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Russian symbolism on social aesthetics*

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Abstract. This article is a review of the book *Literature and Religious-Philosophical Thought of the Late 19th — First Third of the 20th Century. To the 165th anniversary of V.S. Solovyov* (Book 2. E.A. Takho-Godi (Ed.). Moscow: Vodoley; 2018) published with the support of A.F. Losev house-museum and the journal *Solovyov Studies*. The authors analyze the philosophical theories of the key Russian thinkers of the Silver Age, primarily the symbolists, which focus on such issues as the fate of the Russian society, the place of man in the world, cultural values, social aspects of religion, life-creation, and aesthetic understanding of social-cultural reality. The review shows the inner logic of the book based on the alternation of philosophical and literary approaches, and its main line — from personalities (V.S. Solovyov, V.F. Ern, D.S. Merezhkovsky, F.M. Dostoevsky, M.N. Katkov) and their contribution to the national philosophy and culture to the trends of the era of historical and ideological changes. The interdisciplinary approach of the book is the result of the joint work of scientific schools and generations of researchers from different countries. The book's methodology is based on the integrative approach of social aesthetics — the tool of philosophy of integral knowledge and unity, which can be applied to the field of social knowledge.

Key words: social aesthetics; culture of the Silver Age; life-creation; social-cultural values

The book under review was published as a part of the project 'Literature and Philosophy: Ways of interaction' implemented by the museum-library 'House of A.F. Losev', the Faculty of Philosophy of the Moscow State University and the journal *Solovyov Studies*. In the introduction, the Editor-in-Chief E.A. Takho-Godi emphasizes the complex structure of the book (P. 14) due to its broad methodological scope, analysis of the complex evolutionary path of the concepts under study and issues of the social crisis, its causes and consequences, specific representations of all these issues and heated debates of the intellectuals of the Silver Age. Representatives of the Russian symbolism (V.S. Solovyov, A.F. Losev, D.S. Merezhkovsky) developed their own methodology to study social-civilizational issues on the basis of such concepts as theurgy, life-creation, sophiology and some other intuitions that allow to understand social-cultural processes and constants in their multi-level structure (methodology of integral knowledge about the world and man). The very complexity of the scientific analysis based on philosophical generalizations and plural approaches determined the participation of a group of authors.

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The first book in the series considered mainly the philosophical aspects of literature and only mentioned (due to the anniversary of the 1917 Revolution) social reflection, while the second book analyzed a much broader scope of issues of a social-philosophical nature focusing on the development of the ideas of life-creation, unity, understanding of the spiritual and empirical unity of man and society by Russian writers and philosophers. The book considers the key concepts of the Russian philosophers at the turn of the epoch and of the Silver Age — F.M. Dostoevsky, L.N. Tolstoy, V.S. Solovyov, N.A. Berdyaev, S.L. Frank, A.F. Losev and others. The scope of topics is impressive: social progress, roles of the individual, nihilism, positivism and harmonious development, spiritual crisis of society and ways out of it, criticism of civilization, the trinity of truth, good and beauty, utopian thinking, searches for cultural constants and invariable values. They all refer to the creative role of the personality — life creation and interdisciplinary social aesthetics. This term is not used in the book, but it explicates its methodological basis and implicitly present in its philosophical texts.

The book aims at interpreting life creation as an ontological project that includes personal and social dimensions in the constructive and creative intentions. A.G. Gacheva defines life-creation as the anti-entropic essence of culture (P. 35): this concept is inextricably linked to aesthetics; however, it means not being sensuous-for-yourself but rather an aesthetic understanding of the social-cultural reality. The social-cultural dimension of the era of symbolism is inextricably linked with the concept of aesthetics of practical life creation [4. P. 262]. The key thesis of aesthetics of life-creation is that the laws of creating perfect forms of art should be applicable to the active design of the personal and social reality. Dostoevsky connected existing things with those that are to be, Fedorov and Solovyov insisted on the need for projective and transformative creativity with a universal mission — creation of a spiritual society.

Art is defined through its social-transformative function — what Solovyov called the first step to a positive aesthetic not as an abstract contemplation of beauty but its live embodiment which determines ethical norms and scientific paradigms. Such an embodiment is possible only in society as a space of communications. Thus, social aesthetics is implicitly present in discourses about life-creation since its value-semantic aspect appeals to the creation of art values as vital values of society without which social reality has no meaning.

