



# Nikolai Lossky's Evolutionary Metaphysics of Reincarnation

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## Abstract

The Russian philosopher Nikolai Onufrievich Lossky (1870–1965) adhered to an evolutionary metaphysics of reincarnation according to which the world is constituted of immortal souls or monads, which he calls ‘substantial agents.’ These substantial agents can evolve or devolve depending on the goodness or badness of their behavior. Such evolution requires the possibility for monads to reincarnate into the bodies of creatures of a higher or of a lower level on the *scala perfectionis*. According to this theory, a substantial agent can evolve by being gradually reincarnated multiple times through a sort of process of metamorphosis from the level of the most elementary particles all the way up to the level of human beings or even higher. In ‘Учение Лейбница о перевоплощении какъ метаморфозѣ’ (‘Leibniz’s Doctrine of Reincarnation as Metamorphosis,’ 1931), Lossky argues that the works of Leibniz contain scattered elements of such a systematic evolutionary doctrine of reincarnation as metamorphosis and he attempts to reconstitute this doctrine. The present article is intended as an historical introduction to the translation (published in the same journal issue) of Lossky’s ‘Leibniz’s Doctrine of Reincarnation as Metamorphosis.’

**Keywords** Nikolai Lossky · Leibniz · Wincenty Lutosławski · Monad · Monadology · Substantial agent · Preexistence of souls · Reincarnation · Metamorphosis · Immortality · Evolution · Emergent evolution · Personalism · Philosophy of religion · Russian philosophy

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## Lossky's Early Years: From Crude Materialism to Leibnizianism

Nikolai Onufrievich Lossky was born on December 6, 1870, in the town of Krāslava (in Russian ‘Kreslavka’), in the province of Vitebsk, which was then within the Russian Empire, and which is now located in Latvia. His parents were predominantly of Polish origins. In 1881, Lossky entered the classical gymnasium in Vitebsk. In 1887, he was caught reading the works of Dmitry Pisarev, Nikolai Dobrolyubov, Nikolai Mikhailovsky, and Wilhelm Wundt and discussing socialism and atheism with classmates (Lossky 1968, p. 46). For this heresy, he was expelled from the gymnasium under the charge of socialist and atheist propaganda (Lossky 1968, p. 45). He claims to have been atheist for eight years—twice as long as Vladimir Solovyov’s own atheistic phase (Lossky 1968, p. 43).<sup>1</sup> Forbidden to re-enter any other Russian educational institution, he nevertheless managed to be admitted at the Saint Petersburg Imperial University, where he studied at the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics from 1891 to 1894. In his memoirs, he says: ‘In the Fall of 1891, I entered the university at the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics in the Department of Natural Sciences. [...] At that time, I was convinced of the veracity of mechanical materialism. That is why I was sure that to study physics, chemistry, and physiology was to acquire knowledge of the foundations of the structure of the world.’<sup>2</sup> In ‘Creative Activity, Evolution and Ideal Being’ (1937), he says: ‘From the age of eighteen to twenty five I puzzled a great deal over the problems of metaphysics. I began by accepting the crudest kind of materialism resembling the atomism of Democritus, and abandoned it only when I saw that it could not be epistemologically justified’ (Lossky 1937a, p. 2).<sup>3</sup> Lossky was thus, in his early years, an atheist materialist.

But in 1894, Lossky’s intellectual life underwent a radical change of course: he began studying philosophy at the Historical-Philological Faculty. Moreover, while living in Saint Petersburg, Lossky befriended Sergei Alekseevich Alekseev (1870–1945), also known as Askoldov. Judging from Lossky’s memoirs, the two would have met at the university around 1891 and later began studying philosophy together (Lossky 1968, pp. 80 & 87). Askoldov was the son of the philosopher Alexei Alexandrovich Kozlov (1831–1901)—a Leibnizian. Lossky lived in the house of the Kozlovs for three years, during which time Kozlov (the elder) became a mentor for the young Lossky. In his *Воспоминания (Memoirs, 1968)*, Lossky recalls how it was ‘[u]nder the influence of his conversations with Kozlov that he quickly freed himself from materialism to arrive at its opposite — panpsychism.’<sup>4</sup> He adds that, even before his studies in philosophy, Leibniz had already become his ‘favorite

<sup>1</sup> According to the chronology compiled by Lossky’s son, Boris, and Boris’s wife, Nadejda (*née* Georgieva), this atheist phase began in 1887, when Lossky was sixteen years old (Boris and Nadejda Lossky 1978, p. 9).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Осенью 1891 г. я поступил в университет на Естественнонаучное отделение Физико-математического факультета. [...] Я в это время был убежден в истинности механистического материализма. Поэтому я был уверен в том, что изучить физику, химию и физиологию это и значит получить знание об основах строения мира’ (Lossky 1968, pp. 75–76).

<sup>3</sup> Lossky also claims that his early materialism was similar to that of Democritus (Lossky 1968, p. 82).

<sup>4</sup> ‘Под влиянием бесед с Козловым я очень быстро освободился от материализма и перешел к противоположной ему крайности — к панпсихизму’ (Lossky 1968, p. 193). It is noteworthy here that two of Lossky’s very first articles were an obituary of Kozlov (Lossky 1901a) and an article on Kozlov’s panpsychism (Lossky 1901b). We should mention, also, that by ‘materialism,’ Lossky does not mean the theory according to which matter exists, but rather the theories according to which *only* matter exists or according to which matter is *more fundamental than* spirit.

philosopher' (Lossky 1968, p. 193). In 1897, when he was twenty-six years old, he started translating Kant's *Fortschritte der Metaphysik seit Leibniz und Wolff* (*The Progress of Metaphysics Since Leibniz and Wolff*)—a choice that, we may surmise, was connected to his interest in Leibniz.<sup>5</sup> In 1898, four years after beginning his bachelor in philosophy, Lossky had to write a short dissertation to satisfy the requirements of the program.<sup>6</sup> He decided to write a comparative study entitled 'Рационализм Декарта, Спинозы и Лейбница' ('Rationalism in Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz'), wherein he argued that the system of Leibniz was—among those—the most logical development of the principles of rationalism.<sup>7</sup>

When Lossky started studying philosophy at the Saint Petersburg Imperial University, he followed the courses of Alexander Vvedensky, who was a Neo-Kantian, and inevitably fell under the influence of Kant's philosophy. In his memoirs, he recalls: 'there was in my mind a clash between the influence of Leibniz's metaphysics and Kant's gnoseology, due to my two masters — Kozlov and Vvedensky.'<sup>8</sup> The dialectical clash was eventually resolved in favor of Leibnizian metaphysics:

Under the influence of Vvedensky, gnoseology came to the forefront for me at that time. I was deeply imbued with the conviction that we can only know what is already immanent in consciousness. At the same time, I clearly conceived of the affirmation that the substantiality of my 'I' is reliable knowledge and I was deeply imbued with the tendency to understand the universe as a system of monads in the spirit of Leibniz's metaphysics. It thus became my task to overcome Hume and Kant, i.e., to develop a theory of knowledge that would explain the possibility of knowing things in themselves and to justify the study of metaphysics.<sup>9</sup>

Lossky subsequently developed an intuitive theory of knowledge, namely intuitivism, that enabled him—or so he thought—to show that we have knowledge of the external world as it is in itself and that justified the overcoming of Kantianism and a return to metaphysics. He presented this gnoseology in his doctoral dissertation entitled *Обоснование интуитивизма* (*The Foundation of Intuitivism*, 1906). At first, Lossky was supposed to defend his dissertation with Vvedensky. But, as a Neo-Kantian who explicitly denied the possibility of metaphysical knowledge, Vvedensky was not in favor of Lossky's rather anti-

<sup>5</sup> For Lossky's translation of *Fortschritte der Metaphysik seit Leibniz und Wolff*, see Kant (1910).

