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# Morphology of V.N. Ilyin in the Context of World Philosophical Thought

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Abstract. The research is devoted to the morphology that V.N. Ilyin developed in the work Static and Dynamics of Pure Form and other archival texts. Morphology is central to the philosophy of V.N. Ilyin, but it remains an unexplored subject. The article's author explores the morphology of the philosopher from a historical and philosophical point of view. In addition to apparent influences (G.W. Leibniz, E. Husserl, N. Lossky), the article's author revealed the connection of V.N. Ilyin's ideas with the history of Western European philosophy and his attitude to medieval thinkers. The author considered how V.N. Ilyin understood and assessed his modern philosophy and its results by the middle of the twentieth century. V.N. Ilyin especially paid attention to phenomenology and its connection with morphology, analyzing phenomenology's influence on existential philosophy. In addition to phenomenology, V.N. Ilyin highly appreciated the intuitism of H. Bergson and N. Lossky. The third main philosophical direction in the twentieth century for V.N. Ilyin was religious philosophy (Neo-Thomists and followers of H. Bergson), which aimed at creating axiology, a new system of values. V.N. Ilyin sought to combine various philosophical ideas in the project of morphology based on logic and scientific methodology. He stated the need to reform formal logic and create "metalogic" that would be more consistent with the philosophical tasks of the twentieth century. The morphology of V.N. Ilyin is based on the idea of synthesis and focuses on creating universal science. The comparison of various philosophical ideas of the twentieth century with morphology makes it possible to understand better his philosophical worldview, the course of his reflections, and the meaning of the morphological project.

Keywords: ontology, gnoseology, metaphysics, synthesis, medieval philosophy, phenomenology, existentialism

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# Морфология В.Н. Ильина в контексте мировой философской мысли

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Аннотация. Исследование посвящено морфологии, которую В.Н. Ильин развивал в работе «Статика и динамика чистой формы» и других архивных текстах. Морфология занимает центральное место в философии В.Н. Ильина, но до настоящего времени остается недостаточно изученной темой. Исследуется морфология В.Н. Ильина с историкофилософской точки зрения. Кроме очевидных влияний (Г.В. Лейбниц, Э. Гуссерль, Н.О. Лосский), выявляется связь идей В.Н. Ильина с историей западноевропейской философии, его отношение к средневековым мыслителям. Затем рассматривается, как В.Н. Ильин понимал и оценивал современную ему философию, ее итоги к середине ХХ в. В.Н. Ильин особенно обращал внимание на феноменологию и ее связь с морфологией, анализировал влияние феноменологии на экзистенциальную философию. Кроме феноменологии, В.Н. Ильин высоко оценивал интуитивизм А. Бергсона и Н.О. Лосского. Третьим магистральным философским направлением в ХХ в. В.Н. Ильин считал религиозную философию (неотомистов и последователей А. Бергсона), которая направлена на создание аксиологии, новой системы ценностей. В.Н. Ильин стремился объединить различные философские идеи в проекте морфологии на основе логики и научной методологии. Он заявил о необходимости реформировать формальную логику и создать «металогику», которая бы более соответствовала философским задачам XX в. Морфология В.Н. Ильина основана на идее синтеза, ориентирована на создание универсальной науки. Сопоставление различных философских идей XX в. с морфологией позволяет лучше понять философское мировоззрение В.Н. Ильина, ход его размышлений и смысл морфологического проекта.

