

# Metaphysical realism of X. Zubiri and S. Frank in the context of comparative studies

LIUBOV E. YAKOVLEVA\*

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## *ABSTRACT*

The subject of the article is a comparison of the views of the Spanish philosopher X. Zubiri and the Russian philosopher S. Frank (1877-1950). Both philosophers offer a strikingly similar new interpretation of “reality” against the background of the absence of personal contacts and any dialogue between the Russian and Spanish thinker. In his study, the author relies on the cultural method of historical and philosophical research, which allows us to consider these philosophical systems in the context of national philosophical traditions. It is shown that the differences in these philosophical systems are associated with the difference in the types of religious mentality in Spain and Russia.

L'oggetto dell'articolo è un confronto tra le teorie del filosofo spagnolo X. Zubiri e del filosofo russo S. Frank (1877-1950). Entrambi i filosofi offrono una nuova interpretazione della “realtà” sorprendentemente simile, pur non avendo mai avuto contatti personali o qualsiasi dialogo. Lo studio si affida al metodo culturale di ricerca storica e filosofica, che permette di considerare questi sistemi filosofici nel contesto delle tradizioni filosofiche nazionali. Si dimostrerà come le differenze nei sistemi filosofici siano associate ai differenti tipi di mentalità religiosa in Spagna e in Russia

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\* Liubov E. Yakovleva is Full Professor of Philosophy at the Russian State University named after A.N. Kosygin (Technology – Design - Art) of Moscow.

The national philosophical tradition is a typological concept constructed by the method of consistent meaningful explication of the most essential initial attitudes of the national worldview and the ways of their transmission in the evolution of philosophical thought. The main parameters of the National Philosophical Tradition that define the connection between its various stages include invariant philosophical ideas, philosophies, themes, attitudes; the epistemological status of philosophical knowledge; a general picture of the world correlated with the linguistic picture of the world of a given people and a hierarchy of social values defined for each community.

The introduction of this concept into the methodology of socio-philosophical research allows us to concretize the idea of world philosophy as a dialogue of various national philosophical traditions, to identify their integrative role in different cultures. After all, it is the National Philosophical Tradition that sets the parameters of the attitude towards the philosophical traditions of other peoples, towards the development of the achievements of other philosophical cultures<sup>1</sup>.

The specificity of the historical development of Spain and Russia is the synthetic nature of cultures, the duality of national life, the multilevel nature of identity, special ideas about its historical mission, which allows us to find sufficient grounds to identify similar features in the philosophical development of Spain and Russia in the twentieth century. These include the long oblivion of a significant part of the history of Russian philosophy, the fulfillment of an informative function by literature, integrating and stimulating the national consciousness, a heightened interest in philosophical, historical and metaphysical problems.

And the study of the connection of the National philosophical tradition with the cultural substrate of society-religion, allows us to reveal the specifics in the search for new metaphysics carried out by Russian and Spanish philosophers.

Reality in the understanding of S. Frank is an extremely broad concept, which includes both worlds being, or reality, and supratemporal, “ideal” being. Reality is multi-layered, and its deepest layer does not appear for us in the form of objects with a certain content, to which our thought is directed, but we “have it in the way that somehow our inner being belongs to it”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> A.V. Sokolov and L.E Yakovleva, *National philosophy and interaction of philosophical tradi-*

Frank points out the need for a special cognitive attitude for penetration into the deeper layers of reality, which he calls the “primary type of knowledge”, “living knowledge or knowledge-life”, which acts as “knowledge that is born in us and we carry in the depths of life experience - knowledge, in which our entire inner being somehow participates<sup>3</sup>. “The directly accessible layer of the primary, immediate, self-revealing reality S. Frank calls the reality of the inner life of the individual.

Reality, as an all-embracing unity, contains everything, including negation, since there can be nothing outside of this all-embracing unity. S. Frank connects the incomprehensibility of reality not with its irrational character, but with its super-logical concreteness. It is the concrete, self-sufficient completeness of reality that prevents its conceptual comprehension, which seeks to grasp its abstract private content by distinguishing it from other private content. Philosophy S. Frank defines as “the rational overcoming of the limitations of rational thought”, capable of capturing not only the incomprehensible essence of this reality, but also the diversity of its structure. S. Frank, like X. Zubiri, emphasizes the dual, super-logical nature of the primary reality, which is expressed in the fact that it appears “both as something different from all particular, definite contents, and as something that encompasses and permeates them”<sup>4</sup>. The most important characteristic of this reality is the moment of transcending, going beyond oneself.

