



Barbara Hallensleben,
Regula M. Zwahlen,
Aristotle Papanikolaou,
Pantelis Kalaitzidis (eds.)

BUILDING THE HOUSE OF WISDOM

Sergii Bulgakov and Contemporary Theology:
New Approaches and Interpretations

 **Aschendorff**
Verlag

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Abstract

Sergii Bulgakov (1871–1944) is one of the preeminent theologians of the 20th century whose work is still being discovered and explored in and for the 21st century. The famous rival of Lenin in the field of economics, was, according to Wassily Kandinsky, “one of the deepest experts on religious life” in early twentieth-century Russian art and culture. As economist, publicist, politician, and later Orthodox theologian and priest, he became a significant “global player” in both the Orthodox diaspora and the Ecumenical movement in the interwar period.

This anthology gathers the papers delivered at the international conference on the occasion of Bulgakov’s 150th birthday at the University of Fribourg in September 2021. The chapters, written by established Bulgakov specialists, including Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury (2002–2012), as well as young researchers from different theological disciplines and ecclesial traditions, explore Bulgakov’s way of meeting the challenges in the modern world and of building bridges between East and West. The authors bring forth a wide range of new creative ways to constructively engage with Bulgakov’s theological worldview and cover topics such as personhood, ecology, political theology and Trinitarian ontology.



EPIPHANIA

Herausgegeben von
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in Zusammenarbeit mit
dem Zentrum für das Studium der Ostkirchen
der Universität Freiburg Schweiz

Band 19

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Münster
2024

Publiziert mit Unterstützung
des Schweizerischen Nationalfonds
zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung

Publiziert von
Aschendorff Verlag GmbH & Co. KG
Soester Straße 13
D-48155 Münster
www.aschendorff-buchverlag.de

Cover:
Aschendorff Verlag GmbH & Co. KG

Text:
© Barbara Hallensleben, Regula M. Zwahlen, Aristotle Papanikolaou, Pantelis Kalaitzidis

ISBN 978-3-402-12060-6 (Print)
ISBN 978-3-402-12061-3 (E-Book PDF)
DOI <https://doi.org/10.17438/978-3-402-12062-0>



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Bulgakov's Ecology

Austin Foley Holmes

Life is a creative activity and therefore history is a creative activity.
(*Unfading Light*, 362)

From his earlier *Philosophy of Economy* to the later trilogy *On the Divine Humanity*, Fr. Sergii Bulgakov (1871–1944) developed what amounts to a full-bore theological ecology. The term *Ökologie* was coined by the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), whose work was well known to Bulgakov, in order to express the economy-like patterns of exchange and commerce among species living in shared environments (or “households”).¹ This biological definition has since been superseded. Ecology now denotes a manifold pattern of thinking which is manifested across disciplines and is particularly at home in the humanities. Ecology attempts to think our ecological crisis of Global Warming/Mass Extinction by thinking its origin and its future. In particular, ecology thinks the relationality of humankind to the nonhuman and attempts constructively to open up new possibilities for that relationality. For a time, the ultimate horizon of ecological thought would rightly have been identified with the political. Today, however, ecology is in the midst of an *ontological* turn—the search for a metaphysics capable of bringing into being a politics and an ecological age of the future. Ecology is *the idea* of all-pervasive interconnectedness, and the thinking of that interconnectedness in and for everything.² Ecology, so understood, seeks a relational ontology. To think ecologically is to think relationality without reserve.

1 Bulgakov references Haeckel, e. g., in *Jacob's Ladder* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans: 2010), 85–86.

2 Drawing on Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

This essay reads Bulgakov in concert with the ontological turn in contemporary ecology. Part I explores this ontological turn in three preeminent ecological thinkers: David Abram's animism, Freya Mathews's panpsychism, and the idea of "subscendence" in Timothy Morton's *Dark Ecology*. Then we turn to Bulgakov's own ecological thought. Part II considers the "world" (*mir*) in the God–Sophia relation, especially Sophia's status as the "world soul." Part III investigates Bulgakov's "Nature aesthetics" and his claim that the beauty of the natural world is a specifically *pneumatological* reality. Finally, Part IV assays Bulgakov's idea of the "humanization" of the world. Kenosis, self-creativity, synergy, and "love-humility" emerge as the simultaneous bases of Bulgakovian ecology.

