

On Reception of Nietzsche's Idea of God in the Russian Philosophy (Late 19th – Early 20th Century)*

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Abstract—The article considers the theme of God and the motive of the death of God in the reception of the four thinkers of the Russian religious philosophy in the turn of the 20th century Vladimir Solovyov, Andrei Bely, Lev Shestov and Aleksei Losev. Attention to these very thinkers is grounded by the scheme, observing their reading of Nietzsche's ideas about God: from the Dionysian point of view or the Apollonian one. On another scale, there is the idea of the degree of manifestation of this principle in Nietzsche's understanding of the theme of God – "maximum" and "minimum" (of the Dionysian or the Apollonian).

Keywords—Friedrich Nietzsche; Vladimir Solovyov; Andrei Bely; Lev Shestov; Aleksei Losev; the death of God; Dionysian and Apollonian

I. INTRODUCTION

It is always interesting to consider the idea in the direct perception of contemporary thinkers.

Friedrich Nietzsche was the most published philosopher in Russia of the turn of the 20th century (by the way, of two turns of centuries - at the turn of the 20th-21st centuries the maximum circulation of Nietzsche books occurred again).

The theme of perception of the ideas of Nietzsche, who proclaimed the thesis "God is dead", allows us to approach such a sensitive topic as the theme of the absence of God in human life, the lack of deity as well as the theme of unbelief - which characterizes not only the crisis of faith, but also a certain part of the religious consciousness: as one of those who addressed Jesus Christ screams - "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" [1].

The article considers the representations of God in Nietzsche's thought in connection with the topic of nihilism as the general context of the Nietzschean topic of God.

Nietzsche is the philosopher whose name is strictly associated with the thesis that God is dead. In this thesis as well as some other Nietzsche put forward the foundations of

what we call post-classical, post-Enlightenment philosophy. And ethics in this period sets his attention on what Nietzsche calls "to pose morality as a problem", to ask why people can lack basic moral straits [2].

The article considers the theme of God and the motive of the death of God in the reception of the four thinkers of the Russian religious philosophy of the turn of the 20th century. Taking into account these very thinkers is grounded by the scheme, which we offer in the Conclusion, observing their reading of Nietzsche's ideas about God. This four-part scheme can be further extended by referring to other researchers of Nietzsche.

The topic that the article suggests is to examine the attitudes to Nietzsche's notion of God in Russian philosophy at the very end of the 19th century and the early 20th century (including events in 1928, because A. F. Losev's work of this period can be concerned to be the direct continuation of the earlier period of Silver age of Russian philosophy).

II. VLADIMIR SOLOVYOV ON THE IDEA OF SUPERMAN AS A DIVINE REALITY

Vladimir Solovyov was one of the most prolific and original philosophical contemporaries of Nietzsche. He immediately, sharply and unambiguously assessed the philological orientation of Nietzsche's strategy, as well as the image of Superman. The founder of the systematic philosophy in Russia, Solovyov, and a critic of all systems in philosophy, Nietzsche, are considered to be the pioneers of the new ways in the history of philosophy and culture [3]. Despite the sharp rejection of the idea of Nietzsche's Superman, Solovyov at the same time as Nietzsche criticized utilitarianism and positivism. In his dissertation *The Crisis of Western Philosophy: Against the Positivists* Solovyov focuses on the crisis of Western European rationalism, which is known also as Nietzsche's favorite object of critique – because of its internal connection with the causes of the decline of the spirit (nihilism) of European humankind.

Thus, Solovyov as a critic of the "abstract foundations" of the Western philosophy coincides with Nietzsche:

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Nietzsche is often regarded a reaction to the logical deadlocks of thought of the classical European rationalism and idealism.

Nevertheless, Solovyov as far as he is rooted in the religious discourse is different from Nietzsche's critic of the "abstract foundations. Solovyov criticized Nietzsche's image of Superman as an empty abstract linguistic notion, what Solovyov calls an empty literature ("slovestnost"). In the article "Literature or truth?" Solovyov compares the image of Superman, which is not filled with any specific content, with "the real Superman of Christ" which is fundamentally described in Christian tradition as a real historical person [4]. Solovyov emphasized that the thesis of Christ "I am the truth and the life" is extremely personal.

