



Review of: Andrea Oppo, *Antinomy and symbol: Pavel Florensky's philosophy of discontinuity*, Leiden; Boston, Brill, 2024. ISBN: 978-90-04-70875-4, 213 p [€145.00]

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In recent decades, European intellectual society has shown a steady growth of interest in Russian religious philosophy. Namely:

- philosophical theology (for example, David Bentley Hart's reception of Father Sergius Bulgakov's sophiology (Hart 2024) or A. Papanikolaou's reference to Vladimir S. Solovyov's political philosophy (Papanikolaou 2012));
- linguo-philosophy (the best example is the reception of Mikhail M. Bakhtin's ideas in the works of Yulia Kristeva¹);
- and historical and philosophical studies (as evidenced by the collection *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought* published in 2020 (Emerson et al. 2024)).

Under these circumstances, the publication of Andrea Oppo's book about one of the most original Russian religious thinkers, Father Pavel Florensky, is an important event that allows non-Russian-speaking readers to get acquainted with a little-known philosophical discourse. In Russian scholarship, several monographic studies devoted to Florensky's work have been published in recent decades. Among them, the most important are the works of Nikolai Pavlyuchenkov (Pavlyuchenkov 2013, 2023). Several years ago, a monograph in the form of a biographical essay on the life and work of Florensky by Natalino Valentini was translated from Italian into Russian (Valentini 2004). Nevertheless, the study of individual conceptual aspects of the thinker's work has not yet been carried out. In this sense, the work of Oppo represents a fresh attempt to identify and analyze the core of Florensky's philosophical methodology.

Oppo's book pursues an important goal – to identify the conceptual principles of Florensky's philosophical method ("philosophical key" (p. 9)). The author considers the two concepts that formed the "skeleton" of the philosopher's thought at different

¹ See her recent book on Dostoevsky (Kristeva 2021).

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stages of his work, namely antinomy and symbol. According to Oppo's interpretation, both of these elements of Florensky's discourse are connected by a contradictory intuition of discontinuity or "gap" in being and thinking (this can be considered as the third unifying concept). This intuition implies the possibility of an inconsistent course of events and paradoxical phenomena developing contrary to cause-and-effect relationships. The triad of concepts of discontinuity, antinomy, and symbol serve as the key to understanding Florensky's philosophy in Oppo's interpretation (p. 9).

According to this methodological perspective, the author points to Florensky's historical and philosophical continuity with the pagan and Christian Neoplatonists (Proclus, Iamblichus, the Areopagite, Palamas,² Ficino), and also places him in the "Soloviev line" of Russian religious thought (pp. 14, 190, etc.).

Oppo discusses the idea of discontinuity as well as the related concepts of antinomy and symbolism in Florensky's philosophy of mathematics (Chapter 1), his epistemology (Chapter 2), studies of logic (Chapter 3), philosophy of history (Chapter 4), natural philosophy (Chapter 5), studies of visual and musical aesthetics (Chapter 6), and philosophy of language (Chapter 7). The book is preceded by a detailed introduction, which substantiates the need to consider Florensky's philosophical discourse at different stages of its evolution through the prism of general intuition, expressed in the above-mentioned triad of concepts that are close in meaning but differ in their areas of application (p. 28).

In Oppo's interpretation, discontinuity itself does not represent some special substance or special dimension of being, but points to the possibility of its unpredictable change, independent of the natural course of events in accordance with the principle of cause and effect. Discontinuity in some sense implies a "cause" external to the world, which unpredictably violates natural laws (whether they are physical, social or historical). Due to that external status, discontinuity itself cannot be strictly conceptualized (p. 18). It turns out to be something like a theory without theory. This is the problem and the main paradox of constructing a systematic, i.e., "continuous" discourse on discontinuity (p. 17). However, according to Oppo, its presence can be recorded in various areas of human knowledge. This allows the author to consider Florensky's thought in the broad context of twentieth century philosophy and science. According to Oppo, the discourse of discontinuity in its logical embodiment turns out to be close to research in the field of paraconsistent and "imaginary" logics (N. Vasiliev) (pp. 94–96). It is comparable to neo-Kantian and post-structuralist ideas in its philosophical form (pp. 135–136) and comparable to psychoanalysis in anthropology (p. 192). However, Oppo emphasizes that because of the impossibility to formalize systematically and "continuously" Florensky's idea of discontinuity, representatives of STEM have not fully embraced it (p. 53).