Metaphysics in Recent Ecology

Ecological philosopher David Abram has argued that a sensuous attention to our surrounding environment reveals the fundamental reciprocity of being—the interplay between perceiving and being perceived.³ His phenomenology of embodiment and language re-envisages human agency as communion with a "more-than-human-world" of other sensorial subjects rather than our unilateral action upon an inert background. This account of human agency is, for Abram, inseparable from "animism": a metaphysics which recognizes the communicative agency of every encountered being, from celestial bodies to blue herons; everything is ensouled and expressive.⁴ Freya Mathews has argued for the coherence of a particular form of panpsychist metaphysics in which the universe is a "psychophysical unity," one whole bound together by the *sympatheia* of its disparate parts.⁵ Like Abram, Mathews sees such a metaphysics as capable of eliciting a new kind of human agency in the world. The "blind matter of classical physics" becomes perceptible, in its truth, as a "subjectival matrix" in which the scientific order of manipulation is replaced by an erotic order of "dialogical engagement with a communicative world."⁶ Whereas Abram grounds the communion of human and nonhuman subjects in reciprocal per-

3 David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Penguin Random House, 1997, 2017), 278. Abram draws especially on Merleau-Ponty, who underwent an ecological turn at the end of his life, shifting from an emphasis solely on the human body to the "flesh of the world" in the unfinished and posthumously published *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

4 E. g., Abram, *Spell*, 262 f.

5 Freya Mathews, *For Love of Matter* (Albany: SUNY, 2003).

6 *Ibid.*, 4–11; 45–69.

ception (the “reversibility of flesh”), Mathews articulates a formal monism: “This universal system or subject (the One) realizes itself through its creation, via self-differentiation, of a manifold of conative subsystems that possess a relative unity of their own, and hence qualify as derivative subjects (the Many). By following their own conative desire, the unself-conscious Many perpetuate the self-realization of the One.”⁷ Such a metaphysics may be compatible with Christian Neoplatonic thought.⁸ What Abram and Mathews share, fundamentally, is a rhetorical habit of insisting on the primacy of re-immersing oneself in the natural world and cultivating attunement with one’s environment. Each basically recommends, to borrow a term from ancient philosophy, a program of *theōria physikē* or “natural contemplation”—a concept now equally central to the field of Christian ecology.⁹

Timothy Morton’s *Dark Ecology* treads another path. According to Morton, the widespread tendency of ecologists to narrate in their writing the experience of becoming re-immersed in Nature (e.g., “As I write this,” followed by rich sensorial detail) actually perpetuates a version of Romantic consumerism: “a consumption of transformative experiences that presumes a liquid subjectivity akin to (indeed co-derived with) that generated by capitalism [...] the Romantic subject who aesthetically yearns for an impossible reconciliation with the alienated object (Nature).”¹⁰ We rather need an ecology *without Nature*: an ecology which thinks *not* in terms of a harmonious natural whole that humankind can choose either to embrace (through re-immersion) or recklessly destroy, but rather an ecology which begins with the reality of the Anthropocene’s ecological truth—i. e., the recognition of humankind’s radical “loop-like” relationality to everything else, such that there is neither a pre-given nonhuman Nature nor a reified pure humanity disentangled from the nonhuman.¹¹ However, such an ecology should resist the temptation to simply replace the idea of humanity and Nature as two isolated entities with their combination into one larger whole, such as James Lovelock’s “Gaia,” since such a holism

7 Mathews, *For Love of Matter*, 9.

8 E. g., Eric Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany: SUNY, 2007), 17–34.

9 E. g., Douglas Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

10 Mick Smith, “Dark Ecology,” *Environmental Politics* 20.1 (2011), 133–38 (136). See the use of Hegel’s concept of the “beautiful soul” in Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

11 There is an intriguing isomorphism between Morton’s rejection of pure humanity/pure nonhuman Nature and the twentieth-century Catholic debate concerning *natura pura*.

