

BULGAKOV'S SOPHIOLOGY AS PHILOSOPHEME: NON-ONTOLOGY AND ONTOGENESIS

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“The main feature distinguishing [cosmism] from the Christian cosmology is the absence of the idea of the createdness of the world, and this absence is, of course, rooted in the denial of the existence of the Creator.” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 4).

ABSTRACT: The text examines Sergej Nikolajevič Bulgakov’s description of the philosopheme as thoroughly “immanent” (viz., the immanence of man *qua* being, such that ontology in Bulgakov becomes a conceptual analogue for immanence) and the corollary that such immanence necessarily excludes the problematic of the “creation of the world.” Because of this resolute immanence and the notion that the creation of the world in the form of *creatio ex nihilo* requires a non-immanent or non-ontological thought and concept, the problematic for Bulgakov is approached only by a theologeme. Appropriating this argument as material for a cursory philosopheme, the text attempts to transform Bulgakov’s theologeme into a philosopheme through an elision of God and dogma that overdetermines the theologeme. This philosopheme (nascent within Bulgakov’s work itself, in both his hesitation to the overdetermination of immanence and the commitment to the problem of creation) would be a thoroughly non-ontological philosopheme, one that allows for the treatment of the problematic of “creation” or singular ontogenesis, yet with the corollary that this philosopheme must rely on an “ontological zero” Such a philosopheme *qua* ontologically empty formula nevertheless remains ontologically significant insofar as it is to evince the limit of ontology, in the ontological zero’s non-relationality to ontology.

KEYWORDS: Non-ontology. *Creatio ex nihilo*. Ontogenesis. Hypostatization. Transcendence. Immanence. Non-relation.

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The absence of God entails the insufficiency of cosmism, that is, the philosopheme,¹ metaphysics without revelation; theology will ascribe the privation to philosophy in the former's assumption of the dogmatic. For Bulgakov, this delineation recalls a tension between axioms. The theologeme permits, in its axiomatic commitment to the acuity of a dogma, "the idea of the createdness of the world"; the philosopheme operates with the "incorrect axiom." (BULGAKOV, 2006, p. 16) This gloss of the axiom recapitulates two premises crucial to Bulgakov's thought:

- 1) The reduction of epistemological possibility to ontological possibility.
- 2) The insufficiency of this reduction vis-à-vis the "idea of the createdness of the world", which infers an *insufficiency of ontology itself, in terms of the notion of ontology as stricture, a stricture that occludes the creation of the world.*

The thought of Bulgakov thus consists of a succession of radically oppositional moments: the reduction towards the bare minimum of being and how the latter may determine thought; and the subsequent *metabasis eis allos genos* – a syntagm Bulgakov will repeatedly employ – away from this very reduction and determination, a *metabasis eis allos genos* that is rendered licit by the non-ontologicality of the dogmatic axiom. The presence or absence of God, as the discrepancy between the philosopheme and the theologeme, is thus, beyond their initial isomorphy, indicative of a contentual variation within the axiomatic form that engenders and delimits two distinct types of cosmology: ontological and non-ontological. The difference between the ontological and the non-ontological is a question of the absolute. In both cases, there is an absolute; the decision is whether to ascribe an absoluteness to the world or an absoluteness to the non-world. The metaphysics of Bulgakov, his "sophiology", is a decision for the latter.

Non-Being of the World's Antecedence

The occlusion of the createdness of the world is the occlusion of the second moment in Bulgakov's thought; it is the commitment to a resolute ontology. The intention of "ontology" may be provisionally clarified in the postliminary of Bulgakov's texts as identical with a series of conceptual analogues: immanence, cosmos, world. The philosopheme, in consistency with the logic of the axiom, is an organon determined by these analogues: any philosopheme that is to explicitly or implicitly invoke transcendence is a

¹ Bulgakov employs the term philosopheme to describe any variant of philosophical thought; he employs theologeme as describing any variant of theological thought. In the text, the terms philosopheme and theologeme are used in the Bulgakovian sense.

dissimulation engendered by this series, as the latter, necessarily without God, is qualified as lacking. Transcendence may be defined in apophatic formalisation as non-immanence, non-being, non-world, etc...; in kataphatic formalisation, as God. In a recollection of nihilism, the absence of God is the absence of transcendence; and insofar as for philosophy there is neither a formalization nor contentual ascription of transcendence, there is no antecedent to the world. For Bulgakov, no philosopheme may aver transcendence without the support of immanence - a resemblance to various Parmenidean and Platonic abstractions of the affinity of thought and being, yet without the idealistic corollaries of this affinity - the reduction of epistemological possibility to ontological possibility does not abjure from a realism, but rather suggests the ontological status of thought itself, one that may be described in various consonances with Bulgakov's metaphysics as complicit to the strictest materialisms: "Human thought...as such, remains immanent to the world" (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 8) insofar as this thought is itself of the world.

The separation at stake is thus not between thought and the world; that is, the problematic of the createdness of the world is not one of realism *contra* idealism, but of ontology *contra* non-ontology. With more acuity, it is the problematic of a *realist non-ontology*. To posit the creation of the world requires a thought of the non-world, in which the privative of the "non" remains thoroughly undetermined by its stem, so as not to tautologically re-intercalate the world as a postulate in the thought of the its own creation. When in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein remarks, "it is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists", (WITTGENSTEIN, 2003, 6.44) it is the non-worldliness of the world that suggests an anagogic, inasmuch as any prospective theorisation remains disjunctive to the immanence of the philosopheme. This is the symmetrical logic of Bulgakov's denotation of the thorough cosmism of the philosopheme; and the latter is thus acuminated - according to a vocable that is to be added to this series of conceptual analogues - as a monism, the latter identical to the following thesis: "The world is self-sufficient and can be understood from itself." (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 3) The world is *kath' hauto*, and the question of its origin, or of its death, are to be understood from the world itself. To compare the death of the world to the death of a multicellular organism, the latter's death can be understood as *kath' hauto*: for example, the phenomenon of apoptosis. The origin of the organism, under this same denotation as *kath' hauto*, can be traced to the consistency of what Kant would call "the reproductive faculty"², or the