At the same time, discontinuity also turns out to be a guarantee of doubt and of questioning individual provisions of established philosophical and scientific systems (conceptual "continuums") (p. 21). In this sense, the concept of discontinuity not only represents an original concept, but also acts as a tool for justifying the need for constant verification of generally accepted rules and patterns (p. 21). The author notes

²The author devotes considerable attention to the difficult question of the nature of Florensky's perception of Palamas's legacy in Chapter 7 of the book.

that Florensky associates the discourse of discontinuity in question with overcoming extreme forms of rationalism (p. 198), the origin of which is found in the “continuum” metaphysics of Aristotle³ (p. 22).

In connection with the identification of the antinomic and symbolic aspects of the philosophy of discontinuity, Oppo identifies two main periods in Florensky's work (p. 14).⁴ The first is associated with the affirmation of antinomianism as a fundamental ontological and epistemological principle (for example, the antinomy of being and non-being, where being is “interrupted” by non-being and vice versa (p. 20)). Oppo emphasizes that at this stage, it was important for Florensky to contrast two philosophical paradigms: the rationalistic position of Kantianism and the supra-rational position of Christian Platonism (p. 82). Florensky uses this antinomy of two philosophical paradigms (p. 117) for the methodological conjugation of two opposing positions⁵ in understanding reality, i.e. the reason, searching for a truth external to it and the truth, mystically generating the reason involved in it (p. 116).

The second period is characterized by the Russian philosopher's development of the concept of symbol as a point where antinomic positions come into contact with each other (p. 20). The symbol is interpreted by Oppo as a reality that is an implied “inner force”—the content of the “gap” between antinomies (p. 141). Moreover, this content can be described mathematically (number as a “gap”⁶ (p. 54)), logically (the admission of contradictions (pp. 71, 74)),⁷ religiously-philosophically (the mystical interpretation of Platonism (p. 63)), theologically (the unity of God in three persons (p. 70)), and aesthetically (the symbolism of form in music (p. 155), fine art (p. 160) and literature (pp. 167–169)), etc.

Thus, according to Oppo, antinomy and symbol are two basic categories of Florensky's philosophy of discontinuity. On the basis of this “key”, the author carries out a generalizing reconstruction of Florensky's diverse work. In the seventh (final) chapter of his study, Oppo comes to an important conclusion from the point of view of the chronology and teleology of Florensky's thought: “All Florensky's scientific and philosophical pursuits converge in his philosophy of language of the 1920s” (p. 165), “Florenskian philosophy of language as a crucial part of his thought” (p. 167).

The catalyst for Florensky's linguo-philosophical thought was the discussions about the name of God in Orthodox theology of the early twentieth century (the onomatodoxy disputes). Nevertheless, Oppo shows that Florensky touched upon a

³Oppo argues that Florensky's philosophical project is directed against all Western European metaphysics (p. 27) and the philosophical foundations of scientific knowledge (p. 61). In our opinion, and with some reservations, it can be compared with similar attempts to overcome metaphysics (Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Derrida) when identifying its distinctive features.

⁴The author of the book under review correlates the distinction presented here at the level of philosophical categories with theological theodicy and anthropodicy in Florensky's works: “The shift from theodicy to anthropodicy is therefore, in many ways, the shift from antinomy to symbol” (p. 120).

⁵Platonism retains priority here as a universal philosophy, which in its pursuit of truth includes the “untrue” but necessary for thinking Kantianism (pp. 118–119).

