

РАЗДЕЛ IV.
COSMOLOGY IN PERSONS
КОСМОЛОГИЯ В ЛИЦАХ

RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS OF CULTURE
(THE CONTROVERSY
BETWEEN SIMON FRANK AND SIMON LURIE ON VEKHI)

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The author analyses discussion that took place between S. Frank and S. Lurje concerning “Vekhi” (“Landmarks”). In this context, the author’s objective is to show the evolution of S. Frank’s outlook on culture and religion, which developed in three stages: the humanistic individualism, the religious humanism, and the Christian realism.

Key words: culture, creativity, S. Frank, philosophy of culture, religion, religious humanism, “Vekhi” (“Landmarks”).

During publication of “Vekhi”, and the discussion that followed, Simon Frank was redactor of the philosophical section of “Russkaya mysl” (“Russian Thought”), while the chief redactor of the journal was P. Struve. That was usual, for “Russkaya mysl”, to discuss important general issues. It was not merely an attempt to follow a fashion (though, there could hardly be found by then a “thick journal” without a philosophical section in it), but rather a conscious redactor’s policy to meet the urgent common request that was well comprehended. Considering this request in his article in “Vekhi” Frank speaks of “*philosophical thoughtlessness and incompleteness*” of the newest Russian public movement, and its profound conservatism (or rather — retrogradation) in philosophical sense [Frank, 1990: p. 108]. In this paper, Frank also sates a fundamental methodological principle in order to define the notion of philosophical critics, distinguishing it from the yellow press sophistic and carping. He says that beyond all routine problems and interests, beyond the dominant issues set by a fashion, we must always hold a conscious grasp of moral, religious, and philosophical principles that lay the foundation for dominant ideas. “In order to realise the wrong character or narrowness of an idea, and to amend it, in the majority of cases, it is enough to make clear the ultimate premises of it, as though to touch its deepest roots¹. In this sense, the insufficient interest to moral and

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¹As the proverb goes: “feel the difference” with another well-known “methodological principle”, used for the similar situations: “cui prodest”.

metaphysical issues, focusing exceptionally on technical matters, on means rather than fundamental issues of the last end and the initial cause, is the living source of ideological chaos and confusion” [Frank, 1990: p. 108].

Frank took an active part in the post-Vekhi discussion, but he was dissatisfied with the paper controversy. A few days later, after the journal had been published, responding to by D. Philosophov’s, I. Ignatov’s and D. Levin’s invectives, he observed that they endeavoured to avoid *the discussion to the point*. In their responses, “A decline of interest to the truth (pravde — *i.e.* truth, justice) is felt somehow, though differently motivated, but psychologically identical: unwillingness to participate in the *struggle of ideas*”. While the authors of “Vekhi” “seek and ask for criticism, that in the collision of different opinions the truth might be born” [Frank, 1996: p. 551, 550]. In this sense much more valuable for Frank were the criticism by A. Kisewetter and S. Lurje, but especially by the last one [Lurje, 1909]. First, because these comments conformed to his own conception of philosophic criticism, which should be guided exceptionally with objective motives, not confusing the ideological disagreement with the moral slander. “<...> Such an objective *criticism of the critics* is calling to exposure and more distinctive elucidation of these positive ideals and appraisals, in the name of which “Vekhi” rebelled against the traditional values of the Russian intelligentsia” [Frank, 1996: p. 554].

Thus, it should be noticed that “Vekhi” itself, as a criticism of worldview and the mental set of the Russian intelligentsia, as well as following discussion gave for Frank a cause to make a number of philosophical generalisations, concerning the point of phenomenon of philosophic critics itself, as it often reappeared by then into the Russian public discourse. As to the contentive aspect of the post-Vekhi polemics, here in the foreground Frank sets the metaphysical foundations for the idea of culture in its connection to religion. It was a theme he had already touched causally in “Vekhi”, but in those days it was connected with the contemporary “religious and philosophical fundamentals”, clearing of which was necessary for the right appraisal of “dominant ideas”. The same issue discussed in his brief paper reply to the criticism of “Vekhi” by D. Merezhkovsky [Frank, 1996: p. 551-554], and mainly in his journal reply to S. Lurje, which bore exactly the same title: “Culture and Religion”.

