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## OCCULTISM OF THE SILVER AGE OF RUSSIAN CULTURE IN THE EVALUATION OF NIKOLAI BERDYAEV

### OKULTYZM OKRESU SREBRNEGO WIEKU KULTURY ROSYJSKIEJ W OCENIE MIKOŁAJA BIERDIAJEW

#### Abstract

The article analyses Nikolai Berdyaev's approach to occultism of the Silver Age, which he regarded as an ambiguous phenomenon. For Berdyaev, occultism was not merely charlatanism or psychopathology but a realm of unexplained phenomena that might have significant spiritual importance. Berdyaev distinguished positive aspects of esotericism from negative influences of occultism. In his era, dominated by mysticism and Gnosticism, occultism and theurgy were subjects of intense spiritual quests. Berdyaev emphasised that magic, as a form of deterministic control over the world, differs from mysticism, which leads to divine freedom. The philosopher criticised the fascination with occultism, perceiving it as lacking true freedom. Berdyaev also explored the connections between occultism and magic, astrology, and demonology, analysing them in the context of personalism and spiritual freedom.

#### Streszczenie

W artykule analizowane jest podejście Mikołaja Bierdiajewa do okultyzmu Srebrnego Wieku, który traktował jako zjawisko dwuznaczne. Dla Bierdiajewa okultyzm nie był jedynie szarlatanerią czy psychopatią, lecz sferą niewyjaśnionych zjawisk, które mogą mieć istotne znaczenie duchowe. Bierdiajew odróżniał pozytywne aspekty ezoteryzmu od negatywnych



wpływów okultyzmu. W jego epoce, zdominowanej przez mistycyzm i gnostycyzm, okultyzm i teurgia były przedmiotem intensywnych poszukiwań duchowych. Bierdiajew podkreślał, że magia, będąc formą deterministycznego panowania nad światem, różni się od mistyki, która prowadzi do boskiej wolności. Filozof krytykował zafascynowanie okultyzmem, dostrzegając w nim brak prawdziwej wolności. Dla Bierdiajewa istotne były również związki okultyzmu z magią, astrologią i demonologią, które analizował w kontekście personalizmu i wolności duchowej.

Keywords: Nikolai Berdyaev, occultism, esotericism, mysticism, personalism

Słowa kluczowe: Mikołaj Bierdiajew, okultyzm, ezoteryzm, mistycyzm, personalizm

### Introduction – the method and objectives of the article

The topic of occultism in Nikolai Berdyaev's works is relatively unexplored and practically absent in Polish scientific literature, although it is also poorly present in Russian-language literature, as well as Western literature. This is partly due to the lack of knowledge of the subject of esotericism and occultism, especially in the scientific approach. Perhaps it is also due to the fact that this subject was underestimated (treated as an unimportant superstition, unworthy of philosophical analysis). For Berdyaev, however, it was an important topic, not at all marginal, and sometimes even central, because it was related to the topic of mysticism which was extremely important to him or even at times the most important topic of research.

Esotericism and occultism appeared abundantly in the literature and works of the Silver Age, but Berdyaev's approach – also belonging to this period – is different, more reflective and also more critical. The influence of Blavatsky's theosophy and Steiner's anthroposophy prevailed among writers and artists, which Berdyaev repeatedly and methodically criticised.

The method used in the article is phenomenological-hermeneutic. It is mainly a descriptive method, in the broad sense of the word. Hence the need for longer but mostly processed quotes, because the author explores the topic in various contexts. Berdyaev is not precise, which he admitted to, however, this resulted from the very nature of his own philosophising (he was an intuitionist and at the same time an existential thinker – how he wrote about himself). For this reason, hermeneutics is needed as an attempt to interpret the Author's thoughts, after a thorough reading of the quoted texts. The aim of the article is to outline a problem that is little known and underestimated but requires further research. From this point of view, it is an innovative approach, because most authors (including experts in Berdyaev's work) ignored this topic as unimportant, which is not true and which I will try to demonstrate in this article.

## Berdyaev's ambiguous attitude towards occultism

In the summer of 1910, Nikolai A. Berdyaev wrote to B.N. Bugaev (Andrei Bely): “I consider the main problem of contemporary spiritual life to be the problem of epistemology and the problem of occultism.”<sup>1</sup> This formulation was not accidental. The phenomenon of occultism was therefore very important for Berdyaev, although experts in his work usually did not pay attention to it or made superficial remarks.

The concept of occultism in the understanding of Nikolai Berdyaev is complex, as he himself puts it, or more precisely – ambiguous. He wrote that his attitude to occultism is complex. He could not consider the entire sphere of occult phenomena as charlatanism or self-deception, but he also could not explain these phenomena solely by psychopathology. He therefore admitted the existence of occult phenomena in man, as still unexplored by science.<sup>2</sup> He did not reckon that all this had a demonic genesis as he suggested that many Orthodox and Catholics had believed.<sup>3</sup>

He treats this reality as a fundamentally negative value, but also as a partially positive one. What does this mean? Is it possible? And if so, in what sense. Let us try to analyse this very problem. Berdyaev lives and creates in the period of the Russian cultural renaissance, where people – as he writes – opened up to all kinds of mystical and spiritual trends, both positive and negative.<sup>4</sup>

These trends also included occultism which for Berdyaev was mainly a type of false and even dangerous mysticism, but – in the Russian's view – not entirely. It must be said that the concept of occultism is similar in Berdyaev's work to the definitions of occultism that functioned and function in Western culture, but also in Russia which adopted this concept from the West. Similarly, it adopted the related concept of esotericism, which also occurs in the thought of the Russian thinker. However, it appears more positively (especially when he contrasts esotericism with exotericism, as a type of spiritual aristocratism), although de facto a significant part of his work concerns broadly understood realities of esotericism and occultism.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Б. Фаликов, “Я понять тебя хочу, смысла я в тебе ищу...” (Н.А. Бердяев и оккультизм), “Комментарии” 1995, no. 4, pp. 174–189.

<sup>2</sup> M. Bierdajew, *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, trans. H. Paprocki, Kęty, Wydawnictwo Antyk, 2007, p. 170. The Russian version of the philosophical autobiography by Nikolai Berdyaev is titled: *Самопознание. Опыт философской автобиографии (Dream and Reality. An Essay in Autobiography)*. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/dreamandreality/page/n65/mode/2up> [accessed: 13.05.2024].

<sup>3</sup> M. Bierdajew, *Autobiografia filozoficzna...*, p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 147.

<sup>5</sup> There appears the concept of esoteric Orthodoxy or “Orthodox pneumatocentrism”. Cf. M. Bierdajew, *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, op. cit., p. 168.

