

S. L. Frank and His Teachings: An Appreciation

SERGEI LEVITZKY

THIS PAST YEAR witnessed the hundredth anniversary of the birth of one of the greatest modern Russian philosophers, Simon Ludvigovich Frank. He was born on January 29, 1877, in Moscow, of Russian-Jewish parents. His father was a physician, his grandfather a Rabbi. In the beginning Frank did not intend to be a philosopher. After graduating from high school, he enrolled in the law faculty of Moscow University. But a brief involvement in revolutionary activities and an ensuing exile delayed his academic career. He graduated from the university in 1901.

During his youth Frank experienced two ideological passions: Marxism and, later, Nietzscheanism. But the "sectarian character" of Marxism soon repelled him. In Nietzsche he valued not so much the teaching on the superman but rather "the atmosphere of spiritual life." This acquaintance with Nietzsche awakened his philosophical interests. He became a philosophical idealist and then a Christian philosopher. (He converted to Christian Orthodoxy in 1912.) In 1909 he took part in a celebrated symposium, *Vekhi (Milestones)*, for which he published an article unmasking the spiritual nihilism of the leftist branch of the Russian intelligentsia. In 1908 he married

his student Tatiana Barzeva. The marriage was happy, and they had several children. In 1914 he wrote his first major work, dealing with the problems of epistemology, *The Object of Knowledge*, which brought him recognition. For a few years he was a professor of philosophy at the University of Saratov. But, in 1922, along with a large group of scholars, he was exiled from the U.S.S.R.

Since Frank knew German fluently, he chose to emigrate to Berlin. Here he wrote a number of articles, among them "Religion and Science" and "A Fall of Idols," dealing with the spiritual crisis of the Russian intelligentsia. In 1930 his book on social philosophy, *The Spiritual Foundations of Society*, appeared. In 1939 his magnum opus, *The Unfathomable*, was published. In this latter book he outlined his philosophical creed in grand style. The persecution of Jews in Hitler's Germany forced his family to emigrate to France in 1937. But there he soon found himself in a country under German occupation. Even one denunciation would have been enough to have him arrested and deported. Yet, almost by a miracle, Frank survived. Soon after the end of World War II he moved to London to live with the family of his married

daughter. There he succeeded in writing three more books, one of which, *Light in the Darkness*, dealing with ethics, appeared in 1949; two others, *God With Us* and *Reality and Man*, were posthumously published. Frank died in 1950, after a prolonged illness. On a cross, erected in the London cemetery where Frank is buried, these words from the Bible appear: "From my youth I fell in love with wisdom . . . and, having known wisdom, I came to the Lord."

Frank was one of those few philosophers who created an original and a consistent system of philosophy, which was also informed by a true wisdom, not only of the mind but also of the heart. This wisdom emanated from him, as it were, and all his books and articles are imbued with it. This fullness of wisdom, combining a strong, a sober, and a logically trained intellect, as well as a true clarity of literary expression, evidences qualities the combination of which cannot fail to impress any reader sensitive to thought. The lines from Vyacheslav Ivanov's poem "Russian Intellect," "He judges about earth soberly, while abiding in mystical depth," fit Frank perfectly.

Frank's external appearance was well rendered by A. Kartachev: "A corpulent, tall figure. Slow in motions, not talkative, a quiet voice. Impassionate, not jocular. He smiled very expressively only with his big, beaming eyes." He reminded one of a very respectful and wise Rabbi. But this "Rabbi" not only converted to Russian Orthodoxy but also became one of the most profound Russian Christian thinkers.

His half-brother, L. Zak, recalls very penetratingly the spiritual impression that Frank made: "I think that everybody who came in contact with Frank experienced the same sensation which I had since my youth, the sensation of huge spiritual spaces, which revealed themselves to anyone coming into contact with him . . . [a] profound seriousness marked him." Not brilliance—although he could be brilliant—not only depth of thought characterized him, but

also, and primarily, a penetrating seriousness, an utter submergence in the thinking *Logos*. I remember once, during his guest lecture in Prague, how I and the majority of the audience, holding our breath, followed carefully the measured movement of his thought as it submerged us, slowly but surely, into the very depths of his topic. It is one of those few lectures that one remembers forever.