Launching into a digression for a moment, I shall cite here a few lines from the memoirs of Andrew Belyj about Frank’s opponent in this polemics: “Semen Vladimirovich Lurje, a member of the “Aesthetics”, extremely poor in his young years, dreamed to become an aesthete. In order to do this he set himself a task to become rich. He had invented a formulation to make something to be waterproof; and having sold it, became rich, though lost for art. He walked among us as a shark, ready to devour everyone. He had already been negotiating with the redaction of the “Russkaya mysl”, which then wasted away (it was sweetened by Eichenwald), to buy this organ and to place himself at its head. He wanted to create an organ at the price of liquidation of “Vesy”, “Zolotoye Runo”, “Ezhenedel’nik”, “Criticheskoe Obozrenie” and the other Moscow journals. He had nearly seen himself a new Mirrielees, making his appearance he greened with an endearing rapacity of a black panther: such a young-looking (he had already been in his middle fifties²), such a rosy-cheeked, such a Mephistopheles! He had a golden pince-nez, perfume and little varnished shoes; his coat was black, and his trousers were made of a grey stripy cloth. It seemed

² Simon Lurje — 1867-1927; thus, the characteristic must be dated approximately 1912.

one of the shoes covered a goat's hoof; it took only to whisper of it, — and no more Lurje: the floor would slide apart, the flame lick out; Lurje would fell down to hell not because of invocation of exorcism, but a mere wish of “vehovtsy”, and Metner, and Trubetskoy, and M. Herschenson. It happened likewise: there was unmasked not Columbus, but Pizarro. Instantly Lurje became unnecessary “smarty”, who wrote unimpressively; once he had even spoken publicly in “Dom pesni”; and got lost at last. He was merely one of many, who walked under a mask. Masks had fallen down, and the demonic natures (rendered harmless later) made mere little flea-bites, not ones of a scorpion <...>” [Belyj].

Certainly, this characteristic does not meet Frank's standards of philosophical criticism, but on other hand, it is an illustration of personality: Frank's worldview appraisal of Lurje as a sceptical relativist, an opponent to anything absolute and making absolute of any idea or value [Frank, 1996: p. 555]. This relativism in respect to the idea of culture becomes the main point of Frank's criticism, giving rise to the next metaphysical justification of the absolute value of culture.

The topic of culture is present in many Frank's papers of different years. Here it is enough to mention at least some of them: “Essays on Philosophy of Culture” (1905), “Religion and Culture (About new book by D.S. Merezhkovsky)” (1906), “Nature and Culture” (1910), “Capitalism and Culture” (1910), “Crisis of the Western Culture” (1922), “Goethe and the Problem of the Spiritual Culture” (1932). We can also mention the title of the journal, which was redacted by Frank in 1906: “Freedom and Culture”, as well as the collection of articles “Philosophy and Life” he issued in 1910 which had the subtitle “Studies and Sketches on the Philosophy of Culture”.

