

From positivism to postmodernism or from Ahriman to Lucifer: the epistemic space of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science

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Abstract: It can be claimed that modern philosophy started with the search for certainty of knowledge. This striving found its faithful heir in one of the two important intellectual traditions of the philosophy of the 20th century, namely in the so-called logical positivism or logical empiricism initiated in Vienna (in the so-called Vienna Circle) and dominant in the Anglo-American world in the first half of the 20th century. The other intellectual tradition, which in the minds of many people eclipsed the programme of logical positivism, was the so-called postmodernism originating primarily in France in the late 60's and 70's of the last century. It can be claimed that this primarily French mode of thinking significantly contributed to the emergence (not only in France, but also in other European countries, as well as within the Anglo-American scientific community) of the alternative scientific approach, the so-called Qualitative Research (QR) paradigm with its emphasis on methodological freedom and inclusion of "subjective" elements in the research process, the paradigm which is currently gaining momentum particularly within the social sciences. Common to the schools of thought loosely grouped under the label of postmodernism and/or QR paradigm is their conscious renouncement of objectivity as the cognitive aim of (scientific) inquiry and their emphasising the irreducible subjectivity of all interpretations of the world and of human experience. Looked at from the perspective of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science, these developments seem to constitute a movement from the primarily ahrimanically inspired tight corset of deeply materialistic logical positivism striving for absolute certainty of cognition devoid of any human element, to the primarily luciferically inspired subjectivism and relativism fashionable towards the end of the 20th century. Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science was and is clearly a form of scientific discipline which treads the middle path between these two unhealthy extremes. It is deeply Christian in its inspiration and signifies a radical rejection of materialism while at the same time overcoming any subjectivism and relativism in the cognitive process through a strict inner discipline of transformation of consciousness and thus attainment of new forms of cognition freed from the influence of the physical body.

Modern Western philosophy began with as a search for certainty of knowledge. The treaty generally regarded as the first work of the modern philosophical era, Bacon's *New Organon* is devoted to discussing empirical methods aimed at achieving veridical and certain knowledge:

I was convinced that all the energy has to be directed to the aim of establishing anew the connection between the [human] spirit and things in the right way [...] . Help could only come if man approached the things with new methods with the pure aim of achieving a complete renewal of sciences and arts, indeed of the whole of human scholarship, on secure foundations.¹

A similar concern was the driving force behind the works of the "father of modern

¹ Bacon, Francis: *Novum organum* (1620), vol. I, p. 3f. The above quote is my translation from the German. Unfortunately I did not have any English edition of Bacon's work at my disposal when working on this text.

philosophy”, René Descartes (Bacon is commonly regarded as the father of modern science rather than philosophy). On the opening page of his first treaty: *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, began at almost the same time as Bacon’s *New Organon* was published, Descartes formulated the goal of his endeavour in the way almost identical to Bacon:

It must be the aim of scientific studies to direct man’s cognitive powers in such a way that they produce unshakeable, true judgements about everything that happens.²

The striving to achieve certainty of knowledge remained a central preoccupation of philosophy in the following centuries and culminated at the beginning of the 20th century in the development of the doctrine of *logical empiricism* (or logical positivism, or neo-positivism), elaborated by members of Moritz Schlick’s Vienna Circle, and Hans Reichenbach’s Berlin Circle in the 20s and early 30s. The emergence of logical empiricism was prompted by the crisis in the theory of science at the turn of the 20th century, the crisis caused by the discovery of the inner structure of the atom. The basic understanding of the nature of science until that point was that science is an empirical undertaking based on observation and experiment, an undertaking which strictly rejects reliance on unobservable, “occult” entities and forces. But it soon became very clear that subatomic entities are so small that direct observation of them would be impossible, and this resulted in a theoretical crisis in the understanding of the nature of scientific inquiry. Logical positivism was seen as an answer to the challenge of (then) modern physics. Its doctrine allowed the introduction of *theoretical concepts* into science but only on the condition that their precise meanings could be related to immediately observable facts. The doctrine saw two basic levels of scientific discourse: the level of the immediately empirically observable facts which could be adequately described by means of so-called *protocol sentences*, free of any theoretical terms, and the level of *theoretical terms* which could be precisely related to observable facts by means of so-called *correspondence rules*. The hope of the founders of this doctrine was that providing that sufficient care is exercised in the interpretation of empirical data, certain, veridical knowledge would still be attainable.

This optimistic view of the possibilities of science received a major blow already in 1934 with the publication of Karl Poppers *Die Logik der Forschung* (Logic of Discovery). In that book Popper drew attention to the well-known logical fact whose consequences had until then been

² Descartes, René: *Regeln zur Ausrichtung der Erkenntniskraft* (1628), p. 3. (As was the case above and for the same reason, the above quote is my translation from the German.)

overlooked by logical empiricists. It is one of the elementary truths of formal logic that an implication is true even if, and in particular *whenever*, its antecedent is false, or in other words it is logically possible to “deduce” truth from falsehood. Let me use a simple example to make this seemingly paradoxical fact understandable. After a spell of rain the streets become wet. This is obvious. Let us now assume that we see that the street in front of our house is wet. Is it correct to argue on that basis that it has rained recently? Initially it may seem so, and we generally feel confident to proceed from the observation of the wet street to the deduction “It has rained”. But upon reflection the matter is less simple. It may very well be that the reason for the wet street is that it has just rained, but it may also be that the street was only sprinkled with water by a passing utility vehicle, or by playing children, or by a fire brigade, or by other causes. Thus it would be premature to assume that observing a fact (“The street is wet”) which logically follows from some assumption or premise (“If it has rained the streets are wet”) *proves* that the assumption has been fulfilled or realized (“Therefore it has rained”). Such “backward” reasoning would only be correct if there were only *one* possible explanation of the observed fact, which can never be assumed. This elementary logical fact often called “the paradox of material implication”³ has fatal consequences for the view which wants to rest the claim to scientific status of theories or claims on their successful *verification*. For it follows from the paradox of material implication that one cannot regard a theory as verified (confirmed, proved) no matter how often its consequences or predictions made on its basis are confirmed by experience. This central limitation of the empirical method of theory (hypothesis) testing has been formulated in the now classic work of one the most prominent exponents of the philosophy of science in the 20th century, Carl Hempel, in the following way:

[A] favourable outcome of a test, i.e., the fact that a test implication inferred from a hypothesis is found to be true, does not prove the hypothesis to be true. Even if many implications of a hypothesis have been borne out by careful tests, the hypothesis may still be false. The following argument still commits the fallacy of affirming the consequent:

If H is true, then so are I_1, I_2, \dots, I_n .

