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### Social Ideal and its Implementation in the Philosophy of S. L. Frank

*Ideal social y su implementación en la filosofía de S. L. Frank*

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#### RESUMEN

El artículo examina la filosofía social de un destacado pensador ruso, Semen Frank, con el objetivo de identificar sus relaciones con ideas filosóficas generales, así como con los fundamentos religiosos de su pensamiento. Para estos fines, los autores examinan los conceptos básicos de la filosofía social de Frank en su interacción y conexión. Con base en la investigación, los autores concluyen que Frank construyó su teoría social sobre la base de la filosofía de la unidad total que da primacía a los aspectos espirituales del cuerpo social sobre bases materiales y empíricas. Los conceptos sociales básicos que desarrolla están relacionados con los dos modos fundamentales de la realidad: ideal y empírico.

**Palabras clave:** Semen Frank, ideal social, cooperación interpersonal, perfección moral, unidad espiritual de la sociedad, desarrollo histórico.

#### ABSTRACT

The paper examines the social philosophy of a prominent Russian thinker, Semen Frank with the aim of identifying its relations with general philosophical ideas, as well as with religious foundations of his thought. For these purposes, authors examine the basic concepts of Frank's social philosophy in their interaction and connection. Based on the research, authors conclude that Frank built his social theory on the basis of the philosophy all-unity that gives primacy to the spiritual aspects of the social body over the material and empirical ones. The basic social concepts he develops are related with the two fundamental modes of the reality – ideal and empirical.

**Keywords:** Semen Frank, social ideal, sobornost, moral perfection, spiritual unity of society, historical development.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Russian social and political thought of 19-th – beginning of 20-th century developed mostly in a broad religious and philosophical context. Many Russian philosophers based their analysis of the nature and structure of the society and its historical forms on the ontological and moral principles of Orthodox Christianity. On the one hand, the Christian-religious component infused Russian socio-philosophical thought with deep ontologism, linking the foundations of social being with the notion of the created world and the prospect of its eschatological transformation. On the other hand, it provided normative framework for social and political practice, bringing it in conjunction with Christian universal moral obligations and religious purpose of man.

In this regard, it is instructive to review the social theory of a prominent Russian thinker, Semen Ludvigovich Frank (1877-1950). Frank belonged to the rank of thinkers who tried to integrate social and political thought with the goals and objectives of the Christian religion and the realization of the religious ideal. In his social philosophy, Frank fuses the original analysis of the ontological foundations of social being with the main categories of Christian theology.

## **TWO PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL UNITY**

In his study of the foundations of social body, Frank has rejected both the realistic approach that society is an independent organism and an autonomous substantive being as well as the opposite nominalist approach conceiving the society as nothing more than just a sum of constituting individuals. Both approaches if taken separately are abstract and therefore not tenable in the frames of the theory of all-unity (a major idealistic current in Russian philosophy of which Frank was a renowned proponent).

According to Frank, a true understanding of society can be achieved only by a synthesis of these approaches that would acknowledge the objective reality of multiple and different individuals as well as the objective reality of society as an entity that supersedes its constituting elements. This means that in society the principle of the general is present not in an abstract form, as a generic concept, identical in all the items that constitute its scope, but in the form of a "unity of diversified". "Society is, writes Frank, ...unity and commonality in the sense of unification and coherence of life, its orderliness as a single concrete whole" (Frank: 1992a). According to Frank, this commonality that unites many members into a single whole is not a natural unity, but a spiritual unity. The essential feature of the type of the general that constitutes society is that in it "... there is no single subject of a holistic, universal consciousness; the spiritual unity is expressed in the internal connection of different individual consciousnesses of members of society" (Frank: 1992a). That is, the spiritual unity of society is precisely "multi-unity, ... existing and acting only in the coherence and unity of many individual consciousnesses" (Frank: 1992a).

