



## RELIGION OF MAN-GOD BY L. FEUERBACH BY BULGAKOV

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov's perspectives on Vladimir Solovyov's concept of Sophia and Ludwig Feuerbach's epistemology, as well as Bulgakov's political views on monarchy, constitutional monarchy, liberal republic, and the workers' state. It explores the author's stance on sensualism and idealism, providing a comparative analysis of Feuerbach's and Bulgakov's epistemological frameworks.*

**Keywords:** *Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov; Religion; epistemology; Sophia; being;*

### 1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In contemporary times, as moral bearings erode—particularly the fundamental psychological disposition of faith, disrupted by events such as war, famine, and epidemics—it is imperative to draw upon the practical theories of self-consolation, self-care, and the epistemology of the Russian protopriest (protoiereus) Sergei Bulgakov. Bulgakov sought to reconcile Marxism (science) with religion (Orthodox faith) by delineating these superstructures within the context of political-economic governance. Critiquing the rigidity of both monarchist rigorists and communist terrorists, he articulated a distinctive path for the development of the Russian national spirit.

**Research Objective.** The objective of this study is to establish a conceptually rigorous metaphysical foundation within Bulgakov's philosophical worldview of Russian philosophy, specifically by:

- Elucidating the historical distinctiveness, uniqueness, and evolution of Sergei Bulgakov's theoretical ideas;
- Reconstructing the core tenets and content of the philosophical systems of Ludwig Feuerbach and Sergei Bulgakov;
- Analyzing Bulgakov's philosophy;
- Examining the primary stages of Bulgakov's philosophical evolution;
- Exploring the foundational ideas of Feuerbach's critique of religion (anthropocentrism) and Bulgakov's counter-critique of this perspective.

**Research Hypothesis.** The hypothesis posits that mastery of Bulgakov's philosophy will lead to:

- An understanding of the existential value of each subject by the subject;
- The realization of Sophianic mysticism as an essential stage in the development of human cognition (*humanae cognitionis*);



- The recognition of the Judeo-Christian-Germanic principle as a significant phase in the formation of socialism.

**Research Methods.** The methodological foundation of this study includes historical-logical, analytical, synthetic, and historical-philosophical methods.

**Scientific Novelty.** The novelty of this research lies in its exploration and presentation of Bulgakov's perspectives to the academic community through a media-based approach.

**Practical Significance of the Research.** The practical significance of this study includes:

- Addressing theoretical gaps in Russian philosophy, particularly in Bulgakov's thought, through logical and scientific philosophical inquiry;
- Investigating the doctrine and evidential system supporting the existence of Jesus Christ for use in religious polemical debates;
- Analyzing the epistemological judgments of both Bulgakov and Feuerbach, with the aim of applying their theoretical insights in teaching and research activities.

**Keywords:** epistemology, religion, faith, beliefs, epistemology.

## 2. BIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW AND PERSPECTIVES OF SERGEI BULGAKOV

Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov (July 28, 1871 – July 13, 1944) was a Russian political economist and theologian. Of Tatar descent from Oryol (Kasimov), he was the son of hereditary priests, a *raznochinets*, a neo-Slavophile, an existentialist, and a Menshevik (Bernsteinian) (Ovsyannikov & Olkhov 2024:629-636).

Sergei Bulgakov grew up surrounded by the affection of his large, impoverished family, consisting of his parents and six children. His father, Nikolai, named him after Saint Sergius of Radonezh (14th century). In 1884, Bulgakov graduated from the Oryol Theological Seminary. In 1890, he enrolled in the Law Faculty of Moscow University, graduating in 1895. During his university years, he embraced social-democratic political ideas, becoming an ardent Marxist, Germanophile, and Anglophile (*l'eau va à la mer*). From 1885 to 1898, he taught at his alma mater. In 1898, he entered a master's program, married, and was sent abroad for further studies (Germany, France, and the United Kingdom). Returning to Russia in late 1900–early 1901, he gradually distanced himself from socialism and became disillusioned with Marxism. Following the 1905 Russian Revolution, he definitively rejected “German socialism” (as he termed Marxism) and embraced idealism (Sophiology).

Bulgakov's life resembled a fragile vessel tossed by the waves of existence. A restless soul seeking a stable haven, born into a poor Russian family, he experienced multiple famines (1873, 1890–1891), witnessed child prostitution, cruelty, and human suffering, and sought answers to the existential question: “Why, Lord?”