<sup>6</sup> In Russia, bachelor students have to write a work similar to the master's thesis—albeit shorter—in order to obtain their 'first degree' diploma.

<sup>7</sup> On Lossky's diploma thesis, see Lossky (1968, p. 99) and Boris and Nadejda Lossky (1978, p. 11).

<sup>8</sup> 'Приступить к такой работе мне было особенно трудно потому, что в моем уме столкнулось влияние метафизики Лейбница и гносеологии Канта, благодаря двум моим учителям — Козлову и Введенскому' (Lossky 1968, p. 100).

<sup>9</sup> 'Под влиянием Введенского гносеология выдвинулась для меня в это время на первый план. Я глубоко проникся убеждением, что познанию доступно только то, что имманентно сознанию. В то же время я усматривал отчетливо, что утверждение субстанциальности моего я есть достоверное знание, и глубоко проникся склонностью понимать вселенную, как систему монад в духе метафизики Лейбница. Таким образом, передо мною встала задача преодолеть Юма и Канта, именно развить теорию знания, которая объяснила бы, как возможно знание о вещах в себе и оправдала бы занятия метафизикою' (Lossky 1968, p. 87).

Kantian pro-metaphysical project.<sup>10</sup> So, instead, Lossky decided to go to Moscow to defend it with Lev Lopatin, who was a fellow Leibnizian.

## The Emergence of Matter from the Mutual Struggle of Monads

Lossky distinguishes the realm of real beings from that of ideal beings. Real beings are those existing in time, whereas ideal beings are supertemporal. Among ideal beings, he distinguishes abstract ideal beings from concrete ones. He calls concrete ideal beings ‘substantial agents.’ Substantial agents are the equivalent of Leibniz’s monads. They exist at the interface of ideal and real being, functioning, so to say, as a bridge between the two realms. They have a foot in each realm, to use Lossky’s own metaphor.<sup>11</sup> In *Мирь как органическое целое* (*The World as an Organic Whole*, 1917), he explains that these substantial agents or monads are centers of force. Some centers of force attract each other, whereas some repel each other (Lossky 1917, p. 52). Matter, on this view, is the result of monads mutually repelling each other. It is ‘from this *mutual* struggle [that] emerges *conflicting oppositions* that bring about a specific form of being characteristic of the kingdom of enmity, namely, the simultaneous externality of particles that are mutually exclusive, i.e., impenetrable to one another. In other words, mutual struggle leads to the emergence of *material* being.’<sup>12</sup> We wonder what an atom could possibly find attractive or repulsive in another atom. This notwithstanding, according to Lossky it is from these processes of mutual repulsion that arise extended bodies impenetrable to one another (Lossky 1917, p. 93). In ‘The Resurrection of the Body’ (1949), Lossky describes the same process as follows: ‘If a substantial agent inflicts repulsions in all directions from a particular point in space, he creates for himself an impenetrable extended body, conquering for himself, as it were, a part of space for his exclusive possession and thus creates for himself a physical body’ (Lossky 1949, p. 72).

This theory implies the recognition of the existence of matter. In this regard, Lossky went against the grain of the philosophy of his early mentor, Kozlov, for whom ‘*material beings, as such, do not exist.*’<sup>13</sup> Why did Lossky have to go against Kozlov’s pure spiritualism? Why did realism with regard to matter prevail? Piama Gaidenko suggests the following reason:

Defending the monadology, the philosopher had to explain the causes of the emergence of materiality either by means of phenomenalism [...] or by means of realism, which required to assume that every particle of the material world is not the product of anyone’s subjective perception, but rather the product of the activity of the correlated substantial agents. For Lossky, only the second path was acceptable, because the phenomenal basis of materiality — and of

<sup>10</sup> On Vvedensky’s stance against the possibility of metaphysical knowledge, see Nemeth (1998, p. 793; 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Lossky uses this metaphor in Lossky (1910, p. 501).

<sup>12</sup> ‘из этой взаимности борьбы, возникают *противоборствующие противоположности*, которыми создается особая форма бытия, характерная для царства вражды, именно *одновременная вынужденность взаимно исключаящих друг друга*, т.-е. непроницаемых друг для друга частей мира; иными словами, взаимная борьба приводит к возникновению *материального бытия*’ (Lossky 1917, p. 92).

<sup>13</sup> ‘*материальные тела, как таковые, не существуют*’ (Kozlov 1898, p. 123). On Kozlov’s rejection of materialism, see also Lossky (1968, p. 85).

corporality in general — fundamentally undermined his theory of knowledge, i.e., the doctrine of the direct contemplation of the object in the original.<sup>14</sup>

Not only was Lossky's acceptance of the existence of matter consistent with his anti-Kantian theory of knowledge, but it was also needed for his theory of reincarnation, because reincarnation requires incarnation, and incarnation requires 'carnation' (the process of becoming *carnis*, i.e., flesh). Lossky himself uses the terminology of 'incarnation' (воплощение). In his memoirs, he mentions that, when he was in Warsaw in 1925 for invited lectures, he stayed at the home of Tadeusz Kotarbiński. Reminiscing their philosophical discussions, Lossky says:

Unfortunately, he was a supporter of some intricate variety of materialism. In my debates with him, I said that I also highly value the corporeal side of life and that, as a personalist, I affirm that everything spiritual and psychical is incarnated [воплощено]; I can therefore call my system a *pansomatism*,<sup>15</sup> insisting, however, that the corporeal side is subordinate to the spiritual and the psychical.<sup>16</sup>

Incarnation requires the possibility of carnal or corporeal reality. And the latter requires the possibility of matter. Incarnation is thus a species of in-materialization. It follows from this that, for Lossky, even though everything is at bottom *constituted of* souls, not everything is a soul.

It is true that Lossky upholds a processual theory of matter and often employs the expression 'material process' (материальный процесс) instead of the word 'matter' (материя).<sup>17</sup> In 'Personalism Versus Materialism' (1952), he sides with the 'dynamistic theory of matter,' which he considers to be 'confirmed by modern physics' (Lossky 1952a, p. 373). On this view, he says, 'matter is not a substance at all: it is merely the totality of the processes of attraction, repulsion and movement, with the addition of sensuous qualities such as colors, sounds, warmth, etc.' (Lossky 1952a, p. 373). In 'Personalist Christian Metaphysics' (1957), he says that 'matter is not a substance, but merely a process of repulsions which produce impenetrable bulk, i.e., material corporeality' (Lossky 1957, pp. 343–344). In this regard, Lossky partially agrees with Whitehead's processualism, but he disagrees with the latter's complete rejection of substances and matter.<sup>18</sup> Because, for Lossky, from these material processes

<sup>14</sup> 'Защищая монадологию, философ был вынужден объяснять причины возникновения материальности либо с помощью феноменализма [...] либо с помощью реализма, требовавшего допустить, что каждая частица материального мира есть порождение активности соответствующего субстанциального деятеля, но не есть продукт чьего-либо субъективного восприятия. Для Лосского был приемлем только второй путь, потому что феноменалистское обоснование материальности — и телесности вообще — в корне подрывало его теорию познания, а именно учение о непосредственном созерцании предмета в подлиннике' (Gaidenko 2001, p. 238).

<sup>15</sup> 'Pansomatism' is the name that Kotarbiński gave to his system at the time. He conceived of it as a species of reism and a variation of materialism. On Kotarbiński's pansomatism, see Kotarbiński (1955, esp. p. 495). Clearly, by pansomatism, Kotarbiński and Lossky had vastly different views in mind.

