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## PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION THROUGH TWO LENSES: CHARLES HARTSHORNE READS SEMEN FRANK

Often considered “the most Western Russian philosopher” owing to a marked influence of German thought, Semen Frank (1877–1950) was one of the most remarkable Russian thinkers of the 20th century. Though born into a Jewish family, for a long while he did not align himself with any particular religion, and, eventually, in 1912 was baptized into the Orthodox Church, viewing the occasion as his vocational fulfillment as a member of the Jewish people. In recent years, Frank’s works have attracted significant attention from a number of Western scholars, not only historians of philosophy but philosophers themselves. In this exploration, I aim to compare some aspects of Frankian thought with the reflections of Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000), a most prominent representative of process philosophy and theology.

While it is known that Frank was well-acquainted with process thought, particularly that of Alfred N. Whitehead (1861–1947),<sup>1</sup> there is no evidence as to whether the latter read any of the works of Russian philosopher. We do, however, know with established certainty that Charles Hartshorne, having cited Frank’s 1946 publication *God with Us*, had. Indeed, Hartshorne made numerous references to Frank in his extended and profound review of the

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<sup>1</sup>The French translation of Whitehead’s *Religion in the Making* (Alfred N. WHITEHEAD, *Le devenir de la religion*, trans. Philippe Devaux [Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1939]) was in Frank’s private library. See also SEMEN FRANK, *Reality and Man* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), 193, 214; FRANK, “Mysli v strashnye dni,” in *Neprochitannoe... Stat’i, pis’ma, vospominaniya* (Moscow: Moskovskaya shkola politicheskikh issledovaniy, 2001), 364; FRANK, “Zapisnaya knizhka 1944,” Bakhmeteff Archive of Russian and East European History and Culture, Columbia University, S. L. Frank Papers, box 15.

English translation of *A History of Russian Philosophy* issued by brilliant Russian émigré thinker Vasilii Zenkovsky (1881–1962).

It is worth noting the context in which Hartshorne's text was written. For initially, Paul Weiss (1901–2002), a former doctoral student of Whitehead and editor of *The Review of Metaphysics*, had sent an invitation for a book review to Alexandre Koyré (1892–1964), though the latter declined. All the while, George L. Kline (1921–2014), the translator of Zenkovsky's aforesaid work as well as the editor of a volume on Whitehead,<sup>2</sup> reported:

Charles Hartshorne, who has read most of Zenkovsky's book, calling it "magnificent," has agreed to review the book. He has made something of a study of Berdyaev and certain other translated Russian philosophers, and is deeply interested in the whole field. I think he'll do a good job. As Paul Weiss put it, he is "the most genuinely speculative mind in existence and the Review is dedicated to allowing such minds to express themselves."<sup>3</sup>

Hartshorne was indeed well-qualified to write on the subject of Russian philosophy. It is noteworthy that he later republished his review along with supplementary remarks on Nikolai Lossky's (1870–1965) *History of Russian Philosophy* as part of his book *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics* (1962). Here, I will consider some selected aspects of Hartshorne's perspective on Frank's philosophy of religion, drawing not only from his book review, but also in light of his own thought.

#### INTEGRAL VISION OF REALITY

First and foremost, Hartshorne accurately noted that an essential feature of Russian religious philosophy was the integral conception of reality. He declared:

I cannot refrain from applauding Solovyov, Karsavin, Bulgakov, and Frank, among others, for their courage and (in my view) penetration in seeing that one cannot simply say ... that reality consists of the created universe "together with" ... the creator. This togetherness must be something, a real property of the crea-

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<sup>2</sup> *Alfred North Whitehead. Essays on His Philosophy*, ed. George L. Kline (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> George L. KLINE, Letter to José Ferrater Mora of December 5, 1953 (Digital Repository of Universitat de Girona).

tion, or of God, or a third something on its own. The togetherness of *A* and *B* includes both, yet it must be one entity, for if more than one, there must be a further togetherness of these, and so on.... In some sense, “pan-unity” or “total-unity” is an inevitable doctrine.<sup>4</sup>

The forenamed concept of pan-unity (Russian: *vseedinstvo*) posits the inner connection between each individual being and God, who constitutes its metaphysical foundation. A note on terminology should be made. G. L. Kline persuasively suggested that *vseedinstvo* “has sometimes been rendered as ‘pan-unity’..., but this term is of mixed etymology, half Greek and half Latin,” and therefore preferred the term of “all-unity,” as it is “half Anglo-Saxon and half Latin.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, in an early English translation of Frank’s essay titled “Contemporary Russian Philosophy,” the term “all-unity” was used to express “the organic structure of Being, in consequence of which every empirical manifold depends upon the absolute divine unity which permeates it.”<sup>6</sup>