Bulgakov's political views evolved from religious atheism to Orthodox mysticism and Valentinian Gnosticism (developed post-October Revolution, 1922–1930). His doctrine posited four divine essences: God, Holy Spirit, Son, and Sophia. For these ideas, he narrowly escaped anathema from the Orthodox Church by merging God with Sophia, preserving the Trinity. His Sophiological schema was: God–Sophia–Holy Spirit–Son.

Naming an idea correctly, Bulgakov argued, is to know the world. However, he viewed Solovyov's Sophia not as the essence of the world's being but as a particular, embedded concept arising from mystical speculation with pretensions to universality, which



failed to benefit fragmented philosophical knowledge. “Philosophical knowledge,” for Bulgakov, was the highest form of understanding being, surpassing ordinary knowledge.

The Orthodox Church persecuted Bulgakov as a Sophiologist and follower of Solovyov. From an acribic (ἀκριβεία) perspective, Bulgakov defended himself by retreating into the “shadow” of his judgments, arguing that, from an economic (οικονομία) standpoint, believers would benefit from his ideas of divine consubstantiality. This nuanced approach helped him avoid ecclesiastical repercussions. Bulgakov believed that God presents different faces (πρόσωπον) to humanity’s sinfulness, with Sophia as both a divine and human (Christ’s) persona. Following Solovyov’s “new Origenism,” Bulgakov sought to clarify and illuminate Solovyov’s mystical ideas. His “Bulgakovism” gave form to Solovyov’s spatial and timeless frameworks but sacrificed their distinctiveness and spiritual clarity. Bulgakov attempted to distinguish and apply Solovyov’s thought practically, much as Proclus, 1800 years earlier, reshaped the teachings of Iamblichus and Plato. Proclus, a precursor to medieval scholasticism, used Posidonius and Aristotle to place Iamblichus and Plato on a scientific footing. Iamblichus asserted that all things have a voice to be heard (a model later adopted by Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola), while Plato prioritized singular ideas over multiple predicates of being (with Kant and Schelling as his notable German idealist successors). Bulgakov, however, reduced these ideas to an ecliptic perception, blending Solovyov’s mysticism with Origenism, Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Plato, seasoned with Valentinianism and Tertullianism.

In discussing Solovyov’s Sophia, Bulgakov delved into ancient interpretations, iterating others’ ideas. Following Solovyov, he developed a borderline doctrine combining the teachings of Arius, Sabellius, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius, Eutyches, and Apollinaris, positing a non-hierarchical Trinity and an incomplete dual nature of Christ. Macedonius’ view of the Holy Spirit as a subservient conductor of divine will further informed Bulgakov’s quadriform schema: God–Sophia–Christ–Holy Spirit.

Bulgakov’s succession of ideas formed a self-contained intellectual society, where Sophia’s concept reached a recessive phase. For Solovyov, abiotic facts were mystical phenomena, while for Bulgakov, they were objects of faith. Ancient Gnosticism (Mandaean, Coptic, Manichaean, and Hermetic) facilitated Solovyov’s ideas’ acclimatization in Britain, from where they were brought to Russia. Bulgakov then “buffered,” “disinfected,” and adapted these ideas for Czech and French audiences.

Bulgakov was elected a deputy from Oryol Governorate to the Second Duma (February 20–June 3, 1907), remaining a deputy until 1918. As a politician, he advocated for the fusion of secular and spiritual authority, envisioning Russia as a New Byzantium under a Caesar-like ruler (as under Constantine I, 4th century CE) rather than a New Rome dominated by clergy (as under Pope Leo I, 5th century CE). A Christian socialist, he aligned with the Constitutional Democrats (Kadets) after 1905, seeking to synthesize various political currents:

1. Mirabeau’s dual allegiance (Honoré Mirabeau, 1749–1791), balancing advocacy for the National Assembly as a “torch of the people” while serving Louis XVI (in Bulgakov’s case, Nicholas II).
2. Jeffersonianism (Thomas Jefferson, 1743–1826), rooted in English chauvinism (American imperialism, beginning with the 1803 Louisiana Purchase) and reliance on the yeoman class, drawing on John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*. Modern heirs: Democrats.



3. Hamiltonian federalism (Alexander Hamilton, 1755–1804), emphasizing private property and rejecting labor’s emancipation from capital, based on David Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Modern heirs: Republicans.

A slave who recognizes and fights against their servitude is a revolutionary. A slave unaware of their enslavement, living in submissive, unconscious obedience, is merely a slave. A slave who glorifies their servitude, extolling their master, is a serf. A slave who removes their shackles and is remembered in the silence of being and the darkness of time is a revolutionary.

