

The Metaphysics of Archbishop Nikanor (Brovkovich) of Odessa (1827-1890)

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Archbishop Nikanor (Brovkovich) was bishop of Odessa until his death in 1890. His interesting metaphysics of Light has much in common with Palamas, and is largely ignored in English. St. Basil's concept of Substance is similar to Nikanor's. Both men rejected the idea that objects have an essence, in Aristotle's sense, all to themselves. The essence of creation is Substance, or Logos.

Another way of putting this is that there is a single “elemental essence” that is the foundation of knowledge. There are other, more numerous “individual essences” that correspond with the objects that humans find useful. The former deals with reality, the latter, mere use.

For humanity, the unconditioned, Substance, can be understood from our perception of the limited. The unlimited Substance cannot be understood by the senses, but can only be deduced through our reflections on them. The simple proposition that underlies his metaphysics is that the finite, or the limited, always and logically must, entail the unlimited or Substance. This Substance is of immense simplicity and represents “absolute, unconscious reason.”

Substance is spirit. Like S. Frank's analysis of Spinoza, this is not pantheism. Substance is the creative cause of all things, the spiritual fundament upon which all existence rests. This is instantiated in matter. For epistemology, this means that the task of cognition is to grasp the whole, that is Substance, perfectly present in each part. The “parts” are abstract in Hegel's sense, since the only “object” that can be known is Substance.

Our mind, its archetypes and Substance are not distinct. They form a whole. For practical life, the distinction is pre-cognitive, but this does not suggest that the distinction is ultimate. What it does suggest is that knowledge and universals are predicates of existence. If the mind can operate according to universal ideals, then these ideals are – for this reason alone – an active part of the whole. They are experienced, used as motives for action and hence, are quite real.

“Intuition,” a concept shared later by Lossky, is a “sense” that can discern Substance in the limited. The “limited” is a better way to describe the abstract object of the nominalist. Of objects, taken out of their context and hence “abstract,” can be known to the extent that they are “limited” that is, set off from the rest. The intuition is shared by all men and is part of human nature. It serves as the intellectual springboard for all religion, ontology and metaphysics.

The positivist view only rarely can cease from venerating itself when dealing with history. History is a movement of ignorance, which refutes other ignorance, until it reaches them. Metaphysics for them, especially intuitionism, simply refers to the “ignorance” of previous generations. Metaphysics occurs when men do not know the true causal nature of things. When they do not understand causes, they invent metaphysics. Of course, from the positivist point of view, this thesis cannot be proven or unproven, hence, is “nonsense” in the technical, logical language of that school.

Following Solovyev, positivism was criticized for confusing the self as the origin of thought versus the self being the object of every state of consciousness. Empiricism in Solovyev is self refuting:

1. I know the content of my sense impressions;
2. I know my self through states of consciousness;
3. Consciousness presupposes me, the object of perception;
4. Therefore, the self is both the subject and the object of perception.

For Archbishop Nikanor, however, metaphysics derives not from this historically embedded “ignorance” so dear to positivism and other theories of science, but rather derives from man's desire to know Christ. Positivists hold that a) there is no *telos* to the universe and b) this *telos* cannot be understood. These are often collapsed into one assertion which, again by the positivist method, cannot be used as arguments. From a metaphysical point of view, He is Logos and Substance. He appears in all his fullness when approached liturgically or sacramentally, but this is a work of metaphysics, not theology. There is an inner drive to know the cause, purpose and end of the universe. This, not ignorance, is the cause of metaphysics.

The world of the positivist is that of practice. So long as it remains in its limits, this is not a problem. However, the rule of technics guarantees this not be the case. However, technics and practice are not the end. These presuppose a greater purpose. This begins the extrapolation into “ideal knowledge,” that is, the intuition of the whole. The subconscious mind retains a vague idea of Substance, but it remains at the level of a barely-understood archetype. It conditions experience without being detected as such.

