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Spiritual Origins of Hyperreligiosity: a Philosophical Analysis

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Abstract

Introduction. In the Western research field, the concept of “hyperreligiosity” is a set of characteristics, which is understood as the religious state of the individual as a psychiatric problem. Philosophical analysis of the phenomenon of hyperreligiosity helps to demonstrate the specificity of this issue, expand its horizons, and show that it goes far beyond the scope of psychiatric experience. The aim of the work is a philosophical analysis of the prerequisites for the emergence and nature of the hyper-religiosity of the hybrid topic of spiritual deception.

Materials and methods. This study uses the methods of formal logic (description, comparison, classification, analysis and synthesis); phenomenological, systemic and axiological methods. The philosophical works of S. S. Khoruzhiy, in particular, his developments on the phenomenon of spiritual deception (hyperreligiosity) and its philosophical conceptualization, were used as a theoretical basis for the study.

Results. The importance of the mystical-ascetic experience of hesychasm lies in the fact that hesychasm is a spiritual organon — a repository of knowledge for the formation of a true and healthy religious experience and mentality. The phenomenon of hyperreligiosity is considered through the prism of philosophy, synergetic anthropology and the phenomenology of asceticism. The main reasons for the emergence of hyperreligiosity are analyzed. It was found that when the religious method is violated, an incorrect religious intentionality arises, which leads to various serious consequences. The destructive properties of this phenomenon are shown both for anthropological reality and for culture as a whole.

Discussion and conclusions. Hyperreligiosity in the plane of philosophical analysis is presented not just as some kind of excessive tension, but as a specific distortion of religious experience. In the conceptualization proposed by the Russian philosopher Sergei Khoruzhiy, which is based on the centuries-old experience of the Orthodox tradition (Hesychasm), hyperreligious consciousness is defined as a hybrid experience, or spiritual deception. The prevalence of this issue in religious culture indicates that the issues under consideration are relevant and vital in modern society.

Keywords: hyperreligiosity, hybrid topics, topics of spiritual deception, phenomenology, asceticism, spiritual practice, spiritual deception, passion.

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Научная статья

Духовные истоки гиперрелигиозности: философский анализ

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Аннотация

Введение. В западном исследовательском поле понятие «гиперрелигиозность» представляет собой совокупность характеристик, под которыми понимается религиозное состояние личности как проблема психиатрическая. Философский анализ феномена гиперрелигиозности помогает продемонстрировать специфичность данной

проблематики, расширить ее горизонты, показать, что она выходит далеко за рамки психиатрического опыта. Целью работы является философский анализ предпосылок возникновения и характера гиперрелигиозности гибридной топика прелести.

Материалы и методы. В данном исследовании применяются методы формальной логики (описание, сравнение, классификация, анализ и синтез); феноменологический, системный и аксиологический методы. В качестве теоретической основы исследования использованы философские труды С. С. Хоружего, в частности, его разработки по феномену прелести (гиперрелигиозности) и его философской концептуализации.

Результаты исследования. Важность мистико-аскетического опыта исихазма состоит в том, что исихазм представляет собой духовный органон — хранилище знаний для формирования верного и здорового религиозного опыта, и ментальности. Феномен гиперрелигиозности рассмотрен через призму философии, синергийной антропологии и феноменологии аскетизма. Проанализированы основные причины возникновения гиперрелигиозности. Выяснено, что при нарушении религиозного метода возникает неверная религиозная интенциональность, что приводит к разным тяжелым последствиям. Показаны деструктивные свойства данного феномена как для антропологической реальности, так и для культуры в целом.

Обсуждение и заключение. Гиперрелигиозность в плоскости философского анализа представляется не просто как некое чрезмерное напряжение, но как специфическое искажение религиозного опыта. В концептуализации, предложенной отечественным философом Сергеем Хоружим, которая основывается на многовековом опыте православной традиции (исихазм), гиперрелигиозное сознание определяется как гибридный опыт, или прелесть. Распространенность данной проблематики в религиозной культуре свидетельствует о том, что рассматриваемые вопросы являются актуальными и жизненно важными в современном обществе.