<sup>16</sup> 'К сожалению, он был сторонником какой-то замысловатой разновидности материализма. В спорах с ним я указывал на то, что и я высоко ценю телесную сторону жизни и, будучи персоналистом, утверждаю, что все духовное и душевное воплощено; поэтому я могу назвать свою систему *пансоматизмом*, настаивая однако на том, что телесная сторона находится в подчинении у духовной и душевной' (Lossky 1968, p. 242).

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Lossky (1910, p. 499).

<sup>18</sup> For Lossky's discussions of Whitehead, see Lossky (1938, pp. 142–144) and Lossky (1952a, pp. 382–383).

nevertheless emerge objective, i.e., mind-independent, spatially extended impenetrable things. The processual constitution of matter is irrelevant to its mind-independentsness.

Moreover, like most—if not all—Russian Leibnizians before him, Lossky criticizes the Leibnizian idea of doorless and windowless monads and argues that the possibility of causation and freewill requires the causal interaction of monads or substantial agents with one another.

A human being, being to some extent an independent agent, enters into the constitution of some social group, e.g., a state, all social groups enter into the constitution of humanity, etc. However much individuals may struggle against each other, they are still able, as citizens of the same state, of uniting into one common feeling, into one impulse, and of cooperating in all possible ways to achieve a common purpose.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, Lossky says, ‘Leibniz’s doctrine that substances ‘have no windows or doors,’ i.e., that they are not in immediate communication with one another, must be rejected in the most resolute manner.’<sup>20</sup> For Lossky, monads have the freewill to choose good or evil and they have the capacity to either evolve or devolve depending on these choices. For this reason, Lossky’s metaphysics of monads or monadological worldview may be characterized as ‘evolutionary.’

## Emergent Evolution Through Reincarnation as Metamorphosis

Lossky admits the basic thesis of emergent evolution as we find it, for instance, in Samuel Alexander’s *Space, Time, and Deity* (1920) and Conwy Lloyd Morgan’s *Emergent Evolution* (1923, reedited in 1927). As he says in ‘The Limits of Evolution’ (1927), ‘electrons and protons give rise to an atom, atoms give rise to a molecule, a unicellular organism, and so on. Complex communities, such as are found among ants and bees and human beings, arise out of simpler ones’ (Lossky 1927, p. 498). In ‘Creative Activity, Evolution and Ideal Being’ (1937), he says that ‘[e]volution, in the sense of the creation of new species and new forms of life generally, takes place not only in the plant and animal world but in all spheres of the psycho-physical realm, beginning with electrons and protons that form atoms, molecules, and so on, as different and increasingly complex stages of being’ (Lossky 1937a, p. 8).

Alexander, Morgan, and Lossky all have different conceptions of God. But, despite these differences, they all concur that the whole process of emergent evolution ultimately depends on God. For Alexander, emergent evolution depends on God insofar as he identifies Him with the infinitely evolving spacetime continuum that has the

<sup>19</sup> ‘человѣкъ, будучи до нѣкоторой степени самостоятельнымъ дѣятелемъ, съ другой стороны входитъ въ составъ какой-либо общественной группы, напр., государства, всѣ общественныя группы входятъ въ составъ человѣчества и т. д. Какъ бы ни боролись между собою индивидуумы, все же, поскольку они граждане одного государства, они способны слиться въ одномъ чувствѣ, въ одномъ порывѣ и всячески содѣйствовать другъ другу въ достиженіи одной цѣли’ (Lossky 1917, p. 52).

<sup>20</sup> ‘ученіе Лейбница о томъ, что субстанціи «не имѣютъ оконъ и дверей», т.-е. не находятся въ непосредственномъ общеніи другъ съ другомъ, должно быть отвергнуто самымъ рѣшительнымъ образомъ’ (Lossky 1917, p. 52).



emergent quality of deity as His 'mind.' For him, God is 'the universe flowering into deity' (Alexander 1920, vol. 2, p. 410).<sup>21</sup> Morgan rejects the Spinozistic identification of God with the spacetime continuum; for him, God is rather 'above and beyond' (Morgan 1927, p. 301). In his thought, God appears to be at once 'the Nisus directive of the course of events' (Morgan 1927, p. 34) and 'the ultimate Source on which emergent evolution is ultimately dependent' (Morgan 1927, p. 116).<sup>22</sup> Lossky's conception of God is diametrically opposed to pantheisms such as that of Alexander. For him, he says, 'between God and the world, there is no identity, neither total nor partial. Ontologically, God and the world are separated by a precipice. Therefore, my teaching is an extreme form of theism, most opposite to all the variations of pantheism.'<sup>23</sup> For Lossky, pantheism 'leads to insoluble difficulties.'<sup>24</sup> Closer to that of Morgan, Lossky's God is the ultimate separate fountainhead of the world-process: 'Emergent evolution is inexplicable unless the world is created by the Supra-mundane Being, which puts even at the basis of the inorganic nature a creative power capable of raising nature to ever more valuable strata of being' (Lossky 1954, p. 163).

But, unlike Morgan, for Lossky, the bottommost entities in the evolutionary sequence are not electrons and protons, but rather substantial agents, i.e., monads. Electrons merely recapitulate the lower-level process: 'The most elementary being studied by modern physics, the electron, is a substantial agent which performs actions of attraction and repulsion in relation to protons and electrons' (Lossky 1949, p. 73). Lossky believes that monads evolve into higher-level entities by means of a sort of metamorphosis, in a way analogical to the way caterpillars undergo metamorphosis. He expresses this idea in several works. For instance, in 'Creative Activity, Evolution and Ideal Being,' he says that

a man is an agent who at the beginning of the world-history was an electron or a proton, then became the central agent in an atom, then of a molecule, then of some unicellular organism, then lived, perhaps, in a number of species of multicellular plant and animal organisms and at last reached the level of a human personality organising a human body and realising a human type of conduct. (Lossky 1937a, p. 12)

In *Чувственная, Интеллектуальная и Мистическая Интуиция* (*Sensuous, Intellectual, and Mystical Intuition*, 1938), Lossky writes that

<sup>21</sup> Also: 'God is the whole world as possessing the quality of deity. Of such a being the whole world is the "body" and deity is the "mind."' But this possessor of deity is not actual but ideal. As an actual existent, God is the infinite world with its nisus towards deity, or, to adapt a phrase of Leibniz, as big or in travail with deity' (Alexander 1920, vol. 2, p. 353). For Alexander's conception of God, see Alexander (1920, vol. 2, pp. 341–429).

<sup>22</sup> See also *Mind at the Crossways* (1929), where Morgan writes: 'If we comprise under the one word "evolution" the whole course of natural events, so too should we comprise in one word an answer to the question: Who does it? The answer to which I am led on philosophical grounds is no new one. It is this: God does it. The whole course of events subsumed under evolution is the expression of God's purpose' (Morgan 1929, p. x).

<sup>23</sup> 'между Богом и миром нет не только полного, но даже и частичного тождества; онтологически Бог и мир отделены друг от друга пропастью. Таким образом, мое учение есть крайняя форма теизма, наиболее противоположная пантеизму во всех его видоизменениях' (Lossky 1968, p. 273).