² "If some magical power were capable of modifying the reproductive faculty itself, of transforming Nature's original model or of making additions to it, we should no longer know from what original Nature had begun, nor how far the alteration of that original may proceed, nor into what grotesqueries of form species might eventually be transmogrified." (KANT, 1910, p. 545).

consistency of organisms, viz., their self-sufficiency for describing their genesis. This same self-sufficiency becomes overtly inadequate for the origin of the world, when this origin is thought in its most primordial sense; the commitment to the *kath' hauto* would at least ascribe an eternity to the world in its historical register. For Bulgakov, the world as *kath' hauto* is a stricture, from which the philosopheme is to only affect underdetermined distensions from within the world, whilst it concomitantly precludes the question of the latter's genesis. The axiom of the philosopheme is thus coextensive with, in a Heideggerian manner, the "finding oneself in a world", however, with the supplement of the total stricture this epigraph implies: everything is of the world and the corollary is that the world becomes limitless, the world assumes the status of an absolute - there are only various materialisms,³ there are only various immanences - there is only ontology.

It is clear, therefore, that theology, according to its own prescriptive, cannot accept the philosophical axiom; the absoluteness of the world would belie the absoluteness of God. Bulgakov's theologeme is an intended derogation from the world as *kath' hauto* and ontology. The hostility of this theologeme to ontology thus recalls the traditional theological concept of an *epekeneia tes ousias* that is to be ascribed to God. *Epekeneia tes ousias*, as beyond being, delimits the stricture of ontology; the stricture of monism, immanence, the world, cosmism, etc.,. Furthermore, *epekeneia tes ousias*, as beyond being, permits the genesis of ontology in its positing of an ontological gap, a dehiscence of the stricture, which enervates the absoluteness of the world. If any philosopheme, despite endemic variations, is necessarily ontological,⁴ there is no ontological gap that the philosopheme may petition, inasmuch as it presupposes the world's absoluteness in its rendering of everything as ontological. The "suspicion", as Jean-Luc Marion will term it, (MARION, 1995, p. 82) of an ontological gap is a suspicion of God; yet as these philosophemes are not theologemes, the ontological gap is not rigorously posited. Although the history of ontology evinces that ontology may be differentiated in terms of an exigency to being as presence or being in its non-entical sense, this ontological difference is insignificant for the theological axiom, in the latter's identification of the putative self-sufficiency of the world, which subsumes any prescribed difference, and thus, any gap inherent to the expostulation of a difference, an implicit

³ One can make this a contemporary political commentary and refer to Badiou's syntagm of "democratic materialism" as developed in A. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds (Being and Event, 2)* (New York: Continuum, 2009)

⁴ This is familiar as one of the motifs endemic to the so-called "theological turn" of phenomenology. Cf. as example, J. L. Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

concession of ontological overdetermination, a symptom of the latter. This is the same thought which Marion recovers in his allusion to Heidegger's imagined theology, the latter appearing in the former's *God Without Being* with the effect of a certain imperative: "No more than Heidegger has aroused the suspicion that it may be necessary to liberate "God" from the question on/of Being", (MARION, 1995, p. 61) such that, going on to cite Heidegger, "Being and God are not identical and I would never attempt to think the essence of God by means of Being [...] If I were yet to write a theology – to which I sometimes feel inclined – then the word Being would not occur in it." (MARION, 1995, p. 61) If this "non-identity" evokes some consonance of immanence, world and being to the same degree as Bulgakov's series of conceptual analogues, the explication of God in terms of being would only repeat the dissimulative absolute ontological stricture Bulgakov had sought to delimit and ultimately break – the theologeme is obliged in these formulations to develop a degree, however minimal, of non-ontologicality to God. The axiom of the theologeme is the assumption of this very ontological gap, equivalent to this transcendence *qua* non-immanence. The purely *metaphysical* significance of the theologeme thus lies in the dual indexation and development of this gap: it is a suspicion of immanence, the world, monism, being, although as approached through the specifically theological qualification of the acuity of God, a certain *epekeneia tes ousias* of God.

It can be argued that the development of the sense of such a non-ontologicality at stake in *epekeneia tes ousias* is the essence of Bulgakov's entire sophiology. Non-ontologicality is to be rendered acute; non-ontology surfaces in the problematics that Bulgakov will repeatedly treat, such as the creation of the world, God's relation to the world, and eschatology, the latter non-ontologically overt in its description by Bulgakov as "the doctrine of *ta eschata*, of the final accomplishments, which transcend the present world" (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 379) and "the last word of Christian ontology." (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 379) The notion of non-ontologicality thus remains at least implicit throughout Bulgakov's work, nevertheless with occasions of its explicitness, particularly in such postulations of ontology as stricture and theology's *per contra* commitment to at least a minimal non-ontological register to describe God, as, for example, found in the precision of metonymies for God such as "Not-Is" or "Divine Nothingness" from his *The Unfading Light*. The non-ontologicality of "the very problem of the *origin* of the world" (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 3) thereby confers an unambiguous terminological sense to this "origin": the problem of primordial cosmogony, of the origin of the world, is one of a singular ontogenesis, with this singularity denoting the radicality of this problematic itself, insofar as it recalls the question of being without recourse to being, a singular ontogenesis that cannot be developed ontologically.

The Divine Sophia of Bulgakov's sophiology both rigorously formalizes this problematic and proposes its tangible exposition, as cursorily recapitulated in the abstraction of Divine Sophia as "divinity as the foundation of the world." (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 14) This divinity as divinity excludes itself to a degree from the world, as the divine is not the world, and thus the foundation is here congruent with the origin of the world. Sophiology, irrespective of its theological tropes, is a treatment of this non-world that is the foundation of the world, of an ontogenesis without ontology. It is a theory of the origin and the death of the world. Sophiology allows for the origin and the death of the world in its derogation from ontology; moreover, it does not dismiss the origin and the death of the world as the impossible, as beyond thought. For sophiology, ontology becomes germane only in the thought of its own ontogenesis, or its relation to the thought of the death of being. In the occlusion of this origin and this death - "this last word of ontology" - ontology proper always defers this last word, according to a regionality that dissimulates itself as an absolute, such that, *pace* Heidegger, there is no fundamental ontology, but merely regional ontology (a pleonasm). Sophiology does not posit being as exhausting thought, in consistency with what may be termed being's ultimate provinciality; the theological decision, to the degree that it petitions transcendence, is the thought of *not* "finding oneself in a world." The origin and the death of the world becomes the essential question for sophiology, insofar as it evokes the absolute.