Already in his first major book, *The Object of Knowledge*, Frank outlined the basic ideas of his teaching, which he eventually expressed in more mature form. The theme of this book was strictly epistemological. Frank accepts here Nikolay Lossky's intuitivism, but he develops the doctrine on intuition in his own manner. In a letter to Lossky, Frank wrote that the former gave a concise description of intuition as well as a "foundation of intuitivism" (the title of Lossky's book). But, Frank contended, Lossky did not posit the cardinal problem of the metaphysical conditions of the possibility of intuition. According to Frank that epistemological realism towards which intuitivism leans may be founded only on insight into the ideal—the superspatial and the supertemporal—foundations of the world. The main condition of the possibility of intuition, he argues, lies in the unity of subject and object and in their participation in the wholeness encompassing them. Otherwise the object of knowledge would remain transcendent and the world unknowable.

The world itself, moreover, must be thought of not as the sum of its elements but as an organic whole. In both dimensions Frank arrives at the idea of the unity of multiplicity, or "Panunity," as Vladimir Solovyov terms it. Analyzing further the structure of logical judgments, Frank arrives at the idea of the connection between subject and predicate being not their sum but their unity, which, as such, is meta-logical. Frank comes to the idea of the meta-logical unity of subject and predicate in a very rational manner. Panunity is a kind of meta-logical synthesis, the idea which

was to become the starting point of his later masterpiece *The Unfathomable*.

The animating theme of Frank's philosophy is his teaching on Panunity, on the rootedness of all the appearances of the world in a certain mystical primary foundation, which, with the help of Revelation, is perceived by our consciousness as God. This teaching is not identical with pantheism, that is, with the identification of God and the world. It is, rather, a "Panentheism," the belief that, although our world is in God, God is elevated above our world. The main representatives of Panentheism in world philosophy are Plotinus and Nicolas of Cusa. Frank himself stressed that he belonged to the "old, but not aging, sect of Christian Platonists," or, to be more exact, Neoplatonists. The head of the school of Neoplatonists was Plotinus, the ancient Greek thinker who stood nearest to Christianity. His teaching was renewed and expressed in a new form by that thinker of the late Middle Ages, Nicolas of Cusa. Frank himself often said that of all thinkers Nicolas of Cusa was closest to him.

In *The Unfathomable* Frank expressed in a more mature form the ideas which formed the foundation of his first major work, *The Object of Knowledge*. Characteristic of this book is the following excerpt:

. . . firmly as we are implanted in the usual, everyday life, firmly as we identify ourselves with our social environment, and firmly as we form the habit to look at ourselves "from without," and to see in ourselves only that which we appear "objectively" to other people to be, yet sometimes . . . there moves in us something quite different, something which we are inclined to conceal not only from other people but also from ourselves.

This excerpt gives an idea of the direction in which Frank's thought developed. (It also gives an idea of his literary style.) Frank's all-encompassing thought demanded long sentences. But these long sentences are easily grasped by the attentive reader.

Frank's affirmation of the unfathomability of being does not connote, however, a philosophical irrationalism like that of Henri Bergson, for example. On the contrary, he calls irrationalism "a useful trend in philosophy" for it deprives reason of its meaning, and philosophy is reasoning. Irrationalism may be valuable only indirectly, by pointing out the limits of reason. It is not the last word in philosophy. To put it differently, Frank affirms not irrationalism but transrationalism. He acknowledges the rational and suprarational domains of being, but he denies its irrationality. The basic premise by which Frank affirms the reality of suprarationalism is very simple, although it may seem difficult to the unphilosophical mind. Each rationally knowable definiteness, he argues, is connected in this world with other definitenesses, and, in this sense, is opposed to them. But, in speaking about the world, we have in mind the unity of its contents, that is to say, the "coincidence of opposites," to use Nicolas of Cusa's expression. Now, the unity of opposites, and of definitenesses in general, cannot be conceived of as the mere sum of these rational definitenesses but rather as their unity. This unity cannot be just another rational definiteness, or else we would fall into *regressus ad infinitum*. Consequently, the deepest form of unity, of panunity, must be transrational, or, as Frank says, "metalogical." If in *The Object of Knowledge* Frank uses the word "panunity," then in his later works he prefers the word "unfathomable," conceived as the "groundless ground" of the "being in the world":

The Unfathomable is not a night in which all the cats are grey, and against the background of which any clear and distinct perception of the visible traits of the world would lose its meaning. The Unfathomable is, on the contrary, that unattainable Light, from which, on the one hand, the usual lightness of the world stems and against the background of which this usual lightness of the world turns out to be something dark, impene-

trable, irrational. The truth of science and of sober, rational perception turns out to be a derivative, a partial, and, in this sense, an inadequate truth. Only philosophy reveals to us the genuine truth—an attitude in which the rationality, directing toward itself, by this very act transcends itself, thus finding the general and eternal revelation of reality as Unfathomable.