(plagued by a “theistic hangover”) tends to regard the whole’s parts as ontologically inferior and expendable.¹² The axiom that “the whole is always *greater* than the sum of its parts” must be inverted: “the whole is always weirdly *less* than the sum of its parts.”¹³ By thinking the interconnectedness of everything first, there then appears to be strangely less of everything in itself: rather than thinking of things in themselves as grandiose wholes (which Morton indexes to Aristotelian “substance” ontology) we should therefore think in terms of “*collectives*.”¹⁴ As Morton concedes, this is not to abandon wholes entirely but to think wholes differently through the primacy of multiplicity and relationality—the “subscendence” of the whole into its parts, which are suspended over the “first darkness” of their irreducible alterity. Thinking this *difference* as absolute, mediated by relation but never coalescing into identity—difference as the dark void which is first depressing, then uncanny, then sweet—is the thought of *Dark Ecology*.¹⁵ Rather than humanity *and* Nature, or their monistic sublation, Morton opts for an ecological collective called the “symbiotic real” (a whole, to be sure, but an “implosive whole” which elicits its own subscendence into its ontologically greater parts). The Anthropocene is the contingent historical unfolding of the supra-relationality which humankind inherently *is*. A genuinely ecological politics, for Morton as for Slavoj Žižek, will declare that “the regeneration of the earth obviously does not depend upon our smaller and more mindful role—it depends on our gigantic role.”¹⁶ The paradox of the Anthropocene is that we are now confronted by our capacity to severely damage nature and feel the need to don sackcloth and go into exile precisely at the point where a human-led response is the only foreseeable salvation.

Each of these ecologies are more complex and compelling than this brief survey allows them to appear. For our purposes, Abram, Mathews, and Morton each represent interpretive lenses which, borne in mind, will enrich the following attempt to trace Bulgakov’s ecological thought.

12 Morton, *Humankind* (London: Verso, 2017), 105–09.

13 Morton, *Dark Ecology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 12.

14 N. B.: Morton takes subscendence to mean simply that parts are *ontologically greater because numerically greater* than the whole they comprise—a claim which depends implicitly on a univocity of being and a negation of any ontological hierarchy.

15 See Morton’s “object-oriented ontology,” a form of modern realism “developed from a deep consideration of the implications of Martin Heidegger’s version of modern Kantian correlationism” (*Dark Ecology*, 16).

16 Slavoj Žižek, “Last Exit to Socialism,” *Jacobin* (July 7, 2021).

Bulgakov's Ecological Metaphysics

Bulgakov's idea of the "world" (*mir*) is ecological insofar as "world" is Bulgakov's primary category for thinking interconnectedness, with respect to both God and humankind. For Bulgakov, neither monism nor the dualism of some classical Christian models of creation are sufficient for elucidating the sophianic character of the God–world relation.¹⁷ Dualism at least "recognizes the world's createdness," but it fails profoundly insofar as it thinks of the nothing out of which God creates as some sort of positive, non-divine reality (a "something" existing alongside of but alien to God). Creation has absolutely no ontological foundation other than God's own life. This eternal "foundation of the world in God" is essentially what Bulgakov means by the "sophianicity of the world." The Platonist doctrine of emanation is venerable insofar as it sees in its Absolute principle "the inexhaustible source of super-abounding being which is the outpouring of its wealth and fullness[.]"¹⁸ The non-possessive love of God for creation, which makes possible the autonomy and freedom of creaturely life, involves the kenotic self-limitation of the Absolute:

Creation is therefore an act of the measureless humility of the Absolute [...] *love-humility* is the ultimate and universal virtue of Christianity. It is the ontological basis of creation. By giving a place in itself to the world with its relativity, the Absolute in its love humbles itself before the creature—in truth the depths of divine love-humility are unsearchable!¹⁹

To imitate this "love-humility," by which divine Love brings into being and loves what is non-divine (such that creaturely *difference* from and *unity* with God is guaranteed by one and the same divine loving), is the goal of Christian asceticism and also, as will become clear below, encapsulates Bulgakov's vision for how human agency should be operative in relation to the world.

Bulgakov thinks of Sophia as a demiurgic principle but is always very careful to distinguish Sophia's creative activity from the creative activity which is proper only to the Trinity. The conversion of absolute non-being into the primordial waters of cosmic potency, the dark void of *meonal* nothing, is accomplished by the "submergence" of Divine Sophia into non-being, her kenosis or

17 Sergii Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 3–78.

18 Sergii Bulgakov, *Unfading Light* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2021), 183.

19 *Ibid.*, 186.

