

Nicolas Berdyaev's Critique of Marxism

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I

IN ORDER TO APPRECIATE Nicolas Berdyaev's critique of Marxism, one should know something of the man himself. For his was no cold, detached analysis; it arose out of his own experience as a participant in the revolutionary developments which culminated in the establishment of the Soviet regime.

A scion of the military aristocracy, Berdyaev early became involved in socialistic activities. For this he was expelled from the university and later exiled to the north of Russia. During this period he was identified sociologically and politically with the extreme left wing of Marxism, which he regarded as best representing the interests of social justice.

Yet he was never wholly able to accept the Marxist metaphysic and anthropology, and veered increasingly toward Idealism. Eventually he embraced "Neo-Christianity," as he called his free, existential faith in order to distinguish it from the authoritarian traditionalism of the established churches. In his first book, *Subjectivism and Individualism in Social Philosophy*, he attempted a synthesis of Marxist sociology and Neo-Kantian philosophy. His early works display an effort "to build up a theory according to which the psychological and social consciousness of the proletariat (as the class free from the sin of exploitation and itself exploited) is pre-eminently open to transcendent reality, to the realities of absolute truth and justice. This psychological consciousness, in its turn, was defined in his view by economic and class conditions. In this way he attempted to overcome the materialistic element in Marxism and to combine the latter with a belief in the absolute truth and meaning of life."¹ Many years later, he wrote wryly of the attempt: "I have since greatly departed from the ideological concepts of my youth."²

As Berdyaev came under the influence of such writers as Ibsen and Dostoyevsky, he was challenged to an even more profound concern with freedom and its relation to the development of human personality. The outlook which informed his return to Christianity owed much to the German mystic, Jacob Boehme, and to the nineteenth-century Russian thinkers, Vladimir Solovyev and Alexis Khomyakov, whose concept of *sobornost* plays such a vital role in modern Orthodox social thought. Following the October Revolution, Berdyaev was appointed to the chair

¹ Evgeny Lampert, "Nicolas Berdyaev," *Modern Christian Revolutionaries*, Donald Attwater, ed. (New York: Devin-Adair, 1947), p. 315.

² Nicolas Berdyaev, *Christianity and Class War* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933), p. 17.

of philosophy at the University of Moscow, only to be twice imprisoned by the Bolshevik government, and finally expelled from his native land in 1922. He lived in Germany for two years and then in France until his death in 1948. All through these years of exile he was an unsparing critic of every form of political totalitarianism, assailing with equal vigor the Bolshevik tyranny and the "Whites" among his fellow émigrés.

Berdyaev's opinions on Marxism are scattered widely throughout his many works. His most sustained strictures appear in four books, *The End of Our Time*, *Christianity and Class War*, *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, *The Russian Revolution*, and an article, "Human Personality and Marxism." In many instances his critique of Marxism is so closely interwoven with his critique of Russian communism that it becomes difficult if not impossible to separate the two. In this essay, however, an attempt has been made to limit discussion to the former, insofar as this can be done without violating the wholeness of his thought.

Another problem is presented by the ambiguity of many of Berdyaev's references to socialism, which he sometimes seems to equate with Marxism in an absolute sense. However, the fact that he himself advocates "personalist socialism" would indicate that when he speaks of socialism in the manner just mentioned he is actually referring to Marxism rather than to the broader concept. As Evgeny Lampert remarks with reference to Berdyaev's philosophy, "thought such as this does not prompt criticism."³ Berdyaev's ideas are easier to accept than to analyze. This is because they are not presented in objective, systematic form, but rather as personal insights arising from the existential situation of the author.

All the forces of my spirit and of my mental and moral consciousness [he writes in the introduction to *Freedom and the Spirit*] are bent towards the inward understanding of the problems which press so hard upon me. But my object is not so much to give them a systematic answer, as to put them more forcibly before the Christian conscience.⁴

This makes for apparent contradictions in his thought and necessitates familiarity with enough of his total output so that superficial inconsistencies may be placed in proper perspective by reference to the underlying integrity of the whole corpus.

His style has been described as "tautological": it is marked by frequent reiteration of the same ideas and phrases. Therefore the reader is apt to pass over some of his freshest insights. For although his phraseology is redundant, almost every passage is characterized by a unique nuance of direction, which throws light from a different angle upon the same idea.