Ключевые слова: онтология, гносеология, метафизика, синтез, средневековая философия, феноменология, экзистенциализм

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## Introduction

From a philosophical point of view, Vladimir Nikolaevich Ilyin (1890-1974) was until recently best known as the author of *Static and Dynamics of Pure Form*. published in 1996, and the creator of the project of morphology. In the early twentieth century, the era of universal philosophical systems was thought to be over. Nevertheless, thinkers who offered their projects occasionally appeared, claiming to be fundamental and achieve comprehensive knowledge. Such was V.N. Ilyin, who took the concept of form as a basis for constructing his project. In Static and Dynamics of Pure Form, he argued that all forms (images) in human perception have a visual-spatial character. Form is an image concept, but it relates to the nature of a human being, a natural ability to see and perceive the combination of light and darkness with eyes. However, there are extra-spatial forms besides spatial forms, including questions and problems with no definite answers and solutions (many mathematical equations, metaphysical problems, and undefined feelings). The forms have different degrees of closure and openness. Their dynamic, forceful nature unites them. Proceeding from this position, Ilvin argued that there are three concepts whose meanings coincide — spirit, form, and force. In his opinion, being has an absolute unity, uniting life and thought, so any form corresponds to a "thought-image".

At the beginning of *Static and Dynamics of Pure Form*, Ilyin called his chosen philosophical method *the path of absolute creativity*. This creativity has sources, or, as Ilyin formulated it, "foundations," "primordialities." In this case, Ilyin proposed to abandon the usual Modern Era philosophy of choosing a single "original" (matter, substance, monad). Many forms may have different origins in his morphology, with much hidden from man and his thinking. Ilyin proposed a fundamental reform of philosophy to overcome the opposition between essence and existence, being and consciousness. In his opinion, the usual categories of classical philosophy from Aristotle to Kant no longer work in the twentieth century. For a new picture of the world, characteristic of the epoch of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we need a new philosophy: his "phenomenologically taken morphology and the formula of form" [1. P. 114]. It is necessary to understand his morphology, its main tasks, and its place in the history of philosophy of the twentieth century.

# Morphology from a Historical-Philosophical Standpoint

If one tries to evaluate the project of morphology, one should identify historical and philosophical influences to determine the originality and novelty of V.N. Ilyin's doctrine. The philosopher recognized several influences on his morphology — Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, Nikolay Lossky's intuitionism, and Gottfried

Wilhelm Leibniz's monadology. The totality of such different influences makes us assume there were other, less noticeable, and obvious ideas, concepts, and doctrines that Ilyin considered when constructing morphology.

One of the sources for philosopher's philosophical reflections was the Church Fathers' heritage, the basis of which is a holistic view of being, knowledge, and human. Additional sources for Ilvin were religious psychology and philosophical anthropology. In the context of these sources, it becomes clear why Leibniz, Husserl, and Lossky were close to V.N. Ilvin. For Leibniz, monads are universal elements that permeate all existence, as monads form a hierarchy, the essence of which is the ascent from the lowest monads to the highest. Husserl perceived the whole world from the point of view of Eidos, which forms human consciousness and thinking, i.e., phenomenology is connected again with universal elements of being. Intuition in Lossky's understanding opens for human thinking a holistic being, all parts of which are interconnected (the central thesis is "everything is immanent to everything"). Thus, V.N. Ilyin's choice of doctrines and concepts to justify morphology becomes more apparent, and the general principle of selection is revealed. However, his primary idea is to realize philosophical and theological synthesis using the concept of form. According to his general ideological attitude, form is not an ordinary philosophical concept (as, e.g., in Aristotle) but a philosophical and theological idea. The whole world in Ilyin's morphology is a hierarchy of forms subordinate to the Supreme Form, or the source of all forms -God. Forms are not static but dynamic, i.e., their essence is creativity and spiritual development, consistent with Christian doctrine and church ideas about the structure of the human soul.