Theologeme as Philosopheme

That the dogmatic axiom of theology, however heteroclitite, may claim to essentially vulgarize ontology recalls the theologeme's endemic speculative potential. It will induce as corollary the *a fortiori* elimination of problematics that are symptoms of ontology: the ligation of thought and being, realism and idealism, anthropomorphism, finitude, etc., in the positing of the minimal continuity and constancy of ontological statuses that constitute the stricture of the world. The inflection of this speculative potential does not, of course, suggest that philosophy is in some way obliged, according to its own set of theoretical commitments, to take this axiom as forcing any austerity whatsoever. Nor does it accept the minimum of this postulate in its pure content. The axiomatic support of dogma, of the acute content of revelation by fiat, is obviously thoroughly insufficient for any philosopheme. Moreover, this dogmatic aspect only attenuates any initial speculative potentiality of the theologeme. These are of course the immediate terms of philosophy's irreconcilability with theology, the latter a tension resolutely clear in the Kantian syntagm of dogmatic metaphysics: the axiom that begins from the necessary being of God, when appropriated as philosopheme, concedes its own symptomatology, its own putative and dissimulative minimum.

Yet insofar as the theologeme itself may be said to mimic a traditional philosopheme in its claim of a thought according to transcendence - although one that is in tension with the philosopheme - the theologeme remains germane to the philosopheme, according to such a hesitation towards the world. Furthermore, that the theologeme in Bulgakov's reading may propose a question that philosophy is unable to even formulate would suggest a more radical "scandal of philosophy", which could only incite for the philosopheme a *non* - what Aleksandr Dugin would term - "ontological reconnoitering." The philosophical as opposed to theological reading of Bulgakov engenders a primary line of investigation: *the possibility of a non-ontological philosopheme, that is, the method for the transformation of the theologeme into a philosopheme*

Any such method is accompanied by an immediate prohibition; however, a prohibition that at the same time cursorily suggests the terms of a direction. A philosophical appropriation of the non-ontologicality of the theologeme must *ipso facto* maintain the insufficiency of God, which forces a certain derogation from and crossing out of God and its corollaries (e.g., some divinity applied to the anthropic or the world); the philosopheme cannot repeat God as axiom without repeating the necessity of a being, thus assuming the dogmatic and rendering itself a theologeme. The elision of the dogmatic content - transcendence without dogma - necessary to the non-ontological philosopheme would thus evoke what may be provisionally termed a "void"; and the effectuation of the latter that is this philosopheme, to maintain its purity as philosopheme, must maintain an asceticism to this elision. The philosopheme claims the ordination of the theologeme's transcendence, but rather than operating from the latter's maximal and minimal senses, i.e., the maximal lucidly indicative of the thinking under God, it deploys only a (non)minimum, a theorisation according to this "void"; a theorisation which, for example, would be used to develop a previously foreclosed problematic such as that of singular ontogenesis.

This prospective transformation of the theologeme into a philosopheme does not repeat any dogmatic metaphysics or onto-theology. Following Bulgakov's formalisation of the problematic of singular ontogenesis, this transformation is rather *a repetition of a formal enervation endemic to a classical philosopheme, ligated to a separation of being and the absolute*. If philosophy is always concerned with degrees of apostasy to *doxa* as a certain, at least minimal, invariant, then the Bulgakovian apostasy does not repeat, with and after Nietzsche, the dissimulative essence of any philosopheme, insofar as in Bulgakov there is a pacification of this judgment of dissimulation, which is the invariant that is the immanence, being, worldliness of all philosophy; it is even a philosopheme that posits a beyond being, such as

the classical metaphysical form Nietzsche would critique, which would remain at least unconsciously ontological, according to Bulgakov's reduction of epistemology to ontology. In consequence, Bulgakov will repeat the theologeme's own generic suspicion: that the radicality of the philosophical suspicion is never radical enough. It is such a *doxa* of being, the fealty to the world and its putative "givens", which implies that the proposed radicality of the suspension, reduction or elimination⁵ performed by the philosopheme falters on the conceptual analogues of immanence, world, ontology, in its inability to think without maintaining some minimum of being. The rejoinder of the theologeme, however, is not merely the identification of this impasse, which would only repeat what Russian Orthodox theology had already delineated as the antecedence of nihilism in Kantian finitude⁶ (conceived through the latter's separation of thought from the absolute), but rather the commitment to transcendence's inflection into this very impasse, the latter having itself become reified: a certain cutting of transcendence through any putative absoluteness of the world. If philosophy, man, immanence, as lacking the axiomatic of transcendence, lack the radicality of the theologeme, the problematic for such a cursory philosopheme is thus one of determining the precise terms of the correct apostasy, terms that are preliminarily established in the assumption of the seriousness of the apostasy to immanence proposed by the theologeme, however, without the adherence to the axiomatic of transcendence in the form of revelation, dogma. It accepts this axiomatic only insofar as it recalls a radically philosophical gesture, that of the suspicion of the *doxa* of immanence, being, matter, self-reflexivity, consciousness, language, anthropomorphism, life and whatever other remainders have been posited in the history of philosophy after this suspicion has been acuminated in the formal methodology of the suspension, reduction or elimination. The apostasy of the philosopheme would thus entail the separation of being and the absolute, the commitment to an acute non-immanent, non-ontological point - this is a singularity⁷ exterior to any "economy"⁸ of the ontological -

⁵ The reverse operation, an irreduction, for example in the Latourian sense of "making things more real" is also insufficient, as it is an explicit commitment to the ontological, and moreover precludes a singular irreduction: the irreduction of metaphysics to ontology.

