man first fell into evil when he rejected the bliss of paradise in order to explore his own destiny to its depth. To arrive at a clearer

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<sup>12</sup>Berdyaev, Destiny of Man, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

understanding of the meaning of this rejection and the resultant evil Berdyaev makes use of the myth of the Fall. His reason for doing so is that he sees in myth the only adequate approach to the problem. This is so in the first place not only because the myth points to the fact that good and evil are only symbols, but at the same time it also gives expression to the meaning of these symbols.

In its inmost being reality is neither good nor evil, neither moral nor immoral, but is symbolized in this way in accordance with the categories of this world. The world is not the ultimate reality but only a phase of it--a phase in which being is alienated from itself and everything is expressed by symbols.... All that lies 'on this side of good and evil' is symbolic: only that which is 'beyond good and evil' is real.<sup>14</sup>

In the second place, Berdyaev adopts the myth because the problem of good and evil cannot even be formulated unless one admits that the distinction between these two had an origin in time--gave birth to time as we know it--and was preceded by a state of being prior to good and evil.<sup>15</sup>

Good and evil are applicable only to this side of the Fall. They are correlatives that appeared and will disappear at the same time. In paradise there were no distinctions and valuations. These came into being with the Fall and will disappear at the end of the ages. Good and evil are categories that are applicable only to this present world and to individuals and events limited and bounded by this present world. To ask the question whether God willed evil is to ask a question that cannot be asked, for in doing so we are judging God from this side of the distinction between good and evil.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

It is obvious that God is 'beyond good and evil' for on 'this side' of it is our fallen world and certainly not God. God is above good. And there cannot be in Him any evil that is on this side of the distinction. When we ask whether God is free to will evil we apply to Him categories of this fallen world.<sup>16</sup>

In interpreting the myth of the Fall, Berdyaev approaches it from several directions. The Fall may be interpreted as the origin of the knowledge of good and evil. When man made distinctions and valuations, when he knew good and evil, he lost his original wholeness, ceased being an integrated person, and fell away from God. Knowledge results in the loss of paradise. The attempt to know good and evil is sin. On the other-hand, a different interpretation is possible. Knowledge is not evil but is good, for knowledge means the discovery of meaning. To eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, however, can signify a godless uncreative experience of life. Because God created man in His image, that is to be a creator, this act on the part of man indicated his refusal to make a creative answer to God's call. Instead of creating his own values, man tried to appropriate values ready made. He resisted the act of creation to which he was called and attempted to return to non-being. Yet the knowledge that resulted from this act brought about a higher level of existence for man. Either of these two interpretations may be advanced. Whether either is adequate is another question. Berdyaev says no, for to ask the question whether the knowledge of good and evil is good or to ask whether it is evil is to ask a wrongly formulated question. Good and evil are categories that exist only this side of the Fall and can in no case be applied to conditions and events that lie on

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<sup>16</sup>ibid., p. 43.

the other side of that event. Good and evil are results of the Fall. Consequently, it is equally impossible for us to pass moral judgments on the events that resulted in the Fall or to determine whether knowledge of good and evil is good or whether it is evil. The moment we do that we are talking in a vacuum. The only thing we can say is that man chose to know good and evil via the path of experience.<sup>17</sup>

Another interpretation that Berdyaev gives to the Fall is that it symbolized the birth of consciousness. Paradise, according to this interpretation, is the realm of the instinct, of the unconscious unity of nature. In this state no antithesis between subject and object exist. No conflict between the conscious and the unconscious is present. No distinction between the one and the many is to be found. "Life is itself everything, and everything is identified with it." Man is in God and the world is in man. Man knows God neither as idea nor concept, but as God, Himself. Life is lived in an I-thou relationship and not in an I-it.<sup>18</sup>

In the present world, however, dividedness, opposition between the one and the many, painful conflict between the conscious and the unconscious is everywhere in evidence. The fruits of the tree of knowledge have proved bitter to the taste and that bitterness has been transferred to consciousness itself. Consciousness is born in pain and suffering. The higher an individual's consciousness is, the higher is his capacity for suffering. Increase in consciousness inevitably means a corresponding

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<sup>17</sup>Cp. Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 37 f.

<sup>18</sup>Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 25.

increase in sorrow. Consciousness implies concentration on a limited area to the exclusion of other areas. But the very focusing of attention brings with it separation, dividedness, distinction. And these cause pain. Man desires to be whole, to be complete, but consciousness means lack of completeness. From its very nature consciousness can never embrace the whole of being. It closes us off from the realm of the subconscious and the superconscious.<sup>19</sup> In the realm of the moral

Consciousness presupposes dualism and opposition between the moral personality and the evil world both around it and within it. And this means that moral acts and valuations have their source in the Fall, in the loss of original paradisiacal wholeness and the impossibility to feed from the tree of life directly without discrimination and reflection. Discrimination and valuation presuppose dividedness and loss of wholeness.<sup>20</sup>

Although consciousness involves man in pain and means his separation from God and the separation of the world from him, it cannot be viewed as completely evil. Consciousness has a paradoxical character. After the Fall, when the darkness and nothing of the abyss had invaded the unconscious, the formation of a clear-cut, limited consciousness saved man from being annihilated in non-being. Consciousness preserved man from the meonic chaos let loose by the Fall. But at the same time it closed the realm of the superconscious to man and prevented complete union with God. Consciousness separates man both from non-being, the ultimate evil, and from God. In this lies its paradoxical character.<sup>21</sup>

Another interpretation that Berdyaev gives to the Myth of the Fall

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<sup>19</sup>Op. Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>21</sup>Op. ibid.

is that it is an outward symbol of an inner event. What appears to have happened in the realm of the material world is in reality a reflection of a previous event in the spiritual world. In fact,

The natural world is itself but the reflection of the spiritual world, an event in spiritual life...The fall could not have taken place in the natural world, because the world is itself the result of the Fall. The Fall is an event in the spiritual world, and in this sense it is anterior to the world, for it took place before time began and, indeed, produced time as we know it.<sup>22</sup>

The Myth of the Fall is a reflection of an event that took place in the highest orders of the spiritual world. It is an attempt to portray in symbols of the material world events that belong to an entirely different order of being. It was in the spiritual world that man for the first time gave a negative answer to God's call to creative activity and to his need to experience the love of another.

Evil in its origin is spiritual by nature and belongs to the spiritual world. The evil which we know here below and which binds us to the material world is only the result of evil in the spiritual sphere.<sup>23</sup>

Through his own free act Satan revolted from God. He, who at one time believed in God, because of his pride and rebellion forfeited the heights for which he had been created and fell to the depths of existence. This fall involved and included the entire order of creation for in the spiritual world man and Satan are integral parts of an ordered hierarchy of being. What occurs in one part of this hierarchy effects and influences every other part. Consequently when Satan fell, man was involved in his fall.

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<sup>22</sup>Berdyayev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

Man, together with all creation and the whole hierarchy of the universe, became separated from God, and it was spiritual forces that were responsible for leading him astray. Pride is the temptation of a higher order of spirit which seeks to put itself in the place of God.<sup>24</sup>

In the same way evil comes to man. It appeals first of all to his higher spiritual life and to the freedom which it possesses. It is from this point that the response to evil comes. "It is only later that evil finds expression in our subjection to lower elements and carnal passions."<sup>25</sup> The fact that man is subject to the natural world is due to previous action in the world of the spirit. Man may be and man is the slave of many and various external objects, but the source of his slavery is always to be found within. The source of his slavery is to be found in the realm of the spirit.