The Solovyov did not comment Nietzsche's idea of the death of God. It is important for him to read what is proclaimed in the new religious image – the image of Superman suggested by Nietzsche. Russian philosopher could accept that God in the hearts of modern people is dead (Solovyov is also known for his consideration of the crisis in the contemporary historical Christianity). However, for Solovyov it is important to understand what God Nietzsche is trying to give his heart to. This God (Superman), according to Solovyov, is foam emerged as linguistic constructions build by a brilliant stylist Nietzsche. This God has borrowed an image of the prophet from the ancient times but has no real power. Solovyov did not comment that the principles of Zarathustra might be regarded as the hard-won principles from the life of Nietzsche. He, as a critic of the abstract rationalism in philosophy, sees that the image of Superman offers a way of increasing the will to live, self-overcoming etc. Nevertheless, this return to very specific realities is not seen by Solovyov as sufficient. Such an ethical program lacks a major point – ethics of personality. He supposes Nietzsche's Superman as an idea of a strong will without any specific moral ideas to be a cause for a grave pessimistic concern.

III. ANDREI BELY ON A NEW MYSTICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF NIETZSCHE'S CREATIVE THEORY

Russian symbolism, an intellectual and artistic movement, was one of the most profound reception of Nietzsche in late 19th – early 20th century. They became followers of Nietzsche's philosophy in the aesthetic, psychological and metaphysical sense [5].

One of the most important theorists of symbolism, Andrei Bely accepted the delight and inspiration of the Silver age of Russian culture, on the one hand, as well as a sense of the decline of spirit, decadence, the end of the world or the end of the nineteenth century – fin de siècle – on the other. The imprint of this duality of perception of time and the role of man is found in Bely's reading of Nietzsche's ideas.

In the essay "Friedrich Nietzsche" Andrei Bely comes up with the idea of the ethical component of the doctrine: "Friedrich Nietzsche is a morality explained in the light of the theory of values – the theory of symbolism" [6]. At the same time, Bely emphasizes Nietzsche's "this-world" value

theory, which is determined by the absence of God's being in his worldview.

"A biblical walk in front of the Lord, he turns into walking in front of one's self... To know your own and to subdue one's self to their own. Here his morality is ruthless, strict" [7]. Bely notes that this "walking in front of ourselves" corresponds to the whole system of symbols of Nietzsche's philosophy, which "says nothing to us but nods us without words", that means that it is a symbolic rather than a rational-conceptual reality.

Despite Nietzsche's God rejecting ontology, Bely compares Nietzsche with Christ: "the temple of the new soul is raised by Christ... the temple was being tried to be build and by Nietzsche" [8]. Further we read: "Nietzsche himself was crucified. How do I know, maybe in his cross, it will revive another cross, gathering around the nations, which is now ... offended" [9]. Bely draws attention not only to the well-known fact of Nietzsche's self-meaning as The Crucified, but also that among the daring, sharp, poisonous propositions of Nietzsche we can find not so frequent, but even more precious, refined and gentle expressions for the value of love, beauty, sentimentality. "Oh, my soul, now no heart would be more loving than you... who could look at your smile and resist tears". "No more talking, you recovering, go to roses, to bees, to flocks of pigeons" - Who says this: Christ? No, Nietzsche" [10].

Bely as a symbolist highly appreciated Nietzsche's postulation of the non-rational foundations of culture and life. He calls it the return of personality to its musical roots. Understanding the rooting of consciousness in the "musical", vital basis of life leads to overestimation of the classical forms of religion, morality, philosophy. Bely notices that in a certain period Nietzsche falsely identified musicality in general with the music of Wagner, who appeared to be a trickster, reviving not the hero but the actor, not life, but a stage. The most important provisions of Nietzsche's philosophy (including the philosophy of religion) are related to the amendments to his understanding of Wagner aesthetics: so that the theater does not dominate over art; so that the actor does not deny the artist; and to prevent music from turning into the art of lying.

Bely takes from Nietzsche, as well as out of the general spirit of time, the theme of the fake love for one's neighbor and historical violence of philanthropists. In Nietzsche Bely appreciates the "uncompromising honesty and rebellion against the pernicious illusion" of the perverted forms of morality and God (as an impersonation of supreme values) [11]. Overall, as the researchers note, Bely is inspired by Nietzsche's creative theory, the theory of transforming man into a new personality, whose ideals (including the idea of God) are killed by the "deadening power of reason" and have remained in the past [12]. A new personality will overcome "bourgeois swamp", will create a religion of life, religion, reviving the dead spirit to life, is what Bely calls a new mystical consciousness and compares the ideas of Nietzsche with the way of Christ and "raj yoga" of India [13].