⁶ The continuity of nihilism and Kantianism conceived in terms of a shared separation of thought from the absolute is identified by Milbank as one of the critical philosophical positions of Russian Orthodox theology. Cf. John Milbank's lecture *Sophiology and theurgy*: the new theological horizon.

⁷ Singularity here can be understood in a sense agnate to when it is employed in physics to denote the "outside" of the latter's laws; here this singularity is non-ontology.

⁸ This derogation from the economy of the ontological, can be recapitulated in terms of Bulgakov's own personal theoretical turn away from economics.

and to think this singularity, to think outside this “economy” is the asseveration of the possibility for a non-economical, non-ontological thought.

Yet this provisional non-ontology of the philosopheme as opposed to the non-ontology of the theologeme appears all the more austere, according to the theologeme’s necessary ascription of an ontological status to God.⁹ In this regard, the theologeme cannot be conceived as a thorough non-ontology. For although Bulgakov made explicit the necessity of a radically non-ontological account of ontogenesis, viz., a singular ontogenesis that is the problematic of the ontogenesis of being itself; it therefore professes, through the dogmatic axiom of revelation which is its logos of non-world, to think non-ontologically, yet with the corollary of ontological concession that is essential to its axiomatic: the being of God. For whereas the ontological status of God is to a degree non-worldly, or absolute, that God is to be conferred an ontological status will ultimately force a conflation of ontology with the absolute. It is necessary for the theologeme that God exists. Following this necessary commitment, it is clear why Bulgakov did not go so far as to abstain from abstracting this problematic as “ontological.”

There is no such ontological concession for a philosopheme that would appropriate Bulgakov’s formulation of the problematic. According to a non-ontological philosopheme, the question of singular ontogenesis does not require a necessary being, the dogmatic metaphysical position as described by Kant. There is no obligation to the existence of God for any philosophical assumption of the theological axiom, in the sense of a transcendence (non-world) deployed to avoid the stricture of being. This is why the philosopheme will maintain a greater ascesis to a provisional non-ontology than any possible theologeme. The absence of God allows for the formalization of the ontogenetical problem in its strongest sense, as that of a pure non-ontological problematic.

What is the constitution of this non-ontological philosopheme? If for Bulgakov the entire problematic of singular ontogenesis without ontological

⁹ Thus, Marion too, at first glance exemplary of this desired “diminishment” of being as already explicitly given in the title of the monograph *God Without Being*, must retain being to not belie his theological commitments: “Was [*God without Being*] insinuating that the God “without being is not, or does not exist? Let me repeat now the answer I gave then: no, definitely not. God is, exists, and that is the least of things. At issue here is not the possibility of God’s attaining Being, but quite the opposite, the possibility of Being’s attaining to God.” (J. L. Marion *God without being: hors-texte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. xix-xx.) The concession of God’s being is clear, and thus of the ultimate ontologicality of Marion’s project; even the subsequent notion of “attainment” as an analysis of “the possibility of Being” delimits the location of Marion’s thought strictly within the horizon of Being.

expostulation requires the *metabasis eis allos genos*, the “transferring the question to another plane” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 11) away from the putative absoluteness of being, the nascent philosopheme is consistent with such a shift, and moreover completes it, in the movement away from both being and God *qua* absolute. In this regard, the formalization of this philosopheme is rudimentarily a series of adductions against both the theological and the ontological. On the one extremity, the elimination of God; on the other extremity, the elimination of being; because of the at first glance temerity of this *metabasis eis allos genos*, the non-ontological philosopheme immediately recalls only the formalisation of apophatic negation, according to the opacity of what constitutes such a non-ontology of ontogenesis. Regardless of this opacity, it can be suggested that a variant of such a philosopheme and the possible elaboration of its constitution is present in Bulgakov’s account itself; however, only to the extent that the *metabasis eis allos genos* of the non-ontological philosopheme is one that includes the elision of God, with the intent to avert any theologeme, whilst concomitantly petitioning a rigorous thought of the non-ontological. *The contention is that in this elision of God from Bulgakov’s account, there remains the rudiments of a non-ontology, as Bulgakov makes explicit, despite his reliance on the theologeme, both the axiomatic nature of thought (and thus the possibility of a non-ontological account of ontology) and a non-ontological treatment of singular ontogenesis.* A philosopheme as developed from a non-ontology that is nascent within Bulgakov is thus an application of this more parsed philosophical non-ontology, in which a certain grafting of the latter unto Bulgakov’s own decisions is performed. As the preclusion of being is already to a degree extant in Bulgakov, the philosopheme is a progression through the elimination of any remaining theologemes - the suspension of any explicit declaration of transcendence = (ontic and/or ontological) X - such that the transcendence without dogma is carried out through these eliminations in an intended treatment of singular ontogenesis, in which the theologeme, read as elided of God, may be transformed into a philosopheme.¹⁰ This is a certain mutated or reversed anagogic as applied to Bulgakov – an anagogic that practices the excision of the mystical from the texts – what is behind or

¹⁰ As Bulgakov will make explicit the inclination of the philosopheme’s immanence and the theologeme’s non-ontologicality, what Bulgakov implicitly invokes is the general transfiguration of theologemes into philosophemes, viz., the non-ontological anagogic of theological systematics. This is a material that takes on somewhat of a philosophical avatar in the theologeme’s non-reduction to the ontological, whilst concomitantly delimiting the latter’s non-absoluteness, a certain separation of thought and being, however with the proviso entirely necessary to the philosopheme of the elision of God.

beyond the text is rather a non-ontology: an experimental anagogic committed to such a non-ontological concept within and beyond the text.¹¹

Creatio Ex Nihilo

It is not a fortunate coincidence that Bulgakov will employ *creatio ex nihilo* as the syntagm to abstract the problematic of ontogenesis without ontology. This is not only a “thoroughly dogmatic formula”; (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 6) in the elision of its dogmatic content, it is consonant with a philosophical formula, as it incites the very problematic of singular ontogenesis. That is, the formula, despite its origin as theologeme, is germane precisely in its evincement of the non-ontological symptom of Bulgakov’s texts: it marks the extent of Bulgakov’s commitment to the non-ontological, irrespective of the ontological status the theologeme ascribes to God.