diffusion into the multiplicity, temporality, and relativity of particular being.²⁰ The fecund *meonal* nothing of the unformed world just is the light of Sophia shining in the darkness of non-being. And it is her illumination of non-being that makes God's creative activity not, properly speaking, one of cause and effect. Rather, divine creativity is—by virtue of Sophia's presence—a dialogical activity: "This is not creation out of nothing [since *creatio ex nihilo* describes only that initial conversion of *ouk on* to *mē on*] [...] It is birth from the proto-mother who is summoned to participate in her own way in creation: The earth *responds* to the creative summonses of the Creator that are addressed to her."²¹ Scripture bears a direct witness to this collaboration: "Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life"; "Let the earth bring forth the living creature" (Gen. 1:20, 24). This synergy between divine creativity and the birthing power of the earth is what Bulgakov calls "God-creatureliness." The term is potent because analogous to the more commonly appearing "God-manhood," a shorthand for the theandric interrelation and perichoresis of Christ's divinity and humanity which, under Bulgakov's Neo-Chalcedonian lights, involves a real mutuality that rules out the pure passivity of the human nature in relation to the divine. Bulgakov insists that in Christ, the archetype and source of God-manhood, "the human nature puts its imprint on the life of the divine nature."²² In the case of the Incarnation the basis for the created principle's penetration of divinity can be attributed to Christ's human freedom, which suggests that by "God-creatureliness" (assuming that God-creatureliness has a meaning analogous to God-manhood) Bulgakov intends to signal that even *nonhuman* created nature imprints itself on the life of the divine—i. e., is made a partner with divinity through an exercise of its own finite agency.

Sophia relates to creation as the "world soul," as both the vital force that fills the world with a diversity of species and the foundation of the world's integrity.²³ "She is the life of the world." No part of the world, as such, is devoid of Sophia's animative life-giving power. Bulgakov adds a qualification to this idea: Sophia is "the soul of the world, *not* its spirit." This is because spirit is hypostatic and Sophia is not a hypostasis: "The soul corresponds to the spirit's *nature*. The soul lives and is hypostatized by the spirit (and, in this sense, the soul is not the spirit's hypostasis but its hypostatizedness, or more precisely, its hypostatizability)." A consequence, therefore, of Bulgakov's doctrine of Sophia as the world

20 Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 79.

21 *Ibid.*, 66.

22 Sergii Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 256–59.

23 Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 79–80.

soul is a recognition of the world's universal hypostatizability—the intrinsic connection of the world of nature (soul) to person (spirit) as the source and content of its actualized hypostatic life. This distinction between hypostatizability and hypostasis is, of course, Bulgakov's way of distinguishing divine Sophia and the divine Trihypostatic Person. In the case of *creaturely* Sophia (the world soul), her nature is hypostatized precisely by *creaturely* hypostases. Yet this hypostatization cannot be actualized by the demiurgic activity belonging to Sophia “who cannot communicate to creation what is not proper to her” (i. e., her vitalization of the world as its *soul* is not capable of positing its *spirit*).²⁴ “The creation of hypostases is therefore a special, additional or parallel act, alongside the creation of the world [...] if the world is created ‘out of nothing,’ that is, ‘out of’ the Divine Sophia [...] then the creaturely hypostases, the spirits that hypostatize the world, are directly created by God out of Himself[.]”²⁵ The creaturely Sophia is hypostatized by the human person whom the Trihypostatic Person creates “face to face.”²⁶ The relation between the non-human natural world and human beings is therefore a finite repetition of the relation between Sophia (“the divine world”) and the Trinity, which is why the relation of human beings to the world is Bulgakov's way of addressing what it means that human beings received the image of God: “The fullness of the divine image given to man, his nature, that is, *the world as belonging to man*, is sophianic, and this sophianicity of *the world in man* belongs, of course, to the fullness of the divine image.”²⁷ The human person is a living icon of God, indeed a “creaturely god,” precisely insofar as she actualizes a world as her own. This is why the image of God in humankind is known explicitly in their “dominion over the earth” (Gen. 1:26–28). What the image images is nothing other than the relationship between God and Sophia, the divine Persons and the divine nature or world. And for this reason, the human person's actualization of the world as her own cannot possibly denote a crude ownership of, or even a unilateral power over, the world as such. Humankind and the natural world, as creaturely hypostases and creaturely hypostatizedness, are mutually determining.²⁸ Their relation is one of genuine synergy (a Bulgakovian equivalent to Morton's “symbiosis”) in which the nonhuman world, no less than humankind, is characterized by a

24 Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 84.

25 *Ibid.*, 83–84.

26 *Ibid.*, 87.