(As the evidence shows) I_1, I_2, \dots, I_n are all true.

_____ H is true.⁴

³ Cf. e.g. Salmon, Wesley: *Logik*, p. 80.

⁴ Hempel, Carl: *Philosophy of Natural Science*, p. 8.

It is a *logical* fact that no theory or claim can ever hope to be fully or completely proved (confirmed, verified) empirically. As a consequence of this insight Popper developed an alternative view of scientific endeavour, the so-called *critical rationalism* approach; the view that was based on the assumption that even though *proving* of theories empirically is for purely logical reasons impossible, their empirical *disproving* is possible. From the point of view of formal logic Popper's contention is certainly correct because an implication whose antecedent is correct and consequent false *is* false, or in other words one cannot deduce falsehood from truth. Let me illustrate this logical point by means of a simple example: If I claim that it is enough to cook an egg for three minutes to get it hard-boiled, and if it is observed that after cooking an egg for three minutes it comes out soft-boiled, my claim is refuted. On a more abstract level: If a theory is proposed which predicts that a certain observable outcome should occur under certain specified conditions, and if these conditions are fulfilled but the predicted outcome does not materialize, the theory cannot be right and must be rejected.

Or so it seems looking at it from the point of view of formal logic alone. But it quickly turned out that this hope of us being able to reach at least a partial (for negative) certainty of knowledge was overly optimistic. In the middle of the 20th century one became aware of further substantial weaknesses of not only logical empiricism, but also of Popper's programme of critical rationalism. In 1953 an influential philosopher Willard Van Orman Quine published an article⁵ in which he pointed out that when testing a hypothesis or a theory one is only seemingly testing a single proposition; in reality a whole complex edifice of various statements of the theory is *jointly* subject to an empirical test. Thus a negative outcome of the test does not necessarily signify that the proposition which one thinks one is testing itself is wrong. It may very well be that this central proposition is correct, but the falseness of one or more of the other propositions or assumptions jointly involved in the test leads to the negative outcome of that test.

This important insight can easily be illustrated by the well-known case of empirical arguments levelled against the Copernican theory of our planetary system immediately after its publication in 1543, arguments which at the time were taken to prove conclusively that the theory must be false. Of many such objections let us look at two: Firstly, it was argued that if

⁵ Quine, Willard Van Orman: "Two Dogmas of Empiricism".

Venus and Mercury really are situated between the Sun and the Earth then both of these heavenly bodies should exhibit phases, as does the Moon. No such phases could be detected, so the theory must be wrong. However, already in 1610 Galileo was able to observe the phases of Venus using the primitive telescope available to him at the time. It turned out that the phases were not unobservable *in principle*, but merely not visible to the naked eye. Secondly, it was pointed out that if the Earth revolves around the sun as Copernicus envisaged it, it should be possible to observe the so-called parallax of the stars, i.e. the sun should be observed against the background of different stars at different times of the year depending on the position of the Earth relative to the Sun in its annual motion around it. No such parallax was observed, which led to the claim that the Copernican theory cannot be true. In fact due to the great distances separating the Sun (and the Earth) from even the nearest stars the stellar parallax is so small that it became possible to observe it only with the refined instruments which became available in the 19th century. Once again: it was not the theory that was wrong, but the instruments used in testing it and the background assumptions (this time about the size of the universe). Thus the general logical point must be accepted that it is premature to regard an empirical disconfirmation, even repeated disconfirmations of certain claims made by a theory as a sufficient reason for its rejection.

Some years after Quine's seminal paper another publication further weakened the basic assumptions of the paradigm of logical empiricism. Norwood Hanson published a book in which he showed by means of a number of convincing examples that even seemingly simple and elementary observations are influenced by conceptual or theoretical assumptions, the phenomenon which came to be called theory-dependence or theory-ladenness of experience.⁶ At about the same time Wilfred Sellars published a famous paper in which he questioned the existence of the "given" of experience, or the possibility in principle of having a thought-free experience,⁷ or and finally in 1962 Thomas Kuhn published his extremely influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*⁸ in which he was able to demonstrate that the transitions from one form of a dominant scientific conception, or from one – as he called it – *paradigm* to another paradigm, such as e.g. the transition from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican picture of the universe, is not achieved on the basis of rational argumentation alone, but rather represents a shift of basic faith or basic metaphysical assumptions among a

⁶ Hanson, Norwood Russell: *Patterns of Discovery*.

⁷ Sellars, Wilfred: "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind".

⁸ Kuhn, Thomas: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

sufficient number of members of the scientific community. According to Kuhn, such transitions signify changes of the ways we broadly perceive and interpret the world, and are not the result of simply giving up of a certain set of theoretical assumptions and claims in favour of another set. These developments led not only to the final collapse of the programme of logical empiricism and with it to the collapse of the hope of achieving unshakeable knowledge of the universe by strict derivation of theoretical scientific propositions from indisputable and unshakeable atomic observations of the senses in controlled experiments, but also to the serious undermining of Popper's "*via negativa*": of the hope of being able to achieve conclusive elimination of wrong theories from the scientific canon.