The problematic of singular ontogenesis occupies the first part of Bulgakov’s *Bride of the Lamb*. Bulgakov uses God as conjecture against both the insufficient exigency and ultimate preclusion of the problematic in terms of the familiarity of a theological doctrine petitioned against that, which would belie the absoluteness of God. Cosmism substitutes the latter with the absoluteness conferred to the world; furthermore, what Bulgakov will term dualisms allow for the exposition of singular ontogenesis, however as dualisms, they are to concede a second “altero-God” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 7) alongside both the world and God, which engenders the formation of the world itself. Theologically, this dualism is of course suspect, as it “is impossible to accept that God exists and that, alongside Him and besides Him, there exists a pseudo-divine principle, a ‘second God.’” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 6) It is nevertheless the intercalation of the supplement of the altero-God, despite its pure theological insufficiency, which creates an aperture from which to approach singular ontogenesis insofar as it infers what Bulgakov is to term an “ontological hiatus”: the hiatus functions as the positing of the creation of the world via such an altero-God that delineates a diffusion or discontinuity in ontological statuses, from which the origin of the world is made licit in the interruption of the putative absoluteness of the world.

In the history of the mistreatments and preclusions of the ontogenetical problematic, it is thus for Bulgakov Platonism which had occupied a crucial position in this history, as in Plato there is extant a variation of this hiatus. Bulgakov remarks that Platonism contains a sophiology, however a corrupt or incomplete sophiology: “Platonism remains only an abstract sophiology,

¹¹ There is a resemblance in method to Althusser’s “symptomatic readings”, to a prospective Laurelleian non-theology.

unconnected with theology” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 9) as “we have only Sophia, divinity without God, ideas without anyone who has them, inasmuch as the demiurge is not God.” The initial ontological hiatus within Platonism is one between ideation and the world, in which there is a separation of the “heaven of ideas from the empirical vale” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 8) – although Bulgakov will go on to construe the *Timaeus* as an “attempt to complete Platonism” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 9) in the form of a demiurge that effectuates the ligation of ideation and the world, this attempt is lacking both theologically and non-ontologically. Whereas the theological criticism of Platonism relies on the heretical quasi-divine status of the demiurge as its obvious trope, for the non-ontological anagogic this supplement is entirely inconsequential inasmuch as what remains is an ontologization of both ideation and the world, or of any such demiurge itself, such that there is an impasse inherent to Platonism with regards to a prospective non-ontological treatment of this hiatus, as the latter in Bulgakov’s words “inevitably slides into subjective (transcendental) idealism or into Aristotelian monism.” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 9) There is an idealism extant in the positing of the ontologization of the idea and any of its correlates such as the subject; or there is a monism that will be effectuated according to a general ontologization of ideation, the world and the demiurge. Regardless of the amendments Bulgakov conceived within Platonism, in both cases, what is operative is the motif of ontologization, either through a hiatus that casts two regions of ontologization, or an ontologization (the demiurge) proscribed to avert this hiatus within being in an ontological conjoining of these ontological regionalities. That Bulgakov found this account insufficient is not only demonstrative of the typical argumentation of theological doctrine, but in the terms of the non-ontological philosopheme, such insufficiency is the identification of the absence within Platonism of a pure non-ontological dimension: Whilst Plato neared a Sophiology in the notion of hiatus, it is because this hiatus is a resolutely ontological hiatus that Platonism is explicitly unable to address *creatio ex nihilo*.

Yet the notion of the hiatus is nevertheless non-ontologically relevant, as what the formula *creatio ex nihilo* evokes is such a hiatus between the ontological and the non-ontological, viz., why Platonism may be said to intimate a sophiology (and why non-ontologically, such dualisms are ultimately monisms): the ontological hiatus non-ontologically is to denote the limit of the ontological; and furthermore, rather than to posit being as the terms of this hiatus, *creatio ex nihilo* is to intercalate the non-ontological variant of this hiatus. The non-ontological significance of *creatio ex nihilo* is construed precisely in terms of the treatment of this hiatus not as a hiatus within being, but rather as the hiatus’ adduction against the absoluteness of the conceptual analogues of world, immanence, being.

It is the notion of what would (non)constitute such a non-ontological hiatus that *creatio ex nihilo* immediately recapitulates: from the perspective of a non-ontological anagogic, there is nothing resolutely theological or dogmatic about the formula. If the philosopheme's appropriation of this formula must at first glance remain hesitant towards aspects of *creatio ex nihilo*, this can be conferred to an effect of the deistic inflection of *creatio* – the latter is nevertheless unnecessary, if *creatio* is to be thought in terms of the non-ontological treatment of ontogenesis – it does not conflict with the ontogenetical problematic, but only demarcates, in the non-ontological anagogic, the becoming of being from non-being. The directionality of this non-being itself, however, must be adhered to, since it allows the problematic to appear as such – the alternative is the becoming of being from being, which would only repeat the very cosmism that excludes the problematic, i.e., the purely ontological problem of individuation, in opposition to the non-ontologicality of *creatio ex nihilo* – without such an ontogenesis, the world would repeat its historical absoluteness. As such, the *ta eschaton*, as Bulgakov notes, is to a degree consistent with this ontogenesis: Against its apparent theological essence, *creatio ex nihilo* abstracts both ontogenesis and eschatological death in the prescription of the limit of being. To consider *creatio ex nihilo* as a false problematic could only be attributed, following Bulgakov, in the acceptance of the axiomatic of immanence and an absoluteness of the world, being – the problematic itself remains consistent only from a non-ontological axiom that treats the world, being as non-absolute.