Man is the slave of various sorts of idols, but they are idols which he has himself created. Man is always a slave of that which lies, as it were outside himself, which is estranged from him, but which is an inward source of slavery. The struggle between freedom and slavery is carried on in outer, objectivized, exteriorized world. But from the existential point of view it is an inward and spiritual struggle.... The slavery of man consists not only in the fact that external forces enslave him; but still more profoundly in this, that he consents to be a slave, that he in a servile way accepts the action of the forces that enslave him.<sup>26</sup>

In the myth of the Fall Satan is pictured to us as a character of the external world, actually, however he possesses no such extrinsicism. Satan belongs to the spiritual world where everything is inward and integral. That is why in the world of spirit man and Satan are inwardly related.

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<sup>24</sup>Berdyayev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 162

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Berdyayev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 131.



Satan is also an inner reality of the spiritual world of man, and he only appears to be something external through analogy with the natural world. He is a reality of the spiritual order and cannot be conceived in a naive realist sense. He is not the autonomous source of evil in his original being but only the manifestation of irrational freedom at the highest spiritual level.<sup>27</sup>

Thus we come back to what has been said previously. "The inner dialectic of freedom produces evil from within itself. The source of evil as well as the source of life is to be found in primal irrational freedom and infinite potentiality."<sup>28</sup>

For Berdyaev the Fall may be interpreted in yet another way; that is, it is the delineation of evil as egocentricity. The cause of sin lies in man's self affirmation and pride which regards self and not God as the source of life. But this action on the part of man destroys the harmony of the hierarchical system of being of which man is a part. The harmony is destroyed because man no longer takes his proper place within the hierarchy. Consequently man and every reality in the world are set in a false perspective. Life is no longer integrated, but divided, partial, and out of joint. The personality of man is also destroyed because man in insulating himself from God shuts himself off from the source of life. This inevitably leads to the abyss, to non-being; for outside of God there is no life but only illusion and death. Egocentricity means the inability to receive light from God.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore egocentricity denotes slavery to self. It is the

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<sup>27</sup>Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 163.

<sup>28</sup>Supra 7.

<sup>29</sup>Cp. Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 132, and Freedom and the Spirit, p. 168.

inability to issue forth out of self. The egocentric man is engaged exclusively in his own condition and is without interest in the world or in other people. Egocentricity, however, is at the same time not only slavery to self, but also slavery "to the world, which is transformed exclusively into an object which experiences constraint from without."<sup>30</sup> Instead of being determined from within from freedom, the egocentric man is determined from without. He becomes a slave to his passions, to his desire for wealth and power, to his possessions, to his dreams, and even to his ideals. "Man becomes a slave to his most lofty ideas, to his highest feelings, to his talents, etc."<sup>31</sup>

For the egocentric everything is used to serve self. Everything becomes an object to be used or to be discarded. He lives exclusively on the level of the I-it relationship and knows nothing about the I-thou.

His attitude towards everything which is a non-I is a servile attitude. He is aware of the non-I only, he has no knowledge of another I, he does not know a Thou, he knows nothing of the freedom of going out from the I. The egocentric man usually defines his relation to the world and to people in a way that is not personalistic.<sup>32</sup>

In fact the very existence of egocentricity is a denial of personality. For personality can only exist in the going out of self to another. Personality cannot exist where community does not also exist. It looks for the image of God in another, and tries to establish communion with Him. Personality is grounded in God. It is the image of God in man.

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<sup>30</sup>Berdyayev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 43.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

And so we return to the starting point. Egocentricity is evil because it is rejection of the image of God in man, and thus also a rejection of God.

Yet another interpretation to the myth of the Fall is that it reveals evil to us as a lie. Evil is always masquerading as something else. Satan is constantly approaching us in deceptive disguises. He claims to be somebody when in reality he is nobody. He has no source of life in himself. Everything he has he has taken from God and then perverted. The power he has is a fiction.

There is no such thing as a kingdom of evil existing side by side with the kingdom of God and the Divine Being. Evil has always a negative character for it destroys life and being, in fact it destroys itself and there is nothing positive about it.<sup>33</sup>

The way to defeat evil is to recognize its emptiness, impotence, and vanity. The attraction of evil is always a lie. Because evil is non-being, it is in the final analysis always the extreme of boredom and emptiness.

Evil is non-being but non-existence is the last extremity of boredom, emptiness, and impotence; which is, moreover, exactly what we always find when we finally come to end of an experience of evil.

No evil passion pursued to the end has any positive content. All evil consumes itself. Its nothingness is laid bare by its own inner course of development.<sup>34</sup>

The myth of the Fall reveals evil, as said previously, at the very depth of the human spirit. The greatest tragedy about this is that once the human spirit has chosen evil it no longer is free to determine its

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<sup>33</sup>Berdyayev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 166.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

own course. Thereafter everything man does is touched with evil and everywhere he goes he comes into contact with evil. Evil is a condition in this fallen world that is inherent in everything. Even when man attempts to remedy evil with good, the result is evil.

The world is full of undeserved suffering, of tears, of unredeemed evil, and those who rebel against evil and suffering and wish to create a better world, a more righteous and a happier world are themselves the cause of innumerable sufferings.<sup>35</sup>

Man is under the domination of evil and no one can by his power free himself from that domination. From this, however, we cannot conclude that positive spiritual forces no longer exist within man. The spiritual nature of man is broken, twisted, deformed, but it is not destroyed. Man regardless of the depths of evil to which he may sink, nevertheless, during this life, always maintains the image of God.<sup>36</sup> He remains capable of enlightenment. The yearning for life with God remains in him and makes both revelation and salvation possible.

Evil has not finally possessed man's nature for it is a dual nature belonging to two worlds and even after the Fall man did not completely break with God, who continues to have dealing with him and to impart to him His regenerative powers... God and devil are at war within the human heart, and fallen man preserves the divine image in spite of everything, for he has passed through the experience of evil as a being of a definitely higher order. The negative results of evil in man indicate precisely his predestination to a higher life.<sup>37</sup>

Before closing this chapter on the origin of evil, another question should be considered. And the question is, "Is good good and is evil evil?" This question poses a problem when we remember that although good

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<sup>35</sup>Berdyayev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 86.

<sup>36</sup>Cp. Berdyayev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 170.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

and evil have their origin in freedom, they become actual only on this side of the Fall. Consequently any value judgments we pass on them will be relative. Therefore, in answering the above stated question, Berdyaev makes use of paradox. "It is bad to have gone through the experience of evil, but it is good to know good and evil as a result of that experience."<sup>38</sup> In asking the further question of the relationship between good and evil—a question already implied in the previous one—the answer at which Berdyaev arrives is again paradoxical in nature.

Just because we carry original sin within us and live in a fallen world doomed to move within the categories of good and evil, our thought is riddled with insoluble paradoxes. If we think deeply and consistently we are impelled both to identify evil with non-being and to recognize its positive existence....The possibility of evil is the condition of the good."<sup>39</sup>

It is as a relation to evil, that good often comes into existence. Good struggles against evil and thus realizes itself. Personality develops because of the internal and external struggle it wages with evil. "One of the paradoxes of personality consists in this that a keen awareness of sin presupposes the existence of sin and guilt. Complete insensitiveness to sin, to guilt, and to evil is commonly also insensitiveness to personality."<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, the existence of evil points man to God. This is true despite the fact of atheism which usually uses the existence of evil as a proof against the existence of God. Historically speaking, however, evil has had an opposite effect on the beliefs of men. Faith in God

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<sup>38</sup>Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 38.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 40. Cf. Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 185.