The fact that logical empiricism as a specific theoretical doctrine or prescription for pursuing scientific inquiry is dead does not, however, imply that the approach to science influenced by the attitudes implicit in its theory disappeared from the scientific practice. On the contrary, we know very well that the mainstream science of today functions basically along pre-1960's lines. One has the impression that the scruples and misgivings of the philosophers of science play no role whatsoever in the "business as usual" of the real science: theories are formulated today, as they were 50 years ago, they are subject to stringent empirical tests, and the conclusions about their validity are based on the results of such tests. When these results are favourable for the theory, it is looked at as a respected member of the scientific canon, when they are unfavourable; the theory gets into disrepute even though it is generally not rejected outright.

Critique of science in the 70s, the birth of "post-modernism"

Nevertheless, the theoretical battles of the late 50s and early 60s of the last century did leave lasting traces, even though such traces cannot be discerned in the mainstream science. The seeds of doubt concerning the possibility of obtaining certain knowledge of the world, produced by those battles found a particularly fertile soil in France. That was no accident. In the first half of the 20th century France was the homeland of existentialism, a philosophical tradition whose roots can be traced to the Danish philosopher of the first half of the 19th century, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), but which achieved world fame through Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). This tradition rejected the traditional approach to philosophical inquiry centred on ontology (the question of what exists) and epistemology (the question of how being can be known) in favour of concentrating on the question of the unique existential situation of the human being in the world, and on the responsibility he carries for his choices.

France was also to a large extent (primarily through Sartre's treasured life-companion – if never wife – Simone de Beauvoir [1908-1986]) the breeding ground for feminist philosophy, a philosophical tradition which in its own way questioned the validity of many central and cherished assumptions of western (male) philosophy and science, stressing the necessity of accounting for the role of the body and of human needs in the scientific process and in philosophical theorizing. Finally, France was one of the principal battlegrounds of that social and intellectual upheaval known as the 1968 movement, the movement which challenged not only the pillars of social establishment of the time, but also the pillars of intellectual certainties of the period. Thus it is not surprising that it was in France that the major challenge to the whole western intellectual tradition was born, the challenge which culminated in the birth of a new approach to thinking about the world captured in the now famous phrase *post-modernism*.

Already two years before the events of 1968 the French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1926-1984), published an important work translated into English as *The Order of Things*.⁹ In it he argued – very much in the fashion of Thomas Kuhn's seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – that all periods of history had adhered to specific conditions of what constitutes the acceptable discourse, and that these conditions change rapidly from time to time, which does not allow us to ascribe a particularly privileged position to the conditions of discourse reigning in our time. In 1969 he published *The Archeology of Knowledge*¹⁰ in which he continues the themes of *The Order of Things* by analyzing discursive and practical conditions of the existence of truth and meaning in different periods of time and pointing out that these change too, and in 1975 he published *Discipline and Punish*¹¹ whose theme was the close and sinister interconnections between power and knowledge. Only a year after Foucault's *The Order of Things* In 1967 the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), then still relatively little known outside the borders of France, published three collections of works which were to become of central importance in the emergence of post-modernism: *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, and *Speech and Phenomena*. He laid in them the foundation of his philosophical method which he termed “deconstruction”. In a nutshell it claims that if one examines any philosophical as well as social and political system carefully enough, it will reveal traces of self-contradiction, “tensions, heterogeneity, disruptive

⁹ French original: *Les Mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*.

¹⁰ French original: *L'Archéologie du Savoir*.

¹¹ French original: *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*.

vulcanos”¹² which threaten to destroy or “deconstruct” it from within,¹³ but which at the same time point to new and future possibilities contained in such a system.^{14,15} A few years later, in 1972, Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) published another major work *Anti-Oedipus*¹⁶ (in collaboration with Félix Guattari [1930-1992]) in which he presented an approach to philosophical interpretation of the world within which static *being* – the central concept of classical philosophy – makes way for a more dynamic conception of reality centred on the *event* rather than on the object (or subject), on systems, unities or wholes that are *open* (an idea expressed in his concept of the “*rhizome*”: a multiplicity without any unity which can fix a subject or object), in short, that we should not strive to create a science or theoretical system mirroring the world as closely as possible, but that we should instead try to give expression to the dynamism and instability of the world whose main feature is *becoming*.

In the 70s of the last century a number of influential Anglo-American philosophers joined their voices to the chorus of radical criticism of the philosophical and scientific establishment. Thus Paul Feyerabend’s (1924-1994) groundbreaking *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* appeared in 1975, in which he explicitly advocated a loosening up of the stiff corset of the scientific method by allowing alternative ways of production of knowledge., David Bloor’s *Knowledge and Social Imagery* which gave rise to

¹² Cf. “The Villanova Roundtable. A Conversation with Jacques Derrida”, p. 21.

¹³ Ibid., p. 7, 18.

¹⁴ Cf. John Caputo on the subject: “[E]verything in deconstruction [...] is organized around what Derrida calls *l’invention de l’autre*, the in-coming of the other, the promise of an event to come, the event of the promise of something coming” (in: Caputo, John: “Deconstruction in a Nutshell: The Very Idea (!)”, p. 42).