It appears that the conceptualisation of Berdyaev's philosophical style is fruitful in the light of the concept of philosophical esotericism, currently developed in Russia by Vadim M. Rozin, who also explores the semantics of esotericism in culture. The concept of the esoteric world includes both mysticism as a form of internal self-realisation and prophecy as a form of external manifestation.<sup>6</sup> According to Berdyaev, esotericism and exotericism are not mutually exclusive, and the former is supposed to enlighten exotericism. Esotericism is therefore not marginal for Berdyaev, and is even – in a sense – central.<sup>7</sup>

## Two main trends of religious research in Russia

As Berdyaev writes, there can be distinguished two currents of thought related to mystical and religious searches in his era. One current was Orthodox religious philosophy, to a small extent accepted by the official Orthodox Church. Its representatives are primarily Sergius Bulgakov, Pavel Florensky and people gathered around them. The second current of thought – also based on individual experience – was religious mysticism and occultism. Its creators were mainly Andrei Bely, Vyacheslav Ivanov and even Alexander Blok, but there were many others that should be included here.<sup>8</sup>

The problem, however, is that Florensky also dealt with occultism and magic, as its form (which Berdyaev reproaches him for), and Bulgakov strongly glorified Kabbalah, which is also often classified as occultism or esotericism in scientific nomenclature. Berdyaev himself was also interested in Kabbalah and adopted some typically Kabbalistic concepts such as “Adam Kadmon” or “androgyny” which as an anthropological idea came from the Platonic tradition.<sup>9</sup>

Both trends mentioned by the Russian thinker also had a common characteristic, that is – the mentality and Gnostic influences, and Berdyaev himself is perceived by many experts on the subject as a Gnostic thinker (which is not entirely true), or simply a Gnostic, who was also a mystic.<sup>10</sup> His concept of creativity is closely connected with the concept of “theurgy”, basically rejected as “white magic” by Orthodoxy –

<sup>6</sup> Cf. <https://sci.house/filosofskie-issledovaniya-sovremennyye-scibook/pnevmatoterapiya-berdyaeva-kak-sposob-9658.html> [accessed: 13.05.2024].

<sup>7</sup> Н. Бердяев, *Философия свободного духа*, Москва, Республика, 2006, p. 350. The English title of Berdyaev's book is: *Freedom and the Spirit*.

<sup>8</sup> М. Бьердияев, *Автомобиография филозофична*, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>9</sup> Kabbalah and Neoplatonism – require separate studies.

<sup>10</sup> Н. Бонещкая, *Н.А. Бердяев: мистик, гностик, экзистенциалист*, “Звезда” 2021, no. 9. Available at: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/n-a-berdyaev-mistik-gnostik-ekzistentsialist> [accessed: 13.05.2024]. What is important for Berdyaev is the concept of “Christian gnosis” which he often quotes and which is treated positively. Cf. М. Бьердияев, *Filozofia wolności*, trans. E. Matuszczyk, Białystok, Orthdruk, 1995, pp. 12–13. The Russian version is titled: *Философия свободы* (*The Philosophy of Freedom*).

the Orthodox theologian G. Florovsky criticised the “theurgic temptation” in Russian thought of the Silver Age.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, theurgy was popular in both trends, because it was closely related to Neoplatonism which was used by everyone. Kabbalah was also influenced by Neoplatonism, the specific authority of which was recognised by the creators of both trends.<sup>12</sup> And so the circle of ideas closes.

Berdyaev, for these and other reasons, was counted among the Orthodox modernists, although he did not like this classification, as too much conditioned by the times.<sup>13</sup> He was also treated as a heretic, although he also evaded this classification, saying that he was not interested in new dogmatics or new rituals.<sup>14</sup> He was interested in a new religious experience, which is difficult to describe. He himself criticised various heresies, ascribing to them a rationalist genesis.<sup>15</sup>

Another characteristic feature of neognosis was the “admiration for the cosmos” (ambiguous sophiology), or *cosmocentrism*, characteristic of this era, which – according to the Berdyaev – “appeared in both trends”.<sup>16</sup> The Russian philosopher remained in opposition to most of these trends which rather irritated many of their supporters. If in many of them one could reveal a *pantheistic* tendency (this was the result of cosmocentrism), he rather represented a dualistic tendency, although it was a “relative dualism”.<sup>17</sup> In another place our Author criticises both monism and dualism, both pantheism and theism (if it is not Christian).<sup>18</sup> He appreciated man’s openness to the cosmos or microcosm, but not by abandoning anthropocentrism and personalism. And here lies the key to the criticism of these concepts.

### The concepts of occultism and esotericism and their different scopes

The concepts of occultism and esotericism present in the discourse of high culture (as well as in popular culture) are common, which is why they are broad and vague.

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<sup>11</sup> М. Новикова, *Проблема теургического творчества в концепциях культуры мыслителей серебряного века*. Available at: <https://www.dissercat.com/content/problema-teurgicheskogo-tvorchestva-v-kontseptsiyakh-kulturny-myslitelei-serebryanogo-veka> [accessed: 13.05.2024].

<sup>12</sup> К.Ю. Бурмистров, *Каббала как особый тип религиозного сознания*, “Отечественная философия” 2023, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 64–76.

<sup>13</sup> М. Bierdiajew, *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> This is not entirely true. Berdyaev accepts new dogmas or axioms, while denying Christian orthodoxy on several important issues, e.g. on the subject of hell or apocatastasis, but mainly on the subject of “uncreated freedom”. Cf. *Николай Бердяев и его еретическая философия*. Available at: <https://dzen.ru/a/ZNOEuHhoZk254ehv> [accessed: 13;05.2024].

<sup>15</sup> М. Bierdiajew, *Filozofia wolności*, op. cit., pp. 168–169.

<sup>16</sup> М. Bierdiajew, *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 147.

<sup>18</sup> Н. Бердяев, *Философия свободного духа*, op. cit., p. 34.

They may or may not be synonyms. They may be assessed positively or negatively, or ambiguously. However, they are always assessed as an important part of culture, especially in the aspect that concerns religion and its history, starting from prehistoric times.<sup>19</sup>

When it comes to the genesis, but also the scope of meaning of the concept of “occultism” in Berdyaev’s thought, it semantically touches and really concerns the concept and reality of Satanism, demonism and Luciferianism.<sup>20</sup> However, the Russian author is critical of these realities.<sup>21</sup> Similarly to spiritualism (as a part of occultism), especially to the spiritualism of A. Kardec, which glorifies reincarnation.<sup>22</sup>

These are concepts and at the same time realities that also appear in Berdyaev’s works and in his approach also concern the seriousness and mystery of evil, that the Russian philosopher never disregards and connects it with the mystery of freedom.<sup>23</sup>

## 1. Occultism, magic and science

The concept of occultism appears in Berdyaev especially in relation to the related concept of magic or “magicism”. This phenomenon is particularly intriguing to Berdyaev and he talks a lot about it in various contexts. In the *Preface* to his *Philosophy of Freedom*, he establishes a fundamental *paradigm*. He writes that the basis of the “philosophy of freedom” is the division into two ways of experiencing the world and types of attitudes towards the world – *mystical and magical*. Mysticism resides in the sphere of freedom. It is a transcendent breach in the necessity of being and a passage towards the freedom of divine life. Magic is still situated in the sphere of *necessity*, without leaving the vicious circle of being. An important conclusion results from this. The path of magic in all areas easily becomes the path of *human-divinity*, while the path of mysticism should be the path of *God-manhood*. The philosophy of freedom is the philosophy of *God-manhood*. This is therefore about the anthropology of God-manhood.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> A. Posacki, *Ezoteryzm i okultyzm – formy dawne i nowe. Aspekty filozoficzno–teologiczne i praktyczno–duszpasterskie*, Radom, Polwen, 2009.