Creatio ex nihilo is explicit in its inclusion of both a non-ontological notion and the singular ontogenetical problematic. In this regard, the formula has a *prima facie* dyadic structure, however with an isomorphy between the terms of the dyad that belies the rigidity of the latter delimitation. The development of the formula requires an explication of this *nihil*, this non-ontological aspect; it is also a question that inquires into the becoming of being (or eschatologically, the death of being). In both cases, however, what is isomorphic is that everything cannot be reduced to being. This irreduction necessary to the non-ontological philosopheme is consistent with the latter's necessary elision; and despite the pure apophaticity the elision suggests, it is nevertheless acuminated in Bulgakov's texts, with a regard, above all, to the derogation from the conflation of the non-ontological, viz., this *nihil* or nothing, with any ontological element: "One should not conceive this 'nothing' as 'something' existing before the creation of the world as its necessary material or at least as the possibility of the origination of the world." (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 6) The *nihil* is not an absence of being that still remains determined by being, but rather a nothing whose conceptual vocable remains susceptible to equivocation if compromised by any ontological inflection.

Thus, if there is some inference of trajectory posited in the very formula of *creatio ex nihilo*, this trajectory is not one, as Bulgakov makes explicit, isomorphic with potentiality – i.e., that the *nihil* bears the potentiality of the formation of Being as its “necessary material”, or that it in some way subtends being, would only recall the ancient accounts of matter qua non-being and form qua being and belie non-ontological concept at stake in the problematic of singular ontogenesis. In this sense, there is a radical *non-relation* between this something and nothing, precisely because there is no “necessary material” to this nothing, or any postulated relation between something and nothing. Such a non-relation stems from the positing of this nothing in its strongest sense: “the nothing out of which the world is created is precisely a not-something, the pure not of ontological emptiness.” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 6) It is decisive not to equivocate this nothing with variants of ontological negativity, as ontological emptiness is acutely non-ontological negativity: “We must distinguish two nothings without confusing them: 1) the precreaturely or noncreaturely nothing, or the pure ontological zero, emptiness, which is conceived by us only through logical repulsion, the negation of all being in a certain ‘illegitimate judgment’ (as Plato calls it); and (2) the ontic, creaturely nothing, *me on* on which permeates creation, so to speak. This *me on* is just a mode of this creaturely being, but in this sense it is.” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 7) The second nothing is that of the *me on*, which is the negativity or nothing of the world, the objective genitive, and thus remains ligated to immanence, to being, to ontology – it is a “minus” that in its purely privative form remains overdetermined by the stem *on*, such that Bulgakov can state “according to pseudo-Dionysius God created this nothing” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 7) to the extent that this nothing remains ontological, immanent nothing, merely the opposite of being in its form as non-being. In contrast, the pure ontological zero is the first denotation of nothing that coincides with the dogmatic position that *non-ontologically* elides the necessity of any being (and thus non-being). Although the Platonic “illegitimate judgment” concerns this ontological zero, the illegitimacy can be conceived again as the failure to posit a resolutely non-ontological hiatus. Whilst “the negation of being” is an apparent apophatic description of the ontological zero by Bulgakov, the ontological zero is not derived from the privation of being – in *creatio ex nihilo* its “anteriority” to the world is not subsumed under the categories of ontologicality – the ontological zero is without form or content, without time, existence, or any registers of ontological discourse, yet not in the sense of privation (e.g., Bulgakov will make this explicit to the extent that even the singular ontogenesis cannot be described as a “beginning” since the latter implies a temporal aspect of its existence). Furthermore, nor is the ontological zero consistent with some

type of Hegelian operation, which infers the negativity of the *me on*¹² in what is ultimately a relational dialectic: all these notions belie what is stake in the notion of the ontological zero in their common overt relationality. It is because of the very stringency of such pure “ontological emptiness” that the “fullness of the problematic of creation” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 7) is evinced in the formula *creatio ex nihilo*: the ontological zero of the *nihil* is *absolutely non-relational* to this ontologicality and thus is not the postulate of an apophatic theology or dialectics.¹³ The hiatus of *nihil* and ontogenesis - without this hiatus alluding to some relationality - evinces the “fullness” of the problem, as the radicality of the hiatus that is posited strains the *eikos* of any ontology, such that it becomes a full “paradox” for Bulgakov because of the absolute non-relationality of such a hiatus.

It is of course a paradox that Bulgakov nonetheless approaches, although according to the theological appeal of a *metabasis eis allo genos* consistent with the ontological necessity of God and hence the ontological tropes of relation, viz., that is of being and of beings: “The world relates to God not as equal to Him, not as a mode of being coordinated with Him, but (if one can say this) as a heterogeneous mode of being.” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 7) Despite the ontologization of God that grounds this summation, there are two decisive instances constitutive in this account that licit its non-ontological transposition:

1. The notion of a “heterogeneity of being” entails both the heterogeneity of being to being, an intrinsic heterogeneity, and the heterogeneity of being to the ontological zero, an extrinsic heterogeneity. The cautionary “if it can be said” is an attentiveness to the undesired appropriation of this heterogeneity in terms of a heterogeneity-to, i.e., a relation to non-being - the recusal of both equality and the coordination of mode is stressed because they imply such relationality - it is rather the extrinsic heterogeneity of being that would delimit the singular ontogenetical problem itself and the non-relation of *nihil* and *creatio*, such that this heterogeneity is to be elucidated in terms of this non-relation.

¹² Cf. Bulgakov, *Bride of the lamb*, p. 66-77 for the consignment of time and space to the ontological.

¹³ And certainly the problem of the theologeme is that it must posit God as non-relational to denote His absoluteness, but at the same time the theologeme must posit the relation of God to the world, in the sense that God created the world - God must be both relative and absolute - in the non-ontological substitution of God by the ontological zero, there is no such aporia present insofar as there is neither the endemic theological need to posit a relation between the ontological zero and the world nor the need to confer God an ontological status; as such this treatment may licit the ontological zero as radically non-relational and absolute.

2. The ontogenetical problematic cannot be posited in terms of a terminological usage of the relation as it belies the entire non-ontological anagoric of Bulgakov's account. To aver the non-relationality of *creatio ex nihilo* is thus to suggest a "unilateral distinction" between the non-ontological and the ontological, in the sense that the non-relationality of God and the world is a unilaterality consonant with the singular ontogenesis of *creatio ex nihilo*.