³ Lampert, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

⁴ Quoted by Lampert.

Reading Berdyaev is an exhilarating experience; an adventure into a realm utterly unlike the relatively prosaic tablelands of contemporary rationalism. One is confronted with a peculiar quality of feeling, quite strange to the Occidental consciousness. And yet it "speaks to our condition." Imbued with the mystical, apocalyptic urgency so characteristic of Russian thought, Berdyaev nevertheless draws upon the finest elements in the stream of Western European culture. Impatient with every remnant of traditional abuse, he nevertheless seeks to conserve all that is noble of the past. Bitterly critical of bourgeois complacency, he opposes purely nihilistic change just as bitterly. His is a perfectionistic ethic, but his optimism is not callow. If he sees man in terms of a destiny supremely high, he does not minimize the price that must be paid.

II

BERDYAEV'S CRITIQUE of Marxism, and indeed his social thought in general, is grounded in his concept of the destiny of man. He sees man as a being created with the potentiality to realize within himself the image of God. This process of the transformation of the human into the divine-human Berdyaev calls *theosis*; it is identical with the attainment of mature personality. Personality is an organic unity of body, soul and spirit, with the latter as the integrating principle. As the spiritual factor becomes dominant the individual being fulfills his theanthropic capacity—in becoming divine-human he becomes truly human, a person in the fullest sense of the word.

From the standpoint of its potentiality, then, Berdyaev regards human personality as "the highest hierarchical value in the world."⁵ But the very existence of personality represents a break in the natural process, an incursion into the realm of things and a transmutation of thinghood into divinity.

There enters into the world a being which bears within itself an image not of this world, but of a higher Being—the image of God. It is a being called to an active life in time, but predestined for eternity; a self-contradictory being, the meeting place of two worlds. . . . Man is a being which transcends itself toward that which is more than man and more than human. The transcendence belongs to the existential marks of personality. . . . The lie of humanism consists in the acknowledgment of the self-sufficiency of man, in asserting that man may realise the fullness of his humanity without the super-human, without God.⁶

⁵ Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 72.

⁶ Berdyaev, "The Human Personality and Superpersonal Values," quoted in *Nicolas Berdyaev—Captive of Freedom*, by Matthew Spinka (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 139.

The process of theosis cannot take place in a vacuum. It is only through "I-Thou" relationships that the individual becomes a person. Now Berdyaev sees capitalist society as destructive of such relationships, for under it the individual's potentiality for personhood is stifled; he is viewed merely as a commodity.⁷ Man subjects himself to objective, impersonal forces, actually of his own creation. Thereby he divests himself of his humanity by rendering himself an object rather than a subject.

This analysis of capitalist society Berdyaev takes directly from Marx, who formulated it in his early writings as the concept of *Verdinglichung*—transformation into thing. Anxious that man might free himself from this dehumanizing process, Marx advanced his doctrine of the fetishism of commodities.⁸ In this doctrine so-called economic laws are seen not as the products of a world of objective realities, but simply as illusions of consciousness arising out of men's labor and relationships with one another. Once these illusions are recognized as such, man becomes the master rather than the slave of economics.

The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan.⁹

With this Berdyaev is in full accord. He never ceased to regard Marx as a brilliant sociologist who had correctly diagnosed the secondary causes of the world's ills. In fact, to the very end, he was quite willing to accept Marxism as an economic system. But he refused to accept it philosophically, for he could never stomach the Marxism doctrine of man, which is contrary to the very core of his thought and which he characterized as "extremely crude and out of date, related to rationalist materialism and naturalist evolutionism."¹⁰

For in denying God, Marxism denies man, cuts him off from his *raison d'être*. Human activity exists only by virtue of that spiritual concretion which binds all life together organically and hierarchically.

⁷ Professor Spinka accuses Berdyaev of being misleading in his attack upon capitalism, "because he ignores the very considerable modifications and limitations that have been imposed upon modern capitalism—the limitations imposed by the Government, by organized labor, and by the changing structure of the capitalistic form of economy." (*Ibid.*, p. 174.) This criticism is hardly warranted, for Berdyaev is not dealing with the bastard half-breed that goes by the name of capitalism today; he is dealing with capitalism as understood in the classic nineteenth-century sense of the term. Insofar as present-day capitalism has departed from it, it has ceased to be capitalism.