As a result, Frank described his own position, as well as that of Christianity as a whole, as panentheism, i.e., “the recognition of *the rootedness of man and the world* (in their primordial deep essence) *in God*, the immanent presence of Divine powers, of the energy of the Divine essence, in creation itself.”<sup>7</sup> This means that God is ever present in the world, but is not exhausted by it, as God is totally different, transcendent and incomprehensible. For this reason, Frank distinguished two aspects of God or the Absolute: the first is the absolute unity in its connection with the world as its primordial background, ontological and epistemological basis of all beings (their existence and cognition) which represent an immanent character of God. The second aspect is the absolute as such—as transcendent, unfathomable, transrational. In Frank’s opinion, God is a relational being. As he put it in his major work titled *The Unknowable* (1939),

<sup>4</sup> Charles HARTSHORNE, “Russian Metaphysics: Some Reactions to Zenkovsky’s History,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 8, no. 1 (1954): 64–65; Charles HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics* (LaSalle: Open Court Publishing Company, 1962), 266–67.

<sup>5</sup> George L. KLINE, “The Hegelian Roots of S.L. Frank’s Ethics and Social Philosophy,” *The Owl of Minerva* 25, no. 2 (1994): 196.

<sup>6</sup> Semen FRANK, “Contemporary Russian Philosophy,” *The Monist* 37, no. 1 (1927): 10–11.

<sup>7</sup> Semen FRANK, *The Light Shineth in Darkness. An Essay in Christian Ethics and Social Philosophy*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989), 188. Cf. FRANK, *Reality and Man*, 112–13; FRANK, “Contemporary Russian Philosophy,” 8.

being is an all-embracing unity, in which every particular thing is and is *conceivable* only through its relation to something else. In this respect even the notion of God only seems to be an exception: strictly and precisely speaking, even God Himself does not possess the property to which scholasticism gave the name *aseitas*, i.e., God is not *ens a se*. Precisely because He is conceived as the “Primordial Ground,” the “Creator,” the “All-powerful Lord” of the world and everything else in general, He is not conceivable outside of a relation to His “creation.”<sup>8</sup>

Hartshorne, likewise, espoused a holistic conception of reality, believing that “God knows and thus contains all things, including all mystery.”<sup>9</sup> What is more, the American thinker held the view that God is not a self-sufficient being, as he is influenced by, and in a sense, dependent on the world. With uncanny congruence, he also referred to his position as panentheism,<sup>10</sup> according to which “in one sense God depends on the world and is therefore inclusive of it, in another sense, he is independent of it and consequently transcends it.”<sup>11</sup>

Hartshorne proclaimed process or neoclassical theism, according to which “God is not in every sense self-sufficient, for although He exists independently,”<sup>12</sup> since God’s actuality (the mode in which He exists), unlike divine existence and essence as such, is “contingent, temporal, finite, dependent, mutable, and passible.”<sup>13</sup> From this perspective, Hartshorne viewed God as “all-inclusive” and, at the same time, as a principle of relativity. In doing so, he emphasized not only the metaphysical aspect—the universe containing everything in God, but primarily the dimension of worship and devotion: “If God is loved or can be loved with all one’s capacities, then he must in some sense coincide with being or reality itself.”<sup>14</sup> While Frank, in considering the ontological structure of reality, stressed that the empirical world is rooted in God, Hartshorne in his reflection on an all-encompassing God stressed the significance of all-inclusive love, which corresponds with God’s being. For

<sup>8</sup> Semen FRANK, *The Unknowable: An Ontological Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1983), 31.

<sup>9</sup> HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 119.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>11</sup> Santiago SIA, *God in Process Thought: A Study in Charles Hartshorne’s Concept of God* (Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), 85.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel A. DOMBROWSKI, *Rethinking the Ontological Argument: A Neoclassical Theistic Response* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 83.

<sup>13</sup> Donald VINEY, “Process Theism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2022 Edition), ed. Edward F. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-theism>.

<sup>14</sup> SIA, *God in Process Thought*, 13.

him God is “the unimaginable actual Love of the unimaginable vastness of actual things; what we call His essence, or His attribute of ‘perfection,’ is the common denominator of God loving this world, *or* that world, *or* a third world, and so on, out of the absolute infinity of possible kinds of world and of possible ways in which each kind of world could be divinely loved.”<sup>15</sup>

Both Frank and Hartshorne were convinced of the relational nature of reality. It should be noted, however, that for Frank, relationality was a characteristic of being, merely as a general scheme or mode of organization within the framework of all-unity. In other words, he developed a holistic concept of being (including absolute being), but not the notion of relationality as such which could be understood as a pivotal approach to reality. His understanding of relationality, to some extent, was akin to that of the British Hegelians, such as Francis Herbert Bradley (1846–1924) and Bernard Bosanquet (1848–1923).<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Hartshorne polemically opposed the positions of these philosophers, emphasizing the individuality and freedom in each relationship, thus granting the concept of relationship a special metaphysical status. As Hartshorne presented his conception in a letter to José Ferrater Mora (1912–1991):