The idea of synthesis and the connection between morphology and Christian medieval philosophy was emphasized by the famous researcher K.G. Isupov in his 2000 article *Between Apollo and Dionysus* [2. P. 33]. A similar opinion was expressed by A.F. Gusakov, the author of the dissertation *Morphology in the Philosophy of V.N. Ilyin* [3], defended at Lomonosov Moscow State University in 2009. For instance, he referred to V.N. Ilyin's increased interest in medieval thought and his lectures *History of Medieval Philosophy in Connection with the General History of Culture, Science, and Theology.* We should verify this point of view and consider V.N. Ilyin's attitude to medieval philosophy and its ideological connection with *Static and Dynamics of Pure Form.* 

For instance, take V.N. Ilyin's lecture on *St. Thomas Aquinas*. The lecture highly evaluates certain features that characterized the famous medieval scholastic (systematicity, logical consistency). At the same time, Ilyin pointed out that St. Thomas Aquinas significantly contributed to the formation of secular humanism, laid the foundations of Modern era philosophy, and was a direct predecessor of Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel. According to Ilyin, in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, reason, based on Aristotle's logic, plays a prominent role, and faith has no place (reason acts, and faith is inactive). In other words, the harmony between faith

and knowledge, to which Thomas Aquinas aspired, as Ilyin believed, did not turn out.

On the contrary, the self-sufficiency of cognition began to be asserted, and the way to eliminating faith and the triumph of rationalism in the subsequent period was opened. In this statement lies the main divergence between Thomas Aquinas and V.N. Ilyin, who appreciated the opponents of Thomism and scholasticism (e.g., Bonaventure) and favored Christian Neoplatonism and mystical philosophy more highly. The similarity of the morphology to *Summa Theologica* or other medieval authors can only be external and tentative.

The manuscript Static and Dynamics of Pure Form, or Essay of General Morphology references medieval authors (St. Augustine, Nicholas of Cusa), yet not separately but with other thinkers of different epochs. For instance, V.N. Ilvin opposed the "clarity" and "distinctness" proclaimed by Descartes in Modern era philosophy, stating: "Indeed, "clarity" and "distinctness" are predicates, "accidents" of some essences. These entities themselves may not be or be understood as "clear" or "distinct" but on the contrary: "dark" and "confused." Otherwise, how could the greatest geniuses of the world - such as Socrates, St. Augustine, the author of Areopagitica, Nicholas of Cusa — gain consciousness not only of their complete, though "learned" ignorance (docta ignorantia), "apophatic (negative) theology" (Areopagitica), and "knowledge of their ignorance" of Socrates?" [1. P. 95]. Thus, V.N. Ilyin is united with some medieval thinkers not by the desire for logic and systematicity in the spirit of Thomas Aquinas' Summa but, on the contrary, by recognizing unrecognizable essences underlying being. Medieval thinkers are presented in V.N. Ilvin's reflections from the point of view of a unified philosophical tradition going from Socrates and Plato through the Middle Ages to individual authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, the Russian philosopher emphasized that "fundamentals" are always hidden from cognition, so one should recognize the picture of the world existing in ancient and medieval philosophy. He argued: "For this "immense everything" there is the term "world," which is not quite accurate in the philosophical and scientific sense of the translation of the ancient word "cosmos" (κόσμος). In our sense, it rather corresponds to the "unlimited" (άπειρον) of Anaximander, the "Brahma" of the Hindus, the "fire"  $(\pi \tilde{\upsilon} \rho)$  of Heraclitus and the Stoics (same as logos =  $\lambda \dot{\upsilon} \gamma \sigma c$ ), the "tao" of the Chinese and, finally, the One whom "no one has ever seen," according to the terminology of Christian writing" [1. P. 94]. From this and other quotations, we may conclude that V.N. Ilyin consciously strived for synthesis, which he stated at the very beginning of Static and Dynamics of Pure Form (morphology as "a system of philosophy, theology, and scientific methodology" [1. P. 91]). Unlike Vladimir Solovyov with his idea of synthesis of philosophy, religion, and science, V.N. Ilyin tried to give his system of morphology the character of universal science, i.e., to make it not a series of abstract metaphysical statements but to develop a holistic worldview and scientific methods that reveal the content of concrete forms, their life relationship (culture, human psychology, and so on). We shall assume that he is

better considered from his contemporary philosophical context. The twentiethcentury philosophers had the most significant influence on his worldview. The unpublished article of V.N. Ilyin from 1957 can serve as a confirmation of this point of view.