⁸ See *Capital* (New York: Modern Library), pp. 81–96.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁰ Berdyaev, "Human Personality and Marxism," *Communism and Christians* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1949), p. 221.

"Human powers that escape from a state of organism inevitably become enslaved to mechanization"¹¹ under which personality is sacrificed to impersonal forces. Once divorced from his spiritual center, man cannot fulfill the high destiny for which he was created; he becomes wholly subject to and a part of the natural world. His life has no true substance, end or meaning; it is oriented only to instrumental values.

Both capitalism and communism are aspects of the same malady, the bourgeois world-view, which arose out of the humanistic ethos of the Renaissance. During that period man asserted his creative freedom and rediscovered his affinity to nature. But in doing so he went too far and severed himself from the roots which made that creative freedom possible. He proclaimed his independence of the sacred tradition of the Christian Church. He denied his spiritual heritage and exalted his powers as a natural being. Herein lay the seeds of death. For "in order to make man greater, Humanism took away his likeness to the divine and subjected him to natural necessity."¹² It removed him from the wellsprings of his creativity and caused him to depend for strength upon himself. But the further man gets from his spiritual resources, the more his creative powers wither, until finally humanism turns into its opposite and the Renaissance is at an end.

Atomistic individualism is the first symptom of the self-negation of humanism. This is manifested in capitalism. No longer in communion with God or with his fellows, the individual becomes a thing—a mere function of the economic process. As Emil Brunner puts it,

civilization, freed from God's control, and throwing off all restraint, gets the upper hand, and man becomes the slave of his industrial and of his economic order. Above all, the collective forces which have been created for the sake of civilization make the individual being an insignificant cog in its vast wheel of activity.¹³

Marx's theory of economic determinism was an accurate description of the condition of nineteenth-century bourgeois society, which was characterized by materialism and spiritual degradation. But what he refused to perceive was that man's determination by economic relationships is the issue of a spiritual sickness. He thought that man could overcome it by recognizing and cooperating with the dialectical process of history, by re-constituting society on the basis of a change in methods of industrial production. Berdyaev affirms the insufficiency of such superficial measures,

¹¹ Berdyaev, *The End of Our Time* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933), p. 41.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹³ Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1937), p. 391.

insisting that man can regain his freedom only through spiritual rebirth, through reorienting himself to that which gives his life a dimension which transcends the realm of nature and necessity.

By denying God, Marx sundered man from the end of life and left him without any genuine interior goal.

Socialization of the means of production is certainly not the reality and end of life. There is nothing to be found in economics which has to do with the ends of, and not the means to, life. Economic equality is not such an end, any more than is the organized productive labour that Socialism has divinized. This divinization of labor at the expense of qualitative values has led to complete disregard of the end and meaning of life.¹⁴

It was his concern for human personality which led Marx to protest the brutalizing influence of nineteenth-century capitalism,¹⁵ but by viewing man as a mere epiphenomenon of the social process he left himself without a basis whereby his concern could be justified ontologically.

Communism wants to restore to man the working tools which have been alienated from him, but has no desire to give him back the spiritual element of which he has also been deprived.¹⁶

But without this element man cannot possess personality. He loses the image and likeness of God and becomes the image and likeness of the social collectivity, which replaces both man and God. For Marx, man's personal being is essentially unreal, a mere reflection of his generic being. This concept he derived from Hegel, "admitted the domination of the general over the individual and conceived personality to be devoid of independent value, as a mere function of the universal spirit."¹⁷ But this is an inversion of actuality. According to Berdyaev, individual persons possess anterior reality, although they cannot realize the fullness of life apart from communion with each other. It is not the individual person but rather Society, Class, State, etc., which are abstractions. "Only human personality can reflect in itself integral and universal being, whereas society and the State always remain partial, incapable of comprehending the universal."¹⁸ For integral being proceeds from God, Who is a Person.

Since society, in the thought of Marx, is the primordial reality, men are to be organized by society, rather than *vice versa*. Marx charges Chris-

¹⁴ Berdyaev, *The End of Our Time*, p. 193.