This doctrine of seeing the Unfathomable as the highest unity of being follows the tradition of Solovyov's teaching on "Panunity." But Solovyov outlined only the basic tenets of this teaching. Frank went on to develop it with greater depth and consistency. Father Vassily Zenkovsky rightly remarks that Frank's most original characteristic is not his doctrine but the manner in which he developed it. He even affirms that Frank was the greatest Russian philosopher. In this respect he is going too far, for Lossky had no lesser mind than Frank. Indeed, both he and Frank more than deserve to be called the greatest Russian philosophers. Nor must we forget that, although Solovyov did not elaborate his philosophy with comparable skill, he was the originator of the doctrine of Panunity, the consummate fruit of Christian Platonism in world and in Russian philosophy. The following is what Frank says about "wise ignorance" as the only way to grasp the unfathomable:

The knowledge here is not a judgment but a pure contemplation, which is not a contemplation of something that would stand before us and that could be observed by us. Rather it is a contemplation through experience. We have here a reality, due to the fact that it is in us, or that we are in it; due, in short, to the immanent self-revelation of a reality in its unknowableness. And, as definitions here are basically impossible and would be out of place, then the knowledge of the Unfathomable is, as such, a non-knowledge. But, as the Unfathomable itself is now revealed to us

concretely, it is therefore precisely a knowing, a wise non-knowledge. The abstention from judging and defining knowledge is not a forced resignation, which would commit us to cognitive misery, to the renunciation of a dream to attain the desired last truth. On the contrary, the intellectual humility which is necessary here is humility which consists in the meaninglessness of this domain, of our usual cognitive urge, led by curiosity and aspiration toward discoveries. This humility . . . gives us a full and adequate possession of truth itself. Precisely in this knowing non-knowledge, through the overcoming of object-oriented, seeking, unquietly aspiring knowledge, our sight becomes open for the perception of reality in its fullness and positiveness.

This is a mystical knowledge, to be sure, and Frank speaks from his mystical experience. But he preserves his intrinsic intellectual clarity even when he philosophizes about the Unfathomable, as the preceding quotation reveals. Instructive also are the pages in which Frank tries to translate into philosophical language the mystery of love, of predominantly Christian love. His main thesis is that self-sacrifice in love is essentially self-gain:

Love is the deepest essence of the "I-thou" relationship in which this relationship fully realizes itself, attains its genuine goal, that is, the "I-thou" existence. Love, by its very essence, is a mystery: the loving one, giving himself in self-oblivion to the loved one, transfers, without ceasing to be himself, the center of his existence into the loved one. He abides in the loved one, even as the loved one abides in the loving one. I lose myself in "thou," and by this very act I find myself being enriched by the thou given to me as a gift.

Frank maintains that the above-mentioned unity between "I" and "thou" attains its highest degree in love of God,

which God reciprocates. Thus a new, a highest, category of religious life is gained: "God-with-us." This communication with God is of the highest bliss, and it is full of paradoxes if we try to describe divine communication in our earthy language:

In "being-with God" the first ones turn out to be the last ones before the face of God. Here, in spite of all natural justice, those who possess are given still more, and those who have little are deprived even more of their meagre possession. Here a reward is not proportionate to the labor. Here the greatest sinner, in so far as he, in the act of repentance, becomes again one with God, is valued higher than a just and virtuous man. Here a prodigal son is dearer to a father than his other virtuous son who worked hard at home. Here poverty is wealth, strength is weakness, and weakness is strength. Here suffering is a joyous path to bliss, and well-being is a path to death. Here the weeping ones are consoled, and those who are joyous are doomed to torments. Here the divine mysteries are revealed to infants, while these mysteries remain closed to the wise and reasonable men.

For Frank this "transvaluation of values," so essential to an understanding of the very spirit of Christianity, is additional proof of the transrationality of existence, as exemplified not in intellectual speculation, however sublime, but primarily in living religious experience.