The concept of social aesthetics not only affects the sensory perception of social reality but becomes an optics to see personal basic values. The general methodological principle of social aesthetics is based on the theory of integral knowledge developed by Solovyov: the good is unthinkable without truth, and the truth is unthinkable without beauty, which is determined by the organic nature of the parts and the whole (proportionality). Only a human measure, i.e. a human-peaceful or human-spiritual society can get closer to the good.

Integral knowledge comes from the ontology of unity, the logic of which is analyzed by V.I. Moiseev: he divides the threefold understanding of this logic into analysis of the history of philosophy (spirit of unity), explicit presentation of the

ontological dyad ‘being–not being’ (depends on the categories used), and multi-level dimension of the ontology of all-unity. The latter is divided into 9 levels of ‘involution’ — from the logic of the absolute to the level of society and individual. In the historical and philosophical chronology, the author mentions Losev as the last philosopher of all-unity who made a ‘dead loop’ (P. 62) — from the last level of evolution he returned to the first one, i.e., raised the social-anthropological to the absolute by logically completing the personal as expanded to the social in the spiritual reality.

Social aesthetics is a synthetic field of knowledge; therefore, it was quite organic for the Russian philosophical thought at the turn of the century when worldview systems aimed at synthesis. According to Frank, one of the key Russian social philosophers of the 20th century. “the most interesting and significant field that gave rise to the Russian thought of the 19–20 centuries, except for the religious philosophy, is historical-social philosophy; the greatest and most typical Russian religious ideas were expressed in the historical and social-philosophical analysis. That is why in the Russian literature, it is hardly possible to separate religious philosophy from historical, social and cultural philosophy — they should be considered together” [1. P. 65]. Thus, Frank emphasizes that synthesis and integration are essential features of Russian philosophy. Religious philosophy provides an ontological basis for other areas of philosophy and draws its own content from them [2].

Certainly, it is impossible to describe the features of Russian social philosophy in one book; therefore, the authors focused on the Silver Age, especially the ideas of Solovyov as the most influential thinker of the epoch. The basis of his philosophy was the concept of complete knowledge — acquisition of truth through the good expressed in beauty. Thus, aesthetics focusing on beauty as an integral part of knowledge became a part of the synthetic Russian philosophy of the 19–20 centuries, which allows to study the social dimension of aesthetics, especially the concepts of life-creation and theurgy that are used in religion, art, cultural studies and social knowledge and are represented in this integrity in philosophy of symbolism.

Apocalyptic and utopian projects of symbolists within the anthropological axiology are considered by B.N. Tarasov. He studies the conflict between culture of ‘I’ and apocalyptic elements of civilization. The German philosopher V.S. Kissel uses a similar method in the analysis of civilizational processes in Solovyov’s *Readings on God-Manhood*. Here the focus changes from the civilizational level to the social level and then, according to Solovyov’s concept of integral knowledge, the social is defined through the prism of the eschatological (the possibility of an ideal (spiritual) society is discussed).

According to Frank, apocalyptic, eschatological and utopian ideas in the social discourses of the Russian philosophy are inseparable and integrate into each other as parts of the united whole. M.A. Prikhodko analyzes this integration on the example of social utopia in the works of Solovyov and compares it with the eschatology of John the Theologian. He believes that Solovyov in his last work

Three Conversations considers the possibility of the Kingdom of God on earth, which was quite relevant for the social unrest of the socialist type. Russian intelligentsia accepted Marxism as a practical guide for creating a utopian society based on the principles of positivism and humanism. For Solovyov and his followers this meant, in the religious perspective, approaching the end of history and the ‘kingdom of antichrist’ and, in the metaphysical perspective, strengthening the individual as prevailing over the whole. In the future, the situation would change to the absorption of the individual by the universal and dissolution of the individual in a general order imposed from outside.

M.V. Pantina compares the political views of Joseph de Maistre and Solovyov and emphasizes that, following the logic of synthetic metaphysics, in the Russian thought political and social aspects are strongly connected with theological ones (spiritual dimension of being). The author’s comparison is important not only for revealing the social-political and religious reflections of two philosophers, but also for the appeal to the principles of all-unity even at the level of the state, society and church. According to Solovyov, the moral basis of the state power is true faith, and both are impossible without each other — they form a unity. The Western European interpretation of the basic moral principles of statehood which is presented in the works of de Mestre appeals to one basis — faith, i.e. people’s trust in each other and in the authorities, which leads to strengthening of only one basis and cannot be accepted by Solovyov as a correct political decision.