¹⁵ Berdyaev, "Human Personality and Marxism," pp. 209-10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

tianity with encouraging human passivity and docile submission to fate. But actually it is Marxism which denies creative activity to man, for it asserts "not the activity of man, but the activity of society or of a social collective body, which suppresses man and transforms him into its own instrument."¹⁹ Marxism looks toward the time when man's dependence upon economics will be no more. But this independence does not pertain to the individual; it is obtained only by dissolving the individual in the collectivity. Man is thus freed from economic necessity, but is he truly free? For freedom, Berdyaev declares, is a spiritual category; it presupposes the autonomy of the individual will, not only in relation to economics but also in relation to society. It presupposes the existence of spirit, for only spirit can commune with God and thus transcend the mass. The Marxist theory of man does not allow for conscience; it leads to the destruction of the prophetic principle, which always signifies the elevation of man above the social collectivity and a conflict with the latter in the name of the realization of the truth revealed by the inner voice—the Holy Spirit.

[Socialism] aims at drilling souls in platoons, disciplining them till they are quite content in their human ant-hill, till they like a barrack-life and no longer look for spiritual liberty; it wants to produce a race of contented children, unaware of sin. Christianity clings first and foremost to the freedom of the human spirit, and will not allow the possibility of drilling mankind into the earthly paradise. It leaves the attempt to Antichrist.²⁰

The task of revolutionizing the social structure Marx assigns to the proletariat, for "it alone is free from the original sin which vitiates all history and all the so-called bourgeois culture, the sin of the exploitation of man by man and class by class."²¹ The proletarian has a messianic role because he has been most fully despoiled of the fullness of human nature and must therefore, according to the dialectical process, be the one who is called upon to realize that fullness.

The conditions of capitalist industrial life exacerbate the proletarian, dehumanize him, alienate his human nature, turn him into a being bursting with resentment, anger, hatred, and the desire to be revenged. Proletarianism is a dehumanisation, a spoliation of human nature, and proletarians are least of all to be blamed for the fact. But what ground is there for expecting such a spoliation, such an appalling contraction, to produce a new type of man?²²

¹⁹ Berdyaev, "Christianity and Human Activity," *The Bourgeois Mind and Other Essays* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933), p. 83.

²⁰ Berdyaev, *The End of Our Time*, p. 189.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

²² Berdyaev, "Human Personality and Marxism," p. 216.

By making it necessary for man to become completely dehumanized before fulfilling his humanity, Marxism profoundly degrades man. By subordinating him wholly to his class, it renders him nothing but an automaton.

Man does not exist; only his class exists. And when classes have ceased to exist, man too will cease to exist; there will only be the social collectivity, Communist society.²³

Marxists may protest against this interpretation of their creed, declaring that with the attainment of the classless society man will at last become truly human; that out of the faceless emptiness of a universal, all-encompassing proletariat the dialectical process will bring forth a species which will for the first time fully realize human nature. Good arises out of evil; non-being generates being.

In speaking to this point, Berdyaev isolates a profound contradiction which lies at the very heart of Marxism; namely, that the dialectical process is logically incompatible with materialism. For Hegel, dialectic was a self-revelation of the universal Spirit, a Divine *Logos*, working in and through matter, leading through meaninglessness to the triumph of meaning. But Marx denied Spirit and introduced the dialectical process into the center of matter itself, into the material economic process, believing that it will lead through the struggle of contradictory forces into ultimate victory of meaning over the irrational necessity imposed by Nature. "A mad belief: for it remains incomprehensible why the complete triumph of meaninglessness, slavery and darkness; such a process is by nature irrational and can guarantee no triumph of reason."²⁴ Far from being scientific, Marx's attribution of logical movement and independence to matter savors of the most benighted faith in miracles.

Matter is endowed by Marxist philosophy with the freedom of spirit, with life, activity, logic, freedom, and the possibility of independent movement. But if we preserve the right terminology of philosophy we see that matter and material processes cannot be active, that free self-directed movement is not inherent in them, that no dialectical development can be theirs. Matter is inert and passive: spirit alone is active; activity presupposes a spiritual principle.²⁵

If one wishes to be literalistic, one can perhaps find reason to criticize Berdyaev at this juncture, for he seems to be guilty of dogmatic overstate-

²³ Berdyaev, "The Russian Revolution," *Essays in Order* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), p. 177.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁵ Berdyaev, "Christianity and Human Activity," p. 82.