<sup>24</sup> 'ведущий к неразрешимым затруднениям' (Lossky 1968, p. 273).

a person is an agent, who was at the beginning of the history of the world, a former electron or proton, which later became the central agent of an atom, then of a molecule, then of some single-celled organism, and then spent life, perhaps as a series of multicellular plant or animal organisms and, finally, rising to the level of human personhood, formed a human body and realized a human kind of behavior.<sup>25</sup>

The following year, in ‘Трансцендентально-феноменологический идеализм Гуссерля’ (‘Husserl’s Transcendental-Phenomenological Idealism,’ 1939), Lossky claims that an

individual *x*, being supertemporal, thus acting in the world as long as the world exists, may have previously acted according to the idea of horseness or, e.g., according to the idea of the speech control center of any human (as the ‘soul’ of the cells of the speech center), then acquired the type humanness and now lives as a human, and after death will live as a creature more perfect than the earthly human.<sup>26</sup>

Two years later, in *Богъ и мировое зло: Основы теодицеи (God and World Evil: Foundations of a Theodicy, 1941)*, Lossky defends the possibility of a substantial agent who

billions of years ago lived the life of a proton, then, having combined several electrons around itself, mastered the type of life of oxygen, then, having sophisticated its body even more, rose to a kind of life such as, for example, a water crystal, then transited further to the life of a unicellular organism, after a series of *reincarnations* or, better, in Leibniz’s terms, after a series of metamorphoses, rose to a life-stage such as, for example, that of a dog.<sup>27</sup>

In ‘Extrasensory Perception and Psychokinesis’ (1952), he says of ‘potential personalities,’ or what Leibniz calls ‘sleeping monads,’ that ‘[u]nder the influence of experience they develop and combine with one another, forming atoms, molecules, unicellular and multicellular organisms. Their life thus becomes more and more complex, and at last

<sup>25</sup> ‘человѣкъ есть дѣятель, въ началѣ исторіи міра бывшій электрономъ или протономъ, ставшій затѣмъ центральнымъ дѣтелемъ атома, потомъ молекулы, далѣе какого нибудь одноклѣточного организма, затѣмъ проведеншій жизнь, можетъ быть, ряда видовъ многоклѣточныхъ растительныхъ или животныхъ организмовъ и, наконецъ, поднявшійся на ступень человѣческой личности, организующей человѣческое тело и реализующей человѣческой типъ поведения’ (Lossky 1938, p. 168).

<sup>26</sup> ‘индивидуумъ Х., сверхвременный, слѣдовательно, дѣйствующій въ мірѣ столько времени, сколько существуетъ міръ, прежде можетъ быть дѣйствовалъ согласно идеѣ лошадности или, напр., согласно идеѣ управления центромъ рѣчи какого либо человѣка (быль «душою») клѣтокъ центра рѣчи), затѣмъ усвоилъ типъ человѣчности и живетъ, какъ человѣкъ, а послѣ смерти будетъ жить, какъ существо, болѣе совершенное, чѣмъ земной человѣкъ’ (Lossky 1939, p. 50). For an English translation of this article, see Lossky (2016).

<sup>27</sup> ‘билліоны лѣтъ тому назадъ вель жизнь протона, потомъ, объединивъ вокругъ себя нѣсколько электроновъ, усвоилъ типъ жизни кислорода, затѣмъ усложнивъ еще болѣе свое тѣло, поднялся до типа жизни, напр., кристалла воды, далѣе перешель къ жизни одноклѣточного животного, послѣ ряда *революцій* или, лучше, выражаясь терминомъ Лейбница, послѣ ряда метаморфозъ, поднялся до ступени жизни, напр., собаки’ (Lossky 1941, p. 33).



they become actual personalities' (Lossky 1952b, p. 702). Finally, in 'Personalist Christian Metaphysics' (1957), he writes:

substantial agents develop and gradually ascend to a fuller life by forming alliances. An agent who had begun by working out only such an elementary type of life as, for instance, that of an electron, may later, on the ground of experience, organize an atom, i.e. of hydrogen; still later he may organize a molecule, e.g. of water; subsequently he may on our Earth organize a unicellular plant or animal such as an ameba; then he may develop the type of life of a multicellular plant or animal. Gradually acquiring more and more complex capacities he may at last create a type of life exemplified, for instance, in the organisms and behavior of a chimpanzee, an elephant, a dog, and so on. Such transitions from one type of life to another, with a new body, are *reincarnations*. (Lossky 1957, pp. 338–339)

These passages further confirm that Lossky's metaphysics of monads may properly be said to be evolutionary in the manner of the twentieth-century theories of emergent evolution. For him, indeed, '[e]ach successive level is the invention of a new, higher type of existence, making possible a more meaningful and variable life richer in creative activities' (Lossky 1949, p. 74).

Even though the evolutionary turn of the monadology (or the monadological turn of the theory of evolution) might at first sight appear to be a peculiarly Losskian development, Lossky believes that this development already rests on foundations laid by Leibniz himself. In 'Учение Лейбница о перевоплощении какъ метаморфозѣ' ('Leibniz's Doctrine of Reincarnation as Metamorphosis,' 1931), he argues that the works of Leibniz contain scattered elements of a theory of reincarnation as metamorphosis and that, '[i]f Leibniz had resolutely and definitively emphasized these doctrines, he would thereby have laid the foundation, long before Darwin, for a theory of evolution much more profound than Darwinism.'<sup>28</sup> Lossky believes that this doctrine could have implications for biology. He suggests that it 'could explain, for instance, those characteristics whereby the individual is different from its parents and is closer to remote ancestors.'<sup>29</sup> Not only could it have implications for biology, but also, Lossky claims, for other fields, such as psychology, where, he says, 'the doctrine of reincarnation as metamorphosis could be applied to understand the nature of instincts, atavisms, and archaisms that Freud traces back to intrauterine life, but that actually stretch back much farther.'<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, even though it has been downplayed in the secondary literature on Leibniz, Lossky believes that this evolutionary doctrine of reincarnation as metamorphosis is already implicitly contained in Leibniz's philosophy and his article 'Leibniz's

<sup>28</sup> 'Если бы Лейбницъ рѣшительно и опрѣделенно подчеркнул эти учения онъ задолго до Дарвина положилъ бы начало теоріи эволюціи, гораздо болѣе глубокой, чѣмъ дарвинизмъ' (Lossky 1931a, p. 82).

<sup>29</sup> 'Такъ, напр., можетъ быть слѣдуетъ объяснить тѣ свойства, въ которыхъ индивидуумъ сходенъ не со своими родителями, а съ болѣе отдаленными предками' (Lossky 1931a, p. 86).

<sup>30</sup> 'Въ психологіи учение о перевоплощеніи, какъ метаморфозѣ, можно использовать для пониманія природы инстинктовъ, атавизмовъ и архаизмовъ, которые Фрейдъ прослѣживаетъ до утробной жизни, но которые на дѣлѣ простираются гораздо дальше' (Lossky 1931a, p. 87).

Doctrine of Reincarnation as Metamorphosis' is his own attempt to show that the philosophy of Leibniz implies such a theory. The article is thus more scholarly than philosophical. But, it is also, for Lossky, a means to substantiate his own philosophical conception of reincarnation by appealing to Leibniz's authority.