Ключевые слова: гиперрелигиозность, гибридная топика, топика прелести, феноменология, аскетизм, духовная практика, прелесть, страсть.

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Introduction. Modern transformations taking place in the post-secular society are complemented with particular speed by a multitude of new and previously unknown phenomena, which include spiritual practices. Unfortunately, today hybrid strategies of their modification and substitution prevail (S. Khoruzhiy). One such hybrid strategy is the topic of spiritual deception. In the configuration of person's spiritual being, this hybrid topics is the most dangerous area. If the necessary religious method is not observed, person's hyperreligiosity acquires wrong intensionality (plunges a person into deception), which represents a dialectic of "hyper" (M. Epstein's definition) — a dialectic of amplification-falsification, hyperbole-trahyarody [1]. That is, in this aspect, hyperreligiosity is a simulation and illusory intensification of the true religious method with very diverse consequences both for the individual and for society as a whole.

Materials and methods. A keen interest in various abnormal manifestations in religious life has led to the emergence of the term hyperreligiousness in the practice of English-language psychiatry. We meet it in the works of: N. Berlinger, F. Previc, J. Rabin, J. L. Salver, Geschwind, Turner, Waxman, and others. [2]. Our research has shown that the elements that characterize hyperreligiousness in the West are also present in full measure in domestic psychiatric practice in the works of V. M. Bekhterev, P. B. Gannushkin [3–5]. Such phenomena as religious fanaticism, religious insanity (paranoia religiosa), religious enthusiasm, hallucinations, ecstasy, mystical delusions, and psychotic epidemics are essentially manifestations of hyperreligiousness from the standpoint of psychiatric and neuropsychological approaches. It is these phenomena of the spiritual life that are, for the most part, derivatives of the hybrid topicality of spiritual deception that Khoruzhiy writes about.

During the study the following methods were used: the method of formal logic (description, comparison, classification, analysis and synthesis), phenomenological, systemic and axiological one. Philosophical works of the Russian scientist S. S. Khoruzhiy were used as a theoretical basis of the study, in particular, his developments on the phenomenon of the charm (in our case hyperreligiousness) and its philosophical conceptualization. Thus, the purpose of the work is to analyze the preconditions of the emergence and the nature of hyper-religiosity of the hybrid topics of spiritual deception.

Results. Synergetic anthropology, interested in the limits of human expression and the dynamics of its change, has developed a new non-classical vision of man and a description of his limits. Following the thought of S. Khoruzhiy, a person

is understood as an entity that unlocks itself in three ways and is believed to be an “open system”, and anthropological reality is an open reality. Thus, person disconnects themselves within the three areas of the Anthropological Border (ontic Anthropological Border: topicality of the Unconscious as the Other of Consciousness; ontological Anthropological Border: Other Being; and virtual Border: as under-birth of being) [6]. To put it more simply, person disconnects themselves in relation to their unconscious (unconscious figures, Sub-Source (devil)), to the virtual (cyberculture phenomena) and to the transcendent reality: Supra-Source (God).

In defining the limits of human existence, spiritual (mystical-ascetic) practices “constitute the most important areal of the Boundary of Man — his ontological Boundary” [6]. These practices affirm the utmost importance of human manifestations for the anthropological reality and develop a sophisticated technique of their observation and management. Since the central object of the ascetic feat is inner experience (self-knowledge, God-knowledge, and knowledge of oneself in God), to obtain it a special attitude to experience in general, a special attention to it and work on it (religious catharsis, religious method, etc.) is necessary. Such an experience “must be a pure and verified, authentic experience of being; a kind of experience that is extremely special, subtle, and difficult to attain” [7]. In this aspect, ascetics is closest to phenomenology: “It reveals precisely what Merab Mamardashvili saw as the specificity of the phenomenological position; it is not just a sphere of experience, but a sphere for experience, it carries out “the creation of constructions through which we can experience that which without them we could never experience as empirical human beings. In the work of consciousness, ascetics, in its language, captures both the setting of intensionality and the setting of epoch, etc.” [7].