Frank's critics sometimes accused him of having too low an appreciation of human personality, which, in his doctrine, is dissolved in cosmic forces, both demonic and divine. But, retorting that a human personality is a center of spiritual existence, he contended that he is only against the promotion of personality to the rank of self-sufficient "monad." The moral pathos of Frank's doctrine consists in the indication of the presence of supra-personal forces in personality:

The Selfhood, in the capacity of a "door" to the spiritual . . . reveals itself as a higher spiritual Ego, as something opposing the selfhood in its lower functions. . . . This higher spiritual selfhood constitutes what we call the higher spiritual, objectively-valid forces. Spiritual selfhood is permeated here by these higher forces and represents them. It is a principle of a super-natural being, as it reveals itself to our immediate [lower] self-being.

Every man, in any of his spiritual conditions, has this higher order of selfhood, coinciding with personality....Even the most superficial and spiritually insignificant man possesses a feeling of ... [the] spiritual foundation of his existence. Even man, possessed by the dark forces, feels the reality of spiritual existence. The mystery of soul, as of personality, consists precisely in this capacity to elevate man over himself, to be beyond himself. Here, in another form, we see again the manifestation of the transrational principle of antinomistic monodualism. Personality, that which constitutes the intrinsic unity of our inner life, is given to us only through duality, a duality which even such a naturalistic mind as Freud's was forced to acknowledge in distinguishing in our Ego the immediate Ego from the "Super-Ego."

As we can see from the preceding and protracted quotations, Frank knew how to defend himself against the accusations of "impersonalism." And in all of his deliberations, after careful analysis, he returns again and again to his most cherished idea of the transrationality of being, or "metalogical unity." Although the methods by which Frank arrives at the idea of metalogical unity are philosophically highly instructive, the most interesting are those by which he connects the individual with other personalities and with the super-world principle. Self-consciousness, he says, fixes our attention on the innermost depths of the

ego. And in penetrating mentally into it we discover that it is the spiritual kernel of personality, the supra-individual essence of personality, the manifestation of the absolute foundation of personality. It might even be said that it is the image of God in man. "The empirical man, in his depth," Frank declares, "is indissolubly merged with the supra-individual principle in him—with the absolute foundation of spiritual life. Our individual ego contains the connection with its absolute root." So, beneath the empirical man he sees a spiritual foundation, rooted in the individual but transcending the limitations of individuality, incorporating man into a higher, spiritual reality.

II

In *The Spiritual Foundations of Society*, and especially in his later work *Light in the Darkness*, Frank applies his basic ideas to social life and ethics. In social life, he avers, the connection between the ego and supra-individual reality manifests itself quite obviously. Society begins with communication, the end of which is the inclusiveness of the ego in a certain supra-individual "We." "We," he continues, contrary to grammatic principles, is not the plural of "I" but, rather, the unity of "I" and "Thou." And this unity is *there* in every communicating ego. But let us remember that Frank is not speaking here of the dissolution of the ego into a faceless "collective" but of that unity of personalities that allows each to preserve its individual integrity. For philosophy the "Thou" represents no less an enigma than "I." "Thou" is not just a "foreign ego." This would even be self-contradictory because the ego, according to that notion, is always *my* ego. "Thou" is the primary ethical category, resembling the ego, but not identical to it. Here the miracle of the self-transcendence of individual personality beyond the limits of itself takes place.

To reiterate, "I" and "Thou" achieve profound unity in "We," the primary cate-

gory of social life. "We" is the manifestation of Panunity in social life. "We" emerges in love, in friendship, in every form of communication deserving of the name, as well as in such relatively permanent social unities as the family, the nation, and, especially, the church.

Frank not only defined the basic categories of social life but also enabled the reader to feel the supra-personal mystery of social realities. There emanates from all of his works a sensation of the fullness of his spiritual contemplation. Throughout he distinguishes between the "Unfathomable for us" (or I would say between Kant's "thing in itself") and the "Unfathomable *per se*." The Absolute is unfathomable, he stresses, not merely because of the limitations of human knowledge. It is unfathomable by its intrinsic nature, which transcends rationality. One of Frank's special merits is that he arrives at the idea of the Unfathomable rationally. The supra-rational is the ultimate possibility of any rational thing.

