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WORLD CRISIS THROUGH THE PHILOSOPHY OF S.L. FRANK

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the causes of the modern global crisis based on the philosophy of the Russian thinker S.L. Frank. It is shown that the crisis is caused by financial preferences of people and the underestimation of its spiritual side. Frank's philosophy helps to understand that the modern crisis is the result of a long-term trend that had developed back during the Age of Enlightenment. The essence of this trend is to view history as a process that takes place in accordance with objective laws that are independent of the will of people. As a result, the current crisis is seen either as a manifestation of economic laws that imply the recurrent advent of the crises or as the result of destructive activities of individuals with considerable political leverage and attempting to violate these laws. Frank believed it was a false view. He assumed that the attitude to history as to a natural process had a negative impact on the lives of each individual and the society in general. From this perspective, a person has only two alternatives: either to become a puppet of the laws of history having completely lost his autonomy, or to organize a revolt doomed to defeat since there is no sense to rebel against eternal and unchanged laws. Frank does not deny the objective nature of economic laws, but highlights that if the material side begins to play a major role in human life, the mankind loses a large part of its human status.

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Keywords: Philosophy of history, crisis, subject of history, spiritual values.



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1. Introduction

The global crisis that is currently developing right in front of your eyes makes humanity think about many different things and thus raises many questions. Perhaps the most important and widely discussed among them are the questions concerning the causes of the crisis and how to overcome it. All media are filled with reflections on these issues. They provide a detailed analysis of economic and political mechanisms that led to the crisis and explore various options for recovery.

However, it is noteworthy that the discussion of these issues focuses, in the vast majority of cases, on their economic or, in the best-case scenario, political aspects. The causes usually point to unreasonable policies of the world powers, the wars in the Middle East and other regions of the world, the instability of the exchange rate, etc. Everyone is engaged in economy and politics and almost no one seriously explores the spiritual aspect of the problem, which, in our opinion, is very important.

The discussion of this topic usually does not take into account the obvious fact that the factors of spiritual order often have a decisive impact on all other social processes exactly in the turning historical epochs, when the society is undergoing the transformation of conventional forms of life. A classic model of taking this circumstance into account was given in Weber's (1930) work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Its author proves that capitalism would not have taken place without the Reformation. Fukuyama (1989) wrote on this issue: "in order to understand the emergence of modern capitalism and the motivation of profit, it was necessary to study their predecessors in the kingdom of spirit" (p. 52).

2. Problem Statement

The considered problem is fundamental in understanding the history. Its solution will make it clear whether the history will be perceived as a natural and deterministic process, the personal will of the participants of which, almost means nothing, or as a sphere of possible, in which nothing is predetermined in advance, but there is space for creative forces of a person and the realization of his ideals. Hence, there are two different options for the attitude to the phenomena of crisis in the society. In the first case, the crisis is perceived as a consequence of inevitable, objective processes, which a person shall try to survive with minimum losses to his material well-being. A person can neither avoid nor prevent these processes, as they occur in a sphere independent of his consciousness. In the second case, the crisis is perceived not as a fatal manifestation of forces that exceed human abilities and dominate them, but as a mistake made by a person as a result of his careless actions. It is important to identify which of these options take place in a real historical process. The answer to this question depends on the solution of the modern problem: whether the mankind is able to overcome the crisis and how it can do it.

3. Research Questions

The paper analyzes the perception of the Russian thinker of the first half of the 20th century Semen Ludvigovich Frank of the causes of the human civilization crisis. Since the Age of Enlightenment the natural science paradigm has been dominating in the view of the world. For history this meant that it was seen as a process taking place apart from a person, under the laws beyond his control. The spiritual interests of a person were ignored. The tradition of taking into account spiritual prerequisites in the

analysis of social phenomena was formed in the Russian religious philosophy of the first half of the 20th century – a time of violent social upheaval. Frank's thought was focused on the spiritual world of a person and the spiritual foundations of the society, and precisely because of that it gives us an invaluable opportunity to analyze the economic and political crisis from an unusual perspective, as a consequence of the phenomena of spiritual order, which is the subject of this paper.

4. Purpose of the Study

When, at the beginning of the 20th century, the world was experiencing a crisis much more severe than the current one, the apotheosis of which was the world war and the revolutionary upheaval in several European countries at once, most people, as today, tended to search for its causes only in economic and political fields. The crisis seemed to be a natural consequence of aggravation of antagonism typical for the capitalist system of economy, which had entered the monopolistic stage of its development. Political relations also saw the expression of the economic interests of the ruling circles. Just few people at that time drew attention to the fact that the crisis itself was largely the result of the special spiritual mood that dominated the minds of the majority of people and, accordingly, the ways to overcome it, and most importantly, the prevention of its repetition lies in the same spiritual area. The purpose of the study is to illustrate the similarity of the causes of the modern crisis with the causes of the crisis that took place in the first half of the 20th century.