Due to the fact that person is a being who comprehends themselves as an existential being in a constant relationship with transcendence, the structure of their own being reconstructed by person is subject to constant changes, which indicates the mixed nature of anthropological reality. In this aspect there is a mixing and overlapping of Borderlands, energies of lower order with energies of higher order, at which various combinations or “overlapping areas” arise. On the basis of three areals of human reality, S. S. Khoruzhiy singles out three of their a priori areas, and calls them hybrid topics, which are a posteriori really present in human experience. In the topics of spiritual deception there is a combination of elements of spiritual practices and patterns of madness; in the psychedelic (acidic) topics — spiritual practices and virtual practices; in the topics of idiocy — patterns of madness and virtual practices.

The psychedelic hybrid topics are characterized by the virtualization of spiritual practices; one imitates it with various drugs and psychedelics. The topics of idiocy include the spectrum of multiple phenomena of unembodied madness: “Idiocy...is traditional in contemporary culture, being a modern Gulfstream in it” [6]. Finally, the topic of spiritual deception involves the substitution of spiritual patterns for unconscious patterns, in which one remains in a false illusion, believing that one is and is progressing in spiritual practice. S. S. Khoruzhiy identifies two types of spiritual deception inherent in this topic: involuntary spiritual deception (the most common patterns in asceticism) and intentional spiritual deception (psychotechniques of Grof, Castaneda, holistic therapy, methods of meditation and holistic training composed on the basis of Eastern traditions, ecstatic procedures of sects and New Age style groups), into which one falls when trying to achieve those radical transformations of consciousness “which accompany the highest stages of practice and to which canonical discipline leads hard, long and knowingly without guarantees” [6]. Such practices are not authentic spiritual practices, but imitations, simulacra [8, p. 146].

In the sphere of ascetic experience, in the structure of the “holistic practice of the self” (which has a step-by-step character in the transformation of all human energies, rising to the ontological Boundary) two crucial concepts emerge: “mental doing” (zeal for God) and “spiritual deception” (zeal not for reason). The practice of “mindfulness” is a consistent right (religious method) ascent to the meta-anthropological telos (the way to God — theosis) which contains ways of distinguishing true supernatural perceptions from the false experience of “spiritual deception” which imitates them [8, p. 66, p. 119]. Spiritual deception in Orthodox mysticism acts as a violation of the hierarchical subordination of the external to the internal and is a delusion, deception, deception (Rom. 1, 27). “Spiritual deception is the corruption of the nature of man by a lie; the assimilation by man of a lie taken by him as truth” [9, c. 133–135].

As prayer and the technique of attention are the key points of the organon of spiritual experience, their violation leads to the emergence of false, imaginary experience [7]. The origin of the hyper-religiousness of the spiritual deception topical is the improper exercise of prayer, especially the heated devotion and intensified prayer of the novice [9, p. 137]. Such hyperreligiosity is a non-methodical illusory ascent to pseudo-spiritual heights, the basis of which is self-belief

(conceit, vanity, pride), and the result is demonic spiritual deception. Such “condition of people in demonic spiritual deception is very diverse, corresponding to the degree to which man is seduced and enslaved to the passion” [9, 136]. The same set of defining structural attributes brings psychoanalytic and ascetic discourses together in principle: “In ascetic practice the phenomena of the unconscious, as is not difficult to see, are precisely those phenomena which bear here the name of the passions” [6]. It is therefore obvious that it is the passions that are at the root of religious insanity, enthusiasm, hallucinations, ecstasy, mystical delirium, as manifestations of the hyper-religiousness of the topical spiritual deception.