<sup>40</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 58.

arose because of the very fact that men experienced suffering and accordingly felt a need to free themselves from the power of evil. If it had not been for suffering and evil men would have been content with this world. Belief in God would have been unnecessary. There would have been no reason for the attempt to transcend earthly existence.

The existence of evil is not the only obstacle to our faith in God, for it is equally a proof of the existence of God and the proof that this world is not the only nor ultimate one. The experience of evil directs man's attention towards another world by arousing in him a discontent with this.<sup>41</sup>

It can further be said that evil is the cause of a higher state of being in man. If it had not been for evil, man would have continued living in an unconscious state, a condition of ignorance. He would not have known Christ nor would he have attained deification.<sup>42</sup> In Paradise God was revealed only as Creator, not as the Trinity. After the Fall, however, God in Christ, revealed Himself as a God who suffers along with His Creation. In the person of Christ He descended into the abyss of freedom in order to overcome sin by enlightening freedom from within.

He manifests Himself not in power, but in sacrifice. The Divine Sacrifice, the Divine self-crucifixion, must conquer evil meonic freedom by enlightening it from within without forcing it, without depriving the created world of freedom.<sup>43</sup>

Evil thus called forth redemption which formed a second act in the story of Creation. It is the cause for the establishment of a new relation between God and man, a relation in which man receives a

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<sup>41</sup>Berdyayev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 159.

<sup>42</sup>Op. Berdyayev, The Destiny of Man, p. 37; and Freedom and the Spirit, p. 184 f.

<sup>43</sup>Berdyayev, The Destiny of Man, p. 26.

higher revelation of God. Evil consequently does not have the final word, God does. He overcomes evil.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Op. Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 176; and The Destiny of Man, p. 33 f.

only a few of the many manifestations of evil that Berdyaev treats in his writings. Before proceeding with a description of these evils, it would seem advisable to give a preliminary definition of Berdyaev's use of the term "objectivation." This term, along with such cognates as "alienation" and "depersonalization," does not appear in his treatment of evil. It is one universal that Berdyaev finds in every particular instance of evil. Objectivation is described by him as a process whereby a subject becomes an object; it loses its existential center and becomes incapable of conscious self-determination or any of the vital processes of life. Objectivation means that which has life, spirit, into a thing. It changes an act into a substance. It destroys the range of personality--the range of act is unbounded; it always free, unique, spirit, qualitative, unrepeatable, creative, self-determined. Carried out to its furthest limits, objectivation means the annihilation of man. It transforms the qualities of man to things and thus renders them lifeless. It causes the inward to become outward and thus divorces it from reality.<sup>1</sup> It is "the fountainhead of slavery."<sup>2</sup>

In Berdyaev's treatment of manifestations of evil, he devoted quite

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<sup>1</sup>Nikolai Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, translated by R. C. Zaehner (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), Chapter I.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE MANIFESTATIONS OF EVIL

In treating the subject of this chapter I shall limit myself to only a few of the many manifestations of evil that Berdyaev treats in his writings. Before proceeding with a description of these evils, it would seem advisable to give a tentative definition of Berdyaev's use of the term "objectivization." This term, along with such synonyms as alienation and exteriorization, comes up again and again in his treatment of evil. It is one universal that Berdyaev finds in every particular instance of evil. Objectivization is described by him as a process whereby a subject becomes an object; it loses its existential center and becomes incapable of communion, self-determination or any of the vital processes of life. Objectivization renders that which has life, spirit, into a thing. It changes an act into a substance. It destroys the image of personality—the image of God in man—which is always free, unique, spirit, qualitative, unrepeatable, creative, self-determined. Carried out to its furthest limits, objectivization means the annihilation of man. It transfers the qualities of man to things and thus renders them lifeless. It causes the inward to become outward and thus divorces it from reality.<sup>1</sup> It is "the fountainhead of slavery."<sup>2</sup>

In Berdyaev's treatment of manifestations of evil, he devotes quite

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<sup>1</sup>Nicolas Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, translated by R. W. French (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), Chapter I.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 178.



a bit of space to nature. In his discussion of nature, he does not treat it in the sense of contrasting it with culture, civilization, or the supernatural. Neither does he use it exclusively in the sense of the world of matter in space and time. For him nature is primarily the antithesis of freedom, and thus also of personality and spirit. "Nature in this sense is the world of objectivization, that is to say of alienation, determinability, impersonality."<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the natural physical world is lower in the hierarchy of being than spirit does not make nature evil. Animals, vegetation, minerals, sea, sands, and stars all have an inner source of existence and consequently also have a place in the divine order. What makes nature evil is the fact that it is enslaved as a result of objectivization. Everything in it has become a thing. Its determination no longer comes from within but from without. The deep source of its life has been taken captive and ejected to the sphere of the superficial. Nature is cut off from the source of freedom and being.

The natural world, this world and its massive environment, is certainly not identical with what we call the cosmos and cosmic life filled with existences. This world is the servitude, the enchainment of existences, not only of men, but of animals and plants, even of minerals and stars.<sup>4</sup>

But,

Man, in virtue of his own image, man as personality is not a part of nature, he has within him the image of God. There is nature in man, but he is not part of nature. Man is microcosm and therefore he is not part of the cosmos.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Man becomes a slave to nature when he exteriorizes it and regards himself as a part of nature, when instead of recognizing himself as a unit--a personality--complete in himself, he regards himself as a part of a greater unit. It is man as personality that is complete and nature that is partial. Not vice versa. Every time this order is perverted, man is enslaved. Slavery to nature can also be expressed in terms of the relation of the universal to the particular. Enslavement would then appear when man, a particular, regards himself as subordinate to nature--a universal. In reality, however, universals exist only in the particular. Universals are part of particulars. Nature is part of man and man not part of nature.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, life lived on the level of this natural world is evil inasmuch as it is meaningless, irrelevant, and accidental. On the natural level there is no underlying principle that unites man with the rest of life. Everything is fragmentary and unconnected. "Man, insofar as he is a natural being, is deprived of any deep significance and his natural life is devoid of significant connecting principle."<sup>7</sup>

Berdyaev also expresses man's slavery to nature as being slavery to Satan. It is a result of man choosing to find the source of his life in a lower being. This act causes distortion of the hierarchy of the universe inasmuch as the spiritual principle is displaced by the material, God is replaced by Satan.

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<sup>6</sup>Cp. ibid., p. 38.

<sup>7</sup>Nicolas Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, translated by Oliver Fielding Clarke (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948), p. 53.

Now Satan has no independent source of life of his own and can therefore only compel man to derive his life from the lower elements of nature.

This lower nature, when it occupies its proper place in the hierarchy of the universe, is not in itself evil for it belongs to the divine world. It is only when it usurps the place of something higher that it becomes untrue to itself and evil. Animal nature certainly has its place in the scale of values and an eternal destiny; but when it takes possession of men, when man submits his spirit to the control of a lower element then it does indeed become an evil thing. For evil is a question of the direction pursued by the spirit, not of the constitution of nature itself.<sup>8</sup>

Related to this is what Berdyaev calls man's slavery to the cosmos. Man recognizes and wrestles against the necessity and determinism of nature that is based on natural law,

but he has another attitude towards the cosmos, to that which presents itself to him as a world harmony, to the world whole, world unity, world order. In this he is willing to see a reflected image of the divine harmony and order, and the ideal basis of the world.