¹⁵ It is very interesting to take note of what Derrida said about his work in an interview filmed late in his life: “Each time I write something and it feels I am advancing into a new territory [...] and this type of advance demands a certain gesture that can be taken as aggressive with regard to other thinkers or colleagues. I am not by nature polemical, but it’s true that deconstructive gestures appear to destabilize or even cause anxiety or even hurt others, so every time I make this type of gesture there are moments of fear. This doesn’t happen at the moments when I’m writing. Actually when I write there is a feeling of necessity, of something that is stronger than myself that demands that I must write as I write. I have never renounced anything that I’ve written because I’ve been afraid of certain consequences. Nothing intimidates me when I write. I say what I think must be said. [...] When I don’t write there is a very strange moment when I go to sleep. (in English:) When I have a nap and I fall asleep. (French again:) At that moment, in a sort of half sleep, all of a sudden I’m terrified by what I’m doing. And I tell myself: “You’re crazy to write this! You’re crazy to attack such a thing! You’re crazy to criticize such and such person. You’re crazy to contest such an authority, be it textual, institutional or personal.” And there is a kind of panic in my subconscious, as if – what can I compare it to? – imagine a child who does something horrible [...] In any case, in this half sleep I have the impression that I’ve done something criminal, disgraceful, unavowable that I shouldn’t have done. And somebody is telling me: “But you’re mad to have done that.” And this something I truly believe in my half sleep. And the implied command in this is: “Stop everything! Take it back! Burn your papers! What you are doing is inadmissible.” But once I wake up it’s over. What this means or how I interpret this is that when I’m awake, conscious, working in a certain way I am more unconscious than in my half sleep. When I’m in that half sleep there is a kind of vigilance that tells me the truth. First of all, it tells me that what I’m doing is very serious. But when I’m awake and working this vigilance is actually asleep.” (Jacques Derrida *On the Problematics of Deconstruction*, placed on YouTube by hiperf289, 17.8.2008)

¹⁶ French original: *L’Anti-Oedipe*.

the so-called “Edinburgh school of sociology of science” or a programme of investigation of the realities of the scientific process aimed at exposing the social and subjective factors influencing the supposedly objective production of knowledge appeared in 1976, and Nelson Goodman’s (1906-1998) *Ways of Worldmaking* which can be regarded as the birthplace of modern constructivism was published in 1978. 1979 saw the publication of Richard Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in which he argued, very much in Deleuze’s style, that the standard image of the mind as the faithful mirror of nature is misguided, for our convictions are deeply embedded in culture and language.

It can be argued that this period of intellectual upheaval or intellectual ferment concerning the basic premises and axioms of not only philosophical but more generally rational discourse culminated in 1979 with the publication by Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) of a short but extremely influential work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge*¹⁷ in which he spoke of the “death of metanarratives”, i.e. large unified philosophical systems or schools of thought characterizing the development of European philosophical thinking from antiquity till the middle of the 20th century. They are dead because the postmodern¹⁸ man has ceased to believe that such systems can adequately express his condition, and looks at them increasingly as mere language games – in the terminology of the famous philosopher of the first half of the 20th century, Ludwig Wittgenstein. The postmodern condition is the condition or attitude of disbelief, incredulity toward all metanarratives or philosophical systems, postmodern man is no longer a proud builder of eternal cathedrals of thought, he is merely a “bricoleur”¹⁹, a humble child of the world assembling together his individual jigsaw-puzzle from the pieces available to him at the time.

The Qualitative Research (QR) paradigm

It is well known that philosophers are the avant-garde of the spirit of the time, and that what a few individuals think first becomes widespread conviction and social practice later. This was certainly the case with Bacon’s theoretical considerations about the correct method of pursuing (truly) scientific inquiry: they became translated into a set of clear and definite rules in the middle of the 19th century in the famous work by John Stuart Mill *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive*, and extended in the 20th century by Ronald A. Fisher by applying

¹⁷ French original: *La Condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir*.

¹⁸ Modernity in philosophy starts in this sense in the 17th century with Bacon and Descartes.

¹⁹ Cf. e.g. Denzin, Norman and Lincoln, Yvonna: “Introduction. Entering the Field of Qualitative Research”, p. 3f.

statistical methods to the testing of scientific hypotheses. The theorizing of the critics of the Western patterns of rationality found its way into practical pursuits considerably faster, namely already in the 90s of the previous century. Under the influence of – if I may describe them that way – postmodern thinkers some scientific fields, such as psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, health sciences, sociology, parts of medicine, etc., i.e. disciplines which vitally depend on the interactions between human beings, opened up to an alternative research paradigm usually described as *Qualitative Research* in contrast to the mostly quantitative methods of the mainstream sciences. In themselves the qualitative research methods are not at all new. They were first introduced at the end of the 19th century in such disciplines as anthropology and ethnography, i.e. disciplines whose research depended on field studies among the “natives”, whose focus had to be sympathetic understanding of strange cultures and ways of being, and whose results could not be codified in numerical terms. Their methods had to be “qualitative”: the instrument-free observation, the interview, the participation, and it turned out that these “soft” methods could produce thoroughly respectable results. This direction of scientific inquiry experienced a renaissance and a period of exponential growth in the 80s and particularly in the 90s of the last century. Its essence is described in the standard textbook of Qualitative Research in the following way:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.²⁰

What is very conspicuous in that definition is the radicality with which it parts company from practically all axioms of the (still) dominant scientific paradigm and follows the recommendations of the postmodern schools of thought. Research is not an absolute, transcendent activity, but is *situated* in the real and contingent world. The researcher does not disappear from the picture hidden or occluded by his instruments and theories, but she is *part* of this contingent world, belongs to it existentially. The world does not exist independently of

²⁰ Denzin, Norman K. and Lincoln, Yvonna S.: “Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research”, p. 4f.

the researchers who simply passively mirror it in their cognitive apparatus, it is made *visible* by the researcher in the process of her investigations, it is in a way *awakened* by her into existence. The research activity does not leave the world unchanged; on the contrary, it *transforms* the world it encounters. Research does not produce the *one* objective and absolute picture of the world which supposedly adequately mirrors how this world is without and prior to the intervention of the researcher, but it results in a series of varied *representations* which explicitly do not claim the status of objective knowledge, but admit to being merely contingent, partial, and transient interpretations of the reality. Finally, the researcher does not look for absolute laws and regularities, but is interested primarily in the *meaning* of the phenomena she encounters, and more precisely not the meaning more or less arbitrarily imposed by the researcher herself, but for the meaning that is ascribed to them by the agents of the observed processes themselves. The contrast between the neo-positivist (or the contemporary post-positivist positivist) ideal of objective, absolute science free from distortions introduced by the subjectivity of the human researchers and the programme of Qualitative Research cannot be more radical.