“The absolute” is merely an abstract constituent or phase of the relative, which is itself the universal principle.... *Absolute as the Pure Form of Relativity Itself*: Since relativity is the universal or overlapping concept, embodied in every total state of reality, relativity itself, as a universal form, is wholly independent of or neutral to alternative possibilities of actualization. Thus relativity as an abstract principle *is* the absolute. Relativity is not relatively, but absolutely, final or inclusive.... His [God’s] transparent relativity is the measure of reality.<sup>17</sup>

Put another way, God—consonant with Hartshorne’s principle of dual transcendence—is both absolute and relative, creator and created. Hartshorne perceives God’s relativity as tied with his potentiality as the source of different possibilities. And although Frank was by no means a faithful follower of process philosophy, he shared Hartshorne’s belief that God could be described by the notion of potentiality. In his later book, *Reality and Man* (published posthumously in 1965) Frank wrote:

<sup>15</sup> HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. FRANK, *Reality and Man*, 75, 83.

<sup>17</sup> Charles HARTSHORNE, Letter to José Ferrater Mora, Jan. 31, 1962 (Digital Repository of Universitat de Girona).

Reality ... is an indivisible unity of actuality and potentiality; it is being and becoming, self-creation.... The ultimate basis and primary source of reality—God—is not only *actus purus* (as Aristotle thought, and Thomas Aquinas after him), pure form, absolutely completed and in this sense stationary being. Rising above and embracing all determinations, the primary basis and therefore the inmost essence of reality is only thinkable as the unity and coincidence of actuality and potentiality, of finality and creative dynamism. In this sense God is freedom itself—not arbitrariness or groundless, indefinite possibility of all that is not yet and may only come into being, but as eternal self-realization and self-creation, as absolute creative dynamism, in which the categories of completed being and creative life coincide.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, both Frank and Hartshorne propounded a dynamic conception of God. Hartshorne envisioned God as the temporally ordered society of all actual entities and individuals, a view which to some extent, bears resemblance to Frank's all-unity; both philosophers shared acceptance in the paradigm of panentheism. Hartshorne acknowledged that the Russian thinker, in his book *God with Us*, masterfully demonstrated how "our experience, in its 'relativity' and dependence, involves an 'absolute' or 'ground,' and in its 'fragmentariness' involves something 'all-embracing,'" since "absolute condition and all-embracing synthesis can, no doubt, only be conceived as together in the One Eminent reality."<sup>19</sup> However, Hartshorne alleged that Frank arrived at this conclusion "only because our experience as a whole is fragmentary, derivative, transitory and relative, it contains evidence of something absolutely first, all-embracing, all-pervading, all-determining and eternal."<sup>20</sup> In other words, the concrete or the individual, as a less than perfect entity, should justify the existence of an all-embracing absolute. Frank's reviewer seemed to consider such an approach as flawed:

on the previous page the author [Frank] had wisely pointed out that we "must beware of confusing the immediate content of our experience with derivative religious 'theories,' i.e., with thoughts and concepts by means of which we attempt—always imperfectly and therefore more or less questionably to express it."<sup>[21]</sup> I cannot but see just such a questionable theory in the contrast the author

<sup>18</sup> FRANK, *Reality and Man*, 171–72.

<sup>19</sup> HARTSHORNE, "Russian Metaphysics," 76; HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 278.

<sup>20</sup> Semen FRANK, *God with Us. Three Meditations*, trans. Natalie Duddington (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946), 41. Cf. HARTSHORNE, "Russian Metaphysics," 76; HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 277–78.

<sup>21</sup> FRANK, *God with Us*, 40.

draws between God and the “particular, the derivative, and the relative,” as such as though we were inferior to God simply because we are particular.<sup>22</sup>

These quotations illustrate well the differences between the Frankian philosophy of all-unity and process theology, which, as Hartshorne explained, “is based throughout on asymmetries: abstract included in concrete, data or objects included as subjects, causes included in effects; absolutes included in relatives.”<sup>23</sup> According to these assumptions, the inference from the “fragmentary” to the absolute suggested by Frank is deemed untenable. For Hartshorne, the ontological ground of the reality does not coincide with an “all-inclusive summation”<sup>24</sup> of beings, such as all-unity.