Methods of modern science distort reality in its drive to shape it according to their own conceptual universe. The assumptions of modernity are several:

First, that objects are discrete. Objects, seen as complete in themselves, are then posited to exist in some kind of mechanical relation. From here, hypotheses are constructed in accordance with this a priori. Needless to say, none of this actually occurs in science. This idea of “theory building” is in the realm of myth and the purely ideal. It is not scientific because it is purely ideal and has never been experienced. What occurs is that the dominant paradigm is used to generate practical problems that are to be solved. The rest is merely taken for granted.

Second, the idea of a “complete” object is false. There is no “scientific” reason to believe that y quality of any x is the essential and “rational” element of it. Of course, such a question is not scientific in itself. Objects, seen in all their manifestations, go far beyond what the positivist and neo-positivist sees. The real weakness of modern empiricism is their deliberate refusal to see the endless parade of assumptions that are required for even the most elementary cognition to occur. Objects contain infinite content in that they are capable of infinite modes of comprehension. To privilege one aspect over the others is arbitrary, and has more to do with power relations than epistemology.

Logic as a set of formal relations pretending to exhaust all that is knowable is the function of reason. Mind is entirely different in Nikanor's thought. Mind is that which is capable of going beyond the merely conceptual. The most unscientific assumption of modernity is likely the assumption that formal concepts are not just the fullness of knowledge, but defines what is real. The absurdity here is evident merely in the expression. Such a view is based on circular reasoning, which is the eternal problem for rationalism of all types, since reason does not justify

itself. Reason is the first, more formal, step in grasping an object (or in Nikanor's idea, to assimilate it). This is insufficient and cannot be called knowledge. Mind then attaches universals, additional Forms of all types, to the object, thus uniting it with the social, the aesthetic and the spiritual.

Third, modern empiricism fails to grasp that all perception is conditioned. If this is the case, than the naive, more popular conception of what "science" is can be easily dispatched. To argue that the perception of a blank consciousness confronting an alien and irrational external world is absurd. It is not scientific, but ideological. Nikanor, Losev and many others in the Platonic tradition reject the notion that any phenomenon is provable. John Locke's system is based, not on scientific and mathematical proof, but on being "reasonable." No appearance or image can be proven.

When an object is discovered and analyzed, what was once seen as "alien" has now been altered: it is no longer "external," but is part of the world of the knower. It is "internal." The known object never retains its purely logical and formal relationships to the mind. It soon is turned into myth. Myth here is the symbolic ordering of a world as a set of pre-cognitive and a priori states. All thought depends on it. A myth is not something that is false, just something that is required for the word "false" to make any sense.

Myth here adds the qualitative to the object. Imagination, memory and emotional associations are now attached to the object. The analysis of the x must have been undertaken for a reason – that is, there was some drive to uncover the object – and thus, the object begins to have quite personal qualities. It becomes a mythical unit. Here, true knowledge can be approached. The emotional connection of the self to the x is as much knowledge as its transference into technical purposes. Since there is a reason for the uncovering of this particular x, the emotional and personal is inherent to the analysis. Again, positivism fails here as well.

This is another way of saying that the whole is slowly and gradually (albeit incompletely) extracted from the object. Ignorance is the belief that an x is external and alien. Knowledge is when the mind, as a social unit, begins to associate other universals with the object. To pursue justice is driven by a love of the good and right. The struggle is cleansing, rewarding and maddening. Knowledge of social things then is not disinterested, since nothing is outside of interest and the personal. Building institutions according to justice requires imagination, a grasp of the universals that can be related to the object and all the aesthetic and qualitative elements that tie men to institutions in general. These are innate to the mind, since the mind itself is social.

For Nikanor, metaphysics is a dialogue between two concepts: the specific and universal essence of things. His view of the world has much in common with Spinoza in that the specific essence implies Logos. If Aristotle's version of essence is true, then it only begs the question – what to the essences of objects have in common. This is the most important question in metaphysics because it will lead to the idea of Substance as being the substratum of all Being.