An interesting way of studying the all-unity in social-political practices is presented by J. Dobieszewski. In the context of the consolidation issues as connected with the national question, the Solovyov-Dostoevsky tandem became a classic one for considering the fate and destiny of the Russian people. The author criticizes this tandem on the basis of the Slavophil ideology starting from the famous *Pushkin Speech* of Dostoevsky which Solovyov appreciated for the national self-determination part. Even in the *Readings on God-Manhood*, he opposed social-political universalism and national egoism — he gave up the ideas of the Slavophiles. *Pushkin Speech* returns to the mission of the Slavic people, but, unlike A. Khomyakov, K. Leontiev and N. Danilevsky, Dostoevsky does not glorify this nation over others but presents it as a part of the all-nation family, however, with a unique feature — all-inheritance or all-responsiveness: “Solovyov did not admire the supra-individual Orthodox-conciliar consciousness of the nation, he did not praise the community. Nevertheless, in the features of the Russian people and in the history of Russia, he sought arguments for his Slavophil-universalist position and against its main threat — the Slavophil-nationalist program (P. 260).

In Chapter III, the authors examine the journals’ polemics of the era consisting of two lines — liberal-democratic (westernistic) and conservative-protective (slavophilic). V.A. Voropaev and D.P. Ivinsky focus on M.N. Katkov — one of the most influential public figures of the late 19th century. The social-political discourse was changed by the ethnic-cultural discourse in the article of E.A. Volodchenko who considered Katkov’s ideas through the concepts of E.P. Blavatskaya. The unexpected kinship of their views is determined by the idea

of the special path of Russia and Slavs and the political idea of autocracy. Contemporaries saw Katkov's goal as 'to prevent all attempts of progress in the European sense' (P. 229), and Blavatskaya agreed with him and emphasized the identity and national isolation of Russia.

After general theoretical questions of all-unity, the authors of the book consider the social-philosophical issues of the era of riots and revolutions. D.D. Romanov studies the nihilistic ideas of N.A. Berdyaev, S.L. Frank, I.A. Ilyin, P.A. Florensky and K.N. Leontiev): nihilism is presented as an antithesis to life-creation in social aesthetics. Despite the Creator's desire to express the highest values of humanity, the rational European individualism remains outside the social as alienated from the spiritual unity by the extreme nihilism unable to overcome the natural inertia. Rationalism, moralism and existential revolt are of the same kind. The next chapters — 'Philosophy at the crossroads of the Silver Age' and 'Religious-philosophical searches of the 20th century — show the logical development of nihilistic ideas in the reactionary aspirations of the new religious consciousness (the social-religious project of symbolists) and theurgic philosophy of D. Merezhkovsky, N. Berdyaev and V. Ivanov (sociological studies show similar spiritual searches of the contemporary youth [3]).

E.A. Takho-Godi believes that Solovyov and Losev criticized the positivist theory of social progress on the basis of the dialectic of relative and absolute myth-making: "Solovyov's metaphor turns into a full-fledged symbol of a rationally dehumanized world, a desolated being" (P. 405). Neoplatonism and sophiology oppose solipsism and nihilism into which the theory of social progress degenerates. The study does not assert that progress is impossible or unnecessary but poses a philosophical question 'what is progress?'. The author comes to the idea of an aesthetic object as possible only as opposite and dialectically produced by the positivist progress. This aesthetic object can be the 'choral', spiritual beginning of society and its consolidation basis opposite to the materialistic atomicity — metaphysical emptiness of 'meon'. This individual atomicity obeys the laws of empiricism within the methodology of natural sciences, but the spiritual dimension requires a completely different methodology.

According to S.A. Seregina considering the poetry of S.A. Yesenin and N.A. Klyuyev, for symbolists, the human life-creation is inextricably linked with theurgy: both symbolists were influenced by Solovyov's ideas of the artist's theurgical 'mission' — to transform the reality and realize the ideal of transcendent timeless beauty in order to recreate the order of life, which again proves the need for social aesthetics. The author believes that 'creation of a universal spiritual organism' (P. 368) is the foundation of theurgic aesthetics in the social perspective, and the artist should 'translate symbols', i.e. remove the communicative-creative act from the sphere of pure art to the practical field.