The First Russian Revolution (January 1905–June 1907) ended ignominiously with the Third June Coup, as many succumbed to their servile souls. Bulgakov’s ambivalence is evident: he warmly supported the Vyborg Manifesto (July 9, 1906) but took no action himself, later criticizing it as a deputy. The First Duma (April 27–July 9, 1906) was ineffectual, salon-like, and Stolypin-esque, attempting to quell chaos through misguided syndicalism, aspiring to a utopian “Schlaraffenland.” Parliaments, as William Cobbett (1763–1835) noted, serve as a “safety valve for the passions boiling in the country.”

Bulgakov’s political activity leaned toward Christian liberalism, attempting to appease both royalists and revolutionaries. A duplicitous figure, he sought to balance tsarist and revolutionary ideals, lacking inner equilibrium (*aplomb*). He aimed to avoid bloodshed and achieve a constitutional monarchy akin to the English Bill of Rights (1689). Despite his pluralism and humanism, he was criticized as a “parquet lapdog” of the Romanovs, neither a “black priest” (otherworldly savior of the dynasty) nor a revolutionary. Shedding the “red cassock” of revolution, he donned “blue garments” to remain in the capital’s favor. His left-leaning fundamentalism hindered revolutionary currents, critiquing Russian social democracy using original Western sources (fluent in French, English, German, Greek, and Latin).

As a deputy, Bulgakov supported the revolutionary movement through articles, sermons, and speeches, yet his actions dulled revolutionary energy while paradoxically fueling it. His “acmism” marked an era of shedding feudal remnants for capitalist blossoming. With Tolstoyan zeal for non-violent resolution, he became a “pruned branch” of autocracy, not a historical weapon.

As a legal Marxist, Bulgakov undermined the democratic dictatorship espoused by Marx’s followers, contributing to journals like *New Path*, *New Word*, *Beginning*, *Life*, *God’s World*, and *Landmarks*. These publications eroded Russian social democracy, betraying the liberation of the 88% agrarian population from obligations to the 10% bourgeois and 2% aristocratic-clerical classes.

Some Russian parties pursued political despotism with religious hypocrisy (Kadets, Black Hundreds, People’s Socialists, Trudoviks, Octobrists, Polish Circle), others religious despotism with political hypocrisy (SRs, Liberationists, All-Russian Peasant Union, Christian socialists). Only popular despotism with political hypocrisy (social democrats) prevailed. Bulgakov deemed bureaucratic collectivism, as advocated by Russian social democrats, impossible and dangerous, echoing Trotsky’s “theory of the deformed workers’ state.” He foresaw a new exploitative class emerging from proletarian embourgeoisement. Denying the feasibility of transitioning from monarchy to socialism, he predicted that a revolution (“*Als Lenin sprach, Aurora schoss, Stets war auch Marx dabei!*”) would lead to:

1. Jacobin terror;
2. Federalist struggles;
3. Thermidorian reaction;
4. Bonapartist regime.



The instinct to dominate, rooted in survival, manifests through struggle, evolving from cannibalism to religious cults and modern forms of exploitation (capitalist labor, political, economic, legal, and military-police oppression). Capitalism perpetuates barbaric instincts, treating humans as objects. This predatory instinct, refined by intellectual progress, masquerades as “public good.” The “devil of human history” is this cannibalistic instinct, fueled by ignorance and servility, producing exploiters and despots. Masses, dulled by routine and humiliation, harm the best among them—visionary individuals who, instead of advancing history, become its ballast.

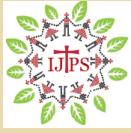
A society without clear moral distinctions fosters “moral corruption”—the triumph of irrational instincts and rejection of human rights. To rise above savagery, one must limit time in power, encourage opposition, and foster self-criticism. Bulgakov’s views, less critical than Marxism, sidelined scientific inquiry for divine supremacy (*tu vas à mont*). His faith in humanity reflected an optimistic pessimism (between Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Shestov), viewing life as Oedipus’ response to the Sphinx. God, for Bulgakov, is not a Hegelian extractor of human vitality but a bourgeois deity. His stance on the “Jewish question” aligned with Bruno Bauer’s metaphysical disdain, not Marx’s economic focus.

Bulgakov’s concept holds that humans remain in God’s domain, even in unbelief. His efforts to achieve bloodless reform make him a significant figure in Russian consciousness. Spared repression by the Bolsheviks as a valuable but unreliable intellectual, he was exiled to Turkey in 1922, then moved to Czechoslovakia, collaborating with British intelligence via the Russian Student Christian Movement. In 1925, he relocated to Paris, acting as a triple agent (Anglo-Franco-American), monitoring White émigré officers. Diagnosed with throat cancer in 1939, he suffered a stroke on June 5–6, 1944, and died on July 13, 1944, after 40 days in a coma (Williams 2001: 1-25).