In the language of asceticism, spiritual ascent requires overcoming one’s passions — “Invisible Combat” (Nicodemus the Saint). Without overcoming the passions, one enters into a relationship with the Beyond-Source, the Sub-Source, where: “...the passions, the ‘figures of the unconscious,’ appear really as figures, demons, and behind these figures the Figure, the ‘Father of the Passions,’ is discerned — and this is all the more natural because the Sub-Source, really opposes the (personally represented) Supra-Source (God), barring and excluding initiation into Him. Thus the unconscious and its patterns deliver the initial prerequisites for the birth of Satan and demons; and mythological consciousness completes the work” [6]. Here the Sub-Source is not the Otherness, but the Ontically Other, a dynamic entity which does not allow for hypostasis and exists only in its patterns, whose elimination, according to both psychoanalysis and ascetics, would also mean its elimination.

We find a similar idea in S. S. Averintsev, who points out that an encounter with God, by definition, is impossible only in one place — the imaginary: “There one can meet only a separate ghost of God” [10]. Blocking the possible way to God with the egoistic and self-centered mirror of his own self, the man in spiritual deception encounters “phantoms of our subconscious, mirages of our inner desert”, fantasies and projections outside his own psyche¹. B. Vysheslavtsev called this kind of being in illusion — neurosis, because “the religious setting of consciousness requires sobriety, vigilance, fervor and light of the spiritual, and the detachment of all subjective “spiritual deception” and all subjective fabrications. It is above all an ontological realism that demands communion with the Supremacy” [4]. In the self-oblivious one there is a communion with the Sub-Source.

A quasi-spiritual state (the illusion of holiness, one’s particularity, and God’s chosenness) that arises from one’s self is most often the result of an incorrect method of prayer. To the most dangerous improper method of prayer I. Bryanchaninov, being the best systematizer of knowledge devoted to the problem of spiritual injuries, refers to such an image when “the one praying composes by the power of his imagination dreams or pictures, borrowing them, at first sight, from the Holy Scriptures, but in reality, from his own condition, from his fall, from his sinfulness, from his self-belief, with these pictures they flatters their conceit, their vanity, their arrogance, their pride, they deceive themselves”. Therefore, “everything composed by the reverie of our nature, perverted by the fall of nature, does not really exist — it is a fiction and a lie...” [9, c. 137]. The dreamer themselves “from the first step on the path of prayer leaves the realm of truth, enters the realm of falsehood, the realm of Satan, submits himself arbitrarily to Satan’s influence” [9, p. 137]. This is the hybrid area of the spiritual deception topics described by S. S. Horuzhim, getting into which the self-oblivious “prayer” (hyper-religious) meets various ghosts (hallucinations, visionary, illusory perceptions): the image of Christ, angels, saints, light, and also hears various sounds and smells [9, p. 138–139; 11]. Such a wrong ascent or a mistake on this path can become fatal for a person who imagines himself to receive the fruits of grace, drawing infernal fires of passions from the unconscious, which give rise to various complexes, perversions, neuroses, psychoses, manias, phobias [6]. Thus, on this way many undergo mental insanity, madness and even end their “prayer feat” with suicide [9, p. 138, 141–143].

In contrast to this improper practice of prayer, I. Bryanchaninov speaks about the highest state of prayer — pure prayer, which is a supernatural state: “Only God’s saints, renewed by the Holy Spirit, ascend into the supernatural state... They receive most of the divine revelations during the exercise of prayer, as at such time as the soul is especially prepared, especially purified, tuned for communion with God” [9, c. 65]. Both visions of saints and their spiritual supernatural states are authentic in the transition of their bodies “from a state of passion to a state of impassivity” [9, p. 141]. Hence the logical conclusion that B. Vysheslavtsev draws: “...true religious life is opposite to all neurosis and psychosis and saints are the healthiest people who possessed in their entirety “the function of reality” [4].