## The Reception of Lossky's Doctrine of Reincarnation

As may be expected, the reception of Lossky's doctrine of reincarnation has often been negative. For instance, discussing the latter doctrine in his *История русской философии* (*History of Russian Philosophy*, 1950), Vasily Zenkovsky writes: 'I must confess that I absolutely do not understand what Lossky needed all this fantasy for.'<sup>31</sup> In his memoirs, Lossky replied to Zenkovsky's disparagement as follows:

My personalist metaphysics, which explains all kinds of evil by referring to the simple old-fashioned notion of egoism and which contains in itself the doctrine of reincarnation, evokes a certain repulsion in the Russian philosophers in Paris. Father Vasily Zenkovsky, for instance, in his *История русской философии* (*History of Russian Philosophy*) draws from my *Богъ и мировое зло* (*God and the Evil of the World*) a citation where I say that an agent, who began its life as an electron, could then, after going through a series of reincarnations, develop itself so much as to become a human being. He further says: 'I absolutely do not understand what Lossky needed all this fantasy for' (t. II, p. 205). Like all the philosophers of the 19th and 20th centuries, Father Vasily ignores that this is precisely the opinion of Leibniz, necessary for the metaphysics of personalism. One day, Leibniz was drinking coffee in public and said that in the coffee that he had swallowed there could be some monads that, in time, would become human beings.<sup>32</sup>

Of course, appeal to Leibniz's authority hardly consists in a proof of the doctrine of metempsychosis. As Frederick Copleston correctly comments:

Together with Leibniz, he [i.e., Lossky] envisages the possibility of a substantial agent or monad evolving from the stage of being an electron or an atom to the status of a person. This process of development he calls 'reincarnation' [...]. Obviously, some of these ideas are likely to seem odd, even fantastic, not only to

<sup>31</sup> 'Должен сознаться, что совершенно не понимаю, зачем Лосскому понадобилась вся эта фантастика' (Zenkovsky 1950, p. 205).

<sup>32</sup> 'Моя персоналистическая метафизика, объясняющая все виды зла ссылкой на простое старомодное понятие эгоизма и содержащее в себе учение о перевоплощении, вызывает к себе некоторое отталкивание у русских философов в Париже. От Василий Зеньковский, например, в своей «Истории русской философии» приводит из моей книги «Бог и мировое зло» цитату о том, что деятель, который начал с жизни электрона, потом, пройдя через ряд перевоплощений, может развиться настолько, что станет человеком. Далее он говорит: «Совершенно не понимаю, зачем Лосскому понадобилась вся эта фантастика» (II т., стр. 205). От. Василий, как и все философы XIX и XX века, не знает, что таково именно мнение Лейбница, необходимое в метафизике персонализма. Лейбниц однажды пил в обществе кофе и сказал, что в проглоченном кофе, может быть, есть несколько монад, которые со временем станут людьми' (Lossky 1968, p. 281).

those who reject Lossky's general religious view of reality but also to those who sympathize with or share it. For example, though the idea of emergent evolution is familiar enough, the notion that an entity such as an electron is potentially a person and in the process of metamorphosis or 'reincarnation' can become actually a person would probably seem eccentric to many people, whether or not they believe in God. True, Leibniz maintained that monads which were previously purely sensitive souls can be 'elevated to the rank of reason and to the prerogative of spirits.' But appeal to Leibniz does not necessarily make a theory less odd. (Copleston 1986, p. 369)

We may also mention Nicholas Arseniev, who, like Lossky, taught at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York, and who, in his obituary of Lossky, writes that 'from the Christian point of view his strange theory of metamorphosis is hardly acceptable' (Arseniev 1965, p. 41). Lossky was well aware that his doctrine of reincarnation went against the spirit of Christian dogmatics. In his memoirs, he writes, about his book *Богъ и мировое зло (God and the Evil of the World)*: 'My book contains ideas diverging from the traditional views of Orthodoxy, such as, for instance, the doctrine of salvation for all, the doctrine of reincarnation, etc. Our Bishop Sergius told me that the Deacon was already collecting wood to burn me at the stake.'<sup>33</sup> But, this divergence did not trouble Lossky, who believed that the Church never officially judged the doctrine of reincarnation heretical. He appealed to something that the Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier wrote to Wincenty Lutosławski in a private correspondence, wherein the former would have admitted that the doctrine of reincarnation 'has never been condemned by the Church in the form developed by Leibniz.'<sup>34</sup> Mercier would have written to Lutosławski: 'I believe that the opinion of pre-existence and reincarnation, as you present it and of which you claim to be subjectively persuaded, is not formally condemned as heretical.'<sup>35</sup> Lossky also appealed, in this regard, to an anecdote involving a certain 'Salesian monk' who supposedly told Jozef Dieška, who was then Lossky's assistant at the University of Bratislava, that 'there had been conferences on reincarnation in Rome and that the theologians recognized that this problem is *'discutabilis'* (can be discussed).'<sup>36</sup> Lossky thus seems to have hoped that the Church could eventually be reformed to accommodate his doctrine.

To give a more recent example of negative reception, the contemporary historian of Russian philosophy Igor Evlampiev speaks, with regard to Lossky's doctrine of

<sup>33</sup> 'В книге моей есть мысли, расходящиеся с традиционными взглядами Православия, например учение о спасении всех, о перевоплощении и т. п. Наш владыка Сергей сказал мне, что диакон уже собирает поленья для костра мне' (Lossky 1968, p. 280).

<sup>34</sup> 'Однако, въ той формѣ, какъ это учение развито Лейбницемъ [...], оно никогда не подвергалось осужденію церкви' (Lossky 1931a, p. 87).

<sup>35</sup> 'Je crois que l'opinion de la pré-existence et de la réincarnation, telle que vous la présentez et dont vous dites subjectivement persuadé, n'est pas formellement condamnée comme hérétique' (Lutoslawski 1930, p. 173).

<sup>36</sup> 'в Риме были доклады о перевоплощении и богословы признали, что эта проблема — "discutabilis" (может быть обсуждаема)' (Lossky 1968, p. 289).

reincarnation, of his ‘comical seriousness’<sup>37</sup> and of his ‘very strange, almost comical statements.’<sup>38</sup> Piama Gaidenko proposed a more generous interpretation of Lossky’s doctrine, claiming that we should keep in mind that

his construction is the result of a solution, sometimes bold and original, to a whole range of philosophical problems. The aspiration to build a unified and consistent metaphysical system constrained the thinker to connect the solutions of many problems — related both to the theory of knowledge and ontology, psychology, logic, the theory of values, etc. And, not infrequently, the elements of this system appear to be very heterogeneous, difficult to combine.<sup>39</sup>

Gaidenko seems to thereby assume that Lossky’s speculations about reincarnation were an attempt to conciliate many of his other philosophical views into a coherent whole. This would be treating his doctrine of reincarnation as the cement holding the bricks together. But would this not be turning the order both of Lossky’s worldview and of his intellectual development inside out? Lossky adopted a metaphysics *à la* Leibniz according to which everything is made up of souls early on, i.e., as soon as he abandoned atheist materialism around 1895–1896. And in ‘Идея бессмертия души, какъ проблема теории знанія’ (‘The Idea of the Immortality of the Soul as a Problem of the Theory of Knowledge,’ 1910), which he had presented at a meeting of the Religious-Philosophical Society in 1910, he had already defended the idea that the issue of the immortality of the soul, conceived as something supertemporal (as opposed to something temporal, but existing eternally), could be an object of his theory of knowledge (Lossky 1910, p. 502). The rest of his works could have been incremental attempts to justify this sort of speculative metaphysics and to make it palatable to various audiences, first through voluntarism,<sup>40</sup> then through his intuitionist gnoseology (which, let us recall, he first called ‘mystical empiricism’), his intuitionism-based logic, his psychology, which combined voluntarism and intuitionism, and so on.<sup>41</sup>

Lossky distinguished three gnoseological spheres: the self (the ‘I’ or consciousness), the body, and the external world. On this view, thoughts belong to the sphere of the ‘I’ or consciousness. Sensations, such as toothaches and thirst, belong to the sphere of the body and are voluntary in the sense that they emanate from the will of the body. And, perceptions of external events such as the firing of a pistol or the falling of a tree are involuntary and somehow passive, although they have a voluntary aspect in the sense that we may pay attention to them or not, we may discriminate them from their background or not, etc.

<sup>37</sup> ‘комической серьезностью’ (Evlampiev 1996, p. 120).