The "elementary essence" for Nikanor, like many variations on this theme, is similar to Spinoza's Substance. In this case, it is not a theological entity, but is also revealed in theology as Logos. Substance, scientifically speaking, is a formal category of Being. It is simple, yet contains all things. The elementary essence is Plato's Unlimited. An object in Aristotle's sense is the Limited. Substance is what connects contingent being to the cosmos as an ideal unit or Substance.

This is not to say that objects do not exist. It is only to say that to argue that any x has a substance in Aristotle's sense is incorrect. One can have a definition of an x, but this is relative. It

is merely utilitarian. The part makes no sense outside of the whole. Substance generates Forms and Archetypes. These act as limits on the specific forces making up the whole. These are “individuals” since they are grasped as products of restraint.

The Form of an object of social importance is a universal element of social life. Agriculture, creative industry or political thought are all indispensable elements to the good life and hence, are that which the Forms manifest to fallen man. The Forms are relative, of course, but they are an empirical first step to the absolute. Plato's Forms are social in origin, but this is just from the point of view of limited people in history. Forms must also have an origin, and this is logos, a manifestation of Substance. The All is fullness and totality, while the part, the individual Form, represents limit and resistance.

Losev's conception of the Platonic Form (or Idea) is typical for Russian Platonism. The Form is the ultimate structure of the universe. It is the conception of the limit, or the features that separate one class of things from another. It is neither a universal nor an abstraction and in fact, is the ultimate amount of content a thing can have. Nikanor uses this same conception in describing the Ideal Form as the fullness of any x in all its infinite relations. Importantly, too, the Form is a subject. The ancient symbol for this was “fire” – the light that comes from the form, or the model. Losev too takes from Nikanor the idea that logic is different from reason: the former practical, while the latter is aimed towards truth rather than use.

The New Martyr Archbishop Theodore (Pozdeevsky) argues that any experience, sustained over time, leads to a rejection of the phenomenal world as its own ground. Moral life serves as an example of metaphysical truth: all moral ideas presuppose a human nature. This human nature is not material and seeks the ideal to rule over the material. The good must be intrinsic to man and commensurate with his nature: hence, it cannot be material or based on pleasure.

St. Theodore has the universal archetype of human nature for his fundamental starting point. All thought presupposes it. His critique of Kant is that he got the equation backwards. Universality and necessity (that is, the categorical imperative must be followed or destruction results) are not a ground for morals, but its consequent. In other words, the content and impetus of moral duty is that which creates its universality, not the reverse.

God is present in creation to the extent that each object participates in this elementary essence. The problem is that grasping this idea makes little sense unless the ontological condition of the Fall is also understood. The Fall for Nikanor is far more than a moral condition. Introducing sin into the world radically alters the structure of the cosmos. It introduces self-will and therefore, individualism and the root of nominalism. In a very real way, “objects” in the sense the nominalist understands them, would not and could not exist prior to the fall. Context and unity was all and everything. Nominalism here is the result of the fall and is inherently demonic. In other words, particularity is the consequence of sin.

Nikanor writes:

Theoretical conscious mind from all sides embrace, contain, penetrated, initiated and guided by reason "almost-cosmic." Space, "unconscious" mind defines "behavior" is the atoms, and the more organisms, but a man of his activity is not less important - and just "feeling uncertain or non-compliance with representations that have arisen from external perceptions of lying in

nature (theoretical mind) rules the existence of things, in the form of instinctive notions or ideas, "is the sole criterion of truth. Because of this, "the verdict of the existence of knowable things and qualities in the conscious of humanity, as well as the animal mind utters. . . cosmic unconscious mind.