At the same time, society as the unity of individuals is defined as the primary reality without which man cannot be conceived. As Frank concludes, "man is inconceivable by his very essence except as a member of society" (Frank: 1992a). Perfect consistency, spiritual unity of "You" and "Me" represents the state of positive all-unity or sobornost. However, positive all-unity does not exhaust the total reality. In accordance with the spirit of the Russian philosophy of the all-unity stemming from Vladimir Solovyov, the single universal reality exists in two basic modes – the mode of positive all-unity that corresponds to noumenal world and the mode of separateness and opposition (dis-unity) that corresponds to empirical world. According to Frank, this duality of the basic modes of universal reality affects all realms of being, including social being. Specifically, in the social being, it finds its expression in the fact that along with the principle of sobornost there is also the principle of the societalness [obschestvennost']. The interaction between sobornost and societalness manifests in the contradiction between the internal, spiritual and moral unity of people on the one side, and their compulsory unification into a social whole by an external force or institutes, on the other. The principle of the societalness as a compulsory unification is the effect of the empirical fragmentation of being; it overcomes the external

alienation of individuals in the similarly external way, so that the social whole is organized forcefully, either by submission of people to someone's individual or collective will or by compliance to legal norms and regulations.

Yet, these two modes of reality, – the immanent connection of everyone with everyone and the external unification of everyone with everyone in a political body – are according to Frank not equal. In fact, the internal unity of individuals has supreme character and lies at the bottom of their external organization into a social whole. Moreover, this organic non-coercive whole comes across not only the social ties of men, but also across each individual. "The whole not only unites inseparably the parts, but is available in each of its parts" (Frank: 1992a). The all-unity is intimately close to every person; it nourishes the personality from within. Defined more specifically, the principle of all-unity within the man is fundamentally her immanent connection with God, i.e. all-unity has theological character. This allows Frank to complement the theoretical foundations of social being and social ideal that he derives from the immanent analysis of the nature of society with religious-transcendental postulates, in particular, with the concept of history as a divine-human process.

### **SOCIAL IDEAL AS SPIRITUAL UNIFICATION OF SOCIETY**

The introduction of the principle of history as a divine-human process is essential for Frank's social theory since it allows him to proceed from social static to social dynamic and, specifically, to define the social ideal as the major driving force of societal changes. Basing on the presence in the social life of internal unifying foundations, Frank concludes that society is in its ground a spiritual phenomenon. Specifically, this is manifested in the fact that inside the social phenomena, according to Frank, lie some kind of ideas-patterns that are the goals of the human action. Only when there is an idea-pattern that individuals follow in their interaction, does a social phenomenon take place. But strictly speaking the social being in itself is not a spiritual reality, but an outward manifestation of spiritual life. As Frank puts it, "history is a great dramatic process ... unfolding in time and in the external environment of the spiritual life of mankind" (Frank: 1992a).

However, the refraction of normative ideas-patterns in empirical reality is different when encountering with two basic modes of the social being – sobornost and societalness. The internal adherence to the ideas-patterns results in moral life while the external subordination to them manifests in the phenomena of law and power, of which one is an abstract and general norm, and another is a specific human command. It is in the tense relationship between morality and law that Frank sees the most visible empirical manifestation of ontological human duality. "Since the nature of man ... is only potentially deified, since man ... remains a natural being, he shows a dualism between the empirically existing and truly-existing principles, [therefore] the action of moral life in the external sphere of human life can be realized only as a conception of the lawfulness of what is postulated as obligatory" (Frank: 1992a).

The tension between the external law and internal morality (or, in theological terms that Frank aptly uses – divine grace) stipulates the dynamic of social life. The fundamental characteristic of social being as predominantly a spiritual unity conditions its inherent and general tendency to overcome the empirical-fragmented condition and to implement in full scope free spiritual life in the empirical realm. In this sense the society's final and highest form is the Church understood by Frank as "...the whole unity of human life, established in faith" (Frank: 1992a). The highest purpose of human life is the complete filling of human nature by the divine grace, so that the world would be transformed into a Church, but this task goes beyond the limits of human history. Frank writes that all spheres of human life no matter how sublime and spiritual they may be, are affected by the worldly-empirical aspects precluding the full implementation of the ideal of spiritual unity. Frank cautions against expectations that the ideal social order can be achieved in the empirical course of history and by virtue of this insists that the social ideal shall be formulated only in general terms.