Furthermore, while Hartshorne conceived of the world as God’s body, Frank refrained from describing reality in panpsychic terms. His pantheism was more extensional rather than intensional in character, expressing the “containedness” of the whole world in the absolute as its metaphysical principle, without giving this relation of inclusion the quality of panpsychism. This does not mean, however, that Frank understood God in his relation to the world as “frozen,” passive, uncreative, merely as the source of all things. To the contrary, during the tumultuous years of World War II, Frank was known to have entertained the notion of composing a work on the philosophy of creativity, leaving behind a number of notes on the subject. He held that

the organic world is constantly *being created*. The generalization that the world, i.e. its organized phenomena, is also uninterruptedly created is certainly plausible (this is prompted by the absence of a strict borderline between organic and inorganic matter, compare Whitehead’s hypothesis about the organic structure of all matter).<sup>25</sup>

This testifies to the importance Frank accorded to the category of creativity, placing an emphasis on the elements of development, changeability as a positive dimension of reality, in a manner consistent with process philosophy. Frank understood creativity not solely as a characteristic of human activity, but as a defining attribute of reality itself. In a sense, this perspec-

<sup>22</sup> HARTSHORNE, “Russian Metaphysics,” 76; HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 278.

<sup>23</sup> Charles HARTSHORNE, Letter to José Ferrater Mora, Jan. 31, 1962 (Digital Repository of Universitat de Girona).

<sup>24</sup> HARTSHORNE, “Russian Metaphysics,” 76; HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 278.

<sup>25</sup> FRANK, “Mysli v strashnye dni,” 364.

tive can be likened to Hartshorne's notion of creative synthesis, though the latter treated it as a discrete metaphysical category.

Additionally, Frank emphasized that God is not only an absolute, but a relationship of Persons. Consequently, Hartshorne remarked:

We hear ... of the "suffering of the Father," but this "patipassionism" (found in Bulgakov, Karsavin, Frank) is certainly no possible qualification of the Absolute. It may for all that be a qualification of God.<sup>26</sup>

In this respect, Frank's thought is an example of classical theological philosophy, concerning, among others, the Christian doctrines of faith, such as the Holy Trinity. By the way of contrast, Hartshorne, as a representative of process theology and dipolar theism (according to which God is permanent in some respects—e.g., in existence—and changing in others—e.g., in response to suffering creatures,<sup>27</sup> so that He is both finite and infinite, both passible and impassible, etc.), does not take into account any dogmatic distinctions.<sup>28</sup>

#### COGNITION OF GOD

Throughout his life, Frank maintained a disapproving attitude towards dogmatized religion. He drew a distinction between faith in authority and faith in "the rights of free reason." In his later work *God with Us*, Frank presented this dichotomy as *faith as confidence* based on the testimony of others, and *faith as certainty* (or *faith as knowledge*) grounded on direct perception of God.<sup>29</sup> Hartshorne, too, distinguished two types or levels of faith. For him, the fundamental form is "trust, and this means, doing our part in the system of things with confidence that the rest of the system will do its part, at least to the extent that we shall not have striven simply."<sup>30</sup> To some extent, this can be compared with Frankian "faith as certainty," although for Hartshorne, this form is merely confidence in reason as such, which is "be-

<sup>26</sup> HARTSHORNE, "Russian Metaphysics," 68; HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 270.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel A. DOMBROWSKI, "Alston and Hartshorne on the Concept of God," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 36 (1994): 129.

<sup>28</sup> See Greg A. BOYD, *Trinity and Process: A Critical Evaluation and Reconstruction of Hartshorne's Di-polar Theism Towards a Trinitarian Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Charles HARTSHORNE, "Two Levels of Faith and Reason," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 16, no. 1 (1948): 30.



yond justification,”<sup>31</sup> whereas for Frank it is guaranteed precisely by religious experience. The second understanding of faith, according to Hartshorne, is the faith characteristic of a particular religious system and which somehow corresponds to Frank’s terminology of “faith as confidence,” based on the testimony of the believers.

Frank and Hartshorne, emphasizing the significance of religious faith, sought to validate it, though they understood the task and limits of philosophy from distinct perspectives. According to Frank, the experience of God was primarily of a self-evident nature and thus, is entirely independent from other forms of cognition, such as philosophical rationalization of inner perceiving. He proclaimed that, “the only true philosophy deserving the name is the *philosophical overcoming of all rational philosophy*.”<sup>32</sup> Conversely, Hartshorne’s process thought was notably speculative in nature and consisted in an attempt to apply sophisticated philosophical categories to express and defend theism. Nonetheless, Hartshorne also wrote on the mystery of reality:

Every concrete thing is in its fullness and uniqueness an unfathomable mystery, and in God all mystery is compounded.... This mystery of God, however,... is not in the mere concept or essence of “divinity,” but in God as an actuality—not the abstract principle of His knowing, but the actual knowing. Of this we know next to nothing.<sup>33</sup>

The conception of apophaticism was much discussed in Hartshorne’s process philosophy and theology. For him, the reason for the mystery lies in the uniqueness of each entity: “Since ‘the total reality’ is never simply the same twice over, and since God must be the inclusive reality, then every time we refer to Him, we refer to a new divine totality.”<sup>34</sup> At the same time, Hartshorne acknowledged the aspect of mystery in Russian thought, particularly that which is present in Frank’s philosophy. Upon reading *History of Russian Philosophy* by Lossky, Hartshorne noted that Frank

says that “the trans-definite essence of the unfathomable ‘never is the same or self-identical, at every moment and in every one of its concrete manifestations it is something absolutely new, unique and unrepeatable.’” ... For a man is a new total reality each moment too. Frank, to be sure, admits this and holds that all be-

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> FRANK, *The Unknowable*, 96.