<sup>20</sup> P. Gajdenko writes about the “Luciferian” nature of Berdyaev’s freedom. Cf. П.П. Гайденко, *Владимир Соловьев и философия Серебряного века*, Москва, Прогресс–Традиция, 2001, pp. 317–322.

<sup>21</sup> M. Bierdajew, *Filozofia wolności*, op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> According to Berdyaev, spiritualism can be a scientific study but also a false religion, as in A. Kardec’s. Cf. Н. Бердяев, *Философия свободного духа*, op. cit., p. 345.

<sup>23</sup> M. Bierdajew, *Filozofia wolności*, op. cit., pp. 95–145.

<sup>24</sup> Here we have the old division and anthropological key of Dostoyevsky and Solovyov. Cf. M. Bierdajew, *Filozofia wolności*, op. cit., p. 2.

It is no wonder that the Russian assesses Florensky's interest in magic and occultism somewhat negatively.<sup>25</sup> He also criticizes the “magical atmosphere” and the search for the extraordinary by Russian intelligentsia, writers and artists.<sup>26</sup>

As Berdyaev writes, occultism is the sphere of magic par excellence, that is, determinism, not freedom. Magic means domination of the world through knowledge of determinism and the laws of the secret powers of the world. He also states that he did not see freedom in people fascinated by occultism, because it was not they who ruled the occult powers, but these powers ruled them.<sup>27</sup>

His assessment of occultism and magic results from his concept of personalism, based on freedom. But here, according to him, the ambiguous nature of magic appears. The Russian negatively evaluates black magic, because black magicians were rapists and people hungry for power. But – according to Berdyaev – magic can also be the light. Black magic enslaves man. On the other hand, “luminous magic”, subordinated to religious principles, will free man.<sup>28</sup>

Illustrating the connection between magic and science, the Russian thinker cites the work of Carl Du Prel, who – according to him – in his very interesting book *Die Magie als Naturwissenschaft* defines occultism as a still unknown natural science.<sup>29</sup>

## 2. Occultism, magic and astrology

The Russian thinker, in the context of his own philosophy, did not fail to appreciate the phenomenon of astrology. According to Berdyaev, astrology divined the inseparable connection of man with the cosmos and thus broke through to the truth about man (hidden from the science, which does not know heaven, and from the science of heaven, which does not know man). Occult and mystical sciences have always taught about the complexity of man, which contains in itself all the plans of the cosmos, experiencing the entire universe in himself.<sup>30</sup>

For the above reasons, the Russian was interested in the secret sciences, searching for reliable sources of information and conducting constant reflection on these

<sup>25</sup> M. Bierdiajew, *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, op. cit., pp. 144–145.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, pp. 128–129.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 171.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.litres.ru/book/nikolay-berdyaev/filosofiya-neravenstva-177077/chitat-onlayn/page-17/> [accessed: 13.05.2024]. This is certainly not white magic but “transformed” magic.

<sup>29</sup> M. Bierdiajew, *Sens twórczości. Próba usprawiedliwienia człowieka*, trans. H. Paprocki, Kęty, Wyd. Marek Derewiecki, 2001, pp. 44–45. The Russian version of this work is titled: *Смысл творчества. Опыт оправдания человека* (*The Meaning of Creativity: An Essay in the Justification of Man*).

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p. 52. M. Eliade's famous statement about the meaning of the horoscope as an expression of the desire for unity with the Cosmos comes to mind. However, this does not change the fact that for Christianity, dabbling in astrology is a sin of idolatry.

topics. As he wrote in *The Sense of Creativity*, an impartial and conscientious history of astrology can be found in Karl Kiesewetter's volume of the history of occultism entitled *Die Geheimwissenschaften*. A. Maury's famous book *La Magie et l'Astrologie* is of little importance due to its hopeless approach to the problem of occult sciences as superstition. For the same reason, A. Lehmann's book *Illustrated History of Superstition and Magic from Antiquity to the Present Day* is presented by the Russian as of little value. Books such as *Histoire de la Magie* by Eliphas Levi are not trustworthy for another reason: they contain suspicious occultism in bad taste. As Berdyaev writes, it is better to reach for such classical sources of this type as *La Philosophie occulte ou la Magie* by Cornelius Agrippa, and especially Paracelsus, and in the 20th century – to the works of A. Fabre d'Olivet,

The Russian thinker notes with satisfaction that now a more serious approach to astrology, alchemy and magic is beginning. Therefore, it is no longer possible to mock the secret sciences with quasi-scientific superiority or use them in a charlatan-mystifying way for dark purposes.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. Occultism, paganism and theurgy

Polemicalising with the neo-paganism of the Silver Age, Berdyaev “denies all forms of paganism and its possible rebirth any spiritual and cultural significance, arguing that paganism, seeing in culture a denial of its own autonomy and self-satisfaction, is unable to comprehend the ‘tragedy of culture’, which cannot achieve perfection, just as no society can be perfect. Unfortunately – says the philosopher – modern man thinks that it is pantheism that preserves humanity – human identity and freedom, while in Christianity identity and freedom disappear. But in reality – says the philosopher – we have the opposite situation: it is only pantheism that is able to completely abolish human identity and freedom, ultimately dissolving everything that is human in natural life, tending towards naturalism and materialism.”<sup>32</sup>

The situation is different with theurgy. Berdyaev clearly explains his position on this issue. He writes that the official Church fears the very word theurgy, as a legacy of paganism. He sees in theurgy something akin to evil magic. Meanwhile, the problem of theurgy is a problem of creativity, but not of all creativity. It is about the creativity in which man creates together with God – religious creativity. In true theurgy, it is not God or gods who are created, as the religion of man-goddess would have it.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> I. Michiejewa, *Neopogański wymiar współczesnej filozofii rosyjskiej: cielesność kontra racjonalność*. Available at: <https://journals.ispan.edu.pl/index.php/sn/article/view/sn.2011.003/1226> [accessed: 13.05.2024].



True theurgy means co-creation with God, creation of what is divine, a specific continuation of God's creativity. In theurgic creativity, God himself descends, participating in the process of creation. In theurgic creativity, man himself calls upon God for help. God, in turn, turns to man as a partner in the finalization of the work of creation. On the other hand, in evil, dark theurgy – writes Berdyaev – the unification of man with the devil takes place and a pseudo-being or non-being is created. However, this is no longer theurgy.<sup>33</sup>

Evil theurgy in Berdyaev's view is therefore something like Satanism, black magic or a pact with the devil. It is certainly also a form of occultism which has much in common with demonism.