# Morphology in the Context of Twentieth-Century Western Philosophy

In V.N. Ilyin's article *The Current State of Philosophical Thought in the West in Connection with the Problem of Creating New Philosophical Values* (1957), twentieth-century philosophy has the following genealogy: the basis and the main impetus for its development was Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. It gave birth to existential philosophy, the problems of which "continue to excite minds and be debated to this day, although not with that intoxicating passion, as we saw in the interval between the two wars"<sup>1</sup>. He said phenomenology was a philosophy prone to intensive development ("progress") and various interpretations. V.N. Ilyin gives Gustav Shpet, Max Scheler, and Martin Heidegger examples. Further, in the same row, Ilyin adds the "philosophy of form," including his doctrine of morphology.

Mentioning the works Static and Dynamics of Pure Form, Zero, Point and Monad, Materialism and Matter, Dialectics of Consciousness and Symbolism of Light, V.N. Ilyin refers them to "the direction of combined phenomenology and morphology"<sup>2</sup>. Thus, for the philosopher, morphology is evolutionarily and ideologically inseparable from phenomenology, which disintegrates into many interpretations. However, more than phenomenology alone is needed to build a fullfledged philosophy, which considers it necessary to involve more intuitivism of Henri Bergson and Nikolay Lossky. V.N. Ilyin perceives phenomenology and intuitivism not dogmatically but through the prism of rather vast understanding; he is attracted only by the methods of intentional analysis, not by specific conclusions made by different thinkers. Based on this, he brings opposite philosophers together, considering the commonality of problems rather than ideological contradictions to be necessary. In his opinion, many philosophical authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are united by the anthropological crisis that engulfed the world in that era, the interest in anthropology and psychology, and the influence of such authors as Søren Kierkegaard and Fyodor Dostoevsky.

V.N. Ilyin highly appreciated the twentieth-century French philosophy, explaining the favorable conditions for its active development by the fact that the philosophical process in Germany and Russia, despite some outstanding thinkers, was interrupted by the ideological expansion of German National Socialism and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Archive of Alexander Solzhenitsyn House of Russia Abroad. F. 31. Op. 1. Ed. chr. 127. V.N. Ilyin. The Current State of Philosophical Thought in the West in Connection with the Problem of Creating New Philosophical Values. P. 2. (In Russian).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Archive of Alexander Solzhenitsyn House of Russia Abroad. F. 31. Op. 1. Ed. chr. 127. V.N. Ilyin. The Current State of Philosophical Thought in the West in Connection with the Problem of Creating New Philosophical Values. P. 3. (In Russian).

Russian Communism. He notes: "France gave the world such a genius as Henri Bergson, who alone is worth an entire Academy. In addition to this exceptional philosophical and literary genius, France shone with the names of Charles Renouvier, Emile Boutroux, Denier, Blondel, Laberthonnière, epistemologist Meyerson, earlier — also epistemologist and philosopher of exact science Henri Poincaré"<sup>3</sup>. According to V.N. Ilyin, if in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany was the leader in quantity and quality of philosophical production, then in the 1920s—1930s, France became the leading country in European philosophy.