<sup>33</sup> HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 119.

<sup>34</sup> HARTSHORNE, “Russian Metaphysics,” 68; HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 271.

coming is antinomic. But this is because it has not occurred to him to think of a unit-becoming as the final concrete entity, each unit summing up the achieved reality of its predecessors.<sup>35</sup>

It is clear that Hartshorne and Frank built their systems based on different assumptions. Hartshorne criticized Frank and other Russian philosophers for lacking a clear concept of relativity, which—in their view—resulted in an insufficiently defined status of the absolute: “They wish to have a total-unity which is somehow *both* the original power creating all things *and* the final achievement of the creative process.”<sup>36</sup> Hartshorne did not recognize the principle of antinomianism propounded by Frank whereby God could be depicted as a coincidence of opposites—*coincidentia oppositorum*, as Nicholas of Cusa put it. In Hartshorne’s review (and overview) of Russian philosophy, he wrote about Frank:

He has an ingenious view of the Unfathomable as beyond the reach of logical laws, thus paving the way for the presentation of his metaphysical position as “antinomic monodualism.” But is the unfathomability of God really best viewed as the paradox of the absolute relativizing itself? It may rather lie in our inability to form any but an exceedingly vague notion of the eminently relative actual synthesis of all things in the divine receptivity.... Here there is silence, surmise, heart-searching, and prayer, not theories, right or wrong. There is not even a paradox. There is bottomless ignorance. Concreteness, not essence, or concepts like the absolute as such, or the relative as such, is the mystery; it is the abstract, essential, and necessary which we can grasp, and our theoretical intelligence is thus most at home in pure mathematics, dealing with essences and necessities.<sup>37</sup>

So once again we have an example of how Hartshorne understood the notion of mystery: not in the “universal” metaphysical sense as the unknowable essence of being (or more precisely, absolute being), but rather the individual, concrete dimension of momentary, actual entities which create themselves out of preceding entities. Frank’s apophaticism is related to the traditional concept of God as a permanent transcendent being, while Hartshorne’s apophaticism—if one may use this notion—is concerned with reality as an affective continuum, immanent but still transcending every antecedent state towards newness.

<sup>35</sup> HARTSHORNE, “Russian Metaphysics,” 69; HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 271.

<sup>36</sup> HARTSHORNE, “Russian Metaphysics,” 69; HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 272.

<sup>37</sup> HARTSHORNE, “Russian Metaphysics,” 73–74; HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 275–76.

In accordance with the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*, theology for Frank is only possible as “learned ignorance”—*docta ignorantia* which is also antinomian in nature: “The element of *ignorance* is expressed in the antinomian content of the affirmation, and the element of *knowing* is expressed in the fact that this knowledge is nonetheless in the form of *judgment*, namely the form of the two mutually contradictory judgements.”<sup>38</sup> Frank’s conviction of the antinomian nature of reality, both in its metaphysical and epistemological respects, also guided his natural theology. It should be noted that he did not believe that evidence was required to prove the existence of God, but nonetheless offered an original interpretation of the ontological proof, which we will discuss further in the following paragraph.

#### ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

According to Frank, there is no need for rational justification of the existence of God. In his opinion, even the notions of being and existence cannot be applied to God properly, as they are related to our everyday experience of the empirical world, which does not express a transcendent, absolute reality. As Frank noticed in his *The Unknowable*:

Insofar as we take the word “is” (or “exists”) to mean the belonging to objective being, we must have the courage to assert that God does not “exist”.... Thus, *God does not exist*, not in the sense that He is an illusion and must be excluded from genuine being, but only in the sense that His reality (which is the reality of the absolute primordial ground or primordial source of being) surpasses all being. (213)

What is more, the only adequate way of knowing God is to address Him directly in prayer. God could not be comprehended in a third-person narrative as “Him”; He can only be called upon as “Thou”:

Let an atheist be right (in the sense discussed above) in his assertion that “there is no God,” this is understood to mean that God does not “exist,” “is” not. But Thou, my God, Thou *art!* (230)

For Frank, the most significant matter was not to demonstrate God’s existence *per se*, but to establish the feasibility of the cognition of God as ex-

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<sup>38</sup> FRANK, *The Unknowable*, 94.

isting, being immanently present in human consciousness. As Frederick Copleston observed, Frank insisted that “God can be sought and found only through an inner experience, by which we come into direct contact with reality itself, with God that is to say, an experience in which reality reveals itself.”<sup>39</sup> In this vein, Frank reinterpreted the ontological proof for the existence of God and devoted two profound texts to this subject: “To the History of the Ontological Proof of the Existence of God” (a supplement to his book *The Object of Knowledge*, 1915) and the essay “The Ontological Proof of the Existence of God” (1930).