27 *Ibid.*, 86.

28 *Ibid.*, 100.

regal freedom, spontaneity, and its own peculiar creativity.²⁹ There are many levels of will and mind proper to the nonhuman: “one must completely eliminate the idea that the domain of non-hypostatized, natural being is completely alien to hypostatization, is a kind of dead matter [...] God did not create death. There are only different degrees of life on the way to its complete triumph and the complete hypostatization of being.”³⁰

We are now prepared to consider the Human-World relation which, according to Bulgakov, is the creaturely icon of this God–Sophia relation.

The Beauty of the World

Bulgakov seems to have been something of an amateur naturalist, generally spellbound by *flora* and *fauna* (especially birds) and eagerly up to date with the zoological science of his day (e.g., Haeckel). And it should not be overlooked that Bulgakov first encountered Sophia in the azure glow of the Caucasus Mountains.³¹ Certain aspects of Bulgakov’s idea of “Nature,” obviously indebted to Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, are susceptible to Morton’s critiques and undesirable for a future ecology. However, it would be a mistake to write off Bulgakov’s account of the beauty of the natural world (his “Nature aesthetics”) as naive sentimentality.

Nature’s beauty bears a pneumatological signature. Bulgakov refers to the Holy Spirit as “the hypostasis of Beauty” who “clothes nature in beauty.”³² Bulgakov thinks Beauty is a pneumatological reality not only in the creaturely world but, eternally, in the divine world: i.e., Beauty as the proper life of the Third hypostasis. The Father’s begetting of the Son is an exhaustive self-sacrificial kenosis which, on its own, cannot realize its self-revelation (“it is as if the dyad of the Father and the Son exhausts itself in this birth of the Word”).³³ It is completed only “by *another* form of the self-revelation of the Father: by the procession of the Holy Spirit upon the Son.”³⁴ The Holy Spirit is “the triumph of life-giving Love [...] the hypostatic movement of Love,” i.e., the Love of the Father and the Son. In the Spirit’s life as the hypostatic *unity* of the Father and

29 Ibid., 103: “The animal world is already called to build the world, and insofar as it is individual, this world is called to freely follow and actualizes its own laws in nature.”

30 Ibid., 100.

31 Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 8–9.

32 Sergii Bulgakov, *The Comforter* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004), 202.

33 Ibid., 179.

34 Ibid., 180.

the Son, as *their* Love, lies the Spirit's "own kenosis, which consists precisely in hypostatic *self-abolition* [...] the Third hypostasis loses itself, as it were, becomes only a *copula*, the living bridge of love between the Father and the Son, the hypostatic *Between*."³⁵ The Spirit's "hypostatizedness is [...] a non-hypostatizedness, a complete transparency for the other hypostases, a non-selfhood."³⁶ Or, as Bulgakov says in summary, this kenotic self-abolition of the Spirit, in which the divine life acquires its perfection, reveals that "Love is *Humility*," which Bulgakov again indexes to the "impersonality" of the copula disappearing in its linkage of subject and predicate. In the act whereby the Father begets the Son, God *knows* Himself as "the absolute Truth or Word," which is to say He reveals himself as "ideality" or "content."³⁷ In the act whereby the Father breathes the Spirit upon the Son, God *feels* Himself "as the actualized *reality* of this content, as *beauty*." Beauty is the *reality* of ideality; truth as *felt* distinct from truth as known; the pneumatic *actualization* (self-depleting unification) of subject and predicate. The dyadic unity of the Father's self-revelation, in the Word (Truth) and the Spirit (Beauty), grounds the circumincession "of the logical and the alogical, of ideality and reality" in God's own life, which Bulgakov identifies with divine self-positing—the artistry of God's self-creation.³⁸ "By the Spirit the Father inspires Himself in His own Word, and this self-inspiration is divine life, Beauty." Beauty is the Spirit accomplishing the Word. Beauty is God being made.³⁹ All of this pertains to the supra-eternal interrelation of the Trihypostatic life in its sacred order: the Word is the *Second* hypostasis, the *theme* of divine self-creation, the Art of the Father; the Spirit is the *Third* hypostasis, the Father's self-inspiration, which *realizes* the theme of divine self-creation ("In God, all things are actual and actualized in the Holy Spirit").⁴⁰ The beauty of the created world, too, radiates from the kenotic life of the Spirit (its cosmic Pentecost): "Life with nature and the joy of nature are accessible to every human being, even to the unbeliever if the breath of the spirit touches him. This mystery of love for nature and its effects on the soul, the joy of nature, attests to the spirituality of nature, to the grace of the Holy Spirit that inheres in it."⁴¹

35 Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 181. See Joshua Heath, "Sergii Bulgakov's Linguistic Trinity," *Modern Theology* 37, 4 (2021), 888–912.