Equally conspicuous is the richness and variety of research methods available to practitioners of this research paradigm: field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, memos to the self, case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, artifacts, cultural texts and productions, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts (describing routine as well as problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives), further scientific report, interpretative case studies, ethnographic fiction, essays, stories, experimental writing, case study, participant observation, phenomenological study, symbolic-interactionist study, action research, narrative research, historiography, literary criticism, etc.²¹ There is also a practically unlimited choice of theoretical systems within which the data obtained can be interpreted: positivistic, post-positivistic, constructivist, feminist, ethnic, Marxist, "Cultural Studies" theories, etc. singly or in any combination are all available to the researcher as a backdrop for interpretation of her data.²² It seems that "anything goes" indeed.

As a signature of the rising importance of this methodology or this research paradigm within the scientific community one can point out the quickly increasing number of academic centres devoted to this paradigm in America (the USA as well as Canada), in England (or UK), as

²¹ Denzin, Norman and Lincoln, Yvonna: "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research" , p. 4f and 34; Janesick, Valerie J.: "The Dance of Qualitative Research Design: Metaphor, Methodolatry, and Meaning", p. 39ff.

²² Cf. Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y.: "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research", p. 33-36.

well as on the continent (e.g. in Germany), as well as fast increasing numbers of publications and scientific journals devoted to its presentation. It seems therefore justified to use the term *paradigm* to describe this research direction.

Assessment

How can one assess these developments from the point of view of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science? On the surface the QR research paradigm seems tantalizingly close to Rudolf Steiner's descriptions of the process of acquiring knowledge in the first part of his *Philosophy of Freedom*. The idea that cognition is not a mere mirroring of the world-in-itself in the human mind (or human brain), but the result of active contribution of the knower, that the world is not there, not complete without the knower, that its full form and with it the knowledge of this full form arise in the process of collaboration between the world and the knower (in Steiner's terminology in the synthesis of the precept with the concept), thus being in a way awoken to existence by the knower and incomplete without him, finally the sense of the freedom of the subject hovering above all of the QR paradigm theorizing seems to fit one-to-one with the basic tenets of the *Philosophy of Freedom*. Yet if one goes beyond this shiny surface, and in particular if one gets acquainted with the real-life samples of this type of research, a very different and in many ways a very alienating picture emerges.

There can be no doubt that practitioners of the QR paradigm have produced significant and worthy achievements especially by way of descriptions of social as well as natural phenomena, for they succeeded in freeing themselves from the tight corset of the need to adhere to quantifiable methods of observation which (corset) must necessarily cloud and restrict the horizon of our normal healthy human experience.²³ But there can be equally no doubt that some of their productions must appear as questionable to the highest degree to any person with a healthy sense for truth and objectivity. Thus for example the 60 pages long chapter devoted to the so-called autoethnography or personal narrative research method published in the textbook of qualitative methods mentioned above²⁴ contains some 10 pages of theoretical content, the remaining 50 being a free rendering of snapshots of life events of both authors, without any obvious reference to the subject at hand. Examples can be multiplied. The flight from stringency and objectivity ends up in irrelevance.

²³ However, such penetrating and illuminating descriptions have been extensively accomplished by e.g. phenomenologists, without the need of recourse to the QR paradigm.

²⁴ Ellis, Carolyn and Bochner, Arthur, P.: "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity. Researcher as Subject".

This is not surprising, for there is no denying the fact that there is much in a human being which is a real and serious obstacle to gaining veridical, unclouded, unbiased insight into the world around us, and which is correctly termed “subjective” with all the negative connotations of the term and which should be eliminated from the scientific inquiry. There are prejudices, sympathies, and antipathies; there is ignorance, fear, pride, stupidity, shallowness, narrowness of interest, laziness and a legion of other foes of knowledge. Thus to claim that objectivity is worthless and that subjectivity is valuable and has to be allowed into the scientific process is to invite a cognitive disaster for, firstly, to reject the possibility of objective cognition is to commit a self-contradiction: anybody claiming that objective knowledge is impossible to attain is saying therewith that his claim does not have this status, i.e. is only a subjective prejudice.²⁵ But more importantly, the central dogma of QR, the dogma that objectivity is a foe of man, is based on a deep misunderstanding of the nature of this ideal, a misunderstanding understandable in view of the fact that the adherents of positivist and post-positivist science *misuse* the term by stubbornly and incorrectly identifying it with the elimination of all human elements from the cognitive process and substituting them by “objective research instruments”, “objective measurements”, “objective statistical methods” and the like. It is a misconception to think that objectivity is arrived at by using measurement apparatus, mathematics or statistics alone. It is a misconception to think that whatever is inward is subjective and that objectivity can only be achieved if the cognitive results are freed from the human element. If this were true, there would be no possibility of knowledge, for thoughts, which are necessary vehicles of any knowledge, manifestly arise *within* the human being. Thus to want to eliminate human beings from the cognitive process in pursuit of the ideal of objectivity is to want to eliminate knowledge and cognition altogether! It is only because one has not sufficiently recognized the paradoxical and unacceptable consequences of identifying objectivity with independence from the human being that one could reduce the pursuit of objectivity to the use of measuring instruments and mathematical methods. This paradox was recognized by the philosophers some 20 years ago with the result that today one distinguishes two distinct and mutually independent meanings