Reading Bulgakov’s essay *The Religion of Human-Deification in L. Feuerbach* (1905, *Questions of Life*; 1906, standalone) evoked sympathy for Feuerbach, the “father of atheistic Christianity.” Bulgakov’s critique, though sharp and transparent, prompted a review of his works, including *Basic Problems of the Theory of Progress* (1902), *Ivan Karamazov as a Philosophical Type* (1902), *From Marxism to Idealism* (1903), *Herzen’s Spiritual Drama* (1905), *Chekhov as a Thinker* (1905), *Karl Marx as a Religious Type* (1906), *The Crown of Thorns* (1907), *Reflections on Nationality* (1910), *Nature in Solovyov’s Philosophy* (1911), *Man-God and Man-Beast* (1912), *Philosophy of Economy* (1912), *The Tragedy of Philosophy* (1927), and *Philosophy of the Trinity* (1938).

Bulgakov’s Marxist phase (1890–1905) lasted 15 years, with the remainder (51 years, excluding childhood) devoted to Orthodoxy, making him more theosophist than philosopher. Standing at the crossroads of materialism and metaphysics, he was neither friend nor foe to either. His critiques of Protestant-Jewish (Marxism) and Greco-Jewish (positivism) doctrines fortified Russian Marxists and positivists. A “healing poison,” Bulgakov sought an ideal society of love and mutual understanding, following Khomyakov’s view that the West lacks the East’s spirituality. He traced a historical continuity from Feuerbach to Chernyshevsky, crediting the latter for fostering Russian social democracy while deeming Herzen irrelevant. Bulgakov’s style in *The Religion of Human-Deification* is direct, sharp, and clear, emphasizing ritual over belief. He viewed the faithless as “monsters,” writing openly and engagingly.

For Bulgakov, Russia comprises two realms: a secular St. Petersburg (akin to Athens) and a spiritual Moscow (akin to Jerusalem). Rejecting Hegelianism-positivism, he advocated a Slavic, Solovyovian ladder of spiritual greatness. A devotee of Solovyov,



Bulgakov synthesized Kantian and Hegelian thought into “Solovyovology.” He viewed humans as spectators, nature as a dancer (*naturalia non sunt turpia*), echoing Eriugena’s fourfold nature: uncreated-creating (God), created-creating (ideas), created-non-creating (world and humanity), and uncreated-non-creating (God as the end). A semi-utopian materialist, Bulgakov was both an early *agelastos* (imperturbable) and a mature “weeping child” (like Ivan and Alyosha Karamazov), embodying the contradictions of his era (Williams 2001: 163-165).

### 3. BULGAKOV’S PERSPECTIVE ON FEUERBACH’S RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Sergei Bulgakov’s work, *The Religion of Human-Deification in L. Feuerbach* (1906), is published in the second volume of his two-volume collected works (1993 edition) and spans 59 pages. The scholarly article is divided into nine sections (I: pp. 162–165; II: pp. 165–171; III: pp. 171–174; IV: pp. 174–182; V: pp. 182–189; VI: pp. 189–196; VII: pp. 196–209; VIII: pp. 209–216; IX: pp. 216–221). Bulgakov’s essay serves as a review of Ludwig Feuerbach’s 440-page *The Essence of Christianity* (1841).

What did Bulgakov say about Feuerbach’s social atheism? To address this question, we employ an Aristotelian methodological framework (Evtuhov 1997: 97).

#### Causa Materialis

1. Sergei Bulgakov seeks to honor the then lesser-known figure of Ludwig Feuerbach within the academic community, highlighting his contributions to the development of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. He traces the lineage of Hegelianism without distinguishing between “old” and “new” Hegelians. Rejecting the “absurdity” of Marxist epistemological methods, Bulgakov posits that Marxism is a continuation of Hegelianism stripped of metaphysics (*nul obstacle, nulle distance, n'arrête le véritable amant*—no obstacles or distances can stop true love). The general philosophical level of Marxist thought is dialectical materialism (epistemological), while its socio-philosophical level is historical materialism (gnoseological). History is an unbroken chain of distinct generations, each utilizing materials, capital, and productive forces inherited from past generations. Consequently, the current generation operates under transformed conditions, indexing and reshaping inherited options through fundamentally altered human activity (Evtuhov 1997: 93).
2. Following Russia’s defeat in the Battle of Tsushima (May 27–28, 1905), anti-tsarist sentiments surged. War reparations and contributions to the Japanese Empire burdened the populace, and the Portsmouth Peace Treaty (1905) stirred the empire. While Bulgakov does not analyze the treaty, he notes that impoverishment and war costs (February 9, 1904–September 5, 1905) drove the population into a “red madness” (*la démente rouge*).