#### 4. Occultism and demonology

One can also compare occultism as a actuality with negative, evil or even demonic realities – for example, such concepts or images used by Berdyaev: “gnosis of the Serpent”, “Luciferian gnosis”, evil theurgy, black magic, non-ecclesial mysticism, false mysticism, sectarianism, suspicious conspirology, philosophical and theological heresy (especially monophysitism, pantheism and monism, as a philosophical error).<sup>34</sup> One could say that the Russian does not limit himself to superficial *sociology* in this respect, but tries to reach deep into the “mystery of iniquity” (*mysterium iniquitatis*), deep into the mystery of evil.<sup>35</sup>

Berdyaev sometimes associates black magic (as a form of occultism) with evil, enslaving spirits. According to him, dark magic leaves a person bewitched by natural necessity and wants to give him power and strength, but does not free him. Even when Christianity completely put end to communicating with the spirits of nature, dark magic continued this communication, aiming at dominating them but still remaining in their dark power. The magician craves power in the world of magic, but is unable to disenchant it.

On the subject of demonology, Berdyaev speaks in accordance with his own *theory of objectivation* (objectivisation).<sup>36</sup> He writes that it is a mistake to think that the devil is a polar opposite of God. The polar opposite of God is God, or rather the second face of God. This is where extremes meet. The devil, the prince of this

<sup>33</sup> M. Bierdajew, *Filozofia wolności*, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 174. Berdyaev's significant words are said that the purely Gnostic path is in a sense the *Luciferian path*, Cf. *ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 95–100.

<sup>36</sup> P.C. Гранин, *Проблема объективации в экзистенциальной философии Н.А. Бердяева*, “Философия и культура” 2012, no. 4(52), pp. 1–13.

world – writes the Russian philosopher – seeks refuge in neutrality. He states that in religious life in general, as well as in Christian life, belief in demons and the devil played a huge role. This was one of the solutions to the problem of evil. However, when the devil is recognized as the source of evil, then the inner drama of the human soul is “objectified”. For Berdyaev, the devil is an existential reality, not an objective reality, close to the realities of the natural world. It is a reality of spiritual experience, it is a path that man follows.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, such demonology is not in line with the Christian tradition (not only Orthodox, but also Catholic and even Protestant), which allows for the real (not symbolic) existence of personal, intelligent evil as a fallen angel.<sup>38</sup>

## 5. Occultism and evil, evil paganism, Satanism, black magic

Evil spirits of occultism are associated with evil and hell. Evil, according to Berdyaev, is associated with human freedom (choice between good and evil, the will to do evil) and creativity (creation of evil). On the horizon of human life entangled in evil, guilt and punishment, hell is also visible. In the religious consciousness of people of many denominations, it is an eternal punishment for a sinful life. Berdyaev did not deny the existence of hell, but understood it temporarily, as the existential loneliness of a human soul.<sup>39</sup>

Berdyaev was convinced that the starting point for solving the problem of evil is always an appropriate formulation and solution of the problem of human freedom. Without freedom, he emphasized, God would be responsible for evil. Human reason, however, often becomes helpless in the face of the problem of evil, because in explaining its existence, it grasps it exclusively in the categories of being. Berdyaev believed that the sources of evil do not lie in being, but in nothingness, with which he identified the original uncreated freedom.<sup>40</sup>

Suddenly we find an interesting discovery, coming from the mouth of the author, concerning the *genesis of Satanism*. He writes that the problem of the black mass is of great importance for discovering the essence of Christianity. For there are reasons to believe that what in paganism was a natural and non-demonic sacrament, after Christ and His sacraments becomes black magic and Satanism. Christianity, after all,

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<sup>37</sup> [http://krotov.info/4/texts/Berdyaev/06\\_satana\\_diavol.htm](http://krotov.info/4/texts/Berdyaev/06_satana_diavol.htm) [accessed: 20.05.2024].

<sup>38</sup> A. Posacki, *Demonologia wobec psychologii, psychoterapii i psychiatrii*, “Paideia” 2024, no. 6, pp. 321–341.

<sup>39</sup> T. Tatar, *Problem zła i piekła w religijnej filozofii Mikołaja Bierdiajewa*, “Humaniora. Czasopismo Internetowe” 2017, no. 2 (18), pp. 29–46.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

banished spirits from nature and they returned in demonic form and gave birth to Satanism. Berdyaev claims that there is some mystery hidden in this fact.<sup>41</sup>

## 6. Occultism vs. mysticism and spirituality

The concept of occultism can be considered in the context of the concepts of spirituality and mysticism. For Berdyaev, there is a false and dangerous mysticism. It is similar to the concept of occultism in the following ways: lack of freedom, the power of determinism, and therefore apersonalism or antipersonalism. However, occultism is even more dangerous, because it is connected, like magic, with the reality of personal spirits, evil spirits.<sup>42</sup> The Russian thinker is not fully aware of this danger.<sup>43</sup>

When it comes to spirituality, Berdyaev's work includes considerations on God, spirit, soul, man, spiritual life, and spiritual experience. In the view of key concepts of existentialism and Christian personalism, Berdyaev's standpoint on spirituality is revealed: 1) as a transcendental energy that shapes the spirit, soul, and body of man; 2) as a process of transmutation of divine energy by man, transforming him into a God-Man; 3) as the development of the human personality, which is the basis of spirituality.<sup>44</sup>

That is why Berdyaev connects spirituality with mysticism. He claims that

In the course of history, phenomena which belonged to the spiritual or astral plane of man have also been called mystical: mysticism was not yet sufficiently separated from magic. But in the strict, differentiated, absolute meaning of the word, only that can be called mystical which relates to the spiritual plane.<sup>45</sup>

Mysticism, on the other hand, Berdyaev clearly defines against the background of the difference with magic or occultism:

We must make a clear distinction between mysticism and magic. Only the modern mind, unclear and inexperienced in such matters, confuses the magic with the mystical. Mysticism is spiritual. Mysticism is communion with God. magic is almost materialistic: it relates wholly to the astral plane. Magic is communion with nature. Mysticism is in the

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<sup>41</sup> M. Bierdiajew, *Filozofia wolności*, op. cit., p.188. A theologian S. Bułgakow holds a similar opinion. Cf. S. Bułgakow, *Światło wieczności*, Kęty, Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki, 2008, p. 452.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, pp. 174–175.

<sup>43</sup> Just as he underestimates the importance of Luciferianism and the so-called demonosophy in Steiner. For more see A. Posacki, *Pedagogika waldorfska – edukacja czy inicjacja?*, "Paideia" 2021, no. 3, pp. 207–219.

<sup>44</sup> Г.Р. Ковалева, *Категория духовность в философии Н.А. Бердяева*. Available at: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/kategoriya-duhovnost-v-filosofii-n-a-berdyaeva> [accessed: 13.05.2024].