²⁵ Incidentally, already the famous skeptic David Hume knew of this pitfall and cleverly avoided it in his *Treatise*, which cannot be said of some of his less penetrating and thorough followers. In section I of Part IV of Book I of the *Treatise* entitled “Of skepticism with regard to reason”, he attempts to justify his skeptical conclusions about the power of human reason by pointing out that we fallible human beings are not sure even of the results of simple mathematical calculations. Thus such results are in reality only probably, not surely what they are, he claims. And then he writes: “But knowledge and probability are of such contrary and disagreeing natures, that they cannot well run insensibly into each other, and that because they will not divide, but must be either entirely present, or entirely absent. [...] I had almost said, that it was certain; but I reflect, that it must reduce *itself*, as well as every other reasoning, and from knowledge degenerate into probability” (Hume, David: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 181). For a modern discussion of the self-contradictory nature of the skeptical stand cf. e.g. Thomas Nagel: *The Last Word*, p. 15-18.

of the term “objectivity”: the so-called ontological and the so-called epistemological.²⁶ The ontological aspect of the term is taken to refer to the distinction outer-inner (mental). In this sense objective is what is part of the world outside of our bodies (part of the “objective world”), whereas the subjective world is the world of our inner (mental) lives. Incidentally, this dimension of the term is clearly a dichotomy: *either* something is out there (e.g. a tree), *or* it is part of our mental life (e.g. my feeling of wonder at the beauty of the tree). In its epistemological sense on the other hand the term “objective” refers to veridical statements or judgements as opposed to distorted statements or judgements. In this sense the concept is clearly a continuum from a fully objective to a fully subjective statement with all shades of possibilities in between. It is only the latter meaning of the term that is relevant in the context of the pursuit of knowledge. Once this point is realized it is easy to see that objectivity of judgement need not be achieved by means of using instruments. In fact it can be shown²⁷ that objectivity is *not* a quality of measurements (which can be right or wrong, but not objective or subjective), but of *human judgements*, when these are formulated on the basis of a comprehensive experience relevant to the case, and are results of a process freed from the influence of subjectifying factors arising from the idiosyncrasies of the personal makeup of the person making the judgement. It is not the instruments, but the *quality of our inner lives* that is decisive to whether our judgements will be objective or subjective.

When assessing the QR paradigm it must further be borne in mind that it is largely ignored by mainstream science. Reading mainstream scientific publications one has the impression that QR does not exist at all, and that it is certainly not taken as a serious challenge to the status quo. Why? I would venture to say that part of the reason for this disregard is the sceptical and thus self-contradictory nature of the QR paradigm joined with its disdain for the virtues of objectivity, one of the central values of mainstream science. But there is at least one other reason why mainstream scientists seem largely unimpressed by the growth of QR: this paradigm is permanently threatened by the charge that it is ultimately unable to offer any coherent *explanation* of the phenomena which it – in ideal cases – so admirably describes. For from the point of view of the mainstream science it seems necessary to ask each time a fine description of human behaviour, of social interaction, let alone of a natural phenomenon is presented: “*Why* this is how it is?” And it is well known that mainstream science offers a *reductionist* explanation of mechanisms leading to the phenomena being what they are, the

²⁶ Cf. Bell, D.: “Objectivity”.

²⁷ I discussed this problem at length in my PhD thesis (cf. Majorek, Marek: *Objektivität: ein Erkenntnisideal of dem Prüfstand. Rudolf Steiners Geisteswissenschaft als ein Ausweg aus der Sackgasse*, pp. 288-320).

explanation which in the case of human (or animal) behaviour boils down to the interplay of genetic factors and brain structures responding to some environmental influences. The adherents of QR have no convincing arguments to counteract this claim, for they cannot undermine, let alone refute, the results of mainstream science by means of their research methods and theoretical apparatus. Indeed, Deleuze at the end of his philosophical odyssey embraces scientific reductionism, and in his *What is Philosophy?* argues that the brain produces our mental life:

It is the brain that thinks and not man – the latter being only a cerebral crystallization. We will speak of the brain as Cézanne spoke of the landscape: man absent from, but completely within the brain. Philosophy, art, and science are not the mental objects of an objectified brain but the three aspects under which the brain becomes subject.²⁸

A philosophical rebel subdued under the spell of materialistic science. Thus the QR paradigm can at best be regarded as an interesting extension of scientific descriptions, but hardly as a serious alternative to the explanatory power of mainstream science. But how powerful is this explanatory power really? It is well known that the exclusive explanatory paradigm of contemporary science consists in materialistic reductionism: a phenomenon such as e.g. the emergence of form in organisms is deemed to be explained by reduction of the observed to a lower, smaller level which is regarded as more primary. The phenomena of this order (in our case genes) are further reduced to a still lower and more primary level (in our case proteins or bases of the DNA string) and so on. Is this a correct way to achieve satisfactory explanation? It can be demonstrated that the supposedly watertight materialistic explanations of the central phenomena of our lives are full of gaps so deep that one is justified in asking the question whether these gaps can ever be bridged successfully.²⁹ And indeed, it seems that the chorus of voices dissatisfied with the reductionist explanatory paradigm has been growing louder recently.³⁰ Isn't there a way beyond the dilemma of the forced choice between the explanatory impotent QR and the explanatory reductionist and materialistic mainstream science?

The middle way of the spiritual science

²⁸ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix: *What is Philosophy?*, p. 210.

²⁹ Cf. Majorek, M.B.: "Können Gene Morphogenese erklären?", Majorek, M.B.: "Kann das Gehirn den Geist hervorbringen?", Majorek, M.B.: "Können Proteine diejenigen Leistungen erbringen, die ihnen zugeschrieben werden?"

³⁰ Cf. e.g. Horst, Steven: *Beyond Reduction*; Kaufmann, Stuart A.: *Reinventing the Sacred*; Laughlin, Robert B.: *A Different Universe*.