It should be stressed that Frank was the first philosopher to distinguish the two versions of Anselm’s ontological proof, despite the widespread belief that it was Hartshorne and Norman Malcolm who introduced (soon after Frank’s death) this differentiation. According to Frank, the formulation of the ontological proof presented in Chapter II of *Proslogion* has been the cause of much misunderstanding, and, as a result, has received criticism from Kant and other thinkers. Frank agreed with all of Anselm’s adversaries who believe that it is not possible to move from the order of thought to the order of existence. However, he stipulated that the “true” ontological argument does not involve making such a “leap.” At the core of the ontological proof, Frank argued, lies the thesis that the concept of God cannot lack the attribute of his existence, or else God would not be *ens perfectissimum*, pointing out that this thesis had been expressed in chapter III of *Proslogion* and in *Liber apologeticus contra Gaunilon, respondens pro insipiente*. The claim that God’s existence is absolutely necessary merely expresses the idea that God is the source of all beings—both their existence and their cognition. To deny that God exists in an absolute (and therefore, real) way means to negate the existence of all other things, which without God are devoid of *raison d’être*.

In turn, Hartshorne characterized his system as “Neo-Anselmianism,” which means “that there is a valid point in Anselm’s ontological proof, which was partly misconceived both by him and by his critics, and that the whole of metaphysical truth can be derived by choosing doctrines congruent with the proof in a corrected form.”<sup>40</sup> Like Frank and other advocates of the ontological proof, Hartshorne argued that

<sup>39</sup> Frederick COPLESTON, *Philosophy in Russia from Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 359.

<sup>40</sup> HARTSHORNE, Letter to José Ferrater Mora of January 31, 1962 (Digital Repository of Universitat de Girona).

the standard criticisms of this argument are irrelevant, for the last thing the argument does is to suppose that “existence,” in the ordinary sense in which dollars or islands exist, is a “predicate” necessarily included in perfection as a predicate.... What is left is the unique predicate of existing-necessarily, which ... is the only mode of existence that is possible for a being without beginning or ending in time, or, in various other respects, free from those imperfections which attend the contingent mode of existence.<sup>41</sup>

Hartshorne also distinguished between the formulations of the ontological proof present in II and III chapters of *Proslogion* and—in conformity with Frank—maintained: “To refute *Prosl.* II, taken by itself, is easy enough, since so taken it seems to misuse the idea of existence; yet this does not refute *Prosl.* III, which turns not upon ordinary or contingent existence, but upon a contrasting modality of existence.”<sup>42</sup> However, for Hartshorne a differentiation between two versions of the Anselmian proof is situated within a distinct framework to that of Frank:

While Frank considered the second argument merely a more adequate version of the first form, Malcolm and Hartshorne saw there a fundamentally new concept of God as a necessary being. Such being is either impossible, or necessary, and since it is possible, it exists.... No such claim can be found in Frank’s version. For this reason, it is hard to recognize that he in any way anticipated later discussions of the ontological argument in analytical philosophy.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, for Hartshorne, the existence of God is purely a logical necessity: God can only be coherently (non-contradictorily) conceived of as existing. To put it differently, the nonexistence of God is inconceivable.<sup>44</sup> As is well known, John Hick, among others, criticized this approach by pointing out that logical modality (and, consequently, necessity as a mode of being) by no means leads to ontic modality (and necessity).

Frankian interpretation of the ontological proof is, in a sense, much more radical than that of Hartshorne. Apart from logical necessity and empirical

<sup>41</sup> HARTSHORNE, “Russian Metaphysics,” 74.

<sup>42</sup> Charles HARTSHORNE, *Anselm’s Discovery. A Re-examination of the Ontological Proof for Gods Existence* (La Salle: Open Court, 1991), 100.

<sup>43</sup> Paweł ROJEK, “God and *Cogito*: Semen Frank on the Ontological Argument,” *Studies in East European Thought* 71 (2019): 126.

<sup>44</sup> Dan DOMBROWSKI, “Charles Hartshorne,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022), ed. Edward F. Zalta and Uri Nodelma, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hartshorne>.

necessity, he—following Nicholas of Cusa—distinguishes so-called absolute necessity. According to his argument:

All circulating criticism of ontological proof ... amounts to pointing out that factual necessity and logical necessity must not be mixed, and that the former, by itself, never follows from the latter.... *If* the ontological proof were indeed based on a confusion of factual and logical necessity (or, if it were formulated in such a way that this confusion could be discerned), then, of course, it would be unfounded.