The Unfathomable is the core of all existence. But if in the external world, and even in our inner life, the transrational is interwoven with the rational, then, concentrating our attention on the source of Being, we must discard all logical categories. The Absolute, or the Unfathomable, is the groundless ground of existence. It is that Nothingness through which Faust tried to find everything. Yet this does not imply the monism of all-absorbing substance. All the differences and contradictions of our world are very real. Its dualism, existing in time and space, and in the absolute Panunity, remains in force. But this dualism is not absolute and attains a degree of unity only meta-logically. It possesses what Frank terms an "antinomic mono-dualism." It is antinomic because, in confronting the most basic problems, our reason arrives at those antinomies (of freedom and necessity, for example) so well discerned by Kant. It is mono-dualistic because it affirms both the inevitability of dualism and its transcendence in a higher meta-logical synthesis.

The Unfathomable thus reflects the "coincidence of opposites." The motto of any true philosophy is not a mutually-exclusive "Either-or" but the all-encompassing "This as well as that." But Frank goes still further, his thought here reaching its culminating point. For, as he notes, it is precisely the awareness of the unfathomability of the Absolute that gives us meta-logical knowledge of it. Deferring to the terminology of Nicolas of Cusa, he concludes that the "Unfathomable becomes known by its unfathomability." Such formally negative knowledge leads to the highest wisdom possible for a mortal. Frank terms this higher, meta-logical knowledge a "wise ignorance." It is "ignorance" because it is negative and humbles the pride of our reason; it is "wise" because it is derived from no lack but from a superabundance of knowledge. Properly speaking, it is not knowledge but the highest spiritual contemplation, for, quintessentially, the Unfathomable is Godhead, the "Holy of Holies," participation in which extends beyond philosophical wisdom into the righteous life.

III

ANY APPRAISAL of Frank's teaching would be incomplete without at least a brief survey of his activities as a philosophic journalist. Philosophic journalism was always popular in Russia. Even such a profound philosopher as Solovyov has paid great tribute to it. His own profound and revealing essay, "The Meaning of Love," as well as his polemics against the Slavophiles, was written as philosophic journalism.

Frank's contributions are also very significant. Even if his philosophic genius flourished in his major books, his essays are also highly important in attaining a proper evaluation of his integral heritage. Frank combined immersion into eternal problems with his keen understanding of the *Zeitgeist*. Mention has already been made of his essay on "Ethics of Nihilism," published in the famous symposium *Milestones*. There Frank points to the dual and

self-contradictory creed of the leftist Russian intelligentsia: its highly idealistic and self-sacrificing devotion to the common cause, mingled with a contempt for religion, for morality, and for aesthetics. Frank stresses the indifference to truth implicit in this attitude, indifference reaching the point of rejection of pure philosophy and pure art. The subconsciously high moral motives of the intelligentsia are undeniable. But, on the conscious plane, the intelligentsia substituted moral values for utilitarian ones to the point of moral nihilism, of moralism without ethics. Frank characterizes the Russian intellectual as a "militant monk of the nihilistic religion of earthly well-being." He concludes that from "an unproductive nihilistic moralism we must go toward a creative culture-constructing religious humanism." This article played a great role in the subsequent return to religion of some members of the Russian intelligentsia.

Among his other pre-revolutionary essays, especially noteworthy was his essay on "Goethe's Epistemology." Frank was perhaps the first important Russian critic who seriously coped with Goethe as a philosopher. Comparing Goethe to Kant, Frank prefers Goethe's wisdom, even if it was expressed in a far less scholarly and more intuitive form than the cautious wisdom of the sage from Koenigsberg. Frank claimed that Goethe achieved a rare synthesis of reason and intuition, and the poet's profound ontologism found in Frank a sympathetic response. In this essay he also expressed, for the first time, the embryo of his own world-outlook, partly inspired by Goethe.

Equally remarkable are his essays published in a symposium, *The Breakdown of Idols*, devoted to an attempt to account for the reasons for the Russian catastrophe after the Bolshevik victory. Frank, in contrast to most Russian Whites, who blamed the Reds for everything, tried to discern the inner reasons for the catastrophe. He claimed that the Russian intelligentsia was spiritually unequipped to withstand the

forces of evil and that the triumph of evil is preceded by the failure of good. The Church, though not corrupted at its inner core, had been seriously corrupted at certain layers of the surface. Both the Russian people, living in ignorance, and the Russian intelligentsia were politically immature. The latter, in spite of their subjective idealism, were blind to genuine spiritual values. Frank concluded that any attempt to crush the Bolsheviks with the force of arms is doomed to failure. We can only wait for the spiritual regeneration of the Russian people and their future intelligentsia. These particular essays were controversial and led to many attacks on him. But they proved to be prophetic.