If one looks at both paradigms from a certain distance one can notice that despite their profound differences they share one very important feature: they make use of the thinking powers of man to explain the world without providing an account of how these powers come to be accessible to us in the first place. Both paradigms of course resort to thoughts, for there is no knowledge or science which is not expressed in the medium of thought. Mainstream science is acutely aware of the deeply arbitrary character of our productive and, as a part of it, theorizing thinking, regarding the creative moment as unpredictable and not subject to any logical or – broader – rational constraints (good ideas can occur to one while thinking hard about the problem at hand, but also in the middle of a party or even in a dream) and concentrates its efforts at controlling the unruliness and capriciousness of the thinking process by means of (primarily) experimental confirmation or disconfirmation of hypotheses and theories. The QR paradigm adherents do not seem to be concerned much with controlling the thinking process at all, preferring to use thoughts very much in the way the painter uses his paints: to freely create appealing patterns or images without concern for their truth or objectivity. Pressed on the question of the origin of thought mainstream science is irrevocably driven through the inertia of its reductionist and materialistic explanatory paradigm to the attempt at explaining it away in terms of various forms of brain activity. The QR paradigm on the other hand has either nothing to say on that subject or, as we have seen in the case of Deleuze, gets infected by the same reductionist tendency. But any attempt at reducing thought to a mere product of brain activity has disastrous consequences: it deprives us of the possibility of engaging in any rational discourse.

Let me justify this claim even if only very sketchily within the scope of this paper. Imagine that a person X claims that man has no free will, whereas a person Y claims that he does have it. Who is right? If you assume that thoughts are just products of brain activity both claims are such products and the reason why they differ lies in the fact that the structures and activities which have produced them differ between X and Y. But if so, the question of who is right has no sense, because there are no right or wrong brain structures (at least as far as we know), there are simply highly individual brain formations and more precisely highly individual connections between various neurons which presumably give rise to the individual differences of opinions mentioned at the outset. There is thus no point trying to convince an opponent that she is wrong, both of us have to agree that we differ because our different brains condition us to have divergent opinions. Should we wish to have unified opinions we should resort to brain surgery rather than to rational arguments. Of course it would be an open question whose brain

should be operated on: X's, Y's, or perhaps both to arrive at some common middle ground. This is roughly the reason why the influential German philosopher, Franz Kutschera, stated radically and vividly that

Their [determinists'] assertions have no reasons, only causes, and therefore are for us cognitively no more relevant than their coughing.³¹

But if our brain cannot be the producer of our thoughts what is? If you reflect on it you will quickly realize that we don't actually know how thoughts come into being. We certainly have no direct experience of them being produced by the brain,³² but upon reflection we are not aware of the process which brings them "to the light of day" of our consciousness. It rather seems that they emerge from the darkness of our unconsciousness or subconsciousness somehow, and then are accessible to us, or we become conscious of them. Thus we have to admit that we are aware of our *thoughts*, but not of the *process* that brings them to consciousness or to being. It is relatively easy to confirm this crucial claim, the claim pivotal for Rudolf Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom* (or *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* as he preferred the title of the book to be translated into English),³³ experimentally so to say, on the basis of the individual experience of thinking. Please, call into your minds an image of a triangle, any old triangle will do. Now, transform the (individual) image you can "see" with "your mind's eye" into another triangle. Now, try to call up in your mind an image of a third triangle, different from the previous two. This little exercise can usually be successfully accomplished without much effort. But now try to become aware of the *process* that transformed one triangle image into another triangle image in your mind. You will see immediately that this is a task which at least initially eludes our mental powers. But it is only the process which we should thus become aware of which is the thought process as such, the images of specific triangles are fruits of this process. Thus it is relatively easy to convince oneself that in our ordinary frame of mind we are aware of *thoughts*, not of *thinking*. Does it matter? Well, in the *Philosophy of Freedom* Rudolf Steiner wrote that the observation of the thinking process is not an everyday mental activity, and that if one can achieve it, this

³¹ Kutschera, Franz von: *Die Teile der Philosophie und das Ganze der Wirklichkeit*, p. 210 (my translation, M.M.).

³² Of course this in itself is not a sufficient argument to assert that they are in fact not products of the brain. We are not aware of the fact that e.g. gall is produced by the liver, but as a matter of fact it is.

³³ The German original: *Die Philosophie der Freiheit. Grundzüge einer modernen Weltanschauung* (GA4). The remaining references to written works of Rudolf Steiner or to his lectures will be limited in the footnotes to the number of the volume of his Collected Works (in German: Gesamtausgabe), shortened to "GA". Full titles of these volumes are stated in the Bibliography. These are arranged not in the alphabetical, but in the numerical order (GA1, 2 etc.).

observation can become the most important experience of one's life.³⁴ In his book *Vom Menschenrätsel* Rudolf Steiner is a bit more explicit on this point and makes it clear that such observation of the thought process can only be accomplished as a result of specific meditation exercises.³⁵ And in a number of lectures given around 1923 he is explicit on the question of what significance the experience of becoming aware of the thought process itself actually has. In a nutshell it is the first direct experience of the *etheric realm* of the spiritual world, and the first direct conscious experience of oneself outside of one's physical body.³⁶ No wonder that this experience is pivotal in one's life: one gains direct, immediate awareness of oneself as a spiritual entity. Thus the question of the origin of thought, the question central to the two paradigms discussed above, if pursued consistently to its conclusion, yields an insight which is surprising to both: the insight that man in his essence is a spiritual, not a material being.