*Reality is not an extensive whole, not a whole that unites everything in itself only from the outside, but a unity that penetrates its parts from within so that it – to a greater or lesser extent – is present as a whole, that is, in its true being in each of them. It is on the basis of reality as such that all particulars and singularities acquire their own reality. For having your own reality means nothing more than being – to a greater or lesser extent – an accomplice of reality as such, i.e. to acquire its primacy, its self-sufficiency and self-affirmation<sup>5</sup>.*

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tions in «Bulletin of Moscow State University» Series VII, 2003, 6, pp. 34-53.

<sup>2</sup> S.L. Frank, *Reality and man*, Rosspen, Moscow 1997, p. 220.

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, p. 221.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259, my italics.

S. Frank introduces the concept of the metaphysical structure of personal being, as a super-individual basis of individual being, in which it is revealed that the personality, "I", in essence, is nothing more than a member of a certain conciliar multi-unity, an accomplice of "we". In the ability to self-disclose oneself in the form of "you" S. Frank sees a characteristic feature of reality that distinguishes it from objective reality. S. Frank asserts, in contrast to the modern subject-object paradigm and the identification of reality and objective reality, the multi-layered reality, the presence of degrees of reality or qualitatively different forms of being.

Reality as a dynamic, creative, transcending principle is directly revealed, according to S. Frank, in the experience of beauty, communication, moral life. It should be noted that the allocation of the aesthetic, communitarian and moral component of life is relevant to those features that, according to some researchers, are inherent in the all-Russian national character, and the archetypal features of Orthodox religiosity<sup>6</sup>.

The Russian philosopher prefers the word "reality" to the word "being", because "by being is usually understood to mean something opposed to 'becoming' as ready-made and in this sense motionless and fixed"<sup>7</sup>, and reality is a living unity of "this and the other," creativity and completeness, becoming an eternity. The moment of creativity is as primordial in reality as the moment of completed actuality. S. Frank emphasizes the creative nature of reality, self-creation inherent in it. The categorical distinction between the subject (the bearer of reality) and the substance (emanating from the subject of activity) is inapplicable to the superlogical being of reality. The actual completeness of reality consists in its self-creation, in the original creative activity.

At the same time, the concept of reality in the philosophical teachings of S. Frank is not identified with the concept of God. Common reality, in detachment from the Divine basis flowing from the primary source, that is, as a formless dynamic potentiality, there is a dark, destructive, dynamic element. If God appears as the unity of potentiality and actuality, as the freedom of self-realization, self-determination, then reality is pure potentiality, incompleteness, readiness for everything. Man, on the other hand, is not only con-

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. V.F. Shapovalov, *Russian studies* FAIR PRESS, Moscow 2001, pp. 369, 432-433, 447.

<sup>7</sup> S.L. Frank, *Reality and man*, cit., p. 286.

nected with God through the personal center of his mental life, which conceals the divine principle, but he comes into contact with the general reality and experiences the influence of its forces throughout his outlines. S. Frank formulates the law of human existence: the weakening of the connection between the personality – the central instance of mental life – with God as the primary source of reality, leads to the transformation of reality as creative activity into the formless element of pure potentiality, destructive dynamism, the beginning of pure groundlessness. Genuine human freedom as freedom of self-realization of the individual and lower freedom, understood as baseless spontaneity, are not, according to Frank, two heterogeneous principles, they coexist, albeit in an unmerged, but also in an indivisible unity of the human soul as a spontaneous dynamic being. The chaotic spontaneity of man is a degeneration of his creative freedom of self-realization; baseless self-will, pseudo-existence, unauthorized “I” – the cause of slavery and sinfulness of man. “The original sin is the fact of a person’s separation from its God-kind root and its transformation into an imaginary self-affirmed ‘I’”<sup>8</sup>.

How is the cognition of reality carried out? S. Frank considers the content of objective knowledge as identical to objective being, and individual consciousness as the subjective illumination of the all-embracing and all-illuminating absolute knowledge, that is, a special kind of being of the objective “universe” itself. Human being is interpreted by him as an integral world outlook or feeling of life (“artistic and integral unity of thought and experience, contemplation and effectiveness”), based on the unity of the personality, its objective, supra-individual meaning, creative meaning. The infinity of the cognizing mind and the infinity of objective being are in contact through the inner spiritual life of the individual. Experiencing as a definite character of the inner being of a person has a supraindividual-objective side, i.e. is rooted in the all-encompassing unity of absolute being. Thus, according to Frank, mental life is both subjective (potentiality and spontaneity as its lower features in comparison with absolute being) and objective, since it is “a form of absolute being and, as such, from within, in its own being, is united with everything infinite. The wealth of objective being is rooted on the basis of absolute unity. To experience, ‘feel’ ... it means at the same time to be in every-

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<sup>8</sup> S.L. Frank, *Reality and man*, cit., p. 384.

thing, to be immersed from within in the endless ocean of being itself, that is, it means to experience everything else in the world”<sup>9</sup> Experiencing is a spiritual state as a unity of life and knowledge. The openness, trans-subjectivity of a person’s mental life makes it possible to explain the fact of communication and direct practical-life connection between people, which is inexplicable from the point of view of empirical psychology. Love not only blinds, but also illuminates, reveals the depths of being inaccessible to reason (pure, objective consciousness detached from mental life).