The question, however, is precisely whether factual and logical necessity (or, to use the terms of logic: “categorical” and “apodictic”) exhaust all possible types of necessity, and thus, is there a third type of necessity distinct from the first two? Indeed, there is a third type of necessity, and on seeing it lies the meaning of ontological proof. It is a *primary* or *absolute* necessity, combining categorical with apodictic, actual indelibility with the logical indispensability of thinking something. This is precisely the necessity of being, as an all-embracing all-unity, as the absolute fullness of everything that exists and can be thought – in other words, the necessity of the absolute.... Absolute Being is both a fact and the primary truth of our thought.... This proof simply says: the Absolute in a necessary way *is*, it is enough to “think” it, to direct our attention to it, to focus our thought on it; its existence, as it were, we “perceive” (with necessity, combining the power of fact with the power of logical truth).<sup>45</sup>

In Hartshorne’s case, the ontological proof is understood rather in a negative manner, in that it demonstrates the internal contradiction or impossibility of the thesis of the non-existence of a perfect being. Frank, on the other hand, overcame the reduction of this strict analytical approach to the argument of Anselm. The ontological proof, as Frank understood it, is not only and not so much a logical necessity, but rather a demonstration of God as *ens absolutum*. Frank did not acknowledge the mere *probability* of God’s existence. In his opinion, the only modus of the existence of God is his *real* existence in an order that transcends all other kinds of being.

As Frank stated in his German article *Das Absolute* (1934), the ontological proof is “nothing else than the proof of a being, to which we do not enter into relation from the outside by idea and objective cognition, but which reveals itself in thinking and is therefore absolutely unthinkable.”<sup>46</sup> In Frank’s

<sup>45</sup> Semen FRANK, “Ontologicheskoe dokazatel’stvo bytiya Boga,” in *Po tu storonu pravogo i levogo* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1972), 122–23.

<sup>46</sup> Simon FRANK, “Das Absolute,” *Idealismus. Jahrbuch für die idealistische Philosophie der Gegenwart* 1 (1934): 157.

view, one can ascertain the existence of God only through religious experience. So, it is “an expression of a fundamental mystical intuition: we cannot have a proper concept of God that is separate from God’s existence.”<sup>47</sup> It is doubtful that Hartshorne read the above-mentioned Frankian texts on the ontological proof, but he was to some extent, familiar with his interpretation, which he summarized in the following words:

On one question Frank and several of his predecessors are very impressive, namely, on the epistemological question, “How do we know the reality of God?” We know, they say, by immediate experience, intuition, but the genuineness of this intuition is vouched for by the impossibility of denying it without betraying misunderstanding.... This is offered as a version of the Ontological Argument.<sup>48</sup>

According to Frank, the thesis of God’s existence serves not as a conclusion, but as a premise for reasoning. He explained: “The meaning of this proof is that here, from the very beginning, we have not an abstract idea, but the fullness of reality itself, and, gazing at it, we see that otherwise we could not have this object at all, i.e. that the usual logical distinction between ‘idea’ and ‘reality’ cannot be made here.”<sup>49</sup> To put it differently, Frank claimed that the ontological proof does not consist in reasoning, but in direct comprehension and acceptance of the existence of God as a higher reality.

Hartshorne was willing to acknowledge, if not the Frankian intuitionist interpretation of the ontological argument, then at least his intention to defend the belief in the existence of God. He referred to the Russian philosopher in the context of his own debate with those who opposed the ontological proof:

The behavior of the writers of skeptical or positivistic textbooks (they keep coming out every few weeks) in dealing with this argument furnishes an apt illustration of Frank’s thesis that the opponents of religious ideas are really talking about something else! Religion does mean by God One who could neither exist, nor fail to exist, by accident, and this status of being “such that his non-existence cannot even be conceived” is so essential to all that is meant by the perfection of God that nothing is left if it be denied.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Paul GAVRILYUK, “Natural Theology in Modern Russian Religious Thought,” in *Natural Theology in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, ed. David Bradshaw and Richard Swinburne (St. Paul: IOTA Publications, 2021), 118.

<sup>48</sup> HARTSHORNE, “Russian Metaphysics,” 74; HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 276–77.

<sup>49</sup> FRANK, “Ontologicheskoe dokazatel’stvo bytiya Boga,” 115.

<sup>50</sup> HARTSHORNE, “Russian Metaphysics,” 74–75; HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, 277.

While Hartshorne debated the non-contradictory nature of the thesis of God's existence, Frank insisted on its certainty. Nevertheless, both philosophers assumed a factor of subject activity, that is, a conviction about the existence of God shared among believers.