#### Causa Formalis

1. Bulgakov critiques Feuerbach with a “critical knife,” delivering non-lethal blows aimed at his former revolutionary comrades (*à telle chair, tel couteau*—to each flesh, its own knife).
2. He aims to protect the people, saving them from themselves (*tel père, tel fils*—like father, like son).
3. He seeks to preserve the political order without radical change (*changer*), urging concessions to the masses under a form of Caesarism.



### **Causa Efficiens**

1. Bulgakov's views led to his condemnation by social-democratic and revolutionary parties.
2. The Alexandrine Palace (residence of the Romanovs from 1905) appreciated Bulgakov's ideas, rewarding him with a Duma deputyship as a bachelor of legal sciences (Gatrell 2004: 208).

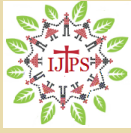
### **Causa Finalis**

1. Bulgakov's expert opinion "shattered" the social-democratic "dam."
2. Intending to undermine trust in Marx and Engels, he inadvertently fueled revolutionary zeal, inspiring young revolutionaries to master Marxism more thoroughly.
3. As a sophist, Bulgakov succumbed to nihilism, rejecting empirical truths (dialectical and historical materialism) in favor of transcendental experience and unquestioning acceptance of factual outcomes. He dismissed experimentally verified truths as fantasy, yet his negation harbors something concealed (*trois frères, trois châteaux*—three brothers, three fortresses).
4. The temporary establishment of Caesaropapism under the Bolsheviks drew attention from both white and black clergy. (I believe Bulgakov was preoccupied with the Stoglav Council of 1551 and envied the prominence of its key figures, Sylvester and Alexei Adashev) (Copleston 1988: 113).

Using Kantian methodology, we trace Bulgakov's arguments in *The Religion of Human-Deification*:

### **Was kann ich wissen? (What can I know?)**

1. "By rejecting God, the Absolute Being, Feuerbach had to recognize as divine the absolute becoming, a deifying humanity. Becoming was equated with completed being, and deifiability with deification. The absolute in a process composed of a mixture of the absolute and conditional, eternal and transient, was declared the sole and final reality. Henceforth, all Feuerbach's difficulties and the tragedy of his position arise. He is condemned to gather rays penetrating from above into the dark element and, with these rays, to illuminate what remains unilluminated" (Bulgakov 1993: 206).
2. "For Feuerbach, this obvious and indisputable truth was insufficient. He needed to assert that truth is not only known collectively but also created collectively. To recognize an existing truth prior to human cognition is to acknowledge God — for truth is one of the necessary attributes of divinity — and to admit that cognition is essentially revelation, albeit conditioned by humanity's active self-activity" (Bulgakov 1993: 209).
3. "Feuerbach immediately retreats from his principle, declaring that an individual can represent the entire species and, in this capacity, disagree with it. This limitation entirely negates the rule, and Feuerbach's attempt to establish it was in vain" (Bulgakov 1993: 209).
4. "The only resolution to the contradiction [the concept of unified humanity contains an irreconcilable antinomy] is to acknowledge that history is not humanity's final form of life and that the results of collective human activity and labor are significant for all humanity. This view is possible only by accepting the Christian faith in the 'future age' and universal resurrection, which alone can sustain belief in progress and



humanity's historical creativity, rather than that of successive generations" (Bulgakov 1993: 215).

5. "Perfect God-manhood, according to Christianity, is the Creator's final thought for His creation, an ideal task resolved in the cosmic and historical process. It presupposes the free assimilation of divine content, eliminating the possibility of human nature being suppressed by divine force. While assimilating divine content, humanity perceives it through free creativity in the historical process, as the real realization of God's image in its own being" (Bulgakov 1993: 217).

**Was soll ich tun? (What should I do?)**

1. Critically engage with humanism, which succeeded the Middle Ages, without abandoning faith for unbelief as a form of belief.
2. Avoid negating the individual psychic self or subsuming it into a collective self. God sees each person's fate individually, and those who seek to forge a monolithic society from the amorphous are idol-worshippers. (Bulgakov neither denies nor advocates for an isolated self but emphasizes mutual understanding, tolerance, and love).