Intellectual intuition is that "fingerprint" of God that is found in all men. Men are made in both God's image and likeness. The likeness was regained only at Pentecost. The image is something universal, and it is reduced to this concept of intuition. This intuition is Platonic and is innate to all men. It is the primal demand for unity and truth in the midst of what appears to be chaos. It is an erotic desire tightly connected to Plato's epistemology in the Symposium. The primal, that is, innate, "senses" bringing man to metaphysics are threefold:

First, All men, under normal, yet fallen circumstances, desire to know the truth. This desire can remain a mere potential, inert under the weight of practical concerns. It becomes active only in a minority of men, but the desire itself is universal.

Second, External perception activates this desire in some because the senses are intuitively seen as insufficient. Men desire unity and seek always to impose a concept of universality on perception.

Third, Man's reason is problematic. The lower orders of nature manifest Logos through their own innate and instinctual action. There is no "choice" in the rational sense. "Choice" implies that going against Logos is possible and, in some cases, probable. Entire societies can be constructed that deny Logos and hence deny innate purpose or reason in nature. This is the modern nominalist idea.

For Nikanor, matter is as much an abstraction as spirit. Rather, matter is a concept of the understanding; a stopgap measure to fill in for any non-spiritual entity. Hence, positivists have no right to speak of it. As a pure concept with no content, it is the same as mere negation. Matter, if it is to be argued for, must be non-spatial and non-material. At most, the term is really focused on the existence of force, which again, are non-material factors in cosmic life. Like Berdyaev, objects seem as "material" are projections: projections of an alienated self fearful of the void and requiring "solid" objects in space to hang onto. In other words, "matter" is a projection of the desire to clothe spiritual life with material coloring.

In an interesting article on "atomism," Nikanor writes:

No matter how we divided the substance in the least part of it, we will always assume the atoms, and because the slightest bit of substance is still volatile substance, dividend and so on. So that, in essence we have to imagine atoms infinitesimal, ie less than any given quantity; in other words, we can not give them any, even the smallest, value, ie must recognize them = 0. However, this denial of all values of all real being positively ascribed to certain and very real, although not naturally occurring properties of these atoms is absolutely indivisible, immutable, chemically incompatible, impermeable, homogeneous, contrary to all properties bodies. (Archbishop Nikanor 1875-1888 I, 154).

The significance here is not so much scientific, but ontological: the argument is that, if any line, for example, be infinitely divisible, then, at some point, the units remaining are so small as to be nothing. This twist on Nicola of Cusa is worthwhile only in the sense that these

ontological riddles do have a real role in critiquing materialism or, in this case, the very concept of “matter.” Yet further, he argues elsewhere that the existence of an atom, one that is connected to a specific element, cannot be associated with the element. The element has a different manifestation than the schema of its subatomic constituents. Hence he concludes by attempting to redefine matter as “organically grounded force.”

Put differently, empirical objects are not real in any non-subjective way. They are, at best, projections of the alienated psyche papering over the reality of the divine self-limitation (in Plotinus' sense of the One alienated into specific fragments). The very existence of the Absolute requires (relative to humanity) its alienation into fragments of greater degeneration.

This is not in any way pantheism only in that it is not emanation. Creation cannot be pantheism by its very structure, while emanation must contain the divine essence. The alienation of the psyche resolves itself in the creation of solid objects in the imagination. The reality is that these are created energies fetishized into things. Hence, he writes:

Metaphysical results similar to one another in the spirit of the unit, as the product of self-limitation of a single absolute being absolute nothingness. . . can decay into genera, species, classes and on the existence of any other forms of difference, which may vary from one to another is not only the quantity, but also quality differences to the so-called substantial [Archbishop Nikanor 1875-1888 II, 42].

The issue here is that the decay of energy in the cosmos is accelerated by our own alienation and sin, and hence, genera and species are the results of this projection. Of themselves, of course, they are essence, the very expression of the logos. This is the “light” so significant to the hesychasts. Ultimately, Nikanor ends up with Leibniz's monads. Significantly, this solves the mind-body problem and the very possibility of knowledge: the light permeating the universe is as much the mind as that which it seeks to understand. As the light decays in its alienation relative to man, its presence and identity changes. It is no longer light (in perception), but the alienated projection of a fearful humanity.