This topic is one of the key-themes in the development of Frank's worldview, especially in establishing the religious and philosophical characters of it. Perhaps, it is an appropriate thing to notice that regarding his spiritual biography, Frank spoke of “epoch of unbelieving youth”: between 16 and 30 years of age [Frank, 1996: p. 44], *i.e.* approximately between 1893 and 1907. Some scholars take the fact to speak as if there are “two Franks”: one of whom is an atheist, while the other is a religious philosopher. However, I would rather connect his conversion to religion with the tragedy of the Russian revolution, the civil war and the emigration. Actually, the spiritual evolution of the philosopher had the more complicated character. Yet in the full bloom of the unbelieving youth, Frank experienced a dim hint of awakening of a spiritual life: he connected it himself with reading F. Nietzsche. The theme of culture and its metaphysical justification, traced into context of Frank's spiritual evolution, is demonstrative enough. The ideas of “Culture and Religion” (1909) were nothing but the development and deepening of conception that had already been emphasised in the paper “Essays on Philosopher and Culture” (1905) that was written in a joint with Struve (unfortunately, unfinished). A specific completion of the theme we might probably consider “Krushenie kumirov” (“The Downfall of Idols”) (1924), which had already been written while in emigration; in that Frank also spoke on the downfall of the idol of culture.

Thus, the development of the theme of culture clearly demonstrates that speaking generally on Frank's philosophical evolution, we can say about a *development* of his worldview, but scarcely about any *rupture* in it. The idea of culture, therefore, brings him to religion yet in the period, which he himself called “the epoch of unbelieving youth”.

Frank defines culture as a “*complex of objective values, realised in social and historical life*” [Frank, 1990: p. 177; see also: Frank, 1996: p. 558]. In “Vekhi” he says of it but at a glimpse, however, if we refer to the “Essays...”, we find there a clear structure of these absolute values: the truth, the good, the beauty, the holiness. The absolute values are the foundation stones of the main human activities: sciences, morals, arts, religion. Being an introduction to the absolute values in human life, these human activities are namely responsible for creation of culture. “The fruits of these human activities (creativity), all spiritual achievements, the works of many generations form the living atmosphere of conscious being, gradually introducing the absolute ideal in the collective life of humanity. This is an everlasting and continuously growing deposition of all that has ever been valuable in feelings, thoughts, and actions of humankind, the true descend of the Holy Ghost on the earth in the works and achievements of the human race” [Struve & Frank, 2001: p. 43]. The culture is, therefore, a complex wholeness that may hardly be denied (namely) as a wholeness, though it is possible to deny and disbelieve its detached manifestations.

Understanding the culture as a complex of the absolute values, Frank argued against the utilitarian and pragmatic approaches to culture, which in different forms were typical for Russian intelligentsia, he (in cooperation with Struve) set the *spiritual* culture against so called the *material* culture. According to Frank’s conception, there cannot be any material culture at all, and that is the reason why he says that “so called”. Everything we usually call with the name of material culture is merely an external means to master the material world, which “is important simply as a preparation, utility in relation to the true culture: it is an indispensable companion and the helper of the latter” [Struve & Frank, 2001: p. 44]. Art is the culture, but not the railways, telephones, and telegraphs: all these, being a consequence of the scientific culture and assisting the cultural development are not the culture themselves. The proximity to the spiritual culture enables it to share in the respect that is felt to civilisation and enlightenment, “but there is no reason to confuse one with the other. Moreover, in behalf of the spiritual culture, it is greatly important to be mindfully conscious of the purely utilitarian, auxiliary meaning of so called the material culture” [Struve & Frank, 2001: p. 45]. Therefore, the culture is but the spiritual culture, which is the production of the absolute values.

Frank and Struve set this conception against both utilitarianism and asceticism, but in its initial version it was scarcely a well founded. Only in his polemics with Lurje, Frank found a clear and precise definition to distinguish the culture as a faith in the absolute values from believing in the relative values: the definition was a faith in the Absolute. In the “Essays...” religion was not yet realised as an equal element of culture, as far as “godlessness of an unruly human thought that is always in doubt has the same rights in culture”, might this thought only be a beautiful, sincere, and creative search for truth, beauty, and moral justice [[Struve & Frank, 2001: p. 48]. Is the holiness not, therefore, the absolute value yet? Arguing in “Vekhi”, Frank already states that the religion is the only foundation of the whole system of absolute values. “We call to intensify life, to make it deeper, spiritualise it with the means of philosophy and religion <...>” [Frank, 1996: p. 561].