<sup>45</sup> N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, trans. D.A. Lowrie. New York, Collier Books, 1962, p. 273.

sphere of freedom: magic is still in the sphere of necessity. Magic is action upon nature and authority over nature, through knowledge of nature's secrets. Magic is closely related to natural science and technics. There was a time when magic was pan-science and pan-technics, the only key to all the secrets of nature. Natural history and technics have forgotten their origins: they originated in magic.<sup>46</sup>

## 7. Occult mysticism as extra-ecclesiastical mysticism

In Berdyaev's language, the term "occult mysticism" also appears, which according to him is sterile, in contrast to "ecclesiastical mysticism".<sup>47</sup> It is separated from ecclesiastical consciousness and not connected with national consciousness. Therefore, it is historically sterile and easily turns into charlatanism. According to him, there is a bad psychological type of occultism, similar to sectarianism. It is characterised by a lack of spiritual humility and inability to adopt universalism, which determines the place of everything in the hierarchy of the world. This type of occult-sectarian type, Berdyaev writes, opens up to universal-ecclesiastical consciousness with difficulty.<sup>48</sup>

In this context, Berdyaev affirms the so-called ecclesiastical mysticism and treats it as a point of reference for the truth of all mysticism, in which he is close to Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Therefore, he criticises both – some sects and heresies. He distinguishes between subjective and objective mysticism, writing that the unification of subjective and objective mysticism is provided exclusively within the Church, while the mystery of all unification and all transubstantiation is an *ecclesiastical mystery*. In the subjective mysticism of experiences, there is no miracle of transubstantiation and the miracle of unification. In the objective dimension, naturalism still reigns, in the subjective sphere experiences dominate. The same – according to Berdyaev – we see in "theosophical" and "gnostic" concepts.<sup>49</sup>

We see then that especially Blavatsky's theosophy, is for the Russian thinker essentially synonymous with the aforementioned subjective mysticism, which is narrow-minded and sectarian. The different terms overlap, but they draw a common picture. It is a pity, however, that "good" mysticism and "good" occultism are often put together, which causes misunderstandings.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, pp. 290–291.

<sup>47</sup> M. Bierdiajew, *Filozofia wolności*, op. cit., pp. 169–171. Berdyaev does not accept the "subtle bodies" (e.g. astral or etheric) typical of occult anthropology, because it is still the world of fallen matter. Cf. ibidem, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, p. 169.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, p. 164.

## 8. Sectarian mysticism and authentic mysticism

In a similar context, Berdyaev also criticises typically sectarian mysticism present in various sects, which he also evaluates negatively. For example, the mysticism of the Quakers and the Khlysts always goes beyond history, beyond the collective responsibility of history. This sectarian mysticism reaches its peak through disconnecting itself from the community and cosmic nature.<sup>50</sup>

Authentic mysticism does not always have to be directly ecclesiastical. This is, for example, the mysticism of J. Boehme, which – according to the Russian thinker – unites historical Churches and denominations, deepening religious experience. Through this, the Church’s consciousness becomes more mystical, and mysticism becomes more ecclesiastical.<sup>51</sup>

As for self-characterisation, Berdyaev writes that Novalis called his philosophy “magical idealism.” The Russian author, in turn, calls his own philosophy in this light “magical realism,” or, more precisely, “mystical realism.” Realism because it demands of man to wake up, not fall asleep. He writes that not only ecclesiastical mysticism is authentically real.<sup>52</sup>

Characterising his own thought, Berdyaev also uses the concept of “mystical anarchism” or “religious anarchism”, rather in a positive sense of the concept of anarchism.<sup>53</sup> This anarchism is based on the primacy of freedom of a person in the face of the determined world in general, in which evil exists, a manifestation of which is also the objectification of social and political institutions, trying to impose their false world of norms and values on everyone.

He also sensed and criticised *sectarian mysticism* in the Merezhkovskys (especially in Dmitry Merezhkovsky), claiming that there was something metapersonal, some unhealthy magic in the atmosphere of the Merezhkovsk’s salon, similar to that occurring in sects, but not of a rationalist or evangelical type. He later sensed the same magic in Steiner’s anthroposophy.<sup>54</sup> He also noticed occultism and sectarianism in Vyacheslav Ivanov.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, he was interested in sects, sometimes discovering in some of them a passionate search for truth.

As for Freemasonry (the Masonic sect), Berdyaev, following the teachings of Joseph de Maistre, who was associated with Freemasonry, proposes dialogue and co-operation, which Orthodoxy and Catholicism tend to reject.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, pp. 165–166.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, pp. 166–167.

<sup>53</sup> M. Bierdiajew, *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, op. cit., pp. 136–140.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem, pp. 138–140.

<sup>56</sup> Н.А. Бердяев, *Жозеф же Местр и масонство*, “Путь” 1926, no. 4, pp. 177–183. Cf. also M. Stępień, *Poszukiwacze prawdy, wolnomularstwo i jego tradycja*, Lublin, TN KUL, 2000, pp. 74n.

## Theosophy and anthroposophy in Berdyaev's critical assessment

Berdyaev's attitude to occultism as a mistaken and dangerous phenomenon is particularly evident in his attitude to the theosophy of Helena Blavatsky and the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner, which partly developed from Blavatsky's theosophy.<sup>57</sup> However, even in his assessment of these phenomena, Berdyaev retains a partially positive view of both authors and their work, in which he also recalls Vladimir Solovyov's ambiguous attitude towards Blavatsky.<sup>58</sup> Thus, in Berdyaev's diagnosis, an important assessment will be made of both Blavatsky and Steiner, as well as the general attitude to their work and activity.

### 1. Berdyaev's attitude towards Helena Blavatsky

Berdyaev (1874–1948) and H.P. Blavatsky (1831–1891) never met or corresponded. This could not have happened, because in 1891, when Blavatsky died, Berdyaev was only seventeen years old. And yet their paths crossed in the 20th century – at different times, in the works he published. The Russian thinker first encountered the occult phenomena propagated by Blavatsky in his early youth. The philosopher's brother, a virtually unknown figure, but a talented man, was interested in Blavatsky's theosophy. Moreover, in a mediumistic trance he received messages from Tibetan mahatmas, spiritualistic experiences that were of primary importance to Blavatsky (she was a spiritualistic medium). But his brother was not able to use his many talents, what is more, he sometimes suffered from states of mental blackout, close to madness. This was traumatic for the philosopher Berdyaev.<sup>59</sup> This atmosphere had a negative impact on him, so he fought it although partially accepted it".<sup>60</sup>

When it comes to H. Blavatsky, it is necessary to recall one of his articles on reincarnation. In this critical article, Berdyaev writes that Blavatsky is a very talented woman with undoubted occult abilities, but in her book *The Secret Doctrine (Doctrine Secrete)*, she is monstrous in her style and confusion of concepts. According to him she makes the following mistakes:

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<sup>57</sup> R. Steiner was previously a member of the Theosophical Society, and his anthroposophy, according to Berdyaev, although he refers to Christ more than Blavatsky, remains cosmocentric, distorting the figure of Christ. Cf. M. Bierdajew, *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, op. cit., p.127. Cf. also A. Posacki, *Pedagogika waldorfska – edukacja czy inicjacja*, op. cit., pp. 207–219.

<sup>58</sup> A. Posacki, *Infiltracja ideologii gnostyckich i ezoterycznych w twórczości Włodzimierza Solowjowa i Heleny Bławatkiej*, "Kultura Słowian. Rocznik Komisji Kultury Słowian PAU" 2021, vol. 17, pp. 121–141.