<sup>38</sup> ‘весьма странных, почти комичных утверждений’ (Evlampiev 2014, p. 368).

<sup>39</sup> ‘Не забудем, что Н.О. Лосский — прежде всего философ, хотя нередко и касавшийся богословских вопросов. И его построения — это результат решения, подчас смелого и оригинального, целого ряда философских проблем. Стремление к созданию единой и непротиворечивой метафизической системы вынуждало мыслителя увязывать между собой решения многих проблем — связанных как с теорией познания, так и с онтологией, психологией, логикой, теорией ценности и т. д. И нередко элементы этой системы кажутся весьма разнородными, трудно сочетаемыми’ (Gaidenko 2001, p. 239).

<sup>40</sup> For the connection between Lossky’s metaphysics and his voluntarism, see Lossky (1968, pp. 102–103).

<sup>41</sup> On the connection between voluntarism and intuitionism, see Lossky (1968, pp. 103–104).

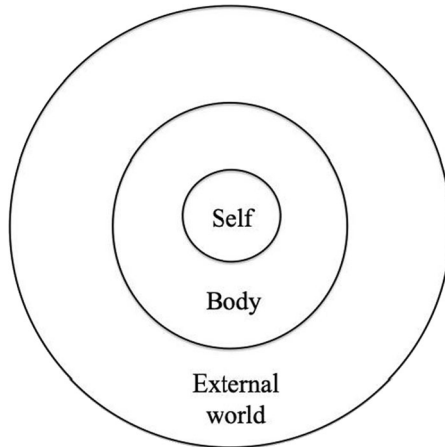


Fig. 1 The self, the body, and the external world

This schema in three concentric spheres was modeled—Lossky claims in his memoirs—on the Leibnizian idea that a central monad is surrounded by a subordinate group of monads. As he writes, speaking of his voluntarism: ‘Having freed myself from materialism and having adopted the Leibnizian conception of the body as an alliance of monads subordinate to one main monad, which is itself the human self, I explained the difference between experiences that are ‘mine’ and those that are ‘given to me’ in the spirit of this metaphysics.’<sup>42</sup>

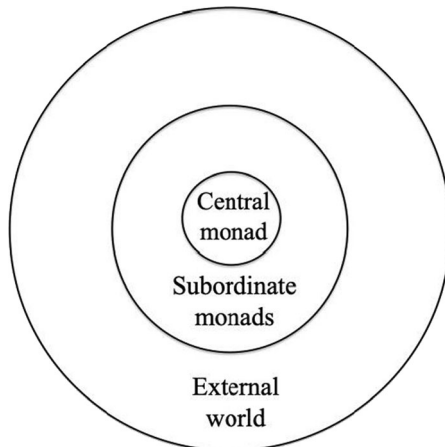


Fig. 2 The central monad, the subordinate monads, and the external world

Therefore, unless Lossky retrospectively invented this narrative about the history of his own intellectual development (which is not impossible), it appears that his whole worldview was based on the Leibnizian model from the beginning.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Освободившись от материализма и усвоив лейбницанское представление о теле, как союзе монад, подчиненных одной главной монаде, которая и есть само человеческое я, я истолковал различие «моих» и «данных мне» переживаний в духе этой метафизики’ (Lossky 1968, p. 117).

Bearing this in mind, we may agree with Zenkovsky and Copleston that there is a fantasmical aspect to Lossky's doctrine of reincarnation—certainly, here Lossky *laxis effertur habenis*, i.e., carried onwards with slackened reins—but I think that Zenkovsky's puzzlement, as to 'what Lossky needed all this fantasy for,' may be somewhat misplaced, because this 'fantasy' may not so much be meant to serve a function as meant to be subserved by other theories. Needless to say, the doctrine of reincarnation is customarily meant to answer questions pertaining to sin (original or not), punishment, reward, etc. And, in Lossky's particular case, it also serves to connect religion, philosophy, and science into an organic whole, as Gaidenko suggests. But, however much reincarnation can be defended by means of philosophical arguments, it remains in the end more a matter of faith and mysticism than of discursive reasoning. We may therefore surmise that this 'fantasy,' as Zenkovsky calls it, forms part and parcel of the deep-seated faith-based religious presuppositions at the core of Lossky's philosophy. It could be an integral part of the metaphysics that he had in his early years pledged to himself to justify and that he progressively allowed himself to disclose as he felt more secure with his gnoseological justifications.<sup>43</sup> If this is correct, his psychological and gnoseological theories would be the ones that more properly speaking serve various justificatory functions towards his metaphysics of reincarnation.

### Lossky's Doctrine of Reincarnation in the Historical Context of the Slavic Intellectual World

In spite of the negative receptions of Lossky's evolutionary metaphysics of reincarnation, his views on this issue are nevertheless roughly consistent with those of several thinkers from the Slavic intellectual world. It is largely consistent with that of Russian thinkers such as Alexander Radishchev, Alexei Kozlov, Vladimir Solovyov, Evgeny Bobrov, Lev Lopatin, Nikolai Bugaev, Petr Astafiev, and other thinkers who, in one way or another, are affiliated with the movement of 'Russian Leibnizianism.'<sup>44</sup> To the Russian Leibnizians must be added a number of Polish thinkers, such as Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849) and Wincenty Lutosławski (1863–1954), whom Lossky has identified as precursors of his own conception of reincarnation.

Lossky says that, according to Juliusz Słowacki, man is a fallen creature and that the 'redemption from this fallen state is attained by a long process of evolution' (Lossky 1936, pp. 25–26). For Słowacki, he explains,

nature is a multitude of eternal individual spirits which by their own efforts create for themselves bodies that increase in perfection. They go from living in the form of crystals to living in the form of plants, then of animals and then of man. Słowacki conceives of the theory of metempsychosis as the evolution of each individual spirit which creates for itself new and higher organic forms passing from one stage to another like the caterpillar that develops into a butterfly. A similar view of evolution as a metamorphosis may be found in Leibniz. (Lossky 1936, p. 26)

<sup>44</sup> For a presentation of Solovyov's supernatural theory of evolution, see Lossky (1930). See also my review of a recent translation of Alexandre Kojève's essay on Solovyov's religious metaphysics: Tremblay (2020b). On Russian Leibnizianism, see Tremblay (2020a).



Wincenty Lutosławski, to whom Lossky refers more than once in ‘Leibniz’s Doctrine of Reincarnation as Metamorphosis,’ was a polyglot philosopher who studied under the Leibnizian philosopher Gustav Teichmüller at the University of Dorpat. He is known in the field of Ancient Greek philosophy for his stylistometric method, which allowed for a revision of the chronology of Plato’s dialogues.<sup>45</sup> He is also known as a promoter of Polish messianism.<sup>46</sup> Lutosławski defends typically Leibnizian views in *Seelenmacht: Abriss einer zeitgemässen Weltanschauung* (1899), *The World of Souls* (1924), and *Pre-existence and Reincarnation* (1928).