V.N. Ilvin especially emphasized the religious direction in French philosophy, represented by neo-Thomists (Jacques Maritain, Étienne Gilson, and others) and followers of H. Bergson. Thus, e.g., he writes about Maurice Blondel and Louis Lavelle: "Blondel is one of the creators of an interesting ontology of cognition, the duality of subject and object, which is adhered to by intuitivists, as well as by the author of these lines. The most important writings, read with almost as much ease as those of his brilliant teacher, present a real, grandiose as it were an *introduction* to the philosophy of the particular ecclesiastical faith and to bypass Blondel as well as his kindred in attitude-though completely independent and even more talented Louis Lavelle (1883-1951) — it is simply impossible for anyone currently engaged in theology or religious-philosophical problems, without falling into ridiculous backwardness and helplessness of thought technique"<sup>4</sup>. Thus, French philosophers attract V.N. Ilyin's attention, first of all, from a "technical" or methodological point of view and as examples of how it is possible to combine church faith with philosophy. However, the Russian philosopher favors Lavelle, whom he considers close to Plato (unlike Maurice Blondel) and the creator of not only ontology but also axiology. V.N. Ilyin considered one of the most important tasks of philosophy to create an objective doctrine of values. He found this in Lavelle: "Lavelle's main ontological categories correspond to the main axiological categories, such as good, value, ideal. Especially new and brilliantly combined in Lavelle's *Plato's idea* and what could be called *entelechial* ideal, which in his case arises and grows into actual value through communion with *absolute being*"<sup>5</sup>. In addition to Lavelle, V.N. Ilyin positively evaluated the Christian philosophy of Gabriel Marcel and gave the most negative characteristic to Jean-Paul Sartre, whom he rejected for his atheism and considered a preacher of "black, nihilistic freedom". Thus, the general picture that V.N. Ilvin drew in his 1957 article looks as follows: in Germany, E. Husserl created phenomenology, under the influence of which

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Archive of Alexander Solzhenitsyn House of Russia Abroad. F. 31. Op. 1. Ed. chr. 127. V.N. Ilyin. The Current State of Philosophical Thought in the West in Connection with the Problem of Creating New Philosophical Values. P. 7. (In Russian).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Archive of Alexander Solzhenitsyn House of Russia Abroad. F. 31. Op. 1. Ed. chr. 127. V.N. Ilyin. The Current State of Philosophical Thought in the West in Connection with the Problem of Creating New Philosophical Values. P. 11. (In Russian).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Archive of Alexander Solzhenitsyn House of Russia Abroad. F. 31. Op. 1. Ed. chr. 127. V.N. Ilyin. The Current State of Philosophical Thought in the West in Connection with the Problem of Creating New Philosophical Values. P. 12. (In Russian).

existentialism appeared in different variants as a vast direction oriented to the study of man. Then philosophical primacy goes to French philosophy, which has both "heroes" (H. Bergson, M. Blondel, L. Lavelle, G. Marcel) and "anti-heroes" (J.-P. Sartre). Nevertheless, the future belongs to religious philosophy, capable of creating new values. To this kind of philosophy, V.N. Ilyin attributed morphology, which combines the best of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophical thought.

V.N. Ilyin's general criteria for evaluating philosophical ideas are understandable. However, given that he applies the idea of synthesis to the most different — including contradictory — philosophical doctrines, a natural question arises: how can they be consistent in morphology? V.N. Ilyin sought to solve this problem, stating that morphology is a strictly scientific system of ideas created based on universal logic. Consequently, it is necessary to consider not only V.N. Ilyin's historical and philosophical views but also his attitude to logic.

# **Morphology and Logic**

Among the archival texts, V.N. Ilyin's lectures on the logic and methodology of exact sciences, dated 1955 and partially published in 2017, have survived [4]. At the beginning of the lectures, V.N. Ilyin stated: "Logic and psychology have not only not shaken for the past 50 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but have immeasurably increased in their weight and the interest represented by these sciences. Specificity, practical significance, and justification in the achieved results of both sciences stand as high as never before" [4. P. 298]. According to him, such importance is since logic, like psychology, serves as a basis for justification of worldview, and protection of genuine science from its "falsifications." Only a scientifically developed worldview can be the starting point in general for philosophy and, in particular, for morphology. Logic plays a form-forming or morphological role, meaning it is a part of general morphology. However, for Ilyin's morphology, it is also imperative that logic, in addition to its essential features (critical attitude, striving for verification of conclusions, struggle against vagueness of judgments and inferences), "has a lot of originality, elegance, slenderness of outlines and beauty, which is also peculiar to mathematics" [4. P. 304-305].