He feels that if he only unites himself with this, everything will go well. There will be meaning, order and completion in his life. He believes that he will again attain to unity for which he feels himself to have been destined. One cannot, however, look for world harmony, for the inner life of the cosmos in objectivised nature for it has lost its inward existence. The cosmos as seen by natural man is a result of the Fall and as such it is enslaved and depersonalized even as natural man is. Man, by trying to unite himself with the cosmos, only succeeds in enslaving himself and thus losing his personality.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>9</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 97.

Fusion with cosmic life does not emancipate personality, it brings about its dissolution and annihilation. The form of slavery is changed. This has fateful results in social life, in relation between personality and society. Society roots itself in the cosmos and interprets itself as an organism which has a cosmic basis. Thus personality is inevitably subjected and enslaved to the organic and in the last resort to the cosmic whole, man becomes a mere organ, and all the freedoms of man, which are bound up with his spiritual independence of society and nature, are abolished.<sup>10</sup>

In this social life, rooted in the cosmos, Berdyaev finds another manifestation of evil and a source of man's slavery. The social doctrine through the ages has sought to convince man that socialization is the force that has created man. This doctrine has been so effective that man now lives in a state of social hypnosis.

It is difficult for him to set his freedom in opposition to the despotic claims of society, because the social hypnosis, through the lips of sociologists of various schools of thought, convinces him that he has received his very freedom from society and from society alone.<sup>11</sup>

Society, thus, has enslaved man by exteriorizing his freedom, by making his freedom, which is integral to man, dependent upon the external conditions of a social group. At this point Berdyaev quotes Hertzzen's phrase, "The subjection of personality to society, to the people, to humanity, or to an idea is an extension of the practice of human sacrifice."<sup>12</sup>

Now it is true that man as an individual<sup>13</sup> is part of society. He

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>13</sup>Berdyaev makes a sharp distinction between man as a personality and man as an individual. The chief difference between these is that the individual is born of flesh while personality is born of the spirit. Consequently, a personality is always complete, an individual partial.

enters into the organism as an organ. But as a personality, the I never enters into society as a part to the whole, as an organ into an organism. The moment man relates himself to society as an individual, as a part to a whole, the hierarchy of being is destroyed, society becomes higher in the scale of values than man, and the partial usurps the place of the whole. Man, by entering society as an organ, becomes the victim of an enslaving lie. He becomes the victim of the social lure and the results are as fatal as those of an individual who is enticed by the cosmos.<sup>14</sup>

Another area in which evil manifests itself is the area of the state, which has a twofold character. Its purpose is to bring order into chaos and to limit the expression of evil. It does this effectively by building up its authority and using the power of this authority wisely and justly. But the very nature of the state is such that the power it obtains to limit evil becomes the evil that destroys it.

First and foremost the state is an embodiment of power and it loves power more than legality, justice, or righteousness. Striving for power is the doom of states and the demonic principle in them. It lures them on to conquests and expansion and may bring prosperity but may also bring destruction.<sup>15</sup>

In its demonic will to power the state always strives to become totalitarian and universal. "By its very nature it lays claim to a universal all-embracing significance. It is willing to share its sovereignty with no-one, with nothing."<sup>16</sup> It seeks to be a church, to

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<sup>14</sup>Cp. Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 106.

<sup>15</sup>Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 195.

<sup>16</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 140.

control and dominate not only the actions of men, but also their souls and consciences. In its search for sovereignty it leaves no room for freedom of the spirit or for the Kingdom of God.

The nature of the state is such that it always, as said above, seeks to make man its slave. Now this slavery of man to the state has a twofold image. It consists not only in the fact that the state seeks to control his entire life, but also and primarily in the fact that man identifies his dream of sovereignty with the state.

Men not only need the state and cannot do without the services it renders, but they are seduced and taken captive by it. They connect their dreams of sovereignty with the state. And there lies the chief evil and a source of human slavery.<sup>17</sup>

It is in the make up of man to seek to dominate others. He constantly dreams of exercising sovereignty. And this dream makes him a slave. The very seeking of sovereignty is a delusion. Sovereignty does not really exist. It is a dream of slaves. Its source is the objectivized, alienated world, which is the world of slavery. Sovereignty enslaves both the enslaved and the enslaver. The enslaver is enslaved even as the men over whom he exercises sovereignty because his power is dependent upon those whom he enslaves. He is determined from without to as great an extent as they are. In both cases freedom of self determination is negated. But man is free. That means equally that he should have power over no one and no one should have power over him.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>18</sup>Cp. Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, Part I, 2, pp. 59-72.

In discussing the relation between the Kingdom of God and the state, Berdyaev strongly censures that tradition within Christianity which reconciles these two kingdoms. He states that they are in principle opposed to each other. In Christ's life he sees an example of the deadly and inevitable conflict between these two. The kingdom of Caesar never recognizes the autonomy of the Kingdom of God. It is constantly trying to make a tool of it. As such it is not something neutral that is willing to take a neutral corner between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil. "It is at the extreme limit of objectivization, the exteriorization and alienation of human nature."<sup>19</sup> It removes freedom from the inward spiritual sphere of man and transfers it to the outward objective sphere. The state does not want man to be free, to be self-determined, but wants his determination to come from without, from the state.

Furthermore the state in its striving for power always perverts the hierarchy of being. The state invariably considers itself of a higher order than man and the Kingdom of God. According to the thinking of the state, man was made for the state and not the state for man. The state constantly considers man as a means to attain its ends. It makes of man an object, a thing, which is manipulated for its own use and ends.

The state always repeats the words of Caiaphas; it is the state's confession of faith. Statesmen have always given the answer that in the interest of the safety of the state and the increase of its strength, an innocent man may and should be put to death. And every time that happens a voice is raised in the crucifixion of Christ. The demoniacal stamp which is imprinted upon the state is due to the fact that the state always gives its vote for the execution of Christ: it is its destiny.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

It is a question of fixing the scale of values. Not only is the existence of the state not the highest value, but even the existence of the world, of this objectivized world, is certainly not the highest value. The death of one man, of even the most insignificant of men, is of greater importance and is more tragic than the death of states and empires.<sup>20</sup>

In the pursuit of its policies of self-protection and self-aggrandizement the state has never had any scruples about using evil means to achieve its ends. In fact that which is considered an ignoble act when performed by an individual for individual ends is considered noble when performed by the same individual on behalf of the state. Berdyaev in further developing this thought arrives at seemingly different answers in different books. In The Destiny of Man he states that the state is not bound by the ten commandments the way individuals are.<sup>21</sup> In Slavery and Freedom he changes this view.<sup>22</sup> There he berates the state for completely perverting moral values in its quest for power. This, however, is a contradiction that is chiefly on the surface level. In the former the discussion revolves around the necessity of killing and the other evils during times of war for the protection of higher values. In the latter the discussion centers around the state's indiscriminate use of evil.

During the course of Berdyaev's treatment of the various classes that comprise Western society, he devotes considerable attention to the bourgeois. For him bourgeois is not only a social category but it is

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<sup>20</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 144. Cp. also p. 149 and The Destiny of Man, p. 197 f.

<sup>21</sup>Cp. Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 199 f.

<sup>22</sup>Cp. Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 142 f.



also a spiritual one. The bourgeois as a class might disappear, but as a condition of the individual spirit it will remain as long as the fallen world remains. The bourgeois spirit recognizes only the physical and the visible. The bourgeois man, an individual dominated by the bourgeois spirit, is engrossed by the material things of this world and is incapable of recognizing spiritual values.