The introduction by S. Frank into epistemology of the new concept of “experiencing reality” as the unity of life and knowledge is a kind of manifestation of the striving inherent in Russian philosophical thinking to overcome the extremes of rationalism and irrationalism.

One of the main goals of creating the philosophical doctrine of X. Zubiri was an attempt to resolve the contradictions that permeate the Western philosophical tradition, paying tribute to the truth of each of the poles - between idealism and realism, between feeling and reason, science and metaphysics, skepticism and dogmatism, individualism and collectivism<sup>10</sup>. The setting of such a goal is fully correlated with the general tendency of the Spanish national tradition to an eclectic unification of science, philosophy and religion, mysticism and rationalism, life and reason.

Axis of philosophical reflection X Zubiri, like S.L. Frank, composes the concept of reality, based on a new interpretation of which, he seeks to resolve the aporia of realism-idealism and empiricism-rationalism. This goal – “reflection of reality as such” – was set by Zubiri already in his first major work “Nature, History, God” and was consistently realized in all his subsequent works, including the posthumously published work *Man and God* (1984). The work *Man and God* consists of three parts, the first of which was completely prepared for publication by the Spanish thinker himself, and the second and third by his student and like-minded Ignacio Ellacuria. It seems to us interesting to compare the main ideas outlined by X. Zubiri in this work, but expressed much earlier, with the work of S.L. Frank *Man and Reality*.

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<sup>9</sup> Ivi, p.169.

<sup>10</sup> X.M. Vegas, *Javier Zubiri's radical realism*, in «Verbum. Issue 5. Images of culture and styles of thinking: Iberian experience», St. Petersburg 2001, p. 118.

The concept of “reality”, which was considered in classical philosophy, mainly to designate the empirical reality of the world existing outside us, is revised and dynamized by X. Zubiri. Reality is seen as the unity of inner life, generation and communication. “If we say about something that it is ‘real’ (es real), then we owe this to the structure of our languages, but there is no ‘real being’, there is only ‘reality in being’, modern reality in the world”<sup>11</sup>. If S. Frank introduces the concept of “experience of reality” as an adequate expression of the search character of reality, then X. Zubiri uses the concept of “impression of reality” as a way of actualizing the real as real inherent in man. A person, according to Zubiri, feels reality in an impression and this impression has a complex structure, since each human feeling feels reality in a different way. Thus, gaze represents the real as images, hearing as a message, taste as satisfaction (in Spanish, wisdom (sabiduria) means etymologically taste (sabor), touch as palpable (tanteado), smell as a trace or imprint, kinesthesia represents reality in dynamic tension not “in front of” me, but in the “direction to” ... reality itself “in the direction”<sup>12</sup>. This is not about the synthesis of different impressions of reality, but about different moments of a single impression of reality.

The main principle of considering reality in X. Zubiri’s metaphysics is the principle of the primacy of reality over being. From the point of view of Zubiri, there is no real being as a kind of substance, on the contrary, everything real exists “being”, that is, acting as a moment of peace. The actuality of everything already real “from oneself” as a moment of the world is being. Reality, from the point of view of X. Zubiri, is a system of signs (properties) that manifest themselves in the very nature of the action. Reality is some formality with a physically material character and preceding meaning or intentional content. Therefore, the distinction of zones of reality is associated with Zubiri with the distinction of the very modes of the presence of this formality “from oneself”.

X. Zubiri criticizes classical philosophy precisely because, starting with Parmenides, she made one of the ways of being out of reality, believing that the real is formally being. According to Zubiri, nothing is originally existing.

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<sup>11</sup> X. Zubiri, *El hombre y Dios*, Alianza Editorial. Sociedad de Estudios y Publicaciones, Madrid 1984, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> Ivi, pp. 34-35.