At the end of the lectures, summarizing the course, V.N. Ilyin stated the necessity of transition from formal logic to metalogic and morphology. He justified the necessity of such a reform in two theses: "1. It is necessary to go further than the usual formal inductive-deductive logic in the matter of working, methodological efficiency, and, at the same time, expanding and deepening the sphere of grasping the investigating mind. 2. It is necessary to develop firm and, at the same time, flexible principles of the doctrine of values — the science of axiology — which should be connected by the ties of consubstantiality with ontology, i.e., with the doctrine of being and with the doctrine of being true, not fake, not with being, becoming, passed off as being" [4. P. 310—311]. Further on, V.N. Ilyin explained the primary meaning of his proposals. "Expansion" of logic corresponds to the situation developed in world philosophy and science by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century. As Einstein's theory of relativity led to radical changes in scientific ideas, previously based on the discoveries of Newton and Galileo, the philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is required to create a new type of logic, which V.N. Ilyin proposed to call metalogic. He proposed to rely on synthesizing several areas of philosophical knowledge (formal logic "expands" towards axiology and ontology) and his concept of morphology as a universal science. V.N. Ilyin, recounting the main theses of morphology, drew the audience's attention to several points directly relevant to logic. From his standpoint, formal logic is static, but morphology assumes statics and dynamics since images constantly change. To cover all the diversity of forms, a metalogic is necessary, which will take into account the ratio of statics and dynamics (change of forms) because, according to V.N. Ilyin's definition, form is "a certain being, due to this fact being simultaneously a duality of essence and existence" [4. P. 314]. It was in his reasoning about the reform of logic that V.N. Ilyin used the definition "method of morphology" instead of the concept of "system," by which he meant "a complete synthesis of statics and dynamics" ("essence and existence") [4. P. 320]. If the "system" V.N. Ilyin only declared and potentially assumed as the goal of his research, then his method is universal. It is designed to cover the broadest possible range of problems of logic, ontology, and axiology and ultimately to overcome the disintegration of philosophical knowledge into a multitude of narrowly specialized directions. In other words, the reform of logic should lead to a general transformation of philosophy and a change in scientific methodology.

# Conclusion

For several reasons, V.N. Ilyin's morphological project was not understood and appreciated during the author's lifetime. First, he needed to strive for a more straightforward presentation of his ideas, be more enthusiastic about the research process, and search for new formulations and definitions. Secondly, due to the circumstances of his emigrant life and the complex twists and turns of his fate, the leading work on morphology, *Static and Dynamics of Pure Form*, and its additions were not published during the author's lifetime. Thus, the morphological project remained to be discovered by his contemporaries. Third, the numerous published articles created a distorted impression of him — he was perceived not as an author striving to create a philosophical and theological system but as a journalist and publicist who actively wrote on various topics unrelated to science or scientific research. As a result, even V.V. Zenkovsky, who has known V.N. Ilyin well since university, in *History of Russian Philosophy*, mentioned him only as an author who "published several works concerning the problems of philosophical systematics" [5. P. 864] but characterized them as "membra disjecta" ("disparate parts").

The perception of V.N. Ilyin as a minor author, publicist, journalist, and lecturer could have persisted for a long time if not for the transfer of his archive to the House of Russian Abroad in 2005. The study of the archival heritage gradually revealed V.N. Ilyin as a thinker with diverse interests, showed the scale of his

personality, and made significant additions to the understanding of his morphology. After the publication of *Static and Dynamics of Pure Form*, the publication of the books *Russian Science* [4] and *Russian Philosophy* [6], active study of diaries, drafts, and sketches stored in the archival collection, it became clear that morphology is not just a declaration about the creation of a universal science, but a consistent disclosure of personal philosophical outlook, a reflection of existential tragic experience, to which V.N. Ilyin tried to give a scientific form.

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