The bourgeois is a slave of the visible world and of the hierarchy of position established in that world. He forms his estimate of people not by what they are, but by what they have. The bourgeois is a citizen of this world, he is king of the earth. To have conceived of the idea of becoming king of the earth is bourgeois.<sup>23</sup>

The bourgeois is completely satisfied with the world in which he lives. He is not disturbed by the vanity, emptiness, and evil that are inescapable conditions of this world. He has no longing for the spiritual and no desire to transcend himself. In fact he is deeply distrustful of anything that smatters of the transcendental and the spiritual. These are a hindrance to his ambition of inheriting the earth. He instinctively feels that they undermine his materialistic foundations. Living in a world of I-it relationships, the bourgeois has become objectivized to the highest degree. Incapable of existential relationships, everyone and everything has become an it, a thing to him. These things he tries to manipulate for his own advantages, and success or failure in these attempts determines the degree of success or failure in his life. His determination consequently always proceeds from without and not from within.

The bourgeois has done a great deal for the advancement of the

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

machine and the machine-age. But the machine has turned on its creator and made him a slave. The master of technique has been enslaved by his own inventions. This is particularly the case when it comes to money the greatest and most horrible of the bourgeois inventions.

This kingdom of money, in which all real substance disappears, possesses a terrible power, holds a terrible sway over human life, sets up governments and overthrows them, makes wars, enslaves the laboring masses, gives rise to unemployment and destitution, renders the life of people who are successful in this kingdom more and more fantastic.<sup>24</sup>

The impersonal power of money which the bourgeois wields enslaves both him and the proletariat, who are dependent upon money for daily bread. The power to dominate is a demonic and demoralizing force wherever it appears, but this is especially the case where domination is dependent upon the illusory power of money. The bourgeois is the most dependent of men.<sup>25</sup>

We now turn from Berdyaev's treatment of the bourgeois to his thoughts on the subject of sex. For him "sex is, as it were the seal of the Fall of man, an imprint which marks the loss of integrality of human nature."<sup>26</sup> Sex in man implies that he is a divided, incomplete, and that he feels an urge towards completeness. It denotes dividedness not only in physical nature, but in the whole person of man. It is not just a function of the sexual organs but it courses through man's entire nature. "Sex, which indicates a lack of completion and fulfillment in man, is

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>25</sup>For this section on the bourgeois compare Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, pp. 181-9.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 223. Cp. Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, pp. 232, 236.

the power of the race over the personality, the power of the common man over the individual."<sup>27</sup> In themselves sexual attraction and the sexual act are completely impersonal and have nothing to do with personality. Sex is something which man shares with the entire animal world. Consequently in human life a fierce struggle is waged between personality and sex. While personality denotes freedom of the spirit, determination from within, sex denotes exteriorization and determination from without. Sex seeks to shackle man to the objectivized world, to make him a slave of impersonal powers outside himself. When man gives way to the impersonal power of sex, he loses power over himself.

Hence comes the shame which is connected with sex. This shame increases with the stature of personality and personal consciousness. The racial life of sex makes personality a means toward the procreation of other personalities and personal satisfaction shows itself as an illusion, necessary for the life of the race but not for personality itself.<sup>28</sup>

The very fact that shame is connected with sex shows that it has its origin in the Fall. But the shame and the terror that one sex feels for the other is overcome in either of two ways. It is either "overcome through love, i.e., the sublimation of shame or through depravity, i.e., the loss of shame."<sup>29</sup> Evil in sex is overcome through personalistic love. But this love between two personalities can again be immediately profaned by being brought under the domination of society. Sexual love is easily enslaved by the mores and laws of society.

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

The most intimate aspect of personality, which simply cannot be judged from outside and of which the person is shy of speaking to anyone at all is the most organized and regulated socially. This is due to the fact that sexual life results in the birth of children, the continuation of the human race. Something intimately personal and absolutely non-social has social consequences.<sup>30</sup>

There is a twofold horror in sexual love. One aspect of this has already been alluded to above; that is the domination of love by society. This, however, can be kept to a minimum. The other aspect, which contains the greater horror, is that sexual love has in it something death-dealing.

Eros-love has a tendency to turn into a universal principle of life, either to subject things to itself or to crowd out everything else. And, therefore, eros-love is not only the search for the fullness and intensity of love, but also a compression and a decrease in the richness of life.<sup>31</sup>

Sex easily cheapens and profanes human life. It easily deludes man into thinking that a temporary infatuation or a strong sexual impulse is true love. The moment that he possesses the object of his sexual desires, he becomes bored and satiated. In married life sex often becomes nothing more than habit, completely disconnected with any deeper spiritual aspect. Frequently it is the cause for living life on a purely sensual and superficial level. On occasion it offers an easy escape from the suffering of everyday life. Sex can profane the whole of human nature. It has a way of making things trivial and superficial.<sup>32</sup>

Before concluding this section on love, it would be well to discuss more fully the relation of sex to personalistic love already alluded to

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<sup>30</sup>ibid., p. 232.

<sup>31</sup>Berdyayev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 235.

<sup>32</sup>Op. ibid., p. 231 and Berdyayev, The Destiny of Man, p. 141.

above. Berdyaev states that

The stamp of the Fall of man very clearly lies upon sexual union, it is seen in everything, and it embarrasses man and disquiets him. But man endeavors to give meaning to and justify sexual union.<sup>33</sup>

Confronted with this man has thought out three ways of justifying sexual union. The most common of these is that it perpetuates the race. Berdyaev rejects this interpretation as evil because it makes man merely an agent of the generic process. Furthermore, "it is hypocritical to assert that man is attracted to sexual-union for the sake of the birth of children when a like end may be merely the result of reflex action." The second interpretation is that the meaning of sexual union is the pleasure and satisfaction it affords. Berdyaev also rejects this one for it makes man a slave to his lower nature. It means that motivation does not come from the spirit but from nature. The third one and the one Berdyaev espouses is that

The meaning of sexual union is to be found in the union with the loved one, in the attainment of completion from this union. This meaning is personal and the only admissible and morally and spiritually justifiable one, and it presupposes that sex is characterized in terms of spirituality.<sup>34</sup>

Before concluding this section on sex, it would be well to say a few words on Berdyaev's views of man's sexual being prior to the Fall. Was man created bisexual or heterosexual? Berdyaev does not answer this question. It would seem to me, however, that opposite answers could logically be deduced from his statement on sex. One could argue that since sex

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<sup>33</sup>Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 236.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid. Cp. also Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, pp. 240-2.

denotes dividedness—separation into the male and female principle<sup>35</sup>—man's condition before the Fall must of necessity have been bisexual. Taking this viewpoint, bisexuality would be equivalent to androgyny. The opposite view would state that inasmuch as sex brings about the realization of wholeness,<sup>36</sup> man before the Fall must have been a heterosexual being who lived an androgynous life through sex.