**Was darf ich hoffen? (What may I hope?)**

1. Hope in God.
2. Hope in oneself.

**Was ist der Mensch? (What is the human?)**

1. A God-man.
2. A sinner seeking God but risking degradation through unbelief (atheist = philosopher).

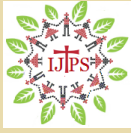
Ludwig Feuerbach employed synthesized modern scientific methods, drawing on Francis Bacon's practical investigations and René Descartes' theoretical foundations. Scientific methods are divided into two levels:

1. Lower level: concrete-problematic characteristics and their detalization (stepwise identification of nodal connections).
2. Higher level: philosophical, characterized by the highest generalization of the generalized (addressing matter, motion, space, time, reflection, quality, quantity, measure, leap, negation, opposition, contradiction, whole, part, content, form, essence, phenomenon, cause, effect, possibility, actuality, necessity, causality, singular, plural, general, particular, etc.) (Feuerbach 1989: 1-14).

All inquiries must begin with investigation: first, the interaction confronting any rational being; second, the examination of matter as the starting point (subject to object); third, the measurement of regularities in the relevant part of reality with causal relations.

Feuerbach concludes that Christian doctrine (revelation) detaches humans from the illusions of sensory existence, transporting them *in caelum venire* for *ascensio eterne spiritus caelum*, where the eternal spirit resides and grants bliss. Bulgakov reverses this, viewing bliss as the descent of divine ideas into the sensory world, creating an illusion of happiness and security. Bulgakov "casts" souls into the Valley of Reeds (Fields of Ialu), while Feuerbach "lifts" them out (Bulgakov 2012: 72).

Feuerbach posited that consciousness, forming reason, distinguishes one's spirit (unique volitional qualities) or psyche from another reason or object. The individual self, in its distinctions, seeks differences from others. When reason emerges, it differentiates itself from the external, material world and from itself, manifesting self-consciousness. For example, a child is naturally rational but only potentially so; to become human, it must develop, realizing its potential. The term "human" (*chelovek*) unfolds as "master of the



forehead” (reason controlling the body) and “age” (*vek*), signifying growth and indivisibility of body and psyche. Unlike Feuerbach, Bulgakov sees each individual as inherently complete, bypassing the process of becoming (referencing “What is the human?”). This leap in thought invites reflection (*il se guillete haut*) but only fleetingly (Feuerbach 1986: 54-55).

When an object changes, so does consciousness’s relation to it. The observing mind discerns the boundaries of the total, determining being and non-being. All givens are rooted in exemplary attributes, unified in their indivisible co-naming.

The universal postulate applies to organic and inorganic entities, though external manifestations vary endlessly (reflecting Hegelian influence on Feuerbach). Religion, as dogma, observes only to fragmentarily adapt, discarding outdated theoretical components. Feuerbach critiques this (echoing Kantian skepticism), arguing that temples, despite incense, should serve material societal needs and eventually be abandoned. This marks Feuerbach’s turn to social atheism, which Bulgakov critiques.

Feuerbach divides the objective world for reason into contrasting perceptions:

1. An existing internal world of laws.
2. A non-existing (empty) external world of manifestations (Feuerbach 1986: 28).

Every individual with will (spirit) is a primary foundation with a profound layer of unconditional truth, unbounded by generalization and capable of enriching reason. The particular accentuates reason toward the universal hidden within. Enclosed universality is always actual but activated by free-thinking will (*peu vin*—a little wine, and life is good).

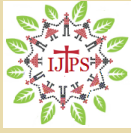
By declaring humans “not free,” Bulgakov falls into an antinomy: the essence of the human spirit is freedom, and denying it negates the highest expression of God (*vifage de Néron*—the image of Nero’s revival).

For Feuerbach, human history is a history of cognition (*hofté nouveau*). Critiquing Kantian limits, he asserted:

1. The human mind is dynamic and capable of unraveling nature’s mysteries.
2. Rejecting agnostic claims of nature’s incomprehensibility, Feuerbach confined Kant’s space-time aporia to human material becoming. (Agnostics dwell in the past (*Vergangenheit*), not the present (*Jederzeit*).) Bulgakov rejected this, accusing Feuerbach, Marxists, and positivists of promising a bright future (*Zukunft*) while ignoring the present and condemning the past. Bulgakov advocates uniting past and present, revisiting French materialists (Voltaire, Holbach, Helvétius) who proposed this synthesis, as did Feuerbach and Bauer, opposing Hegel’s “unraveling” of history.
3. Feuerbach believed nothing is unknown—either we or our descendants will know.
4. Sensory or experiential quality surpasses quantitative or isolated knowledge (sensory over intuition, a posteriori over a priori, indicating Feuerbach’s Aristotelian bent).
5. Sensations generate thoughts, not vice versa. Feuerbach acknowledges that what troubles an individual, if uninterpretable as a sensation, reflects underdeveloped phenomenological reduction. All is confirmed experimentally. Human ignorance does not imply stupidity; others may know (Bulgakov 2012: 145-148).