Without the fundamental principles of spiritual life developed in Orthodox ascetics, a person, having surrendered to “zeal not according to reason” on the religious path, most often comes to conceit and suffers spiritual, moral and mental

¹Here the character of hyperreligiosity is manifested as selfish (selfishness) religiosity, for which God and neighbour (as the most important conditions for true religiosity) are obscured by their own egoism (self-delusion).

disorder [12, p. 315; 22]. On the famous fresco “St. John’s Stairs” depicts stairs from earth to heaven on which ascetics climb. Some ascetics are pushed from the stairs by demons and thrown directly into hell. Those who have overcome the ascent are received by Jesus Christ and his angels. This peculiar image of the stairs most vividly expresses the peculiarities of the moral and spiritual exploit. The stairs itself denotes the path of salvation, and the fall from the stairs of those who strive on this path is a fall into the topic of spiritual deception. Non-methodical following the spiritual path has grave consequences (J. Bunyan traces this in *The Pilgrim’s Journey*). The Hierarchical tradition has always stressed that every religiously-instituted person needs spiritual guidance (the antipode is the modern quasi-spiritual phenomenon of young adulthood). Disregard for this guidance, self-activity (opinion) leads to destructiveness, one of the main properties of hyper-religiosity. Thus, hyper-religiosity manifests itself in its four basic forms: neophyteism, religious fanaticism, young-adulthood, and the topicality of spiritual deception.

The hyperreligiousness of the spiritual deception topical discussed in this paper is the most complex form of hyperreligiosity. Its complexity lies in the fact that it manifests itself extremely unnoticed not only for religious indifferent or atheists, but also for religiously active people and, moreover, for the ascetics themselves (both in monasteries and in the world). The Orthodox tradition (Dobrotolubie, Lavsaic, Paterikas, etc.) preserves many examples of the hyper-religiousness of the spiritual deception of not only young ascetics (the novitiate), but also of experienced ascetics [13]. Famous Orthodox saints who fell into the area of spiritual deception but successfully overcame it include, for example, Nikita of Novgorod, Silouan of Athos, Isaac of the Caves, Theodore of the Caves, Nifont of Cyprus, Jacob the Faster, and others. The experience of these ascetics, as well as the ascetic experience Anthony the Great, Macarius the Great, Gregory of Sinai, Simeon the New Theologian, Nikodim the Holy Mountaineer, Isaac the Syrian, John of the Stairs, Barsanuphius the Great, Abba Dorotheus, Gregory Palamas and other Church Fathers reached that ascetic depth, height, width and longitude on the path of the ontological dynamics of self-transformation (deification), which deservedly acts as a phenomenology in relation to any spiritual practice [8, p. 146].

Therefore, in the light of the phenomenology of asceticism, it is necessary to point out one more property of the hyper-religiosity of the topic of spiritual deception. It consists in the fact that “the intensified prayer feat of those in spiritual deception usually stands next to deep depravity. Debauchery serves as an assessment of the flame that ignites the deceived” [12, p. 339]. Hyper-religiousness, bordering on debauchery, is most clearly manifested in Catholic mysticism and sectarianism. At the basis of such hyper-religiosity are the following passions: anger, love of money, voluptuousness and vanity, which set the blood and nerves in motion. Voluptuousness and vanity have the strongest effect on those who labor illegally, which leads them to frenzied fanaticism. The desire to reach premature heights, inherent in vanity, which a person is not yet able to achieve due to his impurity, composes dreams for himself. And voluptuousness at this stage seduces, falsely consoles, sends pleasure and rapture. In this state of self-delusion are all those who labor illegally. The degree of development of such a state depends on the degree of intensification of such feats. Outlining the main differences between Orthodox and Catholic prayer practice, A. F. Losev wrote: “...look at what is being done in Catholicism. The temptation and deceitfulness of the flesh lead to the fact that the Holy Spirit appears to the blessed Angela and whispers loving words to her ... The saint is in sweet languor, cannot find a place for herself from love languor. And the Beloved is and is, and more and more inflames her body, her heart, her blood. The cross of Christ appears to her as a marriage bed. She herself enters into God through this: “And it seemed to me that I was in the middle of the Trinity...” [14, p. 884]. Studying the primary sources of such states of Western mystics, I. Brianchaninov concludes that they are insane [15, p. 44]. A. F. Losev draws a similar conclusion: “This, of course, is not prayer and not communion with God. These are very strong hallucinations based on hysteria; spiritual deception. And all these hysterics, which is the Mother of God and feeds them with Her nipples; all these hysterics, in whom, at the appearance of Christ, a sweet fire passes through the whole body and, among other things, the uterine muscles contract; all this bedlam of erotomania, demonic pride and satanism can, of course, only be anathematized...” [14, p. 885]. A. F. Losev equates such a bloody kindling of Catholic saints with any mystical sectarianism, although the only deterrent to the former is general church discipline, which cannot be said about the latter. Here it would be appropriate to point out the opinion of I. A. Ilyin about various visions and sensations: “To be religious does not mean at all to have supernatural visions, or indulge in ecstasies, or experience mystical “visits”; all this may not be, and spiritually, it may be even better that this should not be” [16, p. 116].