Frank’s readiness to find in this point to bridge, as it may seem, with the right opposite position of his opponent is quite a demonstrative for his philosophical

criticism. This point of contact does not lose its actuality even today. It is the criticism of an *absolute* faith of the Russian intelligentsia in values that are but *relative*. Lurje criticises the faith, calling to return to the practical relativism. Frank is ready to recognise a relative value of the practical relativism: it is a value of popular wisdom, which realises the relativity of any abstraction; however, it is able to price a conditional value of everything conditional. Frank is not ready to reject for this sake his own faith in ideals, which is finally justified with the faith in the Absolute. The faith in the absolute spiritual values is able to guide the practical relativism in the right direction: in order to realise that the material culture is a relative value. Ideas and beliefs possess (I would like to say so that!) a material power! This is the mighty *vital element*. Ultimately, “the world is moved not with interests or instincts, but with the enthusiasm of the *religious love*” [Frank, 1996: p. 564].

To prove this to an unbeliever is practically impossible. The nihilistic individualism is irrefutable. “None is obliged to believe in any absolute values, but those who appreciate cultural creative work, realises the necessity of an end beyond a single day, those must reject the pure subjectivism: in theory and practice acknowledging over-individual motivation, and consequently justifying its absolute values” [Frank, 1996: p. 565]. Thus, the real foundation of the practical relativism cannot be unbelief but the *true religiousness* only. “<...> the last ends and the highest values have the absolute and over-empirical nature; therefore, they admit a mere relative and approximate realisation within the limits of empirical actuality” [Frank, 1996: p. 566].

It is clear, for the sceptical relativist Lurje combination of culture and religion must seem an intolerable contradiction. He understood well enough the religious dogmatism: as something anti-cultural and inhuman; but the religious humanism, of which Frank spoke, was to him incomprehensible. Once again, it had given Frank a cause to clear his idea of “the *religious sense of culture*” that he defines as a fundamental one for his worldview. This idea is incompatible with dogmatism as the relativism of Lurje, but on the other hand, it justifies not a scepticism, but the creative work of culture, founded on the perfect freedom of the religious feeling and intuition, *i.e.* the faith in the ideal values. The creative work of culture, therefore, joints with the religious feeling and a faith in God with a faith in the humanity. Therefore, religion is comprehended as “an idea of *Bogochelovechestvo* (God-and-man-unity), released but from the dogmatic limits and the vulgar eschatological expectations” [Frank, 1996: p. 568].

It should be noticed that some anti-dogmatism would be peculiar to Frank later: when he wrote “The Unknowable” (“The Unfathomable”), as an “ontological introduction to the philosophy of religion”, and in the period of work on “The light shineth in darkness”, as an “Essay on Christian ethics”. However, it seems that the language of these, later works is connected more closely to the Church traditions. Moreover, in one of his letters, Frank directly writes that it is necessary “to combine the absolute freedom of religious and philosophical thought with the childlike humble prayerful participation in traditional religious life of the Church” [Frank, 1996: p. 94]. Thus, I may say that S. Frank’s religiousness had had its origins in the idea of culture: moreover, it remained ever connected with the idea, and would never have turned into any anti-cultural traditionalism or reactionary. I

can obviously explain the situation with the fact that in his worldview Frank's ever and inseparably linked the idea of culture to the idea of personality.

It seems true to say that the correlation of culture and personality in the "Essays..." had a form of a certain deification of personality. It was a humanistic idealism of a sort. The idea that personality is the only creator and bearer of absolute values justified the metaphysical connection between culture and personality. Frank and Struve understood cultural activities as a translation of the ideal into the realm of the real through the spiritual life of a personality. "Personality creates science, art, morals. Even in religion, denying itself, prostrating itself before the highest beginning, personality creates the beginning itself" [Struve & Frank, 2001: p. 50]. They understood personality as a single point, through which the divine spirit is acting to create all the absolute values. Although, yet in 1905 they wrote "the holy ghost" with small letters, nevertheless, they already acknowledged that "the holy ghost" is the creator of culture through personalities. Even religion itself turns to be a product of holiness, produced by a personality. Perhaps here reveals itself yet an "atheistic" position of that period, but it is so far from any godless nihilism: it is as far as it acknowledges the existence of absolute values. Personality, as the creator of these absolute values, is therefore the point that directs Frank's worldview in the way of *religion* and philosophy.