In his booklet *Three Polish Messianists* (1937), Lossky devotes a section to Lutosławski and presents those aspects of Lutosławski’s worldview that square perfectly with his own: ‘Lutosławski’s conception of the world is based on Leibniz’s monadology. In many respects, however, his views profoundly differ from Leibniz’s because he maintains that the monads have immediate influence upon one another’ (Lossky 1937b, p. 25). Moreover, for Lutosławski, he says, given that ‘spirits are on different levels of development, one may speak of a hierarchy of spirits. Souls of animals are lower than the human soul but they may progress and in a future incarnation become human’ (Lossky 1937b, p. 26). Not only can they become human, but they can even also become creatures higher than humans: ‘There are many degrees of spirits who are higher than man but lower than God’ (Lossky 1937b, p. 26). For Lutosławski, all souls can reach higher levels of perfection through free actions: ‘The soul is destined to reach greater and greater perfection [...]. Perfection is attained by the independent efforts of the soul for it is endowed with free will’ (Lossky 1937b, pp. 26–27). Lossky’s conception of fundamental particles also happens to coincide with that of Lutosławski, who says, for instance, that ‘a stone which at first sight appeared to be something durable and permanent was found to be an appearance produced by the activity of atoms, and the atoms have been explained by the activity of souls’ (Lutosławski 1924, p. 138).<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, the implication that Lossky drew about Leibniz and Darwin, viz., that Leibniz’s doctrine offers a theory of evolution ‘deeper’ than that of Darwin, is an implication that Lutosławski had already drawn about Słowacki in 1909 in a study entitled *Darwin i Słowacki* (*Darwin and Słowacki*). Although a poet, Słowacki was also—as Goethe was—concerned with the natural sciences. In *Genesis z Ducha* (*Genesis from Spirit*), he defended a sort of biological ‘transformism’ (Słowacki 1884, pp. 1–34). But, unlike Darwin, for whom the spirit is determined by material conditions, Słowacki held the opposite view; spirit, he thought, constituted and determined matter. As Lossky writes,

The idea that the evolution from the stage of crystals to that of man and of beings higher than man is carried out by the efforts of the individual spirits themselves suggests a theory of transformism far more significant than the traditional Darwinian view. It is interesting to note, among other things, that according to Słowacki, the genera and species of animals are something secondary, a result of

<sup>45</sup> See his ‘Principes de stylométrie appliqués à la chronologie des œuvres de Platon’ (1898).

<sup>46</sup> See his *The Polish Nation* (1917).

<sup>47</sup> Compare Lossky’s conception of fundamental particles with that of Wincenty Lutosławski in *The World of Souls* (1924), especially Chapter 3.

the inventiveness of an individual spirit and of its creative activity. Professor Lutosławski, comparing Słowacki's theory with Darwinism, remarks that Darwin derives the genesis of new forms from the body and Słowacki from the spirit: matter for Słowacki is an expression of the spirit, while naturalists generally regard spirit as a product of matter. (Lossky 1936, p. 30)

According to Lutosławski, 'Darwin tried to explain the causes of the transformation of one species into another by means of two main causes, sexual selection and the struggle for existence — both completely material factors.'<sup>48</sup> In contrast, Lutosławski adds, 'Słowacki opens wider horizons to us than Darwin, and leaves more room to the free creative will of the spirit, according less significance to external material conditions.'<sup>49</sup> In other words, 'with Darwin, spirituality develops under the effect of external material conditions. With Słowacki, however, spirituality is the primary source of all changes in external material conditions and shapes.'<sup>50</sup> It seems quite possible—if not likely—that Lossky applied the same idea to the relation between Darwin and Leibniz. In other words, Lossky's idea that Leibniz's doctrine of evolution through metamorphosis is a 'deeper' evolutionary doctrine than Darwinism could very well have been inspired by Lutosławski's reading of Słowacki.

### Lossky's Teleological Indeterminism

We have seen that, in *Three Polish Messianists* (1937), Lossky presents those views of Lutosławski that are consistent with his own. He says that, for Lutosławski, the 'soul is destined to reach greater and greater perfection' (Lossky 1937b, p. 26) and that '[p]erfection is attained by the independent efforts of the soul for it is endowed with free will' (Lossky 1937b, pp. 26–27). Now, the thesis that the soul is *destined* to greater and greater perfection implies a form of teleological determinism. In fact, any kind of destiny necessitates teleological determinism. So, how exactly could the attainment of perfection through the exercise of *freewill* be consistent with the *destiny* to reach perfection? If the end is predetermined, freedom of choice can only be illusory. Lossky proposes to solve this problem with the following hypothesis. In 'The Limits of Evolution,' he writes:

If agents are free, progress in nature need not be conceived of as a straight line. (1) There may be different lines of development all leading to the same final purpose — different creatively discovered ways of attaining perfection; (2) there may be badly selected paths of development leading into blind alleys (Bergson speaks of it in his *Creative Evolution*); (3) there may be regress; (4) there may be,

<sup>48</sup> 'Darwin usiłował objaśnić przemiany jednego gatunku na drugi i przytoczył, jako dwie główne przyczyny, dobór płciowy i walkę o byt — czyli czynniki zupełnie materialne' (Lutosławski 1909, p. 13).

<sup>49</sup> 'Słowacki otwiera nam szersze horyzonty, niż Darwin, i więcej miejsca zostawia wolnej twórczej woli ducha, mniej znaczenia przyznając zewnętrznym materialnym warunkom' (Lutosławski 1909, p. 19).

<sup>50</sup> 'u Darwina duchowość się rozmija pod wpływem zewnętrznych materialnych warunków. U Słowackiego zaś duchowość jest naczelnym źródłem wszelkich zmian w zewnętrznych materialnych warunkach i kształtach' (Lutosławski 1909, p. 19).

and actually is, a development in evil as well as in goodness, leading in the last resort to satanic abysses of being. (Lossky 1927, p. 502)

In *Цѣнность и бытіе* (*Value and Being*, 1931), Lossky argues against Nicolai Hartmann's criticism of teleologism that one must not forget the possibility of 'an indeterminist teleology wherein it is possible to have wrong aims, unsuccessful attempts, trials, falling into blind alleys, with a return to the same position for new attempts, etc.'<sup>51</sup> But, even if many paths can be taken, including dead ends and backslides, in the end, all roads lead to Rome. Lossky accepts the Origenian doctrine of ἀποκατάστασις (apocatastasis), i.e., of the universal *restitutio* (restitution), which Leibniz also seems to have endorsed.<sup>52</sup> He is indeed adamant that, ultimately, all the monads progressively re-ascend to the Kingdom of God. In 'The Hindu Doctrine of the Atman' (1959), he says that he endorses the 'idea that all shall be saved and that no one is doomed to the torments of hell lasting for an infinite time' (Lossky 1959, p. 45); 'after a series of reincarnations every being will free itself from egoism, become worthy of deification by grace and enter the Kingdom of God' (Lossky 1959, p. 50). And, in his memoirs, he says that he admits 'the doctrine of salvation for all.'<sup>53</sup> It is thus clear that, for him, the final end is predetermined in advance. In the Losskyan worldview, therefore, all substantial agents are like grains of sand in a sand timer; they are all inevitably bound to fall, sooner or later, through the neck of the hourglass down into its lower bulb. For this worldview to be *stricto sensu* indeterminist, the end of world history would have to remain open-ended. Therefore, even if substantial agents have wiggle room with regard to how they reach that end, what we have here is a form of teleological determinism, whether Lossky wants to admit it or not.

## Conclusion

From the point of view of Leibniz scholarship, Lossky's article 'Leibniz's Doctrine of Reincarnation as Metamorphosis' may help shed light on Leibniz's theory of metamorphosis. The details of Leibniz's account of how his doctrine of monads connects up with his account of the nature of organic bodies remain obscure in spite of efforts by Leibniz scholars to bring clarity to it. Lossky's article presents a tenable case for the claim that Leibniz has a doctrine of reincarnation as metamorphosis. After all, Leibniz did believe that death 'is nothing but a change of theatre,'<sup>54</sup> and he believed in progress, in the ability of human beings to ameliorate themselves, thus in the 'evolution' of monads, and in the idea that everything progressively returns upwards to God. In fact, the passages on which Lossky relies in his article could today be supplemented by

<sup>51</sup> 'индетерминистическую телеологию, при которой возможна постановка ложныхъ цѣлей, неудачныя попытки, пробы, попаданія въ тупикъ, возвраты на прежнія позиціи для новыхъ попытокъ и т. п.' (Lossky 1931c, p. 128).