The foreign authors of the book focused on the metamorphosis of traditions in the Russian thought. The authors from China (Li Yayue), Italy (J. Rimondi), Germany (M.K. Kshondzer) and France (S.A. Garciano) examined the idea of all-unity in different methodologies of foreign schools of philosophy, philology and

sociology. Thus, Rimondi analyzes the metaphysics of love in the works of Losev in different perspective. In the comparative perspective, the author compares different views on the human and divine love (metaphysics of gender by Berdyaev, social-religious system of Frank, gender-centered philosophy of Rozanov, transcendent sophiology of Solovyov). Losev focused on differentiation on the spiritual basis, which appeals to Plato, but went further — to Christianity that defined love through the Trinity; therefore, ontology of the absolute meaning of love is added to the communicative aspect (eros as the connecting principle). This definition of love follows Solovyov's ideas, so the question is 'where is Losev's approach?'. It is found in the description of the possibility which love provides to epistemology: "What makes knowledge possible is the immersion of the subject in the object — love is a spiritual united substantiality. The relationship between the Self and the other that generates knowledge is a form of 'ontological' love that reveals the highest secret of being" (P. 425).

Kshondzer adds some Georgian philosophy to the book — analysis of Grigol Robakidze's perception of V. Rozanov (theory of Self) and A. Bely (combination of philosophy and artistic literature) ideas. Robakidze divides all thinkers into two categories according to their attitude to 'things, time, and chaos' (P. 456): the first admire life, try to understand its challenges, create systems of worldviews and artistic language based on sympathy; the second admire disintegration, try to decompose and analyze things, time and chaos to overcome them and get out of their power. Bely represents the second type for he wants to destroy the existing order and norms of culture, to bring the language of philosophy to the level of creating new concepts and to semantically reorganize these concepts to create a new world.

Garziano studies philosophy of memory (emigration) in its creative-constructive aspect. On the example of emigrants of the Silver Age (I.A. Bunin, L.I. Shestov, N.A. Berdyaev, V.V. Nabokov), he identifies the autobiographical method of self-identification under abrupt changes in social roles: "The historical course destroyed by the Russian Revolution, created independent memory blocks for the creative work. The paradox of the literary memory is that it is to preserve the continuity of time and at the same time to ensure its break (P. 497). The gap in the anthropological unity of 'body-feelings-rationality' can be overcome by remembering and recording the results of these practices in the philosophical and literary texts. The author believes in the possibility of gaining identity through autobiographical practices: "The heterogeneity of memory consistently leads to the semantic unity of poetic-autobiographical discourse, and its multi-valued potential serves to maintain a halo of all possible semantic glimpses around the only possible meaning" (P. 498). Thus, the text helps the person to feel the wholeness of his being.

I.I. Evlampiev and I.Yu. Matveeva study the memory issue in the philosophy of memory of Tolstoy. The authors conclude that late Tolstoy's ideas correspond to the ideas of A. Bergson. Here memory is also an aesthetic category for it allows the person to implement life-creating strategies.

In general, the Editorial Board of the series develops the contemporary research strategies by addressing interdisciplinarity and, thus, methodologically helps to master the categories (theurgy, life-creation and so on) of new social-

philosophical discussions that focus on social aesthetics in both academic-research and social-practical perspectives.

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Русский символизм о социальной эстетике*

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Статья представляет собой рецензию на коллективную монографию «Литература и религиозно-философская мысль конца XIX — первой трети XX века. К 165-летию Вл. Соловьева (Вып. 2 / Отв. ред. и сост. Е.А. Тахо-Годи. М.: Водолей, 2018), опубликованную при поддержке дома-музея А.Ф. Лосева и журнала «Соловьевские исследования». Авторы монографии анализируют философские концепции главных отечественных мыслителей Серебряного века, в первую очередь символистов, сосредоточенные на таких ключевых темах, как судьба российского общества, место человека в мире, ценности культуры, социальные аспекты религии, жизнотворчество, а также эстетическое понимание социокультурной реальности. Рецензия показывает внутреннюю логику книги, построенную на чередовании философского и литературоведческого подходов, и основную ее линию — от персоналий (В.С. Соловьев, В.Ф. Эрн, Д.С. Мережковский, Ф.М. Достоевский, М.Н. Катков) и их вклада в становление отечественной философии и культуры до тенденций эпохи исторических и мировоззренческих переломов. Междисциплинарный подход монографии — результат совместной работы научных школ и поколений исследователей из разных стран. Методологическим основанием книги стал интегративный подход социальной эстетики — инструмент философии цельного знания и всеединства, применимый к области социального знания.

Ключевые слова: социальная эстетика; культура Серебряного века; жизнотворчество; социокультурные ценности

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