Among his other articles, "The World-Outlook of Psychoanalysis" is significant. In it, Frank paid full credit to the terrible, yet epoch-making, discoveries of Freud, who, despite his one-sidedness, had many profound insights into the realm of the human psyche. Yet these profound insights, Frank said, are partly nullified by the materialistic prejudices, the "sexual materialism," of the discoverer of psychoanalysis. Freud keenly analyzed the subconscious, but he was blind to the super-conscious, to the world of the sublimated psyche, to the human spirit. In particular, Frank found Freud's interpretation of religion wholly inadequate.

In the domain of political philosophy, Frank wrote one of his best essays, "Beyond the Right and Left." In it, he claims that the traditional contrast between the "reactionary" rightists and "progressive" leftists has lost its initial meaning. Nowadays the reaction comes mainly from the extreme leftists and the equally extreme rightists, whereas more moderate parties are the truly progressive ones. Our historical epoch, hence, needs new political coordinates to replace and replenish outlived political criteria. A new realm of freedom must be built in which individualistic and somewhat anarchically conceived freedoms are interwoven into a harmonious social whole.

IV

FRANK REFUSES to resolve the problem of evil, as do the upholders of traditional theodices, through reference to human freedom and its misuse. He even insists that it is precisely in the presence of evil that we are not free since then we become possessed by our own ego, whereas the path of Good leads to true freedom. He further notes that the problem of evil is not solvable, at least not rationally. Moreover, any explanation of evil is tantamount to a justification of it, which is both impious and ethically impossible. One should only "describe" evil. Who can explain it?

This deferment of any rational resolution of the problem of evil is characteristic of Frank's philosophical position, that is, of Panentheism, a too close association of the world with God. According to Panentheism, the world is an emanation of God, whereas, in pure theism there yawns an ontological abyss between God and the world, to be bridged only by grace and not by natural disposition. Reasoning within the framework of his "mono-dualistic" system, Frank could resolve the problem of evil, as he had other basic antinomies, by contending that God is "beyond good and evil." But then one could interject Dostoevsky's argument against that world harmony bought at the price of knowledge of the "devil's good and evil." Besides, Frank was too sensitive an ethical thinker to be reconciled to God's being indifferent to good and evil.

Frank's thought, usually so clear, becomes somewhat ambiguous concerning evil, as if the thinker shunned facing it directly. Like Berdyaev, he is sometimes inclined to accept Jakob Boehme's idea of a "dark principle in God." He observes:

The responsibility for evil lies in those elements of reality which, although they exist in God, nevertheless are not God. Evil stems from the groundless abyss which yawns on the border between God and the world. In a living experience this border is presented to me as my own "Ego," as a bottomless depth, which at

the same time connects me with God, and separates me from Him.

Accordingly, evil turns out to be not "transrational" but irrational, contradicting the very idea of Panunity, according to which only rational and transrational domains can exist in the world. But this recognition of the irrationality of evil undermines the system of Panunity from within. Frank admits that Panunity is "somewhat split," but he hastens to add that the split exists only at the level of the world: "In its divine aspect, however, Panunity remains intact, for all its deprivations are immediately replenished by positive being, stemming out of and from God."

Father Zenkovsky, in his chapter on Frank in the second volume of *A History of Russian Philosophy*, rightly indicates that, according to Frank (as also according to Solovyov), the creation is too closely connected with the Creator, so that the idea of creation eludes his system. Evil is not overcome by a higher unity; such a position is ethically unacceptable. Evil remains for Frank a dark mystery which he can only "describe," though his descriptions are masterful.

At any rate, with respect to the problem of evil, Frank's thought underwent a certain evolution, which may be formally characterized as a transition from Christian Neoplatonism to Christian Existentialism. In *Light in the Darkness*, written after *The Unfathomable* (that is, during and after World War II), we encounter an apparent change in metaphysical emphasis: From the perspective of unfathomability the philosopher now turns towards the position of our world, with its sharp dualism between good and evil.