Bulgakov’s “dispelling” of Feuerbach’s speculative mirage (water in the desert) reveals Bulgakov himself as the desert burying the water. The speculative mirage is Bulgakov.

The English thinker Duns Scotus (late 13th–early 14th century) sparked interest in materialism by posing: “What matter does not think?” European materialism’s cradle is English materialism (Locke’s scientific approach, Bacon’s systematization, Hobbes’ political integration). Scotus’ thesis, reinforced by Descartes, separated philosophy from theology.



Spinoza clarified Descartes' obscurities, Leibniz deepened Spinozism geometrically, and Malebranche synthesized Descartes and Spinoza, concluding antique-scholastic metaphysics. This paved the way for English materialism (Leibnizian-Spinozist and Cartesian-Malebranchian), purging metaphysics. English scholars, fleeing the English Revolution (1642–1651), particularly Presbyterians and Dissenters, advanced natural inquiry. Seventeenth-century English thinkers returned French 18th-century Cartesianism as scientific materialism. Matter (*hyle*, *materia*—affair or study of the emergent) examines active or altered characteristics, distinguishing qualitative and quantitative components, forms, and influences.

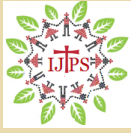
Scotus' question died in Britain but was revived by Giulio Vanini (1585–1619), who, expelled from England, introduced “wild materialism” to France, echoing Renaissance polymaths (Galileo, Leonardo). They drew from ancient Greek materialists (Leucippus, Democritus, 6th–5th century BCE), who viewed all as physics, exhaustively researchable. Humans possess an “inner burning” to explore *physis* through senses and tools (Vanini 2011: 12-15).

Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655) popularized Vanini, aiding Descartes while advocating Epicureanism and Cyrano de Bergerac's skepticism. Feuerbach spawned independent branches: (1) Feuerbachianism + Dietzgenism = Marxism; (2) Kantianism + Feuerbachianism + Dietzgenism = Machism. Franz Mehring notes Hegel synthesized Kantianism and Cartesianism but rejected Humeanism. Feuerbach exposed Hegelian flaws via Hegelianism, incorporating but not developing Humeanism (Gassendi 1972: 312-315). Marx and Engels discarded Kantian-Cartesian metaphysics, focusing on Humeanism (historical materialism). Dietzgen emphasized Cartesian-Kantianism (dialectical materialism). This yielded rational materialism (production-commodity relations, perceptions) and cultural materialism (value perception, apperceptions). Feuerbachianism waned, Dietzgenism merged with Marxism, birthing scientific historical materialism (matter's emergence, transformation, and societal development) and dialectical materialism (method and ideology development) (Mehring 1935: 156-158).

Bulgakov, aware of this, dismissed Feuerbach's achievements as “useless” debris. His metaphysical turn brands him a Machist, critiquing given experience (empiriocriticism). Scientific historical materialism was finalized by Engels in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880) and *Dialectics of Nature* (1883). Russian historical materialism began with Georgy Plekhanov's *On the Sixtieth Anniversary of Hegel's Death* (1891), rooted in Engels' *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1886).

Plekhanov's *Joseph Dietzgen* (1907) critiques confluences of Marx-Engels' and Dietzgen's historical materialism by comrades (Untermann, Bogdanov, Daugel). Plekhanov delineated their approaches, noting fewer errors in Marx-Engels. He called Dietzgen a “familiar of 18th-century French materialists,” absorbing their worst traits. Plekhanov acknowledged Dietzgen's legacy as a “proletarian philosopher” but criticized his stagnation on the subject-object relation. Marx and Engels developed historical materialism; Dietzgen pursued “historical idealism” or “natural monism” (“economy of thought,” per Machists). Dietzgen drew from Hartley, Priestley, Kant, and Feuerbach (Plekhanov 1907: 82-88).

Materialism is studied through three lenses: idealism (subjective interpretation), pragmatism (practical problem-solving), and realism (precise natural properties). These reduce to two philosophical directions: mechanical (empirical) and dialectical (humanistic).