<sup>59</sup> Б. Фаликов, "Я понять тебя хочу, смысла я в тебе ищу...", op. cit., pp. 174–189.

<sup>60</sup> M. Bierdajew, *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, op. cit., p. 170.

- 1) she vulgarises ancient Hindu teachings;
- 2) she does this in the spirit of modern naturalism and evolutionism;
- 3) she hates Christianity, and puts Brahmanism and Buddhism much higher;
- 4) Blavatsky – according to the Berdyaev – would gladly accept the “Aryan paragraph” imposed in modern Germany, which speaks of the superiority of the Aryan race, supposedly having all rights over other races. This makes it very easy to judge Blavatsky from the point of view of Christian consciousness.<sup>61</sup>

Berdyaev refers here to René Guénon’s well-known and serious critique of Blavatsky’s theosophy.<sup>62</sup> He also criticises Blavatsky’s anthropology in detail, where man consists of a physical body, an astral body or soul, and a higher, unchanging, non-human spirit. This is an anthropological doctrine, common to all theosophical movements, denying the integrity of the human personality, both in its genesis and ultimate destiny. Man, according to Blavatsky, has no special gifts; everything can be acquired by one’s own effort, which means the denial of grace. Blavatsky’s impersonal cosmic pantheism is quite clear. The cosmos is God. The true ‘I’ is an emanation of the Divine. Nothing is created, everything is only a transformation. Solar angels endow man with a self. Man can be a stone, a plant, and he can become God. This is a universal transformism, in which it is impossible to find a stable image and face. Everything transforms into everything. Reincarnation is a manifestation of this universal transformation, and the clash with the Christian idea and personality, as the image and likeness of God, occurs here completely and clearly. Blavatsky also categorically denies the Fall and bears no responsibility for it. Evil is necessary for her. Blavatsky, like theosophy in general, does not understand the problem of freedom. In this modern theosophy it differs significantly from Christian theosophy of Jacob Boehme.<sup>63</sup>

## 2. Berdyaev’s attitude towards Rudolf Steiner

When Berdyaev listened to lectures by the founder of anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner, in Germany, he noticed that the atmosphere prevailing in the anthroposophical lodge was alien to him. Steiner himself made a complex impression on him. He did not give the impression of a charlatan but of a man who convinced and

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<sup>61</sup> Blavatsky’s occult abilities were not indisputable. They were publicly denied as a fraud, for example by Vsevolod Solovyov, brother of Vladimir Solovyov. More cf.: A. Posacki, *Infiltracja ideologii gnostyckich i ezoterycznych w twórczości Włodzimierza Sołowjowa i Heleny Blawatskiej*, op. cit., pp. 121–141.

<sup>62</sup> Berdyaev quotes Guénon’s famous criticism: R. Guénon, *Le Theosophisme. Histoire d’une pseudo-religion*, Paris, Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1921.

<sup>63</sup> Н.А. Бердяев, *Учение о перевоплощении и проблема человека*, p. 72. Available at: [http://www.odinblago.ru/pereselenie\\_dush/3](http://www.odinblago.ru/pereselenie_dush/3) [accessed: 13.05.2024].

hypnotised not only others, but also himself. Probably his main temptation was power over souls.<sup>64</sup>

However, few people made the impression on Berdyaev of a man as devoid of grace as Steiner. Not a single ray of light falling from above. Steiner wanted to achieve everything from below. Through enormous effort to break into the world of spirit. Steiner's books seemed boring to him and of little talent. Listening to the lecture confirmed his critical attitude towards anthroposophy and occultism. He expressed his opinion in a frank article published in the magazine "Russkaya mysl" which caused indignation among anthroposophists.<sup>65</sup>

In another article he writes:

The names "theosophy" and "anthroposophy" are not justified. There is no God in "theosophy". In theosophical books even the name of God rarely appears. These books present a monotonous teaching about cosmic evolution, about the complex composition of man and his dependence on cosmic hierarchies. But the name "anthroposophy" is no longer justified, which is particularly interesting for our topic. In fact, both theosophy and anthroposophy should be called cosmosophy. Anthroposophy is also cosmocentric, like theosophy; despite its name, it is not anthropocentric.<sup>66</sup>

This is explained by an analysis of Steiner's theory, which seems more complex.<sup>67</sup>

As Berdyaev writes, Steiner's significance lies in the fact that he reveals the mystical teaching of man as a microcosm, as the centre of the world, possessing a creative calling in the world. And here comes Berdyaev's controversial key sentence. He claims that in all mystical and occult teachings there is hidden a unique anthropological consciousness, which – according to him – is difficult to find in official church teaching and official philosophical teachings.<sup>68</sup>

The Russian, however, has reservations about Steiner's theology and Christology. Steiner's occultism is considered "Christian", but why is there no Saviour in anthroposophical soteriology and man is forced to save himself only by his own effort? In Steiner's there is no Christology in which Christ would reveal himself as "absolute man", therefore his anthropology is also wrong, and perhaps even downright evil.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> M. Bierdiajew, *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, op. cit., pp. 171–172.

<sup>65</sup> It is about the article: *Teosofia i antroposofia. Duchownoje christianstwo. Siektanstwo*, "Russkaja mysl" 1916, vol. 11, pp. 1–34.

<sup>66</sup> Н.А Бердяев, *Учение о перевоплощении и проблема человека*, op. cit, p. 68.

<sup>67</sup> Berdyaev, however, also appreciated Steiner from a philosophical perspective, seeing in him a kindred spirit, which could have happened because both were influenced by Kant's epistemology. The appreciation of Steiner concerns mainly epistemology and its specific openness, but not specific content. Berdyaev thought in a Christian way and did not like sectarianism.

<sup>68</sup> M. Bierdiajew, *Sens twórczości...*, op. cit., p. 58. In this quote, but also in other places, it is clear that the Russian juxtaposes mystical teachings and occultism together, thereby valuing occultism.

<sup>69</sup> Б.Фаликов, *"Я понять тебя хочу, смысла я в тебе ищу..."*, op. cit., pp. 174–189.



## Experience of spiritual struggle in the area of anthroposophy

In connection with anthroposophy, Berdyaev demonstrates something like Christian spiritual discernment, where he discerns anthroposophy as demonic evil.

Berdyaev's occult experiences were associated with A.R. Mintslova, a propagator of Steiner's ideology, whose mysterious activities in Russia caused much speculation in the mystical and occult circles of St. Petersburg and Moscow. "I perceived Mintslova's influence as completely negative, even demonic," Berdyaev writes.