36 *Ibid.*, 182.

37 *Ibid.*, 180–82.

38 *Ibid.*, 183–84.

39 This last phrase borrowed from my friend Terence Sweeney's insightful gloss on Beauty in Eriugena.

40 Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 184.

41 *Ibid.*, 202.

Bulgakov pairs this role of the Spirit with the angels, the “servants of Beauty.”⁴² The angels are the helmsmen of the natural world’s poetic order: “The elemental life of the world [...] is protected and directed by the hypostatically conscious guidance of the angels,” “Is it not by the angelic power implanted in them that flowers blossom? Is it not by their guardians that all forms of beauty, from the lowliest animal to the human body, are robed with beauty?”⁴³ The angels possess a uniquely *pneumatological* ontology: “Love does not seek its own [...] in their voluntary love they renounce *being in themselves*: they live only outside themselves, not *their own* life, in metaphysical self-kenosis.”⁴⁴ Beauty, again, is the realization of the theme of the divine life: Beauty is the Spirit’s kenotic “self-abolition” (as “Love-Humility”) accomplishing the Word of the Father. The angels are the “artists of the world” because their lives, poured out into the creaturely Sophia, hymn an antiphon to the Spirit’s kenosis. The beauty of the natural world *is* the manifestation of this Love for the creaturely Sophia. Yet we can be more precise, for the pneumatic movement of hypostatic Love is, in an absolute sense, *love for the Logos*.⁴⁵

The Idea of „Humanization“

The creaturely Sophia receives its *logos*—its thematic center or captivating idea—in humankind.⁴⁶ The “mystery of human love for nature” is preempted by nature’s love for humankind: to perceive the world’s *beauty* is not to encounter an aesthetically pleasing series of passive objects; it is rather the sensorial experience of an attractive force which Bulgakov identifies with the outpouring of pneumatic-angelic love. This dyadic relationship between the natural world and humankind suggests, at a minimum, their mutual determination of one another (world–human *perichoresis*, Bulgakov might say). There are, for example, many texts in which Bulgakov describes a genuine synergy between humans and nonhuman animals: “The ability of animals to enter into communion with man [...] shows that animals participate in the world soul not only in its necessity but also in its creaturely freedom”; “The bounds that separate human from animal are not unconditional, but relative and constant-

42 Bulgakov, *Jacob’s Ladder*, 84–86.

43 *Ibid.*, 85.

44 *Ibid.*, 162.

45 Bulgakov *The Comforter*, 180–81.

46 E. g., Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 293: “The human being is the logos of the universe in which the universe recognizes itself.”

ly shifting.”⁴⁷ We noted above that for Bulgakov the human person is a living icon of God insofar as she actualizes a *world* as her own. This intrinsic relation between the human person and the world is, however, not predetermined in its actuality. “Dominion” names a historical process in which the human relation to the world is open to the possibility of severe deterioration (N. B.: dominion itself is *not* optional—humankind cannot elect to abdicate; there is only the question of how humankind will rule).

The shape which humankind’s relation to the world should take is what Bulgakov refers to as “humanization.”⁴⁸ As Bulgakov developed the concept in his mature treatise on history; *humanization* refers broadly to the activity of personal creative spirit in the world, including “the entire domain of culture and civilization [...] no nations or epochs are excluded from this common human task in the world[.]”⁴⁹ And this creative history of humankind is not, properly speaking, at the service of any particular institution or authority (“humanity is not an *ancilla*, an obedient instrument [...] it is a goal for itself”), nor is the final content of humanization in any sense pre-determined.⁵⁰ Bulgakov often connects humanization to the meta-history of Eden. The naming of the animals and keeping of the Garden are paradisaical expressions of humankind’s capacity for elevating the self-creativity which is proper to nonhuman life.⁵¹ This Edenic relationality (*dominion* in its true form) was not really a world “under man’s rule” at all, but rather “the development of creation *with* man.”⁵² Earthly rulers inevitably govern by subjugation and a degree of coercion whereas gods—and human beings are called to become “created gods”—are not so limited in their exercise of power. But humankind abandoned this synergy with the world as its gods, opting to pursue instead “the conceit of gnosis before humbly believing love.”⁵³ The ecstatic divine love once characteristic of humankind was supplanted by lustfulness for a possessive, anti-divine mode of dominion: “proprietaryship” emerges here as part of the cursed reality of the world under the influence of Luciferian egoism.⁵⁴ Bulgakov describes this distorted mode of humankind’s relationality as a “magism” that aspires to mastery and control, antithetical to

47 Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 103; 294.