Like all intuitivists, the world for Nikanor is a coherent whole. It is animated by a “universal conscious mind,” similar to the logos in Christian theology. This is connected to the human psyche as he writes: “Nature has laid the most perfect imprint of this cosmic mind in the innermost part of the human soul in the form of vague sensations and premonitions,; they are elusive, but stimulating ideas.” Logical knowledge is utilitarian, while the Rational is a connection to the fullness, the whole – logos.

Thus, the absolute truth accessible only to Reason, which is a person's ability to learn the Ideas or Forms of things. An object can be seen in infinite ways; the cosmos sees this outside time. It fully corresponds to the object in that it sees its fullness as such.

Logos is visible within nature. This is not “mind” but rather, in a sense, “nous.” “Practical” logic is not interested in truth, but rather the completion of a task. Philosophy is to rise above this and to grasp things as such. Seymon Frank has a similar idea where the knowledge of the scientist is about the external aspects of a thing. “Living knowledge” for Frank is the deeper conception corresponding to Nikanor's “Reason.”

This sort of knowledge in Frank is not the static observation of a thing. The self, consciousness, the thing and society are all growing and developing together.

The need for the Platonic form is that any x is itself capable of infinity. Knowing something practically is still a process where the brute given becomes more and more comprehensive in the mind; it goes from being alien to familiar. Yet, it is never exhausted, no matter how simple. Each x has an infinity of properties. Humans cannot grasp all these, but they exist. They exist the idea.

Practical logic or utilitarian science assumes that the object is discrete and is more or less exhausted by observation. A hypothesis is discerned in what is already known and evidence derives from observation under the proper method. The reality of the object is that it is not complete through observation, since only one aspect of it is stressed over all others.

Losev writes in *The Philosophy of the Name* that echoes Nikanor's view of the relation between practical reason and Reason:

The idea of logos in the “concept” is conceived discretely in comparison with what is behind it, and, as in the dialectic of positing, it is a condition for obtaining a new elements in the eidos; this means the logos is discrete in comparison with other meanings. Therefore, in traditional logic, which is almost always formal, there is every need for a separation between the concept and judgment. What is a “concept” in logic? However it may be determined by logic, they all (or most of them) are necessary to first to talk about elements of judgment, then nothing. The concept is a set of attributes of the subject that is combined with a designation of the general properties of that class of objects. Such a definition is absolutely static (Losev, 1927: 123).

The “concept” here is identical to the empirical logic used above. It is practical and utilitarian. Truth and comprehensiveness is not the goal. However, any thought about an object begins to quickly reveal how arbitrary it is to remove it from its connection to all being.

The last paragraph of this work reads:

The essence [of an object] contains all the possible meanings at a single point. . . . So, seeing an object holistically, as a living thing, I must see all edietic and logical relations it contains. But to know the nature of a specifically eidetic or specifically, logical connection inherent in a thing, I must take the eidos or logos apart from all other things so to see how it works. Therefore, philosophy examines all these possible connections and relations: mythological, dialectical, topological, arrhythmical, logical, sophianic, energetic, and so on (Losev, 1927: 197ff).

This means that any x contains the universe within it. Being limited human beings, we cannot grasp this “at a single point.” Therefore, we take it from its context and – so to speak – “rebuild” the object using as many relations as possible. Nikanor is no different. Such a view is inherent in the conception of Christian philosophy before it even begins. For the Archbishop, any scientific approach to the world must take an object in a determinate way. The “way” chosen is not in itself a scientific matter. As in Heidegger, one has a specific “posture” or attitude towards a thing whether utilitarian, moral or whatever. This attitude is not scientific, but understanding any x from its standpoint is.