This means that any social utopianism based on the belief in the absolutely sacred character of a particular historical form of social life should be rejected, and any specific social and political goalsetting should proceed only in the form of the adjustment of general principles to specific historical conditions. The application

of the ideal-normative principles to the empirical conditions forms according to Frank the essence of politics. "Politics is the healing of ... society or its upbringing, the creation of conditions and relationships most favorable for the development of its inner creative powers" (Frank: 1992a). This definition stresses the impossibility of achieving the ideal social order. However, Frank admits the feasibility of a relatively more or less complete implementation of the divine truth in the human commonwealth. The necessary condition for this is the availability and the interplay of three basic social categories or principles – duty, solidarity and freedom.

### **THREE BASIC SOCIAL CATEGORIES AND THEIR INTERACTION**

"The category of duty, writes Frank, is the most common expression of ontological nature of man and therefore is the highest normative principle of social life" (Frank: 1992a). This category stems from the ontological lack of self-sufficiency of man, his need for self-transcendence and the realization of the highest divine will, for man is truly man only insofar as he overcomes his natural passions, and actualizes the divine principle that are originally present in him in a potential state. Therefore, the highest social category is the duty, not right and human behavior shall be determined by the duty of serving to the divine good. All other possible rights stem from the foremost right of providing the man the best possible conditions to fulfill his or her duty in the above provided sense. Only in the principle of duty can two other categories – solidarity, reflecting the unity of "We", and freedom, expressing the uniqueness of "Me" – be reconciled. If the last two categories, taken separately, are perceived as highest ones, then there can be no reconciliation between them, for they seem to be opposed, although at the same time they cannot exist without each other. Therefore, as Frank contends, neither human rights, nor the general will of the people (term coined by Rousseau) can be the basis of human society or serve as the supreme social ideal. However, as a subordinate principle freedom assumes utmost significance because the highest principle – duty – can be achieved only if it is implemented in free manner. Strictly speaking freedom is not a right, but "the primary obligation of a person as a general and supreme condition for the performance of all his other duties" (Frank: 1992a). In this sense, Frank again rejects the absolute character of so-called political freedoms; they are not determined a priori and depend on the specific level of the development of the society.

From the "unity of opposites" of the principles of solidarity and freedom, Frank deduces the need for both conservative and progressive politics in the society, which are morally justified only when they coexist and do not suppress each other. Conservatism arising from the principle of solidarity aims to preserve what has been already achieved and what has been established. Conservative ideology is justified as long as it asserts that society is not only what exists at the present, but includes the totality of its past. On the other hand, the idea of progress, ensuing from the principle of freedom, requires the introduction of new forms of social life and processes. Based on the combination of principles of conservatism and progressivism, Frank, despite all his unwillingness to choose one or another form of political system as the best one, considers that the most acceptable political system would be constitutional monarchy, since it most visibly combines both principles – preservation the continuity of social being and the freedom of social self-determination.

Harsh criticism of the unilateral prevalence either of the principle of solidarity (conservatism) or the principle of freedom (radical progressivism that denies the past) was consequently conducted by Frank in a series of his political articles, published post mortem in the digest, "On the Other Side of the Right and the Left". Thus, in the article "The Religious-Historical Meaning of the Russian Revolution", Frank writes that the meaning and negative lesson of Russian revolution was that it tried to establish the ideal of rational order of social life, while rejecting the principle of freedom, that is, the self-sufficient value of the individual, as well as the principle of solidarity that was manifested in the historical forms of political system. Russian revolution was precisely an attempt to "jump" into the perfect state of society, carried out from the position of nihilistically rational denial of traditional principles (Frank: 1967).

## **STRUGGLE WITH EVIL AND MEANING OF HISTORY**

The ontological duality that at the level of social being is manifested in the tension between the immanent moral life and the external relation to good in the form of obedience to the law, determines the specific ways of establishing the good and fighting the evil. On the one hand, Frank asserts that evil " ...is truly destroyed only by organic cultivation of the substantial forces of good ..." (Frank: 1992a). Any attempts of mechanical suppression of evil by legal measures no matter how severe and harsh they may be – will not be successful. However, these measures also have a relative value since, as per Frank, "... since the whole world lies in evil, the very possibility of preserving and sustaining life in it ... requires another task... – the task of curbing evil and protecting life from it." (Frank: 1992a). Hence, Frank proclaims the dual obligation for a good citizen – "a positive transformation of life through cultivation of substantial forces of good and a purely negative opposition to evil through... protecting life from it" (Frank: 1992a). Yet, Frank never loses from the sight the principal difference between just protection of life from evil and its positive improvement. The task of mere safeguarding from evil is per se not sufficient to secure the progressing to "normal order of life", i.e. to the actualization of spiritual unity. This can be achieved only by purposeful positive action. However, the task of positive perfection of the world, in fact, cannot be completed, because its final acquisition cannot take place without divine interference.

