reading documents of various origins, a high degree of bitterness on the part of the authorities toward believers is evident. This can be seen not only in the reports about the firing squads in different parts of the country (144–45 and passim), but also in the way that the opposite side is described. Thus, the newspaper *Bednota* (Poor thing) describes a procession in Moscow on Red Square that took place in May 1918 on the feast of St. Nicholas of Myra as a collection of marginalists and provocateurs and calls it "a demonstration of obscurantism" (295). The photos of this procession show that it actually appears as a giant national celebration (Red Square is entirely filled with people). But the article in *Bednota* does not just distort reality, it is imbued with the desire to dehumanize the enemy, even if this enemy is all people of faith. It is becoming clear that not only the hierarchs and clergymen, but also ordinary believers found themselves in an atmosphere of daily psychological pressure.

This peer-reviewed edition undoubtedly makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the initial stage of Soviet anti-religious policy. This collection of documents is poised to become a handbook for researchers dealing with the early evolution of state and church relations and the protest of believers in the Soviet period.

*A.L. Beglov*

## That Whereof We Cannot Speak, Thereof We Must Imagine

**Review of: A. Zygmont. 2018. *Sviataia negativnost': nasilie i sakral'noe v filosofii Zhorzha Bataia* [Holy negativity: Violence and the sacred in Georges Bataille's philosophy]. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie (in Russian). — 320 pp.**

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Alexey Zygmont's monograph is an event in Russian-speaking religious studies; at least, it claims to be, challenging the scientific community with the very title.

The main works of French thinker Georges Bataille such as *L'expérience intérieure,* [1943], *La Part Maudite* [1949] and others are available in Russian

(Sakral'noe 2004; *Summa Atheologica* 2016), but we cannot claim close acquaintance with them; Bataille is avoided in academia. Zygmont demystifies the image of the "contradictory author" in a good way, consistently and patiently tracing the development of his philosophical conception of the identity of violence and the sacred. The author designates his goal as the building of its genealogy, for which he takes up the consideration of a genesis of those two core notions. He interprets the genealogy as a study of the movement of meaning (p. 25), and presents it in the book's conclusion in the form of an original scheme. *Holy Negativity* is fundamentally different from previous books in Russian addressing Bataille's philosophy, specifically in its methodology. The author's chosen approach makes it possible to update Bataille much more broadly than before, which unequivocally distinguishes this study from those preceding it, not to diminish their contributions (Fokin 1998; Timofeeva 2005; Evstropov 2008; Weiser 2009; Shutov 2016). For famous researchers and translators of Bataille's corpus of works like Sergey Zenkin (2012) and Sergey Fokin, Bataille is primarily a litterateur, and this view determines their focus. Zygmont, instead, takes up the specific philosophical content of Bataille's conception, which other authors often fail to address (p. 20). It is fair to say that such avoidance is not an accident. The dive into Bataille's philosophy requires a special stance, and the author of *Holy Negativity* seems to find a proper one, formulated in relation to the essay "The Sun's Anus," from which this study begins: "it is practically impossible to say what this text is about, but it makes sense to look at what is going on here" (p. 33).

In offering his original reading of Bataille, Zygmont is engaged in a lively dialogue with his predecessors. The fact that he contextualizes other interpretations and statements from the voluminous body of existing research literature in several languages adds to his persuasiveness. The author of the monograph himself is a translator of Bataille into Russian, which is manifested in the special attention he pays to the nuances of the translation of original quotations.

The monograph consists of five chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. The logic of the structure is based on a chronology of the development of the ideas of the sacred and of violence, from unarticulated to identical. Thus, the period from the end of the 20s to the 60s is divided into four periods that were devoted to different topics, which, in the

end, resulted in the conception of violence and the sacred. The fifth chapter is somewhat different from the others: it highlights the issues of war that permeate all stages of Bataille's theorizing.