ment when he says that the right terminology of philosophy precludes the activity of matter. After all, this is only true according to a particular philosophical frame of reference; ever since the days of Democritus there have been philosophers who have attributed activity to matter. But Berdyaev would doubtless reply that this only demonstrates the antiquity of philosophical error. At any rate, he goes on to tell us that the inner tensions of Marxism can never be resolved—a most disquieting factor in a system with absolute pretensions. Marxism is “continually slipping from dialectic to popular materialism and from that even to the hated mechanicism, and it cannot help it, for dialectical materialism is an untenable position where is bred a perpetual conflict between dialectic and materialism.”²⁶ Communism must somehow justify the strenuous activity demanded of its partisans. But economic determinism is in itself a passive teaching, leaving no room for creative human initiative. Therefore Soviet philosophy introduces freedom into matter itself, even at the cost of logical consistency. Thus it becomes in reality highly Idealist. Yet it must maintain lip-service to materialism, for to do otherwise would be to deny a dogma; furthermore, materialism is a conventional symbol of the struggle against religion and Christianity. But materialism, dialectical or otherwise, asserts Berdyaev, can never justify human activity, for “man can be active, victorious over the elemental forces of Nature and outside himself, the organizer and constructor of the world, only if he has within him the spiritual basis of life which raises him above Nature, only if he himself is no mere regeneration of Nature and of social environment—if the creative principle within him is independent of outward influence.”²⁷

Marxism is not only metaphysically self-contradictory; it is also axiologically self-contradictory. Berdyaev observes that, despite Marx's professed amoralism, his teaching on the class struggle presupposes a distinction between good and evil. For “if the amoralist denial of the distinction between good and evil is accepted, it is incomprehensible why the exploitation of man by man should call forth revolt and condemnation as an injustice.”²⁸

The Marxist conception of time Berdyaev sharply criticizes as destructive of personality. Communist theory sees the relation of present to future always as a relation of a means to an end. “The man of today is merely a means with a view to the man of tomorrow; the present generation likewise is only a means with a view to the generation that is to be.”²⁹

²⁶ Berdyaev, “The General Line of Soviet Philosophy,” *The End of Our Time*, p. 240.

²⁷ Berdyaev, “Christianity and Human Activity,” pp. 80–1.

²⁸ Berdyaev, “The Russian Revolution,” p. 164.

²⁹ Berdyaev, “Human Personality and Marxism,” p. 220.

In this sense Marxism and Nietzscheism are alike. "Nietzsche shows us humanism destroying and denying itself individually; Marx collectively. . . . In Nietzsche's teaching the superman replaces the lost God. . . . In the same way it [humanism] perishes in the superhuman collectivism of Marx."³⁰

Berdyaev contrasts Marxism and Democracy, condemning both. Democracy commits the sin of deifying the popular will. Marxism is right in subordinating the will of the people to a value which it conceives to be the end of life. But the end affirmed by it is false, for "a spiritual life alone can be the proper end of human life, only the divine reality can give reality to it."³¹ Like Milton, Berdyaev insists that there can be no right will apart from holiness of the will. This involves a spiritual transformation, which cannot be imposed by force. Here a wide gulf yawns between Christianity and Marxism, for according to the latter, in the name of the "proletarian idea" every sort of violence may be inflicted upon the people, both proletarian and bourgeois. The unenlightened may be compelled to a realization of the "idea" by force. Workers who lack the proletarian mentality are deprived of the right to participate in social action. The individual is seen merely as a means or an obstacle, as the case may be, to the fulfillment of the "idea," never as a human person with his own intrinsic value. Thus revolutionary socialism cannot but lead to dictatorship. It is by its very essence exclusive and intolerant; it must refuse liberty of conscience. The Marxist state is like a theocracy—it defines the truth and imposes it by force. It seeks a compulsory realization, not only of justice, but of the brotherhood of man. But external, obligatory means cannot bring about the brotherhood of man. Coercion can create only a terrifying collectivism, without a human soul.

III

WITH REFERENCE TO BERDYAEV'S SOCIAL THOUGHT, his denunciations are generally more satisfying than his affirmations. Perhaps this is because his temperament is essentially prophetic. In *The Russian Revolution* he quotes approvingly a statement by Solovyev to the effect that to defeat what is false in socialism one must recognize what is true in it. Later in the same essay he lists nine propositions summarizing what he believes to be true in Marxian communism. But the most convincing of these are propositions of a negative character, recognizing the validity of the Marxian strictures upon bourgeois society.