A certain strange vision is associated with her [...]. I was lying in my room, on my bed, half asleep; I saw the room, in the corner there was an icon and an oil lamp was burning, I looked into this corner and suddenly under the image I saw Mintslova's face, but the expression on her face was terrifying, like that of a person possessed by dark powers. I looked at this face and through spiritual effort, forced this vision to disappear, the terrible face dissolved. Then Zhenya<sup>70</sup>, who is very sensitive, saw Mintslova in the form of a viper, which I had to fight.<sup>71</sup>

The similar experience is recalled by Zhenya, i.e. Eugenia Rapp, who confirms demonic disposition of Mintslova:

I would like to tell you about those events in the life of Nikolai Alexandrovich [Berdyaev] which he does not mention, but which reflect the atmosphere in which he lived. Early in the morning a carriage was sent to bring Mintslova from the station. The window of my room opened onto the veranda. I was lying on the sofa, half asleep. I did not think about Mintslova's arrival, and suddenly, quite unexpectedly, I saw myself in our park, late in the evening. Nikolai Alexandrovich was standing by a stream, on a peninsula, and was staring at something crawling on the surface of the stream. I saw a long viper, which, writhing, was approaching him. I was terribly frightened. I saw the head of the viper, deadly pale, which resembled the head of a woman, with huge, cloudy eyes. Those eyes were staring into the eyes of Nikolai Alexandrovich, who stood motionless, as if enchanted, and at that moment, when the viper reached the land and crawled towards him, he took out his dagger and stuck it in the viper's head. Bloody streams flowed on the surface of the water. At that very moment I heard Mintslova's voice, who was getting out of the carriage. Despite her attempts, Mintslova failed to attract Nikolai Alexandrovich to the occult.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> We are talking here about Eugenia Rapp, the sister of Berdyaev's wife, Lidia. Berdyaev dedicated his autobiography to her.

<sup>71</sup> This recollection of Berdyaev's experience, as well as Eugenia Rapp's note about the vision, is described in *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, op. cit., p. 173. In English version, i.e. *Dream and Reality* there is only description of the experience of Berdyaev himself. Cf.: <https://archive.org/details/dreamandreality/page/n65/mode/2up> [accessed: 13.05.2024].

<sup>72</sup> M. Bierdiajew, *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, op. cit.

However, despite the sinister nature of both visions, Mintslova continued to interest Berdyaev, who recognized her intelligence and talent and continued to meet with her until her mysterious disappearance from Russia. Here again, Berdyaev's ambivalence about the occult is evident, even when he himself discovers its demonic face.

### The antipersonalism of reincarnation ideology as an essential feature of occultism

Unmasking the anti-personalism of reincarnation seems crucial to demonstrating the ideological evil of occultism, especially in relation to Christian personalism. It also concerns Blavatsky's theosophy and Steiner's anthroposophy as

the doctrine of reincarnation is characteristic of all occult and theosophical movements. In this respect, they constitute a general phenomenon. The most seductive thing about these teachings is the idea of reincarnation [...]. The popularity of theosophy and anthroposophy is connected precisely with the doctrine of reincarnation.<sup>73</sup>

The problem, however, is that

the theosophical teaching about man is anti-personalistic. Personality is only a transitory formation in cosmic evolution; it is not the permanent core of man. During reincarnation, the personality of man is not preserved. Personality is understood as limitation and isolation. For theosophy, the permanent element that persists through reincarnation is not personality, but individuality, and this is very characteristic of theosophical anthropology. Christian anthropology, on the other hand, claims the exact opposite. It is personality that is permanent and inherits eternity.<sup>74</sup>

And we read an important conclusion:

The theosophical doctrine of reincarnation is connected with demonology. I use the word demon in the ancient meaning. Man remains completely subordinate to the cosmic forces and hierarchies, the spirits and demons of nature. Man's fate is directed not by Christ, not by God, but by the cosmic hierarchy, the initiates. But this means a return to pre-Christian consciousness. Christianity liberated man from the power of cosmic forces, liberated him from demonolatry and subordinated his fate directly to God.<sup>75</sup>

### Christianity and occultism – fundamental questions

This question appears throughout Berdyaev's philosophical work: what is the hidden meaning of occult phenomena in the light of Christian Revelation? The topic of

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<sup>73</sup> Н.А Бердяев, *Учение о перевоплощении и проблема человека*, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>74</sup> Ibidem, p. 74.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, p. 79.

occultism first appears on the pages of Berdyaev's fourth book, *The Philosophy of Freedom* (1911).

1) In this context, the name of R. Steiner, "an extraordinary modern theosophist-occultist," appears. Berdyaev believes that occultism can serve various gods. This is only a hint at the modest but useful role that theosophy could play if it humbled itself before the Church and did not claim religious status.

2) This role consists in the fact that modern occultism, demanding the expansion of naturalism, introduces phenomena such as telepathy, mediumship, and clairvoyance into the sphere of scientific research, and thus combats positivist limitations.<sup>76</sup> This opinion, however, corresponds to the ambiguity of Berdyaev's position on occultism, including the person of Rudolf Steiner and his anthroposophy. Recognising the right of occultism, theosophy and anthroposophy to exist and develop as independent philosophical movements, Berdyaev reserved the right to criticise some of their theoretical positions with which he disagreed:

My criticism of occultism, theosophy and anthroposophy was connected with the fact that all these movements are cosmocentric and have the power of cosmic seduction, but in anthropocentrism I saw the truth and understood Christianity itself as deepened anthropocentrism. In anthroposophy, which I knew better both from books and from people, I did not find man, man dissolved in cosmic plans, just as in theosophy I did not find God.<sup>77</sup>

This is the time of his rapprochement with the Moscow Orthodox philosophers gathered around the publishing house "Put". The book *The Philosophy of Freedom* was published by this publishing house. It is no wonder that occultism is considered here primarily in the context of the problem of the Christian Church.<sup>78</sup>

### The criticism of false gnosis as a sect and heresy

Evidently Berdyaev is not a Gnostic in the classical, ancient sense of the word. He rejects the extreme monistic cosmism of occultism, but resolutely rejects the Gnostic antic cosmism that occurs in the ancient, dualistic Gnosis.<sup>79</sup> However, in the matter of evil, he appreciates Marcion's extreme dualism, which is paradoxical, because he himself – according to his own declaration – remains a "relative dualist."<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Berdyaev rejects all mediumship in principle as a passive and slavish state of consciousness that leads to the splitting and destruction of personality. As an example, he cites the personality of A. Bely, whom he believes anthroposophy destroyed. Cf. N.A. Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality. An Essay in Autobiography*, trans. Katharine Lampert, New York, Collier Books, 1962, pp. 191–193.

<sup>77</sup> Б.Фаликов, "Я понять тебя хочу, смысла я в тебе ищу...", op. cit., pp. 174–189.

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>79</sup> Berdyaev calls himself a dualist, but a moderate dualist, and this applies mainly to anthropology which is associated with the priority of spirit, person and freedom.

<sup>80</sup> M. Bierdiajew, *Autobiografia filozoficzna*, op. cit., p. 145.

I would classify Berdyaev's "gnosis" more as neo-gnosis, affirming the supposedly innate divinity of man and his significance in the cosmos, understood in Gnostic terms, where the attitude to the cosmos is not radically negative (and sometimes, under the influence of Hermeticism, even positive), as in classical gnosis.<sup>81</sup>

He claims that the heretical Gnosticism that St. Irenaeus fights against is spiritualistic. This Gnosticism destroys the body and does not believe in its enlightenment, it considers it hopelessly evil, because it is created by the evil god Demiurge. According to Berdyaev, such Gnosticism never achieves the unification and transfiguration of man. According to him, Gnostic mysticism is asexual, spiritualistic and therefore sterile. It does not create the transformation of man. The same "abstract spirituality" is present – according to him – in the Gnostic mysticism of India.<sup>82</sup>

Current forms of occultism, as Berdyaev believes, are intellectual sectarianism, intelligentsia Gnosticism, and therefore share the fate of sectarianism and Gnosticism.<sup>83</sup> They have the same "spiritualism", "rationalistic impotence", "lack of spiritual humility". However, "bad spiritualism" in modern theosophy is accompanied by "bad naturalism", as an obvious influence of the dominant positivist worldview.