### CONCLUSION

A query that presents itself is the source of the similarities between Frank's and Hartshorne's investigations within the field of philosophy of religion. One possible answer comes spontaneously to mind: both drew on the Platonic tradition, which in its deepest sense, recognizes not so much pure idealism as the integral relationship of the ideal principle (God) with the material world. Hartshorne confessed that his philosophical formation was inspired by the thought of Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950), who in turn may have been influenced by Semen Frank. Indeed, there are a number of common threads between Frank and Hartmann regarding, among others, the metaphysics of cognition.<sup>51</sup> The influence of Bergson on both thinkers is also considerable.

Nevertheless, Frank inclined towards the classical conception of God, despite his inclination towards panentheism (yet in accordance with Christian tradition) evident in his religious thought. In his understanding, the dynamic conception of God was expressed in terms of being, even though Frank recognized that the term of "being" is inadequate, as God is "the Unknowable." Conversely, Hartshorne advanced beyond classical theism towards process theology. For him, God cannot be described on the basis of the traditional concept of being or substance, but instead, in terms of actual entities, changing relationships and so on. One could probably count Frank among the representatives of process philosophy, in the broad sense of the word, as one who recognized changeability, becoming, and creativity as fundamental dimensions of reality.<sup>52</sup>

In Frank's case, being is not at odds with process, but is apprehended as relational and in a state of becoming in nature: both in a metaphysical sense—as belonging to all-unity—and in the epistemological sense—as

<sup>51</sup> See Teresa OBOLEVITCH, *Wokół filozofii Siemiona Franka* (Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza UZ, 2020), 60–68.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Piotr GUTOWSKI, *Filozofia procesu i jej metafizologia. Studium metafizyki Ch. Hartshorne'a* (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1995), 22.



perceiving in relation to another being, “separated” from the absolute (as the unknowable  $x$ ). Frank argued that the cognitive “actualization” of individual concepts occurs as a result of their being singled out from the remaining terms:  $A = (x - BCD)$ ,  $B = (x - ACD)$ , etc.,<sup>53</sup> which concurs with Spinoza’s dictum: *omnis determinatio est negatio*. Unlike Hartshorne, Frank maintained that God is not influenced by creatures; nonetheless, he also defined God through the lens of potentiality and presupposed the possibility of creation in the world, albeit not divine interaction with it.

Frank and Hartshorne proposed differentiating between the two formulations of Anselm’s ontological proof. Both put forth their own, original interpretations of the ontological argument. Hartshorne’s reference to the works of Semen Frank bears witness to his own broad philosophical culture as well as to the significance of the latter’s contributions for the philosophy of religion in the 20th century.

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<sup>53</sup> See Semen FRANK, *Predmet znaniya. Ob osnovakh i granitsakh otvlechenogo znaniya* (Petrograd: Tipografiya R. G. Shredera, 1915), 268.

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PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION THROUGH TWO LENSES:  
CHARLES HARTSHORNE READS SEMEN FRANK

Summary

The article contains a comparative analysis of the thought of Russian émigré philosopher Semen Frank and one of the most prominent representatives of process philosophy and theology Charles Hartshorne. Among the points of convergence, their integral vision of reality was pointed out. Frank's and Hartshorne's approaches to the question of cognition of God were considered, with special attention paid to their interpretation of the ontological proof. Hartshorne was familiar with Russian thought and even wrote reviews on Zenkovsky and Lossky's classic books on the history of Russian philosophy, where he mentioned Frank more than once. One cannot speak of the two thinkers' influence on each other, but rather of a common philosophical heritage going back to Plato.

**Keywords:** Semen Frank; Charles Hartshorne; process philosophy; integrality; all-unity; ontological proof.

FILOZOFIA RELIGII W DWÓCH OBIEKTYWACH:  
CHARLES HARTSHORNE CZYTA SIEMIONA FRANKA

Streszczenie

Artykuł zawiera analizę porównawczą myśli rosyjskiego emigracyjnego filozofa Siemiona Franka i jednego z najwybitniejszych przedstawicieli filozofii i teologii procesu Charlesa Hartshorne'a. Wśród punktów zbieżnych wskazano na ich integralną wizję rzeczywistości. Rozważono podejście Franka i Hartshorne'a w kwestii poznania Boga, szczególną uwagę poświęcając ich interpretacji dowodu ontologicznego. Hartshorne był zaznajomiony z myślą rosyjską i nawet napisał recenzje na klasyczne książki Zieńkowskiego i Łoskiego na temat historii filozofii rosyjskiej, gdzie niejednokrotnie wspominał o Franku. Nie można mówić o wpływach obydwóch myślicieli na siebie, ale raczej o wspólnym dziedzictwie filozoficznym sięgającym Platona.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Siemion Frank; Charles Hartshorne; filozofia procesu; integralność; wszechjedność; dowód ontologiczny.