Speaking of the "positive truth" in Marxism, Berdyaev cites primarily

³⁰ Berdyaev, "End of Renaissance," *The Slavonic Review* (London: June and December, 1925), p. 16.

³¹ Berdyaev, *The End of Our Time*, p. 190.

its scheme for regulating the economic life of society. "The idea of methodically planning out the norms of economic life," he says, "is, on principle, a right idea."³² And so it is! No thinking person can aver that purposive human action should not be brought to bear upon the chaos of arbitrary and automatic forces. But, writes Professor Ludwig von Mises,

The alternative is not plan or no plan. The question is: whose planning? Should each member of society plan for himself, or should the paternal government alone plan for all? The issue is not *automation versus conscious action*; it is *spontaneous action of each individual versus the exclusive action of the government*. It is *freedom versus government omnipotence*.³³

This is a valuable insight: Berdyaev is surely wrong in assuming that all economic planning must be government planning. But von Mises, too, is guilty of oversimplification, for he posits an artificial limitation of alternatives. Must one choose between atomistic individual planning and planning by the government? Is there not a third possibility; namely, planning by functional extra-legal groups operating within an over-all framework of voluntary association? Here we seem to approach Berdyaev's concept of the corporate organization of society. But there is a crucial difference: in his system the guilds were seen as components of the political order.

Matthew Spinka gives an illustration of the fatal results of the corporate system when geared into the State:

. . . the "corporate state," turned Fascist (*i.e.*, by combining the interests of the employers and the Government against the workers), deprived labor of all effective power.³⁴

Under such circumstances the system merely provides the machinery for a kind of State capitalism, whereby the government may conveniently control and dominate the various interest groups. Berdyaev does not err in condemning unrestrained self-interest. Yet, as von Mises so trenchantly remarks, "if one rejects *laissez faire* on account of man's fallibility and moral weakness, one must for the same reasons also reject every kind of government action."³⁵

Individuals and groups alike will pursue selfish interests regardless of the context in which they operate. And the myth of the automatic har-

³² Berdyaev, "The Russian Revolution," p. 172.

³³ Ludwig von Mises, *Planning for Freedom* (South Holland, Mich.: Libertarian Press, 1952), p. 45.

³⁴ Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev—Captive of Freedom*, p. 169.

³⁵ Mises, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

mony of selfish interests belongs to the exploded optimism of a bygone age. Economic conflicts and tensions are inevitable in a dynamic society. But these conflicts and tensions could be rendered far less disastrous if they occurred within an ordered structure, providing mechanisms and techniques whereby the pressures of antagonistic economic interests might be so related as to bring about a state of relative equilibrium. Each economic interest would have final recourse to its natural weapons, but this very fact would tend to check their actual utilization. Under conditions of negotiation, within a framework of delicately integrated forces, the threats of strike and lockout would have a tendency to cancel out each other, with the consumers' boycott balancing both. The picture would be characterized by absolute formal freedom with regard to the play of the various interests, but in practice this freedom would be modified and regulated internally by considerations of expediency. Necessity would make for continual compromises, adjustments, and shifting combinations.

But with the introduction of government into the picture, not only does formal freedom vanish, but the tension is destroyed and the equilibrium of forces vitiated. For no purely economic power or powers can balance or checkmate the power of the sword, which, in the natural sphere, is absolute. With the incursion of this alien agent into the economic process, internal regulation gives way to external coercion of the most extreme and total character, at least in its potential. That internal regulation has been crude and faulty under individualistic capitalism cannot be denied. But the answer does not lie in subjecting the economic process to coercive manipulation from without. Given an equitable system of land tenure and taxation, it lies, rather, in the erection of extra-legal corporate machinery which will facilitate internal regulation of the economic order through the coordinated functioning of the component economic interests of society.

Berdyaev is mistaken in asserting that politics should serve economics.³⁶ "Social realism demands it," he writes. What kind of realism is this? From Diocletian to Attlee, one would be hard put to find a single historical instance where politics has served economics without dire results! For politics—that is to say, law—is force, as Bastiat remarks, and "consequently, the proper functions of the law cannot lawfully extend beyond the proper functions of force."³⁷ Be it once admitted that force may be used for any purpose other than defense, what principle shall stand in the way of tyranny?