<sup>52</sup> On Leibniz's probable adhesion to the doctrine of universal *restitutio*, see his *Ἀποκατάστασις πάντων* (Leibniz 1991, pp. 60–77). On the word ἀποκατάστασις, see Méhat (1956).

<sup>53</sup> 'учение о спасении всех' (Lossky 1968, p. 280).

<sup>54</sup> 'la mort [...] n'est qu'un changement de theatre' (Leibniz 1890, p. 543).

other ones from texts that remained inedited during Lossky's lifetime, such as *Ἀποκατάστασις πάντων* (*Universal Restitution*, 1715), wherein Leibniz argues that immortal souls could return into resurrected bodies and progress, through spiraling cycles or Platonic Great Years, towards an ever greater perfection 'such that the same <souls> often return to pick up the thread <where they left off>'.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, Lossky's interpretation of Leibniz is quite consistent with the readings of those scholars who attribute to Leibniz an influence from the Lurianic Kabbalah. Isaac Luria (1534–1572) adhered to the doctrine of reincarnation. For Luria, souls are 'sparks' exiled in the material realm. The universe, including inorganic matter, is completely pervaded by souls. The latter may exist at various stages of development and consciousness. Through reincarnation (in Hebrew, *gilgul*), each soul increasingly ameliorates itself until it finally liberates itself from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Every soul can thus go through multiple reincarnations during which it can rise up the ladder bit by bit, becoming ever more spiritual until it frees itself from the cycle. Depending on their behavior, souls can also move downwards on the ladder of creation. Yet, according to Lurianism, there must eventually be an end to this exile, i.e., a universal salvation, restitution, or rectification (*tikkun*), whereby all matter will be restored to its essentially spiritual state.<sup>56</sup>

In *Leibniz and the Kabbalah* (1995), Allison Coudert writes that, following the Lurianic Kabbalah, 'van Helmont outlines an evolutionary scheme of transformation in which monads move up and down the ladder of creation as they become more 'spiritual,' i.e. active, or more 'material,' i.e. passive' (Coudert 1995, p. 122). Coudert claims that 'the primary gnostic source for many of Leibniz's most important ideas was the Lurianic Kabbalah, which Leibniz came to know through his friendship and collaboration with Francis Mercury van Helmont' (Coudert 1995, p. 5). Van Helmont also introduced Leibniz to Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, at whose home Leibniz stayed over a month while von Rosenroth was working on the *Kabbala denudata*—a collection of Latin translations of Kabbalistic texts, including Lurianic ones. According to Coudert, the Lurianic worldview 'found its way into Leibniz's mature theodicy' (Coudert 1995, p. x), which includes the *Monadology* (Coudert 1995, p. 8).<sup>57</sup>

There could thus have been, through Leibniz, an indirect Kabbalistic influence on Lossky's thought.<sup>58</sup> But, conversely, it could be that Leibniz's philosophy was appealing to Lossky precisely because it was consistent with the Kabbalistic ideas that had infiltrated Russian philosophy via the Trojan horse of Freemasonry and, subsequently, via theosophical circles, and to which the young Lossky is likely to have been exposed in one way or another.<sup>59</sup> I leave to others, however, the task of considering the extent to which Lossky's account of Leibniz's theory of reincarnation is consistent with the rest of

<sup>55</sup> 'redire saepe eosdem ad telam persequendam' (Leibniz 1991, p. 60).

<sup>56</sup> For a concise introduction to the Lurianic Kabbalah, see Dan (2006, pp. 71–83). See also Coudert (1995, pp. x, 104–105, 117–118).

<sup>57</sup> Michel Fichant also admits that Leibniz might have borrowed from the Kabbalah (Leibniz 1991, p. 179).

<sup>58</sup> On the influence of the Kabbalah on Russian philosophy in general, see, e.g., Burmistrov (2000).

<sup>59</sup> On the Kabbalah in Russian Masonry, see, e.g., Burmistrov and Endel (1999).

Leibniz's philosophy, the Kabbalah, theosophy, as well as with the traditional Christian doctrines of afterlife, reward, and punishment.

The text that follows, namely Lossky's 'Leibniz's Doctrine of Reincarnation as Metamorphosis,' is a translation of an article that appeared in both Russian and German in 1931. In his memoirs, Lossky recalls:

The article 'Leibniz's Doctrine of Reincarnation as Metamorphosis' was born from a fortuitous occasion. In 1930, S. I. Hessen, I. I. Lapshin and myself were conversing about various philosophical questions and Hessen declared himself against my doctrine of reincarnation. I replied that I am in good company, since Leibniz also upholds the doctrine of reincarnation. My interlocutors were doubtful about this. I then said that I would write an article wherein I would demonstrate the presence of this doctrine in Leibniz. I had a conspectus of all the philosophical works of Leibniz, published by Gerhardt. Two months later, my article was ready.<sup>60</sup>

The Russian version, 'Учение Лейбница о перевоплощении какъ метаморфозѣ' ('Uchenie Lejbnica o perevoploshhenii kak metamorfoze'), was published in the *Сборникъ Русскаго института въ Прагѣ* (*Sbornik Russkago instituta v Pragě*), vol. 2, 1931, pp. 77–88. The German version appeared under the title 'Leibniz' Lehre von der Reinkarnation als Metamorphose,' in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 40, n. 2, 1931, pp. 214–226.<sup>61</sup>

The content of the Russian and German versions of the article is roughly the same, except for the omission, in the German version, of the mention of Hume in the second sentence and of one paragraph and a half at the very end of the article. I translated the text from the Russian version, which was in all appearances written first, but I also took the German version into account. As I always do when translating philosophical prose, my chief guiding principle has been faithfulness to the original. Although I pay due attention to the readability of the target language text, I prioritize semantic and syntactic equivalence with the source language text over other considerations, such as esthetic ones. I think that there is no other way to translate philosophy, despite attempts in contemporary translation studies to increase the 'creative license' of translators. I use angle brackets wherever the additions are mine. This includes the original pagination.

<sup>60</sup> 'Статья «Учение Лейбница о перевоплощении, как метаморфозе» возникла по случайному поводу. В 1930 г. С. И. Гессен, И. И. Лапшин и я беседовали о различных философских вопросах и Гессен высказался против моего учения о перевоплощении. Я сказал, что нахожусь в хорошей компании: Лейбниц держится учения о перевоплощении. Мои собеседники усомнились в этом. Тогда я сказал, что напишу статью, в которой докажу наличие этого учения у Лейбница. У меня был конспект всех философских трудов Лейбница, напечатанных Герхардтом. Месяца через два статья моя была готова' (Lossky 1968, pp. 252–253).

<sup>61</sup> Most of the material contained in Lossky's 'Учение Лейбница о перевоплощении какъ метаморфозѣ' was later republished in the Chapter 'Учение Лейбница о перевоплощении' ('Leibniz's Doctrine of Reincarnation') of Lossky's *Учение о перевоплощении* (*The Doctrine of Reincarnation*) posthumously published in 1992. According to its editor, Vladimir Filatov, the book was written 'presumably at the beginning of the 1950s.' ('В настоящее издание включены никогда прежде не публиковавшиеся полностью работы Н. О. Лосского, написанные им в конце жизни (предположительно, в начале 50-х гг.)') (Lossky 1992, p. 7). The book manuscript is stored at the Institut d'Études Slaves in Paris.

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**Conflict of Interest** The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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