Now, however, having said that, it must be stated that Berdyaev would probably take neither of these views for it would mean transferring categories of this sinful world to a state of being that preceded this world. Sex, as a condition of sinful man, is a result of the Fall. This means that sex came into being with this world and will disappear with this world. To ask whether man before the Fall was bisexual or heterosexual is to ask an illegitimate question. It is a question of the same type as does God will the good or is the good that which God wills? Berdyaev in answering this question stated, "It is equally wrong to say that God is bound to will the good and that the good is that which God wills. We cannot judge of God from our side of the distinction between good and evil."<sup>37</sup> The same type of answer can be made to the question of man's sexual being prior to the Fall. It is equally wrong for us to say that man was bisexual or heterosexual before the Fall. We, living on this side of the Fall—which gave rise to sex as we know it—cannot talk about

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<sup>35</sup>Supra 31, footnote 26.

<sup>36</sup>Supra 34, footnote 34.

<sup>37</sup>Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 43.

man's sexual being prior to the Fall.

As a conclusion to this chapter on the manifestations of evil, the concept of law in Berdyaev's thought will be treated. It immediately becomes evident that Berdyaev holds out no hope for solving the problem of evil through an ethics of the law. It is true that he sees in the law a preventive of evil, but he also sees the same law that prevents evil, bring forth evil. The law has a twofold character. It combats and denounces sin, but in this process the law itself falls victim to the sin it denounces. This is due to the fact that it has no intrinsic power that enables it to overpower evil. It can denounce, but it cannot overcome. Furthermore, inasmuch as the law is directed against the "Old Adam," it is directed against gross evils. But this renders it inadequate in solving the more complex problems of life. It is completely valueless in the solving of problems that have to do with higher values. When confronted with a situation in which the inevitable result, regardless of what kind of action is taken, is evil, the law is useless. The reason for the law's weakness and inadequacy is due to it being a result of the Fall. It came into being simultaneous with the Fall and it shares in the impotence of fallen nature. It is completely incapable of transcending good and evil. It is a result of dividedness and thus cannot bring about integrality.

In another place Berdyaev states that the weakness of the law is connected with the fact that although God gave it, He does not take a part in carrying it out. There is no intimate connection between the law and the source of being. The law is no ontological reality. "Law means precisely that God has withdrawn from man. Hence the impotence of the

law to change human nature."<sup>38</sup>

In its relationship to man, the law attempts to make man a slave of society and social conditions. Living under an ethics of law, man easily becomes a slave to the moral valuations, the taboos, the norms that society seeks to impose upon him. The law does not recognize personality, the uniquely individual, the inner man. It is incapable of recognizing moral struggle going on in the depths of personality. All the law recognizes is the outward man and him it wants to regulate according to a prescribed norm.

The ethics of the law is the expression of herd morality. It organizes the life of the average man, of the human herd, and leaves altogether out of account the creative personality which rises above the common level. It deals with personality in the abstract; the concrete personality does not exist for it. The morality of the law is universally binding.<sup>39</sup>

This is an evil for it subordinates man, who is higher in the hierarchical structure than the law--inasmuch as personality is higher than the universal--to the law.

The greatest of all evils connected with the law, however, consists in that it seduces man into believing that salvation is attained through the law. Berdyaev refers to this as Pharisaism. The Pharisee is a type of person who believes he is saved by keeping the law. The difficulty in repudiating this, in showing that the law is powerless to save, lies in the fact that a legalistic ethics is practical. The Pharisee is able to fulfill the law and therefore thinks he is saved. There is a twofold falsity in this belief. First of all, because the Pharisee regards the

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 95.



law as higher than man, his motivation for "good works" precedes from his concern for his own personal salvation instead of love for his neighbor. But good works done not for the love of others but for the salvation of one's own soul are not good at all. In the second place, because law sprang up as a result of sin, it is powerless to free man from the world into which sin precipitated him. It is applicable only to a world where the distinction between good and evil exists. Where there is no distinction between good and evil, there also is no law. And conversely, where the law is, there is also the distinction between good and evil. Consequently if salvation were by means of the law, it would mean that life in eternity would be lived on a level where the distinction between good and evil still exists. But this is untenable and blasphemous for it vitiates the life and death of Christ inasmuch as Christ's work of redemption means this distinction is transcended. Salvation means man is beyond the ethics of the law. His life is no longer divided but complete and integral.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>For this section on law compare Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, pp. 84-102.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE END OF EVIL

In this chapter I propose to show the limitations Berdyaev ascribes to evil. For him evil is neither all powerful nor eternal. Evil can be destroyed. And not only destroyed but also overcome and transformed. That which is evil, which contains within itself non-being, through the workings of God becomes being and transcends both good and evil.

Man, as the last two chapters attempted to show, lives in and is enslaved by an evil universe. This evil so corrupts life, that life would be unendurable except for the revelation that there is a God who underlies existence, a God who suffers along with and for man.

Christianity reveals to us a God who in the person of the Only Begotten Son enters this world to overcome sin through suffering. Consequently the relation of Christianity to suffering is paradoxical. It reveals that suffering is a result of evil and at the same time it is the means by which evil is overcome. By His suffering on the cross, Christ redeemed the sins of the whole world.

When man accepts suffering and recognizes that it has a positive meaning, that through it evil is overcome, the pain of it grows less and loses its power over him. The most frightful of all suffering is the suffering which man will not accept against which he feels vindictive. This suffering embitters man and makes a hell of his life.

But when he accepts suffering as having a higher meaning, it regenerates him. This is the meaning of the Cross. "Take up thy cross

and follow me." That means accept suffering, understand its meaning and bear it graciously.<sup>1</sup>

In the person of Christ in whom all of humanity finds its place, man attempts to overcome sin and death by sacrifice and suffering. Through and in Christ human nature cooperates in the work of redemption. "Redemption is a dual process in which both God and man share; yet it is but one process, not two. Without human nature and the exercise of human freedom it would be impossible."<sup>2</sup> Man takes a part in the process of redemption by cheerfully taking up his cross and following Christ. He recognizes the use to which suffering can be put and he constantly reaffirms the good in suffering.

The truth of suffering is closely connected with the problem of freedom. In the first chapter it was pointed out that evil has its source in freedom, in the Ungrund, which is prior even to God. God has done everything possible to bring light into this freedom.

But without destroying freedom He could not conquer the power of evil contained in it. That is why there is tragedy and evil in this world; all tragedy is connected with freedom. And we can only reconcile ourselves to the tragedy of the world because God suffers too. God shares His creature's destiny. He sacrifices Himself for the world and for man whom He loves and yearns for.<sup>3</sup>

In the person of the Only Begotten Son, God enters the world, identifies Himself with sinful man, and by the mystery of His suffering, destroys the power of evil in nature from within.<sup>4</sup> Through Christ's suffer-

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<sup>1</sup>Nicolas Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, translated by Natalie Duddington (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Nicolas Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, translated by Oliver Fielding Clarke (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948), p. 177.

<sup>3</sup>Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Supra 19.

ing evil is destroyed, but its source, freedom, remains intact.

In the passion of the Son of God and the Son of Man on Calvary freedom becomes the power of divine love which enlightens and transfigures human freedom in the saving of the world. Truth in the guise of suffering and love makes us free without constraint; in fact it creates a new and higher kind of freedom.<sup>5</sup>

It creates a freedom that is beyond good and evil. Man's determination henceforth comes from within and not from without. And a man determined from within—from freedom, is an integral man, a complete personality. The slavery of objectivisation and exteriorization no longer can control him.

In the Gospel we are told of the coming of the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is beyond the familiar distinctions between good and evil "according to which the first are first and the last are last." The legalistic valuations of good and evil no longer apply. "The harlots and publicans go into the Kingdom of God before you." Christianity reveals an entirely different attitude to man than the pagan and even the Jewish world. It is a paradoxical one. And the paradox has to do with sin. Since all have sinned, no one has the right to condemn anyone else. Mercy is there for everyone.

