

## **Russian Philosophy on Human Cognitive Capabilities** **by Vera Babina and Natalya Rozenberg**

*One of the important directions in modern Russian Philosophy is the research of concepts explaining the spiritual life of human society. In XIX-XX centuries Russian philosophers proposed some new ideas based on the lived experience of Russian culture. They tried to reveal its spiritual essence. The thinkers used both the rich heritage of classical European philosophy and the spiritual traditions of Eastern Christianity. The key goal was to create a philosophical theory that would give answers to numerous up-to-date social questions. This aim was the primary driving force of ontological and gnoseological theories formed by a pleiad of Russian thinkers starting from P. Chaadaev and concluding with P. Sorokin and A. Losev.*

The second half of XIX century was a profoundly fruitful period in Russian philosophy. Original Russian philosophy developed in the circumstances of the sharpest social conflicts and the search for an ideology. Despite the close contact and cross-fertilization of Russian and European philosophy in the XIX century, in many cases, they were conflicting. There was a serious distinction between the Western and the Russian types of philosophical thought. The Russian philosophical thought is inherently inseparable from the Christian mindset and the basics of Christian spirituality. It focused on the problems of the substance and the meaning of human existence, the original mission of a person, the meaning of culture, the consistent pattern of history and other eternal questions, which can never be solved.

At the beginning of the XIX century, Russian philosophy experienced significant influence from classical German philosophy. Russian thinkers actively explored, interpreted and used the ideas of I. Kant, F.W.J. Schelling, G.W.F. Hegel and other German philosophers. However, often those brilliant ideas were misinterpreted and deformed due to different cultural-historical and philosophical traditions. Therefore, from the beginning of the second quarter of the XIX century, Russian thinkers have proposed several original approaches to the most significant philosophical problems posed by world philosophy.

Among others, those concepts included "metaphysics of the heart", which originated in the philosophical culture of Kievan Russia and the Grand Duchy of Moscow and afterward noticed in the works of G. Skovoroda and the Slavophiles. The idea of the heart as a center of spiritual, mental and physical life, according to Russian philosophers, is the valuable precondition of an integral cognition of the world. Primarily, the concept strived to find a path to the closer approaching to the Absolute in its specialness and the intimacy of its existence in the human. Further, it served as a center for different conceptions that would

combine them all into a one integrated philosophical-anthropological theory that could interpret the broad range of scientific data from the position of humanitarian values.

The evolvement of an integral "metaphysics of the heart" concept began from the article "The heart and its significance in the spiritual life of a person" by P. Yurkevich (1826-1874). However, it is necessary to point out, that Yurkevich consistently referred to this theme in his other works.

According to Yurkevich, the heart has both ontological and gnoseological status. The heart and the mind are symbols of two origins, two deepest human powers. Speculation about how to overcome their discrepancy, and how complicated their interrelations are, takes one of the most significant places in the Russian and the world history.

Physiology and psychology in Yurkevich's time held that the human brain acts as a direct organ producing thoughts from impressions of the external world. According to the materialistic philosophy, the human soul considered as a representing agent, not a source of sense; at the same time, it claimed that the intellect accurately represents the spiritual nature of a person.

Such an idea, from Yurkevich's point of view, leads to the denial of personal freedom, to its limitation with the sphere of logical conclusions of the intellect, which does not entirely cover the spiritual life of a person. Yurkevich advanced the idea of the multi-directional connection between the soul and the body. Although the link between body and soul is indubitable for Yurkevich, he considers it as not mechanical but as sensible, ideal, and spiritual. In his opinion, the container of soul-life is the heart, which combines the powers of the human body and acts as the physiological form of the soul. The heart is not mechanical, but a mystical center of human spirituality. Only God knows all its secrets. Yurkevich stated that,

**"the most reliable facts of physiology, which confirm the close connection between conscious movements of the soul with the actions of the human brain, do not contradict the biblical doctrine of the heart as the source of the soul life. It is very likely, that the soul as a basis for known psychic phenomena holds the heart as the closest organ, though its conscious life finds itself in conditions of human brain activity" [4, p.80].**

The heart, in its lofty meaning, is the basis not only for the physical and mental but also for the spiritual essence of a person, including the realization of human cognitive capabilities.

The most important impulses start from the heart. It connects the human being with the Universe, with other people, with God. Connection through the heart is considered the most essential, deep and intimate one. It is felt and experienced in various ways. Whereas the word

shapes the inner essence of the substance, concentrated in the heart, into the logically organized formulas; therefore, it plays not main, but a secondary role.

Yurkevich's gnoseology built on the principle of gnoseological dualism confronted the theory of materialistic monism in the sphere of cognition, which is based on the conjunction of two levels: sensual and rational, through induction and deduction methods. To Yurkevich's gnoseological schemes, a three-stage structure of human knowledge is peculiar: the stage of comprehension of sensual world phenomena; the stage of the intelligible world of ideas; and, finally, the stage of absolute intuitive understanding of the both worlds. The transition from one stage to another is hardly possible, but if it happens, then the stages are connected to each other in such a way, that all differences between them disappear. Eventually, Yurkevich came to the intuitive-irrational gnoseological conception, which answered to the requirements of his own Platonic and theistic outlook.

Cognition of the world's entirety, that is to say, "appearing reality" or "idea" glows in the heart unnoticed by us. It lightens and colors existent reality, or in other words, the heart acts as a horizon of reality. The heart goes ahead of the mind in cognition. "Thoughts of heart" are not immediately understood by the slow mind, since the heart perceives "insights of the truth" directly, whereas the mind comprehends them through the logical decomposition.