⁶Here Oppo notes the possibility of considering Florensky's ideas in the context of discrete mathematics (p. 56).

⁷Using this example, Oppo contrasts Florensky's logical apparatus with Aristotle's formal logic and Frege's logicism (p. 83).

wider range of issues in his linguo-philosophical studies (p. 167). Thus, in the considered interpretation of Florensky's thought, language turns out to be the space where numerous intuitions of the thinker, connected with the philosophy of discontinuity, antinomianism, and symbolism, converge. In this sense, language, as the main instrument of many (if not all) types of human activity (philosophy, science, poetry, etc.) becomes the main subject of research precisely because of its totality. The Russian philosopher antinomically sharpens the "referential" problem of the connection between the word and the verbally expressed object (extra-linguistic denotation)⁸ (p. 166) and asserts the symbolic nature of the word. Oppo notes that in Florensky's opinion, language does not claim the ability to adequately express extralinguistic reality (the linguo-philosophical analogue of *adaequatio rei et intellectus*) (p. 196), but antinomically contains its (reality) presence. The symbolism of a word implies its involvement in the essence it expresses (p. 196). Thus, a word is a mediator between the one who uses this word ("Ego") and what is expressed in this word ("non-Ego") (p. 196).

Unfortunately, the coverage of Florensky's philosophy of language as a result of his philosophical research was limited to only one chapter in Oppo's work. Certainly, a separate detailed study should be devoted to this most important dimension of Florensky's thought. This fact is not a drawback of the book, it opens venues for further research.

Nevertheless, as a recommendation, we would like to point to some shortcomings of the work under review. In our opinion, the nature of the antinomianism and symbolism of Florensky's philosophy can be revealed in a detailed analysis of his philosophical schemes ("Limits of Epistemology", "Structure of Word", etc.), as well as in the prospect of a more detailed study of the relationship of Florensky's thought to the ideas of theorists of Russian symbolism (in particular, Vyach. Ivanov,⁹ whose ideas are presented in the work only in the form of individual references (pp. 123, 135)). A serious gap in Oppo's study is the lack of reference to the works of the recently deceased symbolism researcher and philosopher of language Liudmila Gogotishvili. In particular, the author mentions Florensky's concept of circular thinking (p. 125), the linguo-philosophical understanding of the "cutting line" (p. 152), the ideas of heterophony (p. 176), as well as the synergistic nature of the word, which were originally interpreted by Gogotishvili in the works included in the book *Jacob's Ladder. Architectonics of the Linguo-Philosophical Space* (2018): "P. A. Florensky's Theory of the Correlation between Visual and Linguistic Techniques (Reverse Perspective and "Round" Discourse)", "Nominativity and Processuality in Pavel Florensky's Philosophy of Language (Naming and Discourse in Reverse Perspective)". In our opinion, another bibliographic gap is the omission of L. G. Antipenko's monograph *P. A. Florensky on the Logical and Symbolic Aspects of Scientific and Philosophical Thinking*, dedicated to the narrow epistemological problems of Florensky's philosophy.

⁸As a result, Florensky constructed an original philosophy of language, which was fundamentally different from his contemporary constructivism and descriptivism (p. 165) and was developed in Alexey F. Losev's philosophy of name.

⁹In our opinion, Ivanov's theory of symbol is built on the antinomic principle and goes far beyond the boundaries of artistic symbolism.

Oppo's book is an important contribution to modern studies of Florensky's legacy. In our opinion, the author's reference to the philosophical methodology of the Russian thinker is the most productive approach (in contrast to popular theological or socio-political criticism). The author interrupts the philosophical "silence" regarding the conceptual content of Florensky's thought and tries to elucidate its deep foundation. We express the hope that this work will become a starting point for other similar studies. In particular, we find it important to carry out a systematic generalization of Florensky's philosophy of language, which will allow us to identify the intellectual potential of Florensky's philosophical system for both philosophy and science.

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