48 Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 202.

49 Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 320–23.

50 See Bulgakov’s cautions against the “clericalization of history” at *The Bride of the Lamb*, 331 f.

51 *Ibid.*, 102–03; 177 f.

52 *Ibid.*, 179.

53 Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 322.

54 *Ibid.*, 325.

the activity of humanization.⁵⁵ With humankind having abandoned its divine communion with the world, Nature drifts toward elemental chaos or enslavement to “blind instinct” rather than growing in Edenic intelligence and freedom. Nothing seems so basic to the world now as a constant chain of “natural disasters” and a necessary cycle of death and predation (evidence that “the forces of nature” are capable of becoming demonic).⁵⁶

And yet, humanization remains an imminent possibility for the unfolding life of humankind and the world. It will require becoming free from the practices of ownership and impulses to mastery, i. e., Luciferian dominion, that have tended to characterize humankind’s relation to the world. Economics can be systematically rethought, ecologically, as a vehicle for human creativity “to defend and spread the seeds of life, to resurrect nature.”⁵⁷ As it is, the most powerful economies in the world today depend instead on a functional necromancy (the burning of carbon-dense “fossil fuels”) presided over by an oligarchic class.⁵⁸ The path to another economic reality, according to Bulgakov, begins in the recognition of economy’s compatibility with *art*. In our experience, economy and art seem related only by a natural antagonism: “art treats economy haughtily and contemptuously for its thrifty utilitarianism and lack of creative inspiration [...] economy looks patronizingly on art for the impotence of its reverie and the involuntary parasitism.”⁵⁹ Economy and art are two kinds of relation to the beauty of the world, two methods for unifying the real and the ideal (the latter of which only humankind can actualize as the *logos* of the world). Economy tends to attempt this unification, again, by magism. Art operates through elicitation, “the artist wants to *convince*” rather than master the world, to illuminate matter with beauty through poetic addition.⁶⁰ Art, properly conceived, is a practice of non-mastery and dispossession. But even art can be tempted toward mastery (“artistic magic”), and economy always contains an aesthetic minimum. Before their separation as “two perceptions of the world,” in economic materialism and idealistic aestheticism, economy

55 Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 363.

56 Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 206.

57 Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy*, 153. On the ecological importance of Bulgakov’s economics, see Bruce V. Foltz, *The Noetics of Nature* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

58 On “Necrosphere,” see Enric Sala, *The Nature of Nature* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Partners, 2020), 123 f.

59 Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 367–69.

60 I am influenced here by Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

and art converged in a seamless Edenic life of human creativity (“efficacious,” “life in harmony,” “free of compulsion”).

What we find in Bulgakov’s meditation on art, at the end of *Unfading Light*, is his vision of a future humankind which, having suffered the divine pedagogy, has made its own that quintessentially godly *love-humility*. Artistic agency is a Bulgakovian way of thinking about ecological agency: the “humanization of the world” describes the task of creative human synergy with the world, that *kenotic* mode of creativity peculiar to art (and originating in the artistry of the self-creative life of God). This kenotic love-humility is what distinguishes humanization (understood as *Edenic* dominion) from the various tyrannical modes of human relation to its world. Kenotic love-humility, however, does not imply any degree of retreat from the world. As Bulgakov often insists, true Christian asceticism (which has the cultivation of this divine love-humility as its goal) is not an “acosmism”; it is rather an *angelic* mode of life: rapturous love in and for the world, “metaphysical self-kenosis,” self-renunciation for the sake of absolute engagement with the creaturely Sophia. Love for the world, and creative synergy *with* (not over) nonhuman life, are not peripheral aspects of human personhood: for Bulgakov, these are our highest calling and our very path to deification. For this reason, humankind’s ecological task is not less than, nor even other than, our very salvation.