The position of the certain deification of personality, inherent the "Essays...", does not lead Frank to an atheistic, but to religious humanism. In this context, I may mention, the theme of contradiction between freedom of personality on one

hand, and an external organisation on the other, including the organisation of culture that Frank already developed in 1905. The freedom of personality is "the first and the most important condition of culture" [Struve & Frank, 2001: p. 50]. In this sense, the idea of the organisation of the culture appears to be a sort of "enlighten despotism". Despite the legitimacy and usefulness of organisation and discipline for a cultural process, "to organise and to discipline all means to kill, smother the very spirit which bears the culture". In connection to this, with a fresh actuality and boldness for the revolutionary epoch sounded the philosophic and political criticism: "Even the wisest government is not able to concentrate in itself the entire culture of the time. It is also does not comprehend all the richness of culture, consisting and being born in the souls of personalities. Collective culture of a people and the entire humankind is always higher, fuller and richer than the culture of officials, and this collective culture, in its substance, is able to see and

to develop itself just the way of unorganised intellectual ferment, through the collisions of the spiritual forces and strivings. <...> The state must be strong and well-organised to pursue systematically the cultural ideals into the life of society; but it should not censor and subordinate the cultural work: the sources of which ought always to enjoy freedom. The idea to rationalise the common life, to reduce all to a common denominator, distributing all things in an exact order and its place, is an anti-cultural idea. It is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, who is the creator of culture that ought not to be supposed a machine working at a command.

The culture has never been *fabricated* but *created*" [Struve & Frank, 2001: p. 57].

The same theme continued in the polemics with Lurie. Frank reaffirmed his protest "against the widespread cult of outward forms and relations, against repression of free personal creative activities with a hypnosis of public, against

supplanting the end with the means, against the replacement of creator with the ossified, objectified works of his own spirit” [Frank, 1996: p. 559]. However, in these words, yet more distinctively sounds a warning against another extreme, *i.e.* making a cult of personality, its deification as an abstract principle. Here, the emphasis of the Frank’s thought is even not the idea of personality proper as a point of creative activities of the divine spirit, but the social nature of personal creative activities, *i.e.* the idea of personality as a foundation of the common culture. This emphasis stands in close connection with the practical relativism that has been mapped out above, or even rather with the more precise understanding of relativity of any outward form or establishment. It leads neither to ignoring and rejection nor to the quest for personal salvation in the spiritual and cultural reclusion, but to discovery of the true value of the outward cultural organisation, *i.e.* its *relativity* as well as its *value*.

Culture is “rooted in personal life, being nourished with saps of personality, and it is dying when the root is clipped or withered”. But it does not mean that the personality is torn off the common principle, as far as “in the idea of culture, as creative realisation of the inner spiritual values, directed outside, we find that the unity of personal and social, subjective and objective, individual and over-individual principles” [Frank, 1996: p. 559]. The culture is not the outward establishments, taken in themselves, “but, namely, the unlimited process of self-education of the collective human spirit, as well as the objective result of the process” [Frank, 1996: p. 560].

In his work written between 1905 and 1909, Frank already distinguishes between the idea of culture and the *organised forms of culture*. This distinction became a foundation for understanding “the fall of the idol of culture”, written in 1924. However, the matter he discussed in the book was the fall of the *idea of progress* in culture as a progress of its utilitarian means (*i.e.* the material culture) that Frank himself refused to recognise as a culture. In this sense, the fall of the idol of culture Frank identified with the fall of its outward utilitarian form.