Thus, occult movements are a kind of hybrid of Gnosticism and positivism. If earlier naturalism taught about the natural evolution of matter, now it teaches about the natural evolution of spirits. Naturalism and evolutionism displace the mystery of personality and freedom.<sup>84</sup>

### Brief summary and conclusions

Occultism in Berdyaev's view can be "good" and "bad", "positive" and "negative". The article presents the outline of the problem, requiring even more detailed research, which goes beyond the scope of this text:

1) Occultism, gnosis, magic, theurgy can be "good" and "bad", but good not so much as historical phenomena, but as "transformed", "divinised" or "theurgically" cooperating with God, striving towards God-manhood and being its expression. Occultism is permissible only – Berdyaev recalls – if it is creative gnosis, understanding of being through Logos. If a person is not strengthened in Christ, then knowledge of cosmic mysteries can turn into submission to these mysteries. And then he is in

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<sup>81</sup> A. Posacki, *Ezoteryzm i okultyzm – formy dawne i nowe*, op. cit., p. 139n.

<sup>82</sup> In another place we find a positive definition of Gnostic mysticism (already in a different meaning), to which Berdyaev includes the mysticism of Plotinus, Eckhart, Boehme and the mysticism of the Kabbalah. Cf. Н. Бердяев, *Философия свободного духа*, op. cit., p. 296.

<sup>83</sup> M. Bierdajew, *Filozofia wolności*, op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 172–173.

danger of disappearing in the “cosmic wind”. “Against such occultism,” Berdyaev concludes, “it would be necessary to fight on religious grounds.”<sup>85</sup>

2) However, he also looks for positive aspects of occultism as a form of spiritual and even scientific knowledge, including historical knowledge, but to a limited extent. However, what counts is “transformed” knowledge, and occultism is only an imperfect harbinger of such knowledge (it is positive in the ideal sense, not in the real sense). Steiner’s merit was to draw attention to the significance of the vision of man as a “microcosm”. However, this means a vision of a perfect future, and therefore ultimately rather a utopia, which the Russian was often accused of.

Also, paranormal abilities (occultism, parapsychology) according to Berdyaev, as innate, can be good or bad, and this even in our sinful reality. According to Christian orthodoxy, they are rather bad.<sup>86</sup> The historical phenomena of the forms of occultism described above are rather considered by all branches of Christianity as negative, dangerous, sinful, and even demonic. Hence, it can be said that Berdyaev’s fundamental opinions on this subject are in fact sometimes close to orthodox or traditional Christianity, but not in all aspects. There remains an indelible and constantly discussed ambiguity. This applies, for example, to the ideology of the so-called *Akashic Records*, proclaimed by many occultists, which is close to the idea of pantheism, because the *Akashic Records* is described as a reservoir of quasi-divine Universal Knowledge, which can supposedly be reached by an initiated medium.<sup>87</sup>

3) The question of ambiguity of persons and ambiguity of ideas is important in this context and should be studied separately. The figures of Boehme and Swedenborg are ambiguous – the thinkers are affirmed by Berdyaev as the greatest “mystics” but also glorified by Freemasonry or Blavatsky’s theosophy.<sup>88</sup> This can

<sup>85</sup> Б.Фаликов, “Я понять тебя хочу, смысла я в тебе ищу...”, op. cit., pp. 174–189.

<sup>86</sup> Controversy among Christians concerns parapsychology. Berdyaev argues that paranormal abilities should not be demonised at the outset, but there is much evidence to suggest their connection with demonism. Cf. А. Посацкий, *Идеология Нью Эйдж – между антропологией и демонологией. Сходство католической и православной точек зрения*, [w:] *Chrześcijaństwo a współczesne koncepcje człowieka*, H. Kowalska-Stus (Ed.), Kraków, PAU, 2013 (Prace Komisji Kultury Słowian, vol. 1), pp. 191–200. Cf. also Międzynarodowe Stowarzyszenie Egzorcystów, *Wskazania dla postugi egzorcyzmu w świetle aktualnego rytuału*, M. Rosik (Ed.), Wrocław, Papieski Wydział Teologiczny we Wrocławiu, 2023.

<sup>87</sup> Berdyaev accepts the ideology of the occult presented in *The Akashic Records* partly positively, which seems to be a mistake, unworthy of a philosopher. Learning the information from the *The Akashic Records* also requires clairvoyance, which is problematic in itself. Cf. M. Bierdiajew, *O przeznaczeniu człowieka*, trans. H. Paprocki, Kęty, Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki, 2006, p. 94. The Russian version of this title is: *О назначении человека (The Destiny of Man)*.

<sup>88</sup> There appears in Berdyaev’s works some moderate criticism of E. Swedenborg, apart from his fundamental affirmation Cf. M. Bierdiajew, *Filozofia wolności*, op. cit., pp. 168–169. The Russian noted that Boehme was highly revered, although in his opinion poorly known and poorly understood, by representatives of the mystical and Masonic movements of the late 18th and early 19th centuries –

cause a confusion of concepts, to which the partially positive assessment of Rudolf Steiner's occultism has already led.<sup>89</sup>

4) The concepts in the structure "microcosm-macrocosm" used by Berdyaev are also ambiguous and they also appear in the Church Fathers, as well as in the occultism of Blavatsky and Steiner. They can support the ideology of pantheism (monism), which rejects Christianity, and Berdyaev himself also rejects pantheism.

5) It is even worse, for example, with Kabbalah, including Berdyaev's favourite Kabbalistic figure of the Androgyne, which has been widely adopted by occultism and even Satanism.<sup>90</sup> Berdyaev glorifies Kabbalah, but so does Blavatsky. Baphomet, as a symbol of Satanism, is an androgynous or hermaphroditic figure, which must worry Christian theologians and philosophers but all this requires separate research.<sup>91</sup>

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Novikov, Schwartz, Lopukhin, Labzin and others. Cf. H.A. Бердяев, *Из этюдов о Якобе Беме II*, "Путь" 1930, no. 21, p. 52.

<sup>89</sup> Berdyaev considers Steiner's occultism to be a "serious and important" phenomenon. Steiner's occult teachings have – according to him – a direct connection with religion and mysticism and with the secret tradition. Steiner is directly associated for him with "Christian esotericism". Is it about "esoteric Christianity" like the theosophy of A. Besant? This is too general and unclear. Cf. M. Bierdiajew, *Sens twórczości...*, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>90</sup> M. Bierdiajew, *Filozofia wolności*, op. cit., pp. 175–176.

<sup>91</sup> Ibidem.

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