IV. LEV SHESTOV ON THE OVERCOMING VIRTUES IN THE HORIZON OF GOD

Lev Shestov, the philosopher of the existential tradition, the Russian predecessor of existentialism, is well-known for his study of the confrontation between "Athens" and "Jerusalem" in the world history of culture [14]. In this sense he is the heir of Nietzsche's clinical analysis of the rationalism of European culture and its possible alternatives. As far as Nietzsche says that a philosopher is a clinician of culture, then Lev Shestov was a clinician of rationalistic philosophy. Nietzsche is examined by Shestov from the point of view of his struggle against intellectualism in morality. A major leitmotiv in this struggle is the theme of the faith in God, which Nietzsche, according to Shestov, sought and yearned for.

In the work "The Good in the Teaching of Tolstoy and Nietzsche" (1899) Shestov notes that Nietzsche put all forces of his soul in searching the faith. Nietzsche's life was not cloudless. Severe physical suffering, tragic disappointment about the vicissitudes of virtues forced him to seek the supreme, ultimate justice, to inquire about God. But Nietzsche does not find faith, says Shestov, and if he didn't find her, then, therefore, conditions were such that it was impossible to find her. What is faith and how it is possible, if there is no a direct virtuous path to it – it is the question of Shestov in connection with the life and philosophy of Nietzsche.

An interesting opinion is expressed by Shestov about the personality of Nietzsche. "Nietzsche was, and remained until the end of his life a moral person in the full sense — and the mundane sense — of the word. He could not hurt a child, was chaste as a young girl, and all that is esteemed by people as a duty, he performed perhaps with exaggerated, too conscientious zeal" [15]. It is a contrast that we feel comparing this characteristic of personality and central statements of the philosophy of Nietzscheanism: the most expensive price a person pays for virtues, and they as well as the idea of the maximum of virtues — God — must be abandoned.

Shestov notes that Nietzsche calls to sacrifice everything comforting, holy, healing, all hopes, all faith in the hidden harmony, bliss and justice in the future. There is also the call to sacrifice God himself and, from cruelty to one's self to idolize the stone, stupidity, heaviness, fate, nothingness. The idea "To sacrifice God for nothing" becomes the motto of a man of a new age.

Shestov gives a brilliant analysis comparing the lack of faith in Nietzscheanism and disbelief of Leo Tolstoy. Where Nietzsche does not believe, do not believe and Tolstoy. But Nietzsche did not hide it, count Tolstoy did not consider it possible to tell his disciples about the emptiness in his heart, above which he erected such a brilliant building of preaching.

In order to unravel Nietzsche's skeptical attitude towards virtues and God Shestov comes up with the idea of constant overcoming the frozen, already achieved forms of virtues. "Woe to all loving ones who have not an elevation which is above their pity!", exclaims Zarathustra — and this is the key

to what is called Nietzsche's "cruelty" [16]. Nietzsche appeals to people like himself, for whom compassion is no longer a virtue, not an ideal, who, in his words, have already "gone beyond that ideal because they have achieved it" [17]. Further Shestov summarized: "We need to look for something that is above compassion, above the Good. You need to look for God" [18].

Shestov concludes that Nietzsche, unlike Tolstoy, sees the horizon of the infinite desire for virtue, and it can be called the horizon of God although Nietzsche does not call it so.

V. ALEKSEI LOSEV ON THE PRIMACY OF THE APOLLONIAN WAY OF CULTURE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE GENUINE NIETZSCHE

The youngest contemporary of Solovyov, Bely, Shestov was another outstanding thinker who carried the atmosphere of thought of the Silver age through his long life — Aleksei Losev. In his student work "Ethical-social views of Plato" (1913-14) Losev calls Nietzsche, along with Kant and Schopenhauer, a willing and unwilling apostle of pessimism in the epistemology, metaphysics and moral philosophy. In 1928, in the work "The Origin of the Ancient symbolism" Losev devotes a chapter to understanding antiquity according to the original hypothesis of Friedrich Nietzsche. In the Chapter on Nietzsche he highlights his merits in the study of antiquity and draws attention to how Nietzsche understands the religion of Apollo and Dionysus.