However, Frank also writes here about discredit of many spiritual values that were inherent to European culture until the period of wars and revolutions. The areas that according to the conception of Frank and Struve had been responsible for creation of absolute values, forming the framework of culture: morals, arts, sciences were shaken. The progress of science and development of technique causes the development of weapons and the means of destruction: the moral life suffers decline, and all the greatest achievements of arts are regarded as if they were only possible in the past [Frank, 1990: p. 139-140].

Thus, the point is not only the fall of the *idea of progress* in culture, but also *the decay of the ideas of culture* as a whole. His former distinction among the idea of culture and the organised form of culture Frank identifies with O. Spengler’s distinction between the culture and the civilisation. However, Frank filled the distinction with a different meaning. He admits that so called “material culture” has a right to be called with the name of culture (though, now there has been found more convenient name to it: *i.e.* “civilisation”). Frank did not oppose or separate the civilisation from the culture: the latter was the creative activities to produce the absolute values, in relation to which the civilisation was thought playing assistant, but yet very important role. Now it became obvious that fruits of civilisation

might become hostile to culture. There was not merely difference, but opposition “between the deepness and intensity of the spiritual life on one hand, and extensive spread of its outward results and benefits on the other” [Frank, 1990: p. 143].

The idea of culture as a whole, which Frank defended in 1905, proved to be untenable and inwardly contradictory. Speaking about the shipwreck of the idea of cultural progress, Frank was rather speaking about the dominant social mood (though the idea of progress was not alien to his own early conception of culture). However, the obvious contradictions (not differences, but contradictions!) between culture and civilisation made him doubt his own conception of culture as a system of absolute values. “<...> All the old, formerly indisputable values that were reputed as its parts ought to be at least either checked or revised” [Frank, 1990: p. 144]. It does not mean however that Frank was sliding down to the sceptical relativism. He stated the priority of spiritual life, but on a new, deeper and firm foundation. The foundation was not an artificial and inwardly contradictory notion of “*culture*”, but a natural notion of “*the life*”: “From the vague, disintegrated, contradictory, phantasmal notion of culture we return to more concrete, simple notion of *life* and its enduring spiritual needs and necessities” [Frank, 1990: p. 143]. Thus, the *philosophy of culture* is transferred by Frank into the *philosophy of life*.

I have marked three stages in Frank’s philosophic development, among which the polemics around “Vekhi” occupies the middle position. Frank himself designates these three stages with different names. The first stage that is the period of the “Essays...” is notable for the idea of deification of personality, as well as for stress on the idea of culture (and the cultural process) as a whole. On this stage, religion occupies a subordinate position: it is the stage of *humanistic individualism* [Struve & Frank, 2001: p. 62]. The second stage is the period of “Vekhi” and the polemics with Lurie. It focused on the religious sense of culture and the dialectics of the personal and the social in culture. It is the stage of the *religious humanism* [Frank, 1990: p. 110]. “The Fall of the Idols” marks the beginning of the third stage. Although there is no a new name yet, but Frank states clearly and definitely about conjunction of “the firmest and most resolute adherence to the eternal principles: those, which undergo profanation and being doubted; and the spiritual wideness and freedom, combined with sensitive, detached relation to the real life and its necessities” [Frank, 1990: p. 179]. Later, the conjunction was called with the name of “*the Christian realism*” [Frank, 1998: p. 199] (Frank and Struve created the political invariant of this metaphysical position, calling it with the name of the liberal conservatism). These three stages represent a controversial, but consistent logic. They represent the movement from the idea of culture as personal spiritual activity towards religious justification of the idea of culture and the idea of personality, and eventually towards the religiously conscious perception of life. The living ideal is the life freed of any idols, even from the idols of personality and culture, since the faith in the Absolute itself is sufficient to justify any relative values.

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