5. Research Methods

The paper utilizes the method of theoretical reconstruction that involves the basic provisions of Frank's philosophy for the analysis of modern society. Besides, Frank's ideas are seen as the realization of one of the most important trends philosophical of the 20th century – strengthening of the non-classical paradigm.

6. Findings

Frank saw not any social education, but also a man and God as the main subjects of the history (Vinogradov, 2011). In his opinion, these subjects are very closely related, and their relations are so deep that they do not inherently represent two different realities, but one common reality that forms the basis of superrational unitotality. According to Frank, there is no bottomless pit between God and a man that the Orthodox Christianity is used to see between them. In the foreword to the final work of his life, in the book *Reality and Man: An Essay in the Metaphysics of Human Nature* the thinker writes that the basic intent of his book is to overcome “the fatal strife between the two beliefs – faith in God and faith in man, which is so typical for the European spiritual life of the last centuries” (Frank, 2007, p. 15). Frank overcomes this discord by representing God not in an objective world opposing man, but within the human personality, as part of its spiritual life. God, according to Frank, represents the deepest basis of the human nature, its highest instance. From this perspective, God and a human “ego” prove to be an inseparable unity.

At the same time, Frank does not mix the perception of God with human subjectivity, with its rational or emotional components. For the knowledge of God, a man shall go further than his subjectivity – to his own substantive depth and there to discover his true essence coinciding with God. In the light of this, Frank's (2007) paradoxical argument stated at the beginning of the work that the true existence of the subject is not really subjective is not really surprising. After all, its acquisition requires a way out of subjectivity. But this requirement is given to a man as a task, as a necessity of work to acquire own essence. According to Frank (2007), a man shall transcend, overcome the limits of actual tribute and only then does he fall into the world of genuine, divine being. From the idea described, there are several consequences regarding the historical role of all participants in the historical process.

The first consequence concerns a person. It can be said that Frank, pointing to the divine basis of human nature, protected an individual from his subordination to the public interest. At the same time, Frank's (2007) views are not certainly personalistic: he notes that the absolutism of the personal beginning bears evil, as well as the extremes of collectivism levelling the personality. In the first place he puts the interests of an individual derived from his inalienable moral rights. Every man, according to Frank, has the right to preserve and defend moral ideals as his sacred personal heritage. Already in his first philosophical work *Fr. Nietzsche and the Ethic of 'Love of the Distant'* Frank (1990c) argues that the public good would be much better secured if people thought not so much of the interests of the society but of that there is a saint and inviolable in the interests of their 'ego'. He further explains that "sacred and inviolable" in man are objective ideals with absolute and autonomous moral value (Frank, 1990b).

Hence it appears that the historical tasks of a man cannot be determined by the society, but they are embedded in the spiritual nature of a human person and do not depend on the society. On the contrary, the society may interfere with the positive realization of an individual. Frank devoted a special work *The Collapse of Idols* to a detailed explanation of this issue. There, the thinker consistently analyzes the values that are formed by the society, which comes not from its deep but surface-understood interests, as dictated by the objective conditions of existence of the society. Such values direct the person to external development of life: change of political structure, improvement of culture, development of economic activity, spread of religious morality. All these and similar values Frank calls "idols" because in reality they only constitute the illusion of genuine power. According to Frank, people passionate with idols sooner or later see and discover imperfections of what they have recently worshipped. But, before this happens, people have to pay an expensive price for their illusions, for the idolization of the imperfect: "all who believed in the monarchy or in the republic, in socialism or in private property, in state power or in anarchy, in aristocracy and in democracy as in the absolute good and the absolute sense, all of them, wishing good, do evil and, seeking the truth, found untruth" (Frank, 1990a, p. 126).

Thus, according to Frank, the tragedy of history is generated by the fact that a man as its subject forgets the true basis of his nature concluded in God and is based not on transcendent, but on immanent phenomena (Vinogradov, 2009). But by linking his life to imperfect and temporary, a man inevitably suffers defeat thus giving rise to history as a chain of failures, crises and disappointments. To interrupt this chain and to move to the true existence of a man, according to Frank, is only possible by basing the activities on truly reliable – spiritual values, which make up the inner essence of a man and coincide with the essence of God. Being disillusioned with imperfect ideals, a man found himself as if in a hopeless and

desperate wandering through the desert, but, when already “longing and spiritual thirst reach their extreme peak and become as if unbearable”, there is a meeting of the soul with the living God” (Frank, 1990a, p. 120). Thus a man gains a solid and reliable support, eternal and enduring meaning of life.