The introduction prepares the reader for a thorough inventory of Bataille's ideas by identifying the main problems that captured the philosopher. The first and perhaps the main problem is that of individualization, understood not as a choice and rejection of the community, but, in Nietzsche's words, as a *spell*. The path to unity among people, as Bataille points out, is through "liberation from the prison of individual existence, from a stuffy closure in oneself" (p. 11). In fact, Bataille continues the Hegelian line of reasoning, solving the Nietzschean problem through the idea of *desubjectivation*. It is precisely in desubjectivation as the unlocking of the singular that the general meaning of the concepts of violence and the sacred lies (p. 16). Bataille's second concern is the rationalization of European society, which he considered an infringement upon the irrational part of human nature. The dreams of a "genuine community" and the attempts to put them into practice reflect his worries as clearly as his studies do. The author of the monograph also defines Bataille's place in the history of Western philosophy, tracing his intellectual environment and his influences. He pays special attention to the way in which "the collision of Hegelianism with the theory of the sacred and the complexity of Bataille's vocabulary, mixing ontology with psychology, is born" (p. 16).

The first chapter, "The Blinding Sun of Violence," is devoted to the image of the sun, often overlooked by Zygmont's predecessors, in which he sees the "non- or prephilosophical content" of the ideas of the sacred and violence, which makes it possible to clarify their genesis (p. 29). He also introduces the concept of the unreal as preceding the sacred, but the association between these concepts cannot be attributed to the influence of Durkheim's definition of the sacred, as Zygmont suggests (p. 44). On the contrary, Durkheim describes such an association as erroneous and distances himself from it by localizing the sacred in the social reality sui generis (Durkheim 1995, 226–27). In that sense, Bataille is rather against the Durkheimian point. The same is true in respect to Nietzsche: "If Nietzsche's ecstasy and violence relate to reality, his, on the contrary, relate to irreality" (p. 104).

The second chapter, "First Experiments in Theory," reviews the span of 1929 to 1934. All the various topics and related images are presented in three sections. The first is built around the concept

of "low materialism," from which Bataille develops the science of heterogeneity (heterology). The second section demonstrates how the philosopher's empirical observations contribute to the rapprochement of religion and violence in his theory, and the third describes the system of concepts that shape Bataille's primary theory of violence.

As the author notes, Bataille thinks of heterogeneity as totality and not as opposition, because it is based not on the duality of the world, but on "the coexistence of two ambivalent poles of the same continuum without any synthesis" (p. 81). In this sense, Bataille is close to Freud and this is well illustrated in the book through the relationship between love and death (Eros and Thanatos). Bataille also finds some intellectual resources in psychoanalysis, in particular, the concept of *aggression*, which is employed to understand the *transition* between poles. Aggression is the basis of violence, not just as a release of negative energy, but as an intended transformation through the destruction of borders, i.e., *transgression*.

It is important to keep in mind that Bataille's fascination with the ethnography of Aztec, Hindu, Japanese, and other religions is directly proportional to his rejection of Christianity. For the first time in his writings, Bataille involves a category of otherness precisely in relation to the religious. Otherness in fact is already akin to the sacred, which lacks any contents in his terminology, but appears as the main object of religion by provoking attraction and communication (p. 101). In the light of Durkheimian theory, this is a predictable route to follow, but Bataille will go further in developing an idea of the sacred that closely relates to the concept of *message,* which cannot be expressed in words.

Bataille's message appears as "an energy field destroying the subject-object distinction and as if fusing what he sees" (p. 69). This concept is, of course, at the heart of his philosophy, because it directly addresses the problems he struggles with: individualization and rationalization. Bataille calls out the crisis of the modern world and asserts that it can only be saved by the "restoration of sacred values," i.e., affective values, the essence of which is "communication in death" (p. 106). It is the image of the executed King Louis XVI, which *Holy Negativity* starts with, that Bataille associates with the idea of a true community born of *sacrifice*. "The King's Dead Eyes" is a communication in death of all those who had looked in them. However, it is extremely important that Bataille's community is conceived as an alternative to the "community of death"

(Blanchot 1988). The monograph clearly shows this.

The third chapter, "The Beheaded Community," is devoted to the issues of community, with the hypothesis that "the community for Bataille is sacred in its very nature, and violence in some concrete or purely abstract form is a force that allows to unbind isolated and closed human beings and to unify them in a single body of the community" (p. 122). Now the sacred is treated as lost intimacy — either with an animal or with a paradisiacal state — which can only be recovered through the opening of individual existence borders, i.e., through an act of violence (p. 195). To test this hypothesis, the key image of Acephalus is used and discussed in detail. Acephalus appears as a single body of the community, which has gone through violence and has become *special* and therefore attractive (p. 170). His missing head announces the conversion of the homogeneous into the heterogeneous, i.e., the sacred.