Even God himself is not originally the highest Being: He is the highest Reality. The original is reality. Being is only because there is reality. “Realidad siendo” is not the same as “existence.” Something is existent when it remains immersed in being; insofar as every being is “a kind of being.” But when we talk about “realidad siendo”, then we emphasize the moment that being as something stable, immovable, definite is based on the becoming character of reality itself, because the real is present in the world only by virtue of the simple fact of having reality. This “presence” is best expressed by the participle in the form of the gerund “siendo”.

It is necessary to clarify the meaning of this expression “realidad siendo” in Spanish. The modern Argentine philosopher R. Kush, a representative of the Latin American philosophy of liberation, sees the origins of the originality of Latin American thinking in the network of meanings imprinted in the Spanish language, corresponding to popular culture and everyday consciousness as a natural, unreflected consciousness. In particular, he draws attention to the essential grammatical and conceptual difference between the terms “estar” and “ser”, which make it possible to understand, from his point of view, the originality of Latin American thinking.

“Both verbs in grammatical relation have a clear distinction: ser – defines and estar – indicates. In other words, ser refers to the essence of things, and estar refers to their location. The Argentine philosopher emphasizes that the verb estar is specific to the Spanish language. This verb is used when it comes to circumstances. The verb ser, in turn, is used to express continuous, permanent states<sup>13</sup>”.

It seems that it is possible to give an adequate assessment of the attempts at metaphysical and methodological substantiation of intercultural philosophy in the Latin American philosophy of liberation only taking into account the new understanding of reality given in the concept of “respectability” by X. Zubiri, on which supporters of the intercultural perspective in philosophy rely explicitly and implicitly<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> N.I. Petiaksheva, *The problem of the essence of Latin American life (R. Kush's concept)*, in «Study of Latin American studies at the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia», Moscow 2002, p. 277.

<sup>14</sup> L.E. Yakovleva, *Zubiri's radical realism and the philosophy of liberation*, in «Study of Latin American studies at the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia», Moscow 2002, p. 287-300.



The multidimensional nature of reality manifests itself in Zubiri's concept in the fact that reality is respectful or "related" in its very quality of reality, it is a constitutive relatedness. X. Zubiri insistently emphasizes that his metaphysics is talking about the physical moment of communication, about the responsiveness of everything real in the most formal nature of the real. In the epistemological aspect, reality appears in an impressionable grasp of the real, as the actualization of reality in the feeling mind - a metaphysically unified comprehending structure. Metaphysical knowledge, in contrast to scientific knowledge, studies not the content of reality, but the structure of reality as reality. Metaphysics tries to explore the meaning of reality as a total reality and in its ultimate foundation. Classical philosophy ascribed three functions to the mind: the formation of concepts, the expression of judgments and their combination in reasoning, but it ignored the fundamental fact that all these types of intelligent activity are themselves inscribed in the activity of understanding the real structure of something. A person not only relies on reality but is "filled" with it.

Special place in substantiating Zubiri's metaphysical position is occupied by his philosophical anthropology. A person is considered by him as some kind of reality, the moments of which are consciousness, time and being. A distinctive feature of a person is the need to "give himself an account" in a situation, in what he should do with things and with himself as a reality. Human reality is also a systematic unity, therefore each property of this reality acts only as a moment of action of all other properties. In absolutely all spheres of activity, human activity has a systemic psycho-organic nature.

To establish himself in the integrity of reality, to establish himself as an absolute reality, a person must perform actions with specific things in a specific situation. In this assertion of oneself as an absolute reality, one relates to all other personalities in their way of being an absolute reality. Personality is essentially, in its very basis and in form, correlated with God as an Absolute Personality and other people. This correlation, the inner appeal of a person to other people or the custom of "otherness," as the Spanish philosopher calls it, constitutes the mentality or ways of comprehending the world that everyone possesses, since they are formally perceived from everyone else.

Zubiri associates freedom as a characteristic of human reality with a certain independence from the environment and specific control over it. Both in his active and passive actions, a person acts not only because of the properties

that he possesses, but also because of the system that these properties make up. A distinctive feature of this system is the ability to impress the reality by the feeling mind.

Appeal to God or religacion constitutes a principal characteristic of human reality. The problem of God is a dimension of human reality as such, which is why Zubiri calls it a theological problem. "We are talking ... about a problem that a person is forced to pose, it is better to say that it has already been posed to us due to the simple fact that we are people<sup>15</sup>". Religacion is, in the context of Zubiri's metaphysics, the ontological connection of the emerging reality of the personality with the power of everything real, moreover, with an internal, not external connection. This structure is thus an integral, basic structure for human life.