#### 4. RESULTS

Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov's essay *The Religion of Human-Deification in L. Feuerbach* (1906) presents a semi-analytical and semi-negative examination of Feuerbach's materialist theory. Bulgakov's work should only be read after studying Feuerbach's original *The Essence of Christianity* (1841). Otherwise, readers risk forming a biased and hostile opinion of Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach's contributions.

Bulgakov's ecclesiastical status hinders an impartial engagement with his ideas. He manipulates the discourse to his advantage, initially ridiculing the "friendly atheist" (Feuerbach) and concluding with a patronizing nod, suggesting: "All your ideas are in the name of God."

Who is right? Each operates in their own arena, their own battleground. Taking sides means forfeiting one's own position. I can only assert the following: on one hand, if people fail to understand their purpose and believe they can evade accountability or that no afterlife exists, they often descend into beastly behavior, proclaiming "everything is permitted." On the other hand, who has the right to impose beliefs? Humanity ultimately chooses between two principles: to pray or to act, to beseech or to labor.

#### CONCLUSIONS

1. The study explores Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov's perspectives on Vladimir Solovyov's Sophia, Ludwig Feuerbach's epistemology, and Bulgakov's political views on monarchy, constitutional monarchy, liberal republic, and the workers' state. It examines his stance on sensualism and idealism, comparing Feuerbach's and Bulgakov's epistemological frameworks.
2. Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov was a Russian political economist and theologian of Tatar (Kasimov) descent, a hereditary son of priests, a raznochinets, neo-Slavophile, existentialist, and Menshevik (Bernsteinian).
3. Bulgakov's political views evolved from religious atheism to Orthodox mysticism and Valentinian Gnosticism. His doctrine posits four divine essences: God, Holy Spirit, Son, and Sophia.
4. Naming an idea correctly is to know the world! However, Bulgakov's interpretation of Solovyov's Sophia is not the essence of the world's being but a particular, embedded concept rooted in mystical speculation, aspiring to universal significance yet failing to benefit fragmented philosophical knowledge. "Philosophical knowledge" surpasses ordinary understanding as the highest form of comprehending being.
5. In discussing Solovyov's Sophia, Bulgakov delves into ancient interpretations, iterating others' ideas. Following Solovyov, he develops a borderline doctrine combining Arius and Sabellius' view of the Trinity as three persons with one face responding to three names (Father, Holy Spirit, Son) and Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius' non-hierarchical Trinity, alongside Eutyches and Apollinaris' assertions of Christ's incomplete dual nature (God-man and man-God).
6. As a legal Marxist, Bulgakov undermined the foundations of democratic dictatorship promoted by Marx's "apostles," diluting the epistemological concept of atheistic socialism and the transformative prophet espoused by the RSDLP.
7. Bulgakov seeks to honor the then lesser-known Ludwig Feuerbach, highlighting his influence on Marx and Engels. He traces Hegelianism without distinguishing between "old" and "new" Hegelians, rejecting the "absurdity" of Marxist epistemological



methods and positing Marxism as a continuation of Hegelianism without metaphysics.

8. Bulgakov aimed to erode trust in Marx and Engels but achieved the opposite, intensifying young revolutionaries' zeal to master Marxism more thoroughly.
9. Bulgakov deliberately diminishes the value of Feuerbach's epistemology, depriving readers of the opportunity to explore materialist cognitive-evaluative principles. In contrast, Feuerbach critiques Kant's agnosticism.
10. Feuerbach asserted that consciousness, forming reason, distinguishes one's spirit (unique volitional qualities) or psyche from another reason or object.
11. Every individual with will (spirit) is a primary foundation possessing an unconditional truth, unbound by generalization and capable of enriching reason. The particular directs reason toward the universal hidden within, activated by free-thinking will.
12. By declaring humans "not free," Bulgakov falls into an antinomy: the essence of the human spirit is freedom, and denying it negates the highest expression of God.
13. Bulgakov's essay *The Religion of Human-Deification in L. Feuerbach* (1906) is a semi-analytical, semi-negative assessment of Feuerbach's materialism. It should be read only after Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) to avoid a biased, hostile view of Feuerbach's work.
14. The overarching conclusion of Bulgakov's philosophical-scientific views is that religion synthesizes the transcendent (revealing the meaning of existence through faith and revelation) and the immanent (God's inseparable presence with the world and living beings). Religion is a vital link for knowing the world, God, and experiencing communion with God, grounded in life experiences derived from contact with the divine. Science (philosophy) serves theology. The ideal form of state governance is Caesaropapism, where the Caesar directs the patriarch and rules the people.



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