Berdyaev's acceptance of socialism, even what he calls "personal social-

³⁶ Berdyaev, "The Russian Revolution," p. 173.

³⁷ Frederic Bastiat, *The Law* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N. Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1950), p. 28.

ism," contradicts some of his own deepest insights. In his last work, *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, this contradiction appears in striking form, as is indicated by a comparison of the following two passages:

What we must refuse is the sovereignty of the State. The State has always tended to reach beyond its normal boundaries.³⁸

In times when the question of "bread" (the symbol of economics) for human society is acute, an economic dictatorship may be accepted as necessary.³⁹

Berdyaev sensed the irreconcilability of the two ideas; in fact, the latter passage is taken from a chapter entitled "The Contradictions of Freedom." Since paradox is the very heart of his philosophy, he doubtless had little difficulty in simply accepting the inconsistency as something given. But although paradox is unquestionably appropriate as a method for describing the mystery of the anthropic being, one somehow feels that political economy, if intended as a guide to action, demands an approach which is more rationally coherent even if possibly less profound.

Toward the end of the chapter Berdyaev makes a statement which, if taken seriously, cuts the ground from under every form of coercive socialism:

For freedom man may, and should, sacrifice his life: but freedom should not be sacrificed for life.⁴⁰

He later states that "the lack of 'bread' is really a lack of 'freedom,' " but from the context it is evident that he does not mean that there can be no freedom without material security, but rather that what appears to be an economic lack is in reality a spiritual one.

Passing on to consider another element which Berdyaev believes to be true in Marxism, we find him asserting that "it is true that national selfishness and isolation, producing hostility and war, should be overcome by some supernational organisation of mankind."⁴¹ But his thinking on this subject is very different from Marxist internationalism, which he regards as "abstract and poverty-stricken."⁴² It partakes more of Solovyev's vision of world-wide *sobornost*. Berdyaev's concern for a "supernational organisation of mankind" derives largely from a mistrust of the State:

³⁸ Berdyaev, *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1952), p. 72.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁴¹ Berdyaev, "The Russian Revolution," pp. 173-4.

⁴² Berdyaev, *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, p. 152.

We must strive by all means to affirm federalism, to unite humanity on a basis which is beyond the State: the State has been a self-sufficient power, sucking the people's blood.⁴³

Yet if the National State is dangerous, how much more dangerous the World State! Berdyaev insists that national sovereignty must be abandoned, but he does not tell us how the "supernational organization of mankind" is to be prevented from turning into a crushing juggernaut. Perhaps the answer is implicit in his contention that a federation of peoples "predicates spiritual and social changes in society. By themselves, political and social solutions are powerless."⁴⁴ "The Church universal, which knows neither East nor West, is the spiritual basis for the unity of mankind."⁴⁵ A political federation can never be effective without spiritual fellowship; neither can it bring such fellowship about. *Sobornost* is the work of the Holy Spirit, acting in and through the ecumenical Church. But once mankind is bound together in genuine community by the interior realization of its spiritual oneness, what need will there be for political federation?

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AS A CRITIC of Marxism, Berdyaev is superb. If one accepts his basic premises—that personality is the "highest hierarchical value in the world" and that it is a theanthropic category—the rest naturally follows. If, as Professor Spinka suggests, his own plan for the building of a new social order is disappointingly tentative and insufficiently worked out, this does not detract from his very real contributions in pointing up the defects of both Marxism and atomistic individualism, twin spawn of the denial of transcendence.⁴⁶

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⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁴⁶ A Selected Bibliography. Works by Berdyaev: *The End of Our Time* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933). *Christianity and Class War* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933). *The Bourgeois Mind and Other Essays* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1934). *The Russian Revolution* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931); also in *Essays in Order* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1932). *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1952). *The Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937). "Human Personality and Marxism," in *Communism and Christians* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1949). "The End of Renaissance," in *The Slavonic Review* (London: June and December, 1925). "The General Line of Soviet Philosophy," in *The End of Our Time*, *op. cit.* "Man and Machine," in *The Bourgeois Mind and Other Essays*, *op. cit.* "Christianity and Human Activity," *ibid.*

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