This inaccessibility of ultimate perfection by no means implies that history is meaningless. It precludes only from deification of the history by highlighting that all human efforts to achieve the final stage of the history are insufficient. History as a human process has only a relative meaning consisting in the postulate that "history is [only] the process of educating the human race" (Frank: 1992b), during which there is some accumulation and enrichment of the moral inventory. While not having self-sufficient value, the rational improvement of social structure creates a suitable institutional framework for moral perfection of men. Further on, despite that the highest priority is the moral perfection of individuals, one shall not underestimate the improvement of the general order of life, which is the "collective self-education of humanity" (Frank: 1992b), the approximation of the general order to the ideals of Christian life. Frank formulates this task as "the duty of creatively Christianizing the general conditions of life of the world, i.e. reforming them in the direction of their maximal compliance with the Christian truth..." (Frank: 1992b). At the same time, it remains without doubts that the most effective way of improving social relations is through the moral education of the individual. As Frank formulates it, "the level of social order stands in functional dependence on the moral level of the people who constitute it" (Frank: 1992b). A certain paradox occurs here: each step from the spiritual depth into the imperfection of the world, which by definition cannot achieve perfection, is a departure from the grace-filled, enlightened being, therefore there can be no Christian state in the true sense. But in a relative sense, it is possible and mandatory to strive to achieve the maximal approximation to the ideal of Christian truth, and in this relative sense one can speak about a Christian state, by which Frank understands such a socio-political structure, which consists of harmonious cooperation of small unions of men, where the general order has the character of inter-personal relations.

Summarizing what has been said above, we may conclude that for Frank it is the moral perfection of individuals that stands in the middle between human and divine sides of history – an external protection of the world from the evil and the essential overcoming of the evil, the salvation of the world (Frank: 1992b).

Assessing his contemporary historical situation, Frank considers that both tasks have come closer to each other than elsewhere in the history: on the one hand, "in order to simply protect life from death, ... to simply restore the elementary conditions of its preservation, it is necessary to somehow improve its foundations, correct in the old order what caused these disasters or was powerless to prevent them" (Frank: 1972). On the other hand, as Frank writes in the article "The Problem of Christian Socialism", a Christian believer shall not be indifferent or opposed to the solution of social issues by coercive measures adopted by the state on the condition that he or she is aware of the impossibility to eliminate social evil by such means, or in the words of Frank, a Christian believer shall always assert the ontological primacy of spiritual life, understanding that every

evil, including social, is ultimately determined by the sinful nature of man and, accordingly, cannot be eliminated by man's own efforts. Frank contends that a Christian believer shall not stand aside from safeguarding the life from the evil by force, however she shall bear in mind that, "... it is unacceptable to confuse the organizational task ... the task of external opposition to evil and the promotion of good – with a significant transformation of life that can be achieved only through free love" (Frank: 1972). As Frank formulates, a Christian believer shall act according to the metaphor "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it". One shall protect this light from the encroaching darkness and at the same time try to light it as much as possible. While following this dual obligation a Christian believer shall be always mindful about the final impossibility of realizing the truth and good in the empirical world.

## **CONCLUSION**

Briefly summarizing the above review of the socio-philosophical conceptions of Semen Ludvigovich Frank from the point of view of formulation of the social ideal and the principles of its realization, we come to the conclusion that for Frank the society is based on ideal foundations that are the ontological core, holding together the entire structure of society. Frank built his social theory on the basis of the philosophy all-unity what stipulated the immanent connection of his socio-philosophical ideas with religious foundations. This allowed him to develop social concepts on the ontological basis that gives primacy to the spiritual aspects of social body over the material and empirical ones. Additionally, these religious foundations infused Franks' social conception with normativism what in its turn stipulated that Frank conceived the implementation of spiritual social ideal as the main driving force of social changes and historical development.

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