At the heart of *Light in the Darkness* lies this quotation from the New Testament: "And light shone in darkness, and darkness did not absorb it." Frank rightly perceives the basic enigma, the basic contradiction of ethics: the apparent moral and religious supremacy of light over darkness, on the one hand, and the obstinacy and

visible might of evil, on the other. Pointing out the inner antinomy of the words of the Evangelist, Frank renders the following interpretation: "Light shines in darkness, and darkness opposes light, not being able to absorb it, yet being unenlightened by it. The Evangelist's starting point is the dualistic, and therefore tragic, idea of the struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness." Then, in astonishingly unambiguous words, Frank unmasks the tragic metaphysics behind the words of the Evangelist:

In these words the abnormal, unnatural state of "being in the world" is depicted. The metaphysically omnipotent and victorious, by its essence, light, which is a manifestation of God himself and therefore "enlightens" every man, finds itself in the world in a state of tragic struggle with darkness. This is the greatest paradox. . . . Evil is something which, essentially, cannot be understood and explained, but which must be described precisely in its unintelligibility and unnaturality. . . . It is impossible to explain this mystery logically—that would mean the justification of the obstinacy of darkness. Here only such an interpretation of evil is admissible and possible which would not be its justification but rather its denunciation.

It would be difficult to formulate the enigma of evil better than in the excerpt above. The only possible solution and the only justifiable theodicy lie in an indication of the shining image of Christ, Who descended into the world in order to accept the evil of the world and to save the world from evil. Was it not Christ himself who said: "The world lies in evil . . . but be brave, for I have conquered the world." In his last two books, *Light in the Darkness* and *God With Us*, Frank leans towards such a conception of the relationship between God and the world. He still affirms that our world is founded in the Absolute. But it is, according to his new perspective, not co-eternal with God but an entity that

must be overcome: "If in the world the omnipotence of God remains invisible, being combined with the un-overcome empirical strength of darkness, then the very form of being, which we call the 'world,' is innerly shaky and some day must be overcome." There are, then, no guarantees of the victory of good and reason. Precisely because our world lies in evil, the struggle against evil has a higher meaning, regardless of the outcome of this struggle.

Towards the end of his life, Frank adopted a tragic world-outlook. If, earlier, he had emphasized world harmony (the rootedness of the world and of man in the Absolute), he gradually began to take disharmony and the power of evil quite seriously. This recognition did not make him a pessimist. A true Christian cannot be pessimistic. Evil, according to Frank, is doomed to fail, but only when there will be a "new heaven and a new earth." Such a world-outlook does not contradict the philosophy of Panunity but raises it to a higher dimension. Actually, it is closer to the spirit of Christianity than is his former, perhaps too Platonic, world-outlook. The idea of Panunity was not discarded but rather it became more Christianized. If Frank characterized his world-outlook as "Christian Platonism," in his mature years his emphasis fell on the noun "Platonism" and, in his last period, on the adjective "Christian."

V

FRANK'S TEACHING found a highly positive and lively response during his stay in Russia. When Frank, together with many other scholars and writers, was banned from Russia in 1922, his Moscow students handed him at the time of his departure a

special letter of recognition, which included these words: "In your lectures, beyond the limits of abstract knowledge, we saw a living countenance of Divine Panunity, to the concrete confluence with which you called us in such an inspired way. Your ideal of concrete knowledge will always enlighten us in our continuing attempts to penetrate the realm of truth." Thirty years later, Father Zenkovsky, in his *A History of Russian Philosophy*, said of Frank: "I feel obliged to say without hesitation that I consider Frank's the most significant and profound system of Russian philosophy."

Frank's reputation in Western philosophical circles is lagging far behind the man's great merits. This is mainly due to the almost traditional Western ignorance or neglect of Russian philosophy. Frank is the ideal type of thinker who started with epistemology and classical metaphysics but whose teaching, in the second half of his life, became essentially religious, without, however, losing its high philosophical level. People close to him said that his belief in God, steadfast since his conversion in 1912, became even more pronounced by the end of his life. During World War II, when he lived in German-occupied France and survived only by a miracle, he used to say that only then did he really understand the reality and meaning of suffering. (Hitherto, he had, as he confessed, "blissfully dreamt all his life.") Frank suffered terribly during the last weeks and days of his life, yet he remained joyful at the thought of returning to the womb of the "Unfathomable." In one of his last letters to a friend, the Swiss psychologist Ludwig Biswanger, he relayed greetings "from an area already close to the other world."