X. Zubiri draws a subtle conceptual distinction between being in reality and being with real things. What we are with is this definite reality, and what we are in is "all" reality. Both points are inseparable from each other, but very different. Anything grasped in a human way is real, but none of them is "all" reality. And the most serious thing, from the point of view of X. Zubiri, is that it is every real thing that makes us be in "all" reality. Zubiri characterizes the way the power of the real is manifested in religacion as a mystery, a riddle, just as Frank emphasizes the super-logical nature of reality.

The mystery of the power of everything real gives the realization of personal reality a special character – the problematic nature of justification, the inner anxiety of human life, embodied in two simple questions: "how do I become myself" and "what should I do of myself, since this very reality, what I am, it has been given to me". Compensation for this inner anxiety in human life is the voice of consciousness, which in one form or other dictates to a person what he should or should not do, what particular form of reality he should take, although it does not solve all his problems. In his teaching, X. Zubiri distinguishes 11 feelings, which differ not from the side of the object, i.e. the content of the perceived quality, but by the very way of grasping this content as something "from oneself". Man finds himself inexorably directed towards determining the form of reality that he must accept as a result of choice.

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<sup>15</sup> X. Zubiri, *El hombre y Dios*, cit., p. 12.

The problem of the relationship between man and God is one of the most important issues of the philosophical and anthropological teachings of the 20th century. The solution to this problem involves answering four questions: "The metaphysical question: does God exist? 2) a philosophical question: what is our concept of God? 3) anthropological question: what does God mean for man? 4) a sociological question: what is the meaning of religious communication with God?"<sup>16</sup> The significance of the first question is determined by its close connection with the question of the meaning of life, since it is impossible to save the absolute meaning, the absolute truth outside of God. The merit of X. Zubiri is a deep study of the essential, ontological and inevitable connection between man and God in the unity of the metaphysical and anthropological aspects of this connection. A person can, as Zubiri shows, have or not have a positive religion, but he cannot be ontologically separated from God, he cannot exist without the Absolute.

Zubiri establishes a connection between life and personal being, and gives a fundamentally new, phenomenological interpretation of life. The concept of "life" is used by Zubiri in the meaning of "possessing one's own reality", "being one's own" reality in relation to other realities, in the field of all reality. To the features of life, he refers to the feeling of the richness of possible manifestations of the world, the feeling of anxiety and the problematicism of our own existence, which prompts us to search for the last objective synthesis. He considers life and spirit in unity as two different functions of a single principle of reality. One and the same reality feels, projects and acts - this is the conclusion of the phenomenological concept of life in the philosophy of X. Zubiri.

The revealed similarity between the philosophical teachings of the Russian and the Spanish thinker is striking. This similarity is revealed both in a fundamentally new interpretation of the very concept of reality, its ontological status, and in the forms of its comprehension. Both philosophers substantiate their realistic position by removing the reality of epistemology in metaphysics and introducing the transcendental aspect of reality itself, which receives an anthropological justification. The logic of substantiating the existence of God in the works of these philosophers also coincides.

At the same time, with all the similarities between the dynamic interpre-

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<sup>16</sup> K. Valverde, *Philosophical Anthropology*, Khristianskaya Rossiya Publ., Moscow 2000, p. 394.

tation of reality and the identification of the metaphysical dimension of personality, i.e., understanding it as an absolute and only then human reality, inherent in both thinkers, there is an obvious difference between them in the ways of stating and expressing these ideas. First, the systemic-structural vision of reality created by X. Zubiri reveals its connection with the strong scholastic tradition of conceptual distinctions, in the interaction and polemics with which the Spanish philosophical tradition developed. Therefore, the relationship between the personality and the divine reality of the Absolute Personality, man and God is central in the substantiation of the metaphysical realism of X. Zubiri. While for S.L. Frank, despite the attempt to balance the ontological principle of organic unity inherent in Russian philosophy with personalism, it is the relationship of chaos and space that is fundamental to substantiating metaphysical realism. All-unity is comprehended in Russian philosophical thought as sophiology. As noted by P.A. Sapronov, a common feature of the Russian worldview is “the recognition of Sophia’s mediating role between God and the world and [...] in her interpretation as a single living and self-conscious being”<sup>17</sup>, i.e. in the personification of the cosmos fighting against chaos. At the same time, the divine dissolves into the cosmic.

Secondly, the Spanish thinker, in full accordance with the personalistic nature of Spanish philosophy, tries to conceive of primordial reality as a personal being and, if possible, to reveal all the meanings associated with this fundamental principle.

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<sup>17</sup> P.A. Sapronov, *Russian philosophy. Experience of typological characteristics*, Church and culture, St. Petersburg 2000, p. 181.

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