It is very important to emphasize that “many books have been written by Western writers from this state” [12, p. 339]. Ascetic literature refers to these, the most dangerous books, Ignatius of Loyola’s “Spiritual Exercises” [12, p. 356], “Imitation of Christ” by Thomas à Kempis [9, 35; 15, p. 11], Teresa of Avila’s “History of a Soul”, as well as the works of Francis of Assisi [15, p. 28] and other ascetics of the Catholic Church, in which they “immediately are attracted and attract their readers to heights inaccessible to the novice, are entered and they bring it in. Excited, often frantic daydreaming replaces for them everything spiritual, about which they have no idea. This dreaminess is recognized by them as grace” [15, p. 44].

It is an indisputable fact that Catholic mystics and saints always stand as a special stronghold as examples of the most striking manifestation of hyper-religiousness, not only in psychiatric practice [17]. The religious method of the Catholic tradition is also fundamentally wrong in the light of the phenomenology of asceticism. “The Imitation of Christ” by Thomas à Kempis was for many the “second Gospel”. This work has led many ascetics astray from the right religious path (some committed suicide), and has plunged the overwhelming majority of Catholic mystics into a state of hyper-religiosity of spiritual deception. Ignatius Bryanchaninov speaks about this very thoroughly [9, pp. 156–160]. Denying the works of Orthodox ascetics, the Russian philosopher N. A. Berdyaev also appreciated and loved this work [18, p. 189]. This book was read by V. Van Gogh, and it is clear that the content of this book influenced his ecstatic religiosity and finality, as well as N. Berdyaev’s Gnostic religiosity [19, p. 44, pp. 58–66]. And since madness, as I. A. Ilyin says, is contagious, “a sick or dislocated mental mechanism is transmitted from person to person by means of imperceptible reproduction and involuntary imitation” [11], then any contact with such soul-harming teachings easily acquires the character of mental epidemics.

To summarize, it must be said that the significance of the hyperreligiosity of the topics of spiritual deception in anthropological reality is so great that this phenomenon was also depicted in the works of literary classics. In Dostoevsky’s novel “The Brothers Karamazov”, in Chekhov’s story “Murder”, in Tolstoy’s story “Father Sergius”, in C. S. Lewis’ works “The Screwtape Letters” and Duncan’s “The Pilgrim’s Journey” and others there are descriptions of manifestations of this phenomenon, but no further descriptions have been made.

Discussion and conclusions.

- a major factor in the hyper-religiousness of the spiritual deception theme is the improper practice of prayer;
- human passions are at the root of any form of hyperreligiosity, and the degree to which one becomes absorbed in the spiritual deception topic depends on the degree to which the passions develop;
- hyperreligiosity of the topics of spiritual deception is the most complex and severe form, because it operates at such subtle levels at which the possibility of localization and elimination (necessary modification) of the preconditions of its occurrence, is possible only through the prism of the phenomenological approach of the ascetic practice of orthodoxy;
- although most examples of the hyperreligiosity of the spiritual deception topic relate to people who lead ascetic lives (similar to the monastic lifestyle), there are also similar cases nowadays among people quite far from monasticism, because the main contributing factor is the strongest passion, great pride, which the more developed in a person, the less they themselves can see;
- hyperreligiosity of this topics has the characteristics of a psychotic epidemic; the most frequent outcome of this form of hyperreligiosity, is either insanity or suicide of a hyperreligious person.

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