The terminology of the relation in Bulgakov evinces the necessary ontological status the theologeme confers to God: if the *nihil* is to be posited in its most radical sense, as the ontological zero, this can only indicate its absolute non-relationality to ontology. Any attempt to posit *creatio ex nihilo* as a relation is a re-ascription of ontological status, however minimal, to the ontological zero, insofar as it is posited as something vis-à-vis ontology; or it is a compromise of the status of the ontological zero itself, in some type of overarching, to a degree formally consistent, dialectical mediation of the relata, which *creatio ex nihilo* is against in its prospective unilaterality. It is thoroughly consistent with Bulgakov's account of the ontological zero that it must not be conceived as relata, the latter implying a formal impasse to the treatment of the ontological zero in the theological "need to simultaneously unite and separate, identify and oppose, two modes of being: divine-absolute and creaturely-relative." (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 33) Irrespective of the theological gloss employed by Bulgakov, the relation denotes this form of simultaneous unity and differentiation of beings – if the ontological zero is to be posited in *creatio ex nihilo*, there is essentially no relata extant in the formula of *creatio ex nihilo* as the *nihil* is with exaction not a "mode of being" – rather this formula is a non-ontological description of ontogenesis, such that the ontogenetical problematic of *creatio ex nihilo* is one of formulating *creatio ex nihilo* as the unilateral non-relation of the ontological zero and singular ontogenesis.

Unilateral Non-Relation and Hypostatization

The formalisation of a unilateral non-relationality developed from within the non-ontology of Bulgakov nevertheless lacks an acuity, in the theologeme's ascription of an ontological status to God. If this is a theoretical proclivity, it is not, however, endemic to the theologeme, as Bulgakov's entire criticism of the philosopheme stems from the resolute ontologicality of the latter. The formulation of unilateral non-relationality, in consistency with the ontological zero, is thus to be developed beyond any equivocation with relation or with being.

Both the criticism of this conflation and the positive formulation of this notion are found in the work of Francois Laruelle. One of the commitments essential to Laruelle's project of "non-philosophy" is the notion of a unilaterality that avers a ligature to the non-relation. (in Laruelle: unilaterisation) Although unilaterisation obviously functions in a role intricate to Laruelle's non-philosophy - and despite the technicalities and the unique problematic of this project - one can briefly intercalate here, in an admittedly both cursory and rudimentary utilization of this approach, that such a "non-relation, unilateral duality" is excluded by ontology and that the ontological philosopheme always proceeds so that "the relation is presupposed as that in terms of which the real is to be posited." (LARUELLE, 2004). As Brassier clearly summarizes Laruelle's conception of unilaterality in both its strong non-relational sense and philosophy's belying of this unilaterality by relation: "Unilaterality is well known in philosophy: X distinguishes itself unilaterally from Y without Y distinguishing itself from X in return...But in these standard philosophical contexts, the unilaterality of X is always reinscribed in a bilateral relation with Y at the supplementary meta-level available to reflection, which enjoys a position of overview vis-à-vis X and Y and continues to see both terms in relation to one another at the same time." (BRASSIER, 2007, p. 140). The acute intent is to avoid the re-inscription of the relation: It is the meta-level which betrays the rigorousness of unilaterality, as the former entails a positing of the relationality between the two terms, thus re-introducing the notion of relation into its exposition. To maintain a non-ontological acuity, the formula of *creatio ex nihilo* cannot posit this same relationality, as the formula's significance in Bulgakov is developed irrevocably in its unilateral, non-relational, non-ontological significance; that is, the ontological zero in its strongest sense completes this very unilateral non-relationality. Whereas God must aver the minimum of some gradated relation to the world in order to maintain that the world is the creation of God, and concomitantly not belie the latter's absoluteness, non-ontology does not consist of any relation, but rather requires the absoluteness of a non-relationality to maintain an austerity to the notion of the ontological zero. In the non-ontological appropriation of *creatio ex nihilo*, it is therefore that being in its heterogeneity distinguishes itself from *nihil*, but *nihil* does not distinguish itself from anything, as the non-ontological recapitulates the ontological zero as an absolute nothing – as absolute nothing, there is nothing to be distinguished. In this regard, Bulgakov can be said to maintain the unilateral commitment of *creatio ex nihilo*, as only one side of the "duality" is distinguished: there is no meta-level operative in the non-ontological, since the non-ontological axiom posits the world in terms

of nothing, the thorough unilaterality of a creation from nothing, the world as distinguished from nothing.¹⁴

One may suggest that there is an obdurancy of this notion in Bulgakov's project. *Creatio ex nihilo* can be named a hypostatization, the latter consistently returned to in Bulgakov's Christology and cosmology – the apparent “fourth hypostatization” of Sophia that will thereafter be rescinded by Bulgakov in the re-interpretations of doctrine, such that hypostatization remains abstruse, whilst at once overdetermined by both conceptual genealogy and internecine theologemes – yet it is the bareness of hypostatization itself and the Bulgakovian commitment to hypostatization which maintains a certain consonance with this very non-relationality and unilaterality, insofar as hypostatization denotes essentially an instance of ontogenesis, yet the ontogenesis of the non-ontological. If sophiology may be abstracted as an account of hypostatization, of the effectivity of the Divine Sophia, its hypostatizations in and of the world – wherein here again Sophia is something to the effect of an ontological structure – the vitiating of Sophia completes the hypostatization in its non-ontological significance: to elide the hypostatization of its theological tropes is a treatment of the unilaterality of *creatio ex nihilo* such that it describes *the hypostatization of the non-ontological itself*. The hypostatization that is being's distinction from nothing is a unilateral distinction, as this nothing does not distinguish itself in return, that is, that there is nothing to be distinguished from; moreover this hypostatization entails the hypostatization of this *nihil*, of the ontological zero, such that the createdness of the world becomes the hypostatization of the ontological zero.¹⁵

Within the context of logic, the apparent logical falsity of the hypostatization is no less supportive of this notion. The lack of existence, making the inexistent existent is the grounds of this fallacy, and hypostatization is thus essentially an ontological fallacy. It precludes non-being, as the logical proposition grounds itself in the putative separation between the ontological and the non-ontological, a separation in which what already is ascribed an ontological status avers the remit of the logical. It is thus entirely significant that in Christology, it is this “fallacy” of hypostatization that is the entire essence of its problematic: the coeval

¹⁴ Moreover, *pace* Laruelle, who will equate transcendence with separation and thus relation, it is here that transcendence, viz., non-immanence is acutely non-relational, absolute.