The intellect has the value of light for the philosopher. Spiritual life appears before the light of knowledge in the gloom and darkness, inaccessible for the gaze. Human intelligence is a peak, but not a root of human spiritual life, which is hidden deeply inside the heart. The soul is not a machine controlled by the impressions of the external world. Each thought enters the soul as an internal condition, which means much more to the spiritual life than just a representation because the latter is only an image of a thing.

Cognition by the heart is preeminently intuitive. The inmost essence of things is accessible to the believing mind whose wise vision is directed by the vivid and creative act of faith coming from our hearts.

Defining "the heart" as the core of human spiritual life, Yurkevich does not deny the abilities of the mind, nor does he undervalue its part in human life; on the contrary, he insists on the balance of mind and heart in spiritual life. The truth is that "the heart" can discover and comprehend instantaneously, as quick as a flash – in its individual way – such states of mind, which are inaccessible to the distant abstract-logical cognition of the intellect. However, the intellect regulates purposeful activities of the person. Intelligence is a "legal force" of the soul, whereas spiritual life arises at first through the light of the knowledge – in the dark, in the deep waters of "the heart" hidden from our eyesight. The light of knowledge and comprehension naturally arises on this foundation only.

Determining the borders of "heart" and "rational" cognition, Yurkevich could not avoid the question of reaching the truth as the result and the objective of any knowledge. He researched not the logical form of truth, but the ultimate absolute truth itself. According to Yurkevich, science, which relies solely on experimental data, gives only the matter for logical notions, but it does not provide truth, especially in the philosophical sense. Our thoughts and actions are the expressions of our heart feeling. The soul processes all incoming impressions according to the particular heart's "mood". No external stimulation can convert it to action if it does not meet the heart feelings of the person. Therefore, the ultimate truth is religious truth. Cognition of a thing is only possible in its relation to God.

The truth received through the natural sciences, is so small, that the human feels its slave rather than its master. Nevertheless, Yurkevich states the intellect may dictate and command but only when the commands are consonant to the nature of a living inspired person and do not intrude as something alien.

Further, this theme was developed in the works of S. Frank, P. Florensky, I. Ilyin, V. Rozanov, V. Zenkovsky, B. Vysheslavtsev and others.

I.A. Ilyin (1883-1954) in his monumental theoretic work "The idea of the individual in Stirner's theory" noticed, that the concept of the absolute integrity of a person cannot be created by analysis, but only through the direct synthesis, through the integral perception of the personality in all its uniqueness. The reasons for the deepest crisis in contemporary culture were, according to Ilyin, the contraposition of the mind and the heart, intellect and feelings, the breakup of society and the person:

**A man, whose soul is split and not whole, is a miserable man. If he perceives the *truth*, he cannot identify, whether it is truth or not, since he is not capable of *perfect integral vision*... He stops believing the perfect vision may ever be given to the human. He does not want to accept the fact that others have it and meets it with irony and sneer..." [2, p.396].**

Ilyin associates the overcoming of the breakup with the aspiration to the harmonization of mind, faith, will, and conscience, in other words, with the coupling of mind and heart. Following this concept, Ilyin develops the basis for his theory of intuitivism.

In Ilyin's opinion, the primary sin of philosophy is the compulsion of life to the laws of logical, its subordination to conceptual schemes. The real existence of things cannot be limited by the borders of the human mind. The philosopher-researcher should not distort an object in his reflection; his objective is "heart" contemplation, which leads to the truth. According to Ilyin, the subject of philosophy is the origin of the Spirit, which appears both in

wildlife and in inanimate nature, in the human being and its creations. Philosophic knowledge can be obtained through the spiritual experience only.

One of the key concepts of Ilyin's gnoseology and methodology is "insight", which represents the opposite to the surface visibility. It is always substantive, flexible, and historical. Achieving insight requires from the researcher a sense of responsibility, the ability to develop the deepest feeling and even vivid love to the subject. Only personal pure experience gives the philosopher the right to talk about the subject:

**The main rule of this path states the following: first of all – to be, then – to act, and only afterward from the apprehended being and from corresponding, and maybe dangerous, and even painful doing – to philosophy" [2, p.412].**

In forced emigration, the philosopher developed his vision of the character and the objectives of Russian religious philosophy, which, in his opinion, should have refused to imitate any of the foreign philosophical schools, and should become instead a firm foundation for research of the spirit and spirituality.

The rich theoretical heritage of the Russian thinkers may be considered as one of the approaches to overcoming the systemic crisis of modern civilization. The relevance of this for problems of social-humanitarian knowledge in XX–XXI centuries is shown by the penetration of the humanitarian element in all spheres of education and scientific activities. It is hardly possible today to imagine activities in any area of science and practice without considering values and their hierarchy. Progress in the understanding of the nature of truth in modern science and philosophy turns the attention of researchers to the substance, methods, ideological and axiological frameworks of cognition. To establish a general theoretical basis of culture, to define its historical perspectives, we must analyze the ideas existing in science and philosophy at each of their different stages, to research the reasons for their creation and transformation.

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**Babina Vera Nikolaevna**

Ph.D. in Philosophy, Associate Professor at the Department of Philosophy and Social Communications. Penza State University, Russia

**Rozenberg Natalya Vladimirovna**

Doctor of Philosophy, Head of the Department of Philosophy and Social Communications. Penza State University, Russia.

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Email: [minisel@gmail.com](mailto:minisel@gmail.com)