The second element is that each x then provokes or “excites” the corresponding idea

which is innate. Only when these two objects have come into existence and are reasonably clear can a scientific approach to this aspect of any x begin. Over time, thirdly, repeated experience in the context of some aspect of the x will verify the truth of one's application of the innate notion.

Losev states:

All knowledge is the realization of the original sense of the truth. Man contains a plan of nature (both internal and external): this "grid" is innate and presents images to our mind in general form, only to become clearer as attributes are perceived from the outside. Thus is our knowledge so is a transition to the conscious mind the unconscious. And this knowledge, we conclude in treasury, in the mind of the unconscious, certainly infallible.

Our "inner sense" can grasp only abstract form because this form is innate. Christian philosophy must argue for the proposition that, since man and nature are part of one and the same creation, there is an aspect of man's cognition that is already in tune with the rest of physical and non-physical creation. Only when the Enlightenment eventually guttered out with the abomination of industrialism did epistemology reach its dead end: man was not a part of nature, but in fact "god" himself. Nikanor naturally argued for this same idea. In Frank's work, this corresponds with "consciousness." This is the correlation between the external and internal worlds – these are connected and not alien.

In Solovyev's *Critique of Abstract Principles*, his main criticism of positivism ethically is that it contains, of itself, no moral force. Subjective impressions have no reality or certainly (per se). This is not different from Kant. However, he goes beyond this to say that social life is the objective "content" of any imperative (or those commands that are necessary logically), which is Hegelian. The broader point is that neither intellect nor sense can account for the object existing independently of me.

From this, there are three forms of objective knowledge:

1. empirical phenomenon, or appearances (will and feeling in the moral realm);
2. things as ideal; concepts (truth and beauty)
3. things existing in se (spirit and mind)

Needless to say, the point of philosophy – or at least epistemology – is to bring all three in line with each other in a "symphonic" way, each nesting in the other.

To conclude, Nikanor can be summarized in three steps. First, that any x, to be understood, is understood only in part. This is because some aspect of x is what makes it an object of interest. Second, this is then "lined up" with our innate connection to this x. Finally, history slowly adds details to our "posture" to any object, creating a richer and fuller understanding of any x in increasingly complex ways. Of course, the fullness of any x is impossible, since there are a veritable infinity of connections with all other elements of creation.

Plato's Forms are as close as the human mind can get to comprehending logos, which is inexhaustible, being Christ himself. Logos has "limited" Himself deliberately. In Spinoza, the Trinitarian distinction between Substance, Attribute and (infinite) mode exist only due to the limitations of the human mind. The difference between Spinoza and Nikanor is that the distinctions between the infinity of Substance on the one hand, and the Forms contained in logos, on the other, is a deliberate limitation on the part of God the father, or "Substance." It is true that human limitation can never comprehend Substance in Spinoza's sense, the development

of the Ideas of genera or species are an approach that God has permitted to the human mind. It follows that any truth concerning creation is the correspondence between our own process of connecting the innate structure with the empirical data on the one hand, and this further correspondence with the eternal Form found in logos, on the other. Nominalism is yet again exposed as the epistemology of death (as this author has termed it) because it represents an epistemological surrender. Objects have no inherent meaning or purpose and therefore no knowledge at all is possible.

It therefore follows that any true statement about nature is a proof of God's existence. It is almost redundant to claim that any truth that is eternal cannot exist in a materialist universe. The eternal problem that Christian epistemology has solved is that man is a passionate being. His reason is extremely limited and weak, yet passions and drives are very strong and vivid. Nominalism is the result of the severance of the human mind from any absolute being and hence, a rejection of knowledge *tout court*. Nominalism argues that only the external attributes of things exist. There is no essence around which attributes congregate. The problem is that these attributes do not "excite" the cognitive structure inherent in our rational faculty, but a lower appetite that seeks power and control. Nominalism is a requirement for tyranny, industrialization, totalitarianism and is the default epistemology of all atheism and positivism.

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