Consequently it is Christianity that gives rise to the longing for universal salvation, i.e., for real victory over evil, as opposed to the longing for confining the wicked to hell, first in time and then in eternity.<sup>6</sup>

The Gospel tells us that in the Kingdom of God the ethics of the law are replaced by the ethics of redemption and creation. God is revealed not as a God who exacts retribution, but as a God who saves and gives

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<sup>5</sup>Berdyayev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 178.

<sup>6</sup>Berdyayev, The Destiny of Man, p. 113.

life. Through the Redemption he frees man from the power of the law, from the innumerable social taboos that hold him captive. In the Gospel God reveals to us that man is higher than abstract good, that man is higher than the Sabbath. He shows us that Christianity is based not upon law,

But upon a living Being, a Personality, and man's personal relation to God and his neighbor. Christianity has placed man above the idea of the good.... The idea of the good like every other idea must yield and make way for man. It is not the abstract idea of the good, but man who is God's creation and God's child. Man inherits eternity while nothing shall be left of the law.<sup>7</sup>

Everything in the Gospel is connected with the person of Christ. If you remove Christ you have nothing. The words and injunctions of Christ are utterly impossible of accomplishment apart from Christ. But what is impossible for man is possible for God. Through Christ and in Christ the injunctions of the Gospel become realities. Christ gives man the power to attain the perfection the Kingdom of God talks about. By restoring to man his role as creator, He renews and strengthens the image of God in man. God makes sinful man a part to play in the creation of the universe. He fills man with power to create values, to call forth new existences out of the Ungrund. According to the image of God in him, man is able to conquer fear and overcome the consequences of sin. As a creator man transcends the limits of good and evil, of time and space. He has contact with the eternal.<sup>8</sup>

Creative work takes place in time, but the creative act is directed upon the eternal.... All the products of man's genius may be temporal and corruptible, but the creative fire itself is eternal.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>8</sup>Cp. ibid., pp. 126-53.

and everything temporal ought to be consumed in it.<sup>9</sup>

At this point we turn to Berdyaev's concept of death. Death, which is a universal experience of human life, is both the end of all meaning and at the same time the establishment of meaning. Death comes to everyone and to everything in this natural world. It comes not only at the end of life, but it is an experience of every moment of life. It is the result of the dividedness of our being. Living in a space-time we constantly come face to face with death. The disappearance of emotions and feelings is an experience of death in time. Parting from a friend, a town, a home is an experience of death in space.

Death cannot be understood merely as the last moment of life followed either by non-being or by existence in the world beyond. Death is an event embracing the whole of life. Our existence is full of death and dying. Life is perpetual dying, experiencing the end in everything, a continual struggle against death and a partial dying of the human body and the human soul. Death within life is due to the impossibility of embracing the fullness of being, either in time or in space.<sup>10</sup>

The harshness and hopelessness of death has often been softened by people who, although not recognizing personal immortality, find comfort in the belief that their works and activities will live on in the race. Berdyaev has no room for comfort of this kind, for it does not take into consideration the Last Judgment. There will be an end to everything in this world. Not only individuals but also nations will be judged.

Apocalypse is the end of all perspective of racial or cosmic immortality; in it every creature and all the world is directly faced with the judgment of eternity. There can be no comfort in

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

the thought that we shall be immortal in our children and that our world will last forever, for the end is coming to all consolations that are in time.<sup>11</sup>

For Berdyaev "death is the most terrible and the only evil. Every kind of evil in the last resort means death."<sup>12</sup> Evil is death and death is the result of evil. It is a return to non-being, which at this time first becomes evil.<sup>13</sup> The greatest evil in death is the death of personality, for personality is destined for eternity.

The death of that which is eternal and immortal in its meaning and destination is alone tragic, there is nothing tragic about the death of the temporal and transitory. The death of personality in man is tragic because personality is God's eternal idea of him. It is unendurable that a complete personality containing the unity of all human powers and possibilities should die.<sup>14</sup>

But death is not only evil, but also good. Death gives meaning to life. Death reminds man that he has not fulfilled his destiny in life, that he has gone astray. Through death--be it the death of men, societies, or customs--truth and righteousness remind man that life has been distorted and perverted. "Death reminds man of the divine truth and does not allow unrighteousness to be eternal."<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, it is death which ennobles and transfigures the past. It purifies the past, for nothing corrupt and evil can escape death. Only what is creative in the past will live on.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 252. Cp. Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 187.

<sup>13</sup>Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 262. Cp. Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, translated by R. M. French (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 111.

The very meaning of death is that man's destiny does not lie in this fallen world. Death manifests the depths of life and reveals the end, which alone gives meaning to life. Life is noble only because it contains death, an end which testifies that man is destined to another and higher life. Life would be low and meaningless if there were no death and no end.<sup>16</sup>

A Christian facing death sees in it judgment of his life. But he also sees more in it. His attitude towards death is completely bound up and related to Christ's death. Christ's death changes man, both his life and his death. Christ's death means that the past can be wiped out. What is done can be undone. The evil of man's past life need not pervert and destroy his present and future life. The threads connecting the past with the present are cut.

Therein lies the mystery of penitence and the remission of sins. Man cannot forgive himself his sin and villainy; he is unable to forget his evil past. But Christ has taken upon Himself the sins of the world, and He can take away our sin and forgive it.<sup>17</sup>

The fear man has of the future is intimately associated with death. Man fears the future because he fears impending death. He realizes that death is his fate in this world and shirks from it.

But man's free and creative spirit rises against this slavery to death and fate. It has another vista of life springing from freedom and creativeness. In and through Christ the fate of death is cancelled, although empirically every man dies.<sup>18</sup>

Man should not flee from death but accept it freely, for Christ himself died and through death conquered death. But Christ's death did not only conquer death, it also sanctified death. Through the Cross death is

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<sup>16</sup>Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 250. Cp. Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 188.

<sup>17</sup>Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 108.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 146.



transfigured. Instead of leading to annihilation it leads to resurrection. Now man has to die so that he can live. By cooperating in Christ's death, that is by accepting the consequences of it for oneself, one triumphs over the destroying power of death.<sup>19</sup> And that is a triumph that takes place both in the present moment, for man in Christ daily dies and rises again, and also at the end of the ages when the dead in Christ will rise to eternal life.

From Berdyaev's concept of death we now pass over to his concept of hell, which poses several antinomies. Simply to dismiss hell, makes life too superficial and too easy. Man likes to live on the surface of life where the problem of hell does not present itself to him. But once man loses a sense of eternal life he also loses the sense of responsibility which eternity imposes upon him.<sup>20</sup> Having said that, the opposite must also be said. Belief in hell makes moral and spiritual life meaningless for then it is lived under the fear of torture. And torture can make a man do anything. But any action performed because of pressure applied from without and not because of love cannot be considered of any moral or spiritual value.

If hell exists and is a menace to me, disinterested love of God is for me impossible, and my actions are inspired not by striving for perfection but by the desire to avoid eternal torments.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the existence of personality and freedom demands the possibility of an existence of hell. It is a rejection of freedom to

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<sup>19</sup>Cp. ibid., p. 252; and Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 187.

<sup>20</sup>Cp. Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 266.