In the fourth chapter, "The Dream of Sacred Violence," which corresponds to the postwar period of Bataille's intellectual creativity, the sacred and violence appear as identical. Turning to Bataille's economic theory, the author explains why the sacred is always on the other side of everyday life and can only be achieved through a violent rupture, equivalent to sacrifice. Homogeneity as a sphere of the profane is defined through endless work, production, and accumulation of material, leading to the closure of the individual to himself, and thus excluding any communication. Zygmont asserts that the sphere of the homogeneous arises in the gap between work and its alienated results, i.e., when a person does not live for himself (p. 111). Along with Marx, Bataille problematizes dissolution in work, which he addresses as a (false) substitution for the desubjectivation that makes community possible, because it reduces an individual to a function.

It can be said that in the course of rationalization, human life becomes a product in and of a solid capitalist economy, where there is no space for *waste*. The victim appears as an unproductive, pointless waste, i.e., the *donation of* his or her own and, literally, of himself or herself, which allows, through the denial of economic activity (and thus of a profane existence), the achievement of community. The world in which man exists is opposed to the world of animal welfare (p. 195). The difference between human being and animal is, first of all, in the awareness of death and its separation from life, i.e., in overcoming the continuity (p. 198). At its core, violence directly couples life and death and

thus brings back continuity: "Violence is not murder, but annihilation, and it destroys an absolutely certain premeditated content, i.e., the substance of man" (p. 205). Next, Zygmont takes up the task of explaining how violence has lost its purpose and become just a profane instrument, but rather briefly, which is why it is still unclear; this passage provokes questions (p. 207). The reasoning in the fifth chapter, "The Sacred against War," in which Zygmont undertakes a separate study of war in Bataille's philosophy and explains why "in the present war nothing remained of the sacred," is much more successful (p. 240). Here, however, all the signs of sacred violence come together and it becomes clear that Bataille despises the Christian church (but not its ideals!) for the substitution of sacred violence with profane violence. In contrast to the profane, sacred violence is described through the victim's voluntariness and focus on the inner (not outer) of the community and, above all, on himself.

The answer to the question of the possibility of "being together" is given in the final part of the fourth chapter, which reveals why verbal communication between people has nothing to do with real intimacy, while the source of solidarity may be a *myth* as a "living active force" (p. 226). While language itself, a "function of the world of work" (p. 231), is alien to continuity, because it is a distinctive system, the myth is a joining of language and violence: it refers to continuity while awakening the imagination. The appearance of myth in Bataille's thinking once again confirms the influence of Nietzsche and perpetuates it in the context of the French philosophy of the 20th century, where myth is one of the main topics (p. 224). After all, it turns out that true violence "is essentially imaginary, and that actual murder and bloodshed in it makes sense only to the extent that it serves as food for the imagination" (p. 237). However, when sacred violence is not at least imagined, the capitalist economy wins.

Bataille's understanding of the sacred can be perceived as a way to get out of the captivity of prescribed categories that lack vital dynamics. It is hard to abandon Bataille's belief that the pure/correct sacred is only a derivative of the violent and infectious sacred (p. 21). For example, the idea of the sacredness of human life in modern Western European morality is unthinkable apart from the context of violence wherefrom it originates (Agamben 1998; Joas 2013).

I would like to emphasize that, although Bataille's idea of the sacred differs radically from the one that has become embedded in religious studies, it is quite le-

gitimate in the context of Durkheimian theory, which is often oversimplified. Moreover, Bataille is probably the most consistent Durkheimian, since he is the one who delves deeper into the questions posed but left unanswered by Durkheim: first of all, the possibility of a community in the modern world. Bataille's merit is that he locates the essence of sacralization in emancipation from the slavery of the utilitarian world by means of qualitative change (up to destruction) for the sake of returning to the wholeness of life — continuity, immanence, intimacy, — meaning the absence of any distinction; the merit of the author of *Holy Negativity* is that he manages to clarify it.

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