¹⁵ According to the non-temporality Bulgakov assigns as necessary to the ontological zero, to say the ontological zero is hypostatizing itself, or has hypostatized itself, or will hypostatize itself is non-ontologically consistent and a differentiation is only implied from the ontological remit; whereas the verb “is” does not indicate a dialectical convertibility (Laruelle) of being into nothing (being is nothing, i.e. Hegel), but is the unilateral non-relational hypostatization of nothing.

transcendence and immanence of Christ, or the hypostatization of transcendence. Within the non-ontological anagoric, in consistency with the Christological treatment of hypostatization, hypostatization is not a type of logical fallacy, but rather the derogation from ontology qua primary in the hypostatization of nothing. As corollary, hypostatization necessarily completes the vector or directionality of *creatio ex nihilo*, viz., the unilateral non-relationality of singular ontogenesis, in terms of the hypostatization of *nothing*. From within the horizon of a theologeme that will lead Bulgakov to describe “hypostatization in the image and likeness of God”, (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 82) this image and likeness is substituted in the non-ontological philosopheme with Bulgakov’s pure empty, ontological zero: this hypostatization is the strict dehiscence of transcendence, nothing - there is not, for example, a place for nothing or for creation, as Bulgakov remarks against “Plato’s *ekmageion* or *chora*” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 5) - this is the hypostatization of non-existence, non-life, nothing, without the inscription of a locality or a vassal, but rather a hypostatization of the ontological zero that is a unilateral hypostatization, however diffuse, from a minimum that is not even a minimum in its ascription as zero.

To describe being as a unilateral hypostatization of nothing will signify a temerity for ontology, as this recapitulation is essentially ontologically meaningless, in symmetry to the logical fallacy of hypostatization, when this nothing is taken in its strongest sense, viz., as Bulgakov’s ontological zero. The unilateral hypostatization of nothing as such remains utterly destitute for the economy of the ontological. Yet it is according to such a meaninglessness, that the non-ontological philosopheme delimits and affirms the stricture of ontology away from the putative *kath’ hauto* of being: what is asseverated is a contraction of being, world, immanence through the absolute non-relationality of the non-ontological concept. The ontological destitution itself is the admeasuring of the stricture, insofar as ontology cannot re-inscribe this hypostatization into its remit, without belying the absoluteness and non-relationality of the ontological zero: “this void is neutral, neither separating nor connecting.” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 80) It is precisely the notion of being as a unilateral hypostatization of nothing that is impossible for being, and thus vitiates the absoluteness of the world.¹⁶

¹⁶ Certainly, attempts at such non-ontologies, to cite as examples Levinas and Marion, have maintained concepts designed as delimitations of the ontological with an analogous circumscription of stricture – yet in the non-ontological philosopheme the difference construed here is more radical according to the ontological zero that forces this delimitation of the ontological in a resolutely non-ontological manner – what Bulgakov makes explicit in the recovery of *creatio ex nihilo* is a pure non-ontologicality, beyond any encounter

If both classical metaphysics and theology have always maintained that such a *penia* is conferred to being, the non-ontological philosopheme recalls this same *penia*, however without any ontological status acceded to God, or any ontological hiatus between beings - matter, creature, man, angel, demiurge, idea, God. If there is a philosopheme that is no longer concerned with being; one may aver the certain negation (irreversible, unilateral, eschatological) of the world. The sophiological commitment to the origin and the death of the world does not concede topologies or chronologies, in their inherent determinations by an ontological trope; the metaphysics of the “unfading light” of Bulgakov is the metaphysics of a light without speed, in which the non-ontological philosopheme thinks the completed, final, one could say eschatological excision of the ontological, the zero *qua* absolute, etymologically cutting: “the end of the world is not physical but metaphysical.” (BULGAKOV, 2002, p. 401).

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RESUMO: O texto examina a descrição do filosofema de Sergej Nikolajevič Bulgakov como completamente “imanente” [a saber, a imanência do homem *qua* ser, de modo que a ontologia em Bulgakov torna-se um análogo conceitual da imanência] e o corolário de que tal imanência necessariamente exclui a problemática da “criação do mundo”. Em razão dessa imanência resolvida e da noção de que a criação do mundo na forma de *creatio ex nihilo* requer um pensamento e um conceito não-imanentes ou não-ontológicos, a problemática da “criação do mundo” para Bulgakov é abordada somente por um teologema. Apropriando-se desse argumento como material para um filosofema fugaz, o texto procura transformar o teologema de Bulgakov em filosofema, por meio de uma elisão de Deus e do dogma que sobredetermina o teologema. Esse filosofema [que nasce no interior da própria obra de Bulgakov, em sua hesitação com respeito à sobredeterminação da imanência e ao compromisso com o problema da criação] seria um filosofema completamente não-ontológico, que permite o tratamento da problemática da “criação” ou ontogênese singular, ainda que com o corolário de que ele tem de depender de um “zero ontológico”. Um tal filosofema *qua* fórmula ontologicamente vazia permanece não obstante ontologicamente significativo, à medida que ele evidencia o limite da ontologia, na não-relacionalidade do zero ontológico com a ontologia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Não-ontologia. *Creatio ex nihilo*. Ontogênese. Hipostatização. Transcendência. Imanência. Não-relação.

with the Other or any theological saturated phenomenon: the non-ontological anagogic of Bulgakov evokes the insufficiencies of the ultimately *ontological* ethical or religious undercutting of ontology in the disclosure of the economy of ontology’s thorough *penia*. There is an Other in Levinas, as there is God or the saturated phenomenon in Marion.

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