<sup>21</sup>ibid.

affirm that man can be forced to be good and to be compulsorily installed into heaven. Man's freedom demands the existence of hell, for man may actually prefer to lead a completely self-centered life totally separated from God. He may prefer that to giving his self up. If man is really free, then he is free to choose torment without God in place of happiness with God. But having said that, it is also necessary to say the opposite. For just as it is impossible to affirm human freedom and then deny the possibility of hell and the existence of human freedom. God could not have predetermined a hell for that would be a denial of human freedom.<sup>22</sup>

Hell is the dark, irrational, meonic freedom which has crystalized into fate. Christian consciousness denies the existence of fate in the ancient Greek sense, for that is incompatible with God and human freedom. But the idea of hell is equivalent to that of fate.<sup>23</sup>

In trying to find an answer to the problem of hell, the mind arrives at a twofold answer. Objectively it is unthinkable, but subjectively it is an empirical reality. If one looks at it from God's point of view and objectifies it is incomprehensible and disgusting. If one looks at it from man's viewpoint, one has to admit its existence. If we consider it as an objective reality it is difficult to accept the idea that one's eternal destiny should be decided by one's actions during a relatively short period of time. And it is unthinkable that a temporal act should be punished by eternal damnation. Furthermore to think that God predetermined hell as a place of objective reality for the sake of justice or that he permits it to abide side by side with His Kingdom is an insult

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<sup>22</sup>Gp. ibid., pp. 266, 273; and Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 324 f.

<sup>23</sup>Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 273.

to God. It would mean that creation was a failure.

An idea of an objectified hell as a special sphere of eternal life is altogether intolerable, unthinkable, and indeed incompatible with faith in God. A God who deliberately allows the existence of eternal torments is not God at all but more like the devil. Hell as a place of retribution for the wicked, which is a comfort to the good is a fairy tale; there is not a shadow of reality about it; it is borrowed from our everyday existence with its rewards and punishments.<sup>24</sup>

As a realm of subjective reality, however, we must admit that hell exists.

Unthinkable as a realm of objective being, hell exists in the subjective sphere and is a part of human experience. Hell, like heaven, is merely a symbol of man's spiritual life. The experience of hell means complete self-centeredness, inability to enter into objective being, self-absorption, to which eternity is closed and nothing but bad infinity left.<sup>25</sup>

The idea of eternal hell arises from the experience of suffering here in time torments that one thinks last forever. It is due to a person being so shut up in himself that he is unable to communicate with or pass over to anyone or anything else. The subjective experience of hell is the inability to escape from self-centered agony. But this hell is not an objective reality but an illusion caused by egocentricity. Hell is not eternity but is continuation in endless time. In hell one finds those who do not pass over into eternity but remain in time.<sup>26</sup>

Man, when he is haunted by the horror of continuation in time which appears to him as endless, seeks escape through death. This Berdyaev calls a sign of decadence and an illusion, for when a person does this

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Cp. ibid., p. 269; and Berdyaev, Freedom and the Spirit, p. 324.

he thinks of death as the end of everything and not of endless death.<sup>27</sup> But the possibility of defeating hell lies not in death, but only in and through Christ. "Faith in Christ and in Christ's resurrection is faith in victory over hell."<sup>28</sup> It is impossible for God to give victory over hell for this is not a matter of God's forgiveness and mercy which is infinite, but a matter that has to do with dark, meonic freedom rooted in non-being. Hell is precisely this return to non-being, which is not created by God and over which he has no power. Neither is it possible for man to defeat hell for hell means that man has become a slave of meonic freedom.

Christ alone can conquer the horror of hell as a manifestation of the creature's freedom. Apart from Christ the tragic antinomy of freedom and necessity is insoluble, and in virtue of freedom hell remains a necessity. The horror of it means that the soul withdraws from Christ and His image in it grows dim. Salvation from hell is open to all in Christ the Savior.<sup>29</sup>

The possibility of salvation for all raises the question of Berdyaev's concept of heaven. First of all it should be said that for him paradise is beyond good and evil. It is a life of bliss and integrality. In paradise there is no distinction, no dividedness, no separation. This means that paradise is not the triumph of the good, at any rate not in our sense of the term, for good always implies judgment and constant rejection of evil.

We come nearer to it when we think of it as beauty. The transfiguration and regeneration of the world is beauty and not goodness. Para-

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<sup>27</sup>Cp. Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, p. 280.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 281.

dise is theosis, deification of the creature. The good is relative to an untransfigured and unregenerate world. Beauty alone is liberation from the burden of care; goodness is not yet free from care.<sup>30</sup>

It is tremendously difficult for us to visualize paradise because it is beyond good and evil and therefore something of which we have had no experience. We unconsciously apply the categories of this world to it and thereby conjure up false images. Man dreams of paradise and at the same time fears it and thinks of it as dull and monotonous. The idea of perfection in this world is a not yet, for perfection in this world is impossible. Perfection means the constant striving. It is a dynamic. But when we transfer our idea of perfection to paradise it loses its dynamic and becomes unspeakably dull. "We think in time and project paradise into the future; hence it appears to us as a standstill, as the cessation of infinite striving, movement and creativeness, as the attainment of completion and satisfaction."<sup>31</sup>

But paradise is not in the future, is not in time, but in eternity. Eternity is attained in the actual moment, it comes in the present—not in the present which is part of the broken up time, but in the present which is an escape from time.<sup>32</sup>

Paradise is a present moment, but an existential moment and not an historical one. As such it is qualitative and not quantitative. Consequently it does not imply less movement than time, but greater and more intense movement.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 289. Cp. Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, p. 260.

Paradise, the Kingdom of God, has a twofold character in its relation to time. It comes both at the end of time and "through the depths of time."

An eschatological interpretation of the Kingdom of God is the only true one. But the paradox of eschatological consciousness is that the end is both put off to an indefinite time in the future and is near to every moment of life. (There is an eschatology within the process of life.) There is an eschatology within the process of life. Apocalypse is not merely the revelation of the end of the world and of history. It is also the revelation of the end within the world and the historical process, within human life and every moment of life.<sup>34</sup>

Paradise is both a now and a not yet. This entire world, with all its evil, will not only be destroyed through recreation at the end of time, but is being destroyed at this present moment through the creative action of man. Evil will not only be cancelled out and disappear at the end of the ages, but that is already actually its fate in this existential moment when men through Christ live creative lives.

Before drawing this paper to a close it would be well to restate what was already said above.<sup>35</sup> The state of man beyond history is qualitatively different from that which was prior to history.

There are three stages in the development of the spirit: the original paradisaical wholeness, preconscious wholeness which has not had the experience of thought and freedom; division, reflection, valuation, freedom of choice, and, finally, super-conscious wholeness and completeness that comes after freedom, reflection and valuation.<sup>36</sup>

Man, prior to the Fall, because of his freedom, had the potentiality of evil within him. Evil, however, was not as yet expressed. After the

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<sup>34</sup>Berdyayev, The Destiny of Man, p. 290. Cp. Berdyayev, Slavery and Freedom, pp. 262, 266, 267.

<sup>35</sup>Supra 20 f.

<sup>36</sup>Berdyayev, The Destiny of Man, p. 39.

Fall, when potential evil had become actual, he lived in a state of dividedness and exteriorization. While man was living in this condition, Christ descended into the sinful world, took upon Himself the condition of meonic freedom, and by His death "enlightened meonic freedom from within." That is His death destroyed the potentiality of evil within meonic freedom without destroying meonic freedom itself. In heaven, which is both a now and a not yet, Christ's victory becomes man's victory. Now man again is in God and the world is in man. And this state of being will remain through eternity.

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