Apollinism appears to him as the religion of Apollo, that is the element of dreams, illusion, orderliness, and also individualism. Dionysism includes delight of intoxication, destruction of the principle of individualism, the cult of sensuality, of ecstasy, immersion in nature. But — because of the overcoming of individualism — the reunification of man with man. Losev emphasizes that such a philosophy of Dionysism should be understood as the principle of creation, creation from chaos. "With the blows of the cutter of the Dionysian sculptor there is the call: Oh, world, do you feel me, your Creator?" [19].

As far as Nietzsche is not only a philologist of antiquity, but offers a philosophical hypothesis, Losev also reads Nietzsche, offering an original philosophy. Losev calls for understanding of Dionysus and Apollo "classically", but not romantically. They need to be understood physically and not from the point of view of "the exhausted Christianity". "Romanticism is the endless pursuit and formation of the idea... seeking comfort in the unknown and uncertain. ...The classic idea is the rotation of meaning in itself, staying around its own center, blissful and uninterrupted self-made eternity in itself" [20].

Thus, Losev indirectly determines Nietzsche's attitude to Christianity and the Christian God. In the image of Dionysus and Apollo Nietzsche brings the perfect structure for the religious, but their images themselves must be understood through the prism of the apollonian beginning. According to Losev the Apollonian is more "religious" — creating the cult, ritual, order, even the supernatural as an illusion — but it is to

be understood not as a bad infinity, which was criticized by Nietzsche.

VI. CONCLUSION

So, we considered four interpretations of Nietzsche's philosophy in the Silver age of Russian culture. Summing up, it should be noted that what is common in the views on the theme of God in Nietzsche's view is the prism of connection with the theme of nihilism, denial of God and supreme values.

Soloviev criticizes Nietzsche's insufficient criticism of the nihilism of abstract thinking, he sees too much abstraction in Nietzsche's view of God.

Bely compares Nietzsche with Christ and the mystics of the East, emphasizing the role of the irrational forces and music as the force and the basis of man (even the crucifixion of Christ is seen in the endless movement of "music"). For Bely music can be a symbol of aspect of human life, complementary to the rational logical mind.

Shestov emphasizes the idea of God's irreducibility to morality, God is infinitely greater, never solidifying in the forms of lifeless ideals.

Losev asserts the primacy of the Apollonian way of culture for understanding the genuine Nietzsche. He stands for a "bodily" (physically) understanding of the culture and Apollonism.

Another conclusion about the above observed considerations may be the following classification of the four approaches to Nietzsche's ideas of God. It seems to be appropriate to apply the idea of the dichotomy of the Dionysian and the Apollonian in their more or less pronounced manifestations to the theme of the perception of Nietzsche's ideas about God by these four interpreters of Nietzsche. On the one scale, we take the question of whether the thinker sees ideas of Nietzsche about God from the point of view of attributing to Nietzsche the principle of Dionysian or the principle of Apollonian. On the other scale, let us take the idea of the degree of manifestation of this principle in Nietzsche's understanding of the theme of God – let us limit ourselves to only two conditional values of "maximum" and "minimum", which will indicate to what extent one of the four philosophers considers to be important for Nietzsche to understand God through the Dionysian or Apollonian origin – very important or "not". "Not" means that is not the focus of special attention, although such an interpretation can be traced.

Then our scheme will look as following. The idea of the maximum of the Dionysian reading of Nietzsche will belong to Shestov's reading (infinitely self-overcoming faith). The idea of a moderate-Dionysian interpretation ("minimum") will include Andrei Bely (the transformation of the bourgeois person through creativity). The idea of minimally expressed Apollonian reading belongs to Solovyov, which, although speaks about overcoming Nietzsche's rationalistic forms of culture, but believes that Nietzsche overcomes them not to enough extent, in fact remaining a prisoner of abstractions.

The idea of the maximum of the Apollonian reading will be attributed to Losev - in the view of his statement of the primacy of the Apollonian origin of culture for understanding the true Nietzsche.

Thus, the theme of perception of ideas about God in the philosophy of Nietzsche allows us to approach such a delicate topic as the theme of the absence of God in human life, which characterizes not only the crisis of faith, but also some ways of the religious consciousness itself.

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