At the same time, it is important to note that the described idea implies human activity in this process. He should be considered not only as a creation of God, not only as a performer of the will of the latter, but also as a free participant of historical life. Such a solution to the problem provides an opportunity to get a very harmonious idea of human activity in history. On the one hand, it provides a firm support for his life activity, which allows a person to feel his substantive autonomy from the power of objective natural and social forces. On the other hand, this basis does not dissolve him in itself, but opens opportunities for creative realization, shows the most constructive ways in the disclosure of human abilities. From this point of view, the essence of history lies in the cooperation of a man and God as related forces at their core. However, only God has consistency among the participants in this process. A man is very often distracted by secondary problems and sometimes completely forgets about his purpose. But he has the opportunity to gain his high status, in fact, to find himself. In *The Unthinkable* Frank defined this as follows: “selfhood is personality when it stands in the face of higher spiritual powers, ... it is in meeting the transcendental beginning and in being in contact with it that direct self-determination is established as ‘ego’” (Frank, 1990b). Thus, Frank’s man gains his status as a subject of history to the extent of his connection with the Absolute.

According to Frank, most of the problems and tragedies of the history occur because a man misunderstood his relationship with God. In the book *Reality and Man: An Essay in the Metaphysics of Human Nature* Frank analyzes the history of people’s understanding of their relationship with God. Their oldest understanding contains a delusion, which consists in the notion of God’s unlimited, overwhelming power, before which a man is only the “slave and innocent arm of the almighty Lord” (Frank, 1990b). According to this point of view, only God can be the sole subject of the history, since only his actions are free and meaningful. A man is only one of the phenomena of the world, illusory independent, and in fact fully dependent on his creator.

Christianity, according to Frank, emerged as an attempt to overcome such a division, it gave a balanced solution to the problem of the ratio of God to man: “according to the basic idea of Christian consciousness there is a harmonic combination and balance of moments of transcendence and immanence in relations between God and man” (Frank, 2007, p. 62). However, historical Christianity failed to maintain this approach, and the former idea of God’s transcendence and human impotence again prevailed. Therefore, Christian providentialism, according to Frank, does not provide a satisfactory solution to this problem. In the Renaissance, for the second time the mankind had the chance to correctly understand the relationship between God and man. This chance was a combination of Christian faith and humanism. Christianity, supplemented by humanistic ideas, could overcome the opposite in the view of God and man, which concluded the danger of indifference to the human being. But this chance was not used and the New Time brings another extremity: it stirs up the pride of a man speaking of his almighty (Frank, 2007). With regard to the subject of the history, this meant that if only God was seen as such, now only man is the sole master, both of his destiny and of the world and society.

This belief in man's powers and abilities inspired the New Time thinkers. They began to feel that it was possible to exercise the kingdom of reason and justice in the conditions of Earth history. The man who became the only subject of the history began to transform nature and society as he seemed most rational. Frank notes that this fervor of transformative activity, which assured a man of his limitless abilities, has not yet finally passed even after revolutions and wars: "although his enthusiasm has already significantly weakened, it continues to dominate in the broad, most influential circles of European-American humanity" (Frank, 2007, p. 78).

Frank shows that the continuation of this trend is very dangerous, as it leads to amorality: the person in it is adored in his earthly, carnal nature, as a result of which, everything ends with "enslavement and greed of a man, transformation of him into a blind mechanized element of nature, in which a man loses his being – the image of a man" (Frank, 2007, p.80). Thus, God becomes a necessary participant in the historical process, without which this process loses its high importance and at best turns into one of natural phenomena, and at worst into countless suffering of millions of people. Only the harmonious unity of God and man can, according to Frank, ensure the true human course of history, in which it gets meaning and meets the positive demands of the individual.

7. Conclusion

So, according to Frank, the key and most active figure of the history is a man. His understanding of his own essence and his attitude towards eternal spiritual values depend on the entire historical process, its course and its result. If a man finds himself at the height of his spiritual calling, if he realizes and reveals his true spiritual nature coinciding with divine nature, then the history becomes a process of his development and improvement. If a person stops only at the level of material interests, then it turns into a process fundamentally similar to any natural phenomenon, and the person loses the status of its subject and obeys natural necessity. In the latter case, his life may be overwhelmed by objective processes, which he is aware of in the form of social disasters or crises. Without understanding their real cause, which lies in the distorted perception of their own essence, a man experiences them as natural disasters, such as those that must happen from time to time in nature. In fact, in the face of social crises, a man confronts an abandoned man, his own spiritual reality.

Another crisis represents a desperate attempt by this reality to draw the attention of a man, to give him another chance to acquire his true essence. But to do so, a man must take the crisis not as a manifestation of the natural history of things, but as a chance for him to overcome his objectivity, to become a true subject of history, acting not in servitude, but on the basis of a free choice. Only a person himself can determine whether he is able to turn a crisis into a stage of becoming a subject of the history. Everything in the history ultimately depends on a man, on his value orientations, on his determination to realize moral norms in his life, on the strength of his connection with the eternal ideal of the good.

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