It is well known to those familiar with Rudolf Steiner's writings that this initial insight can be extended by means of further specific meditation exercises into that faculty of supersensible cognition which Rudolf Steiner termed *Imagination*³⁷. Through it one has access to pictures of the spiritual realm. It is important to bear in mind that although acquiring this faculty is of high importance, it is not by itself a reliable method of exploring the spiritual world, for the pictures one is aware of are changeable and conceal as much as reveal the spiritual realities manifesting themselves through them.³⁸ One can form a notion of the difficulty encountered here if one considers one's dreams. Rudolf Steiner pointed out repeatedly that the key to understanding the "message" of dreams lies not in the specific pictures, but in the dramatic development, in the way the plot of the dream unfolds, and that the same message can manifest itself in the guise of dozens of specific dream picture sequences.³⁹ The same can be said about the Imagination pictures: these pictures can also vary considerably even though the spiritual reality underlying them is the same. Thus to gain orientation in the spiritual world another faculty is necessary, namely the one described by Rudolf Steiner as that of "Inspiration". He often compares it with reading a script whose "letters" are individual Imagination pictures,⁴⁰ or also with the "hearing" of revelations of the spiritual beings

³⁴ GA4, p. 46.

³⁵ Cf. Steiner, Rudolf: GA20, pp. 161f.

³⁶ Cf. e.g. lecture given on 30.1.1923 in Stuttgart, published in: GA257, pp. 51-55; lecture given on 23.11.1923 in Dornach, published in: GA232, pp. 11-14.

³⁷ I want to write this word with a capital to stress the technical character of the term and thus to distinguish it from the common use of the word "imagination". I shall do the same for the technical terms "Inspiration", and "Intuition" to be introduced below.

³⁸ Cf. e.g. GA12, p. 37; GA13, p. 351; GA215, p. 53.

³⁹ Cf. e.g. GA199, pp. 261f.

⁴⁰ Cf. GA13, pp. 353-355.

manifesting themselves through Imagination pictures.⁴¹ Finally, the highest supersensible faculty of cognition currently available to man, that of “Intuition”, enables him to experience directly face to face the spiritual beings who revealed themselves to him as the “cosmic word” already at the stage of the Inspiration.⁴² In a rather crude metaphor the process of transformation of the soul leading to the development of the supersensible faculties of cognition can be compared to the polishing of the lenses to be used in a microscope or a telescope. Just as a natural scientist has to use various instruments to achieve his research results, so a scientist of the invisible worlds has to transform his soul into a fine research instrument enabling him to conduct investigations in the realm of the spirit.

Those of you familiar with Rudolf Steiner’s writings are well aware that one of the central insights achieved on the path of investigation of the spiritual worlds is the realization that so-called “evil”, far from being a mere social construct or invention of power-seeking religious groups, is in fact a very real force operating in the world, a force which furthermore comes not in one, but in two very distinct forms which emanate from two very real spiritual beings. The one, to whom Rudolf Steiner gave the name Lucifer, imbues human beings with the tendency to disregard the tasks and duties of the earthly world of the senses and to escape from it into the bliss of the spiritual world. This being is the *spiritus movens* of all one-sided idealistic tendencies. The other, who was given the name Ahriman by Rudolf Steiner, imbues human beings with the tendency to regard the world of the senses as the ultimate and only reality and view the spiritual world as a mere figment of the unhealthy imagination of some pathologically inclined individuals. Ahriman is the *spiritus movens* of all forms of materialism. Rudolf Steiner draws attention to the fact that human beings incarnated in physical bodies are to a large extent screened and protected from the direct influences of these beings by the spiritual powers guiding human evolution.⁴³ But as soon as one leaves the earthly body, and one has to do so also while conducting spiritual research, one is all the more exposed to the dangerous influences of these beings. It is therefore not surprising that whereas it is certainly *not* a requirement imposed on the natural scientist that she should purify and refine her ethical life before embarking on her research, the mental meditative discipline leading to the development of the faculties of Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition has to be accompanied by ethical purification and sublimation which equips the future scientist of the spirit with the maturity and inner strength to withstand such attacks or temptations. This

⁴¹ Cf. e.g. GA10, pp. 49f; GA12, pp. 17f.

⁴² Cf. e.g. GA12, pp. 75f.

⁴³ Cf. e.g. GA153, pp. 101-103.

feature of the path of Steiner's spiritual science is often forgotten or at least its significance is often grossly underestimated, and yet it is repeatedly emphasized by Rudolf Steiner.⁴⁴ Indeed, he makes it clear that a person whose motives are impure cannot expect to achieve any progress on that path.⁴⁵ One of the first and crucial results of the stringent inner mental and ethical discipline in pursuing the path of inner transformation in preparation for the conscious entry into the spiritual world is the event described by Rudolf Steiner as the meeting with the Lesser Guardian of the Threshold,⁴⁶ the event which is tantamount to becoming aware of the luciferic forces in one's being.⁴⁷ Already this encounter calls for the highest degree of integrity from the individual experiencing it, for it confronts one with the ruthless insight into one's weaknesses and shortcomings, an insight which, if it befell a person not prepared for it, would lead to the loss of self-confidence, self-esteem, even of self-consciousness.⁴⁸ And yet this is the insight which, looked at from the point of view of the veridicality of supersensible cognition is absolutely necessary to enable one to overcome those subjectifying influences in exploration of the higher worlds which emanate from the forces of one's individual personality.⁴⁹ However, it is not until the person pursuing this path is able to withstand the meeting with the Higher Guardian of the Threshold⁵⁰ that the seeker becomes aware of the ahrimanic influences in his soul.⁵¹ At that stage, but only at that stage one is able to reach a truly objective knowledge of the spiritual world. In the words of Rudolf Steiner:

The 'Guardian of the Threshold' will take on an up to a certain point individual form for every individual person. For the meeting with him corresponds to that experience through which the personal character of supersensible perceptions is overcome and the possibility of entering into the region of experience which is free from personal colouring and valid for every human being is achieved.⁵²

At the outset of this paper my contention was that the central impulse behind the development of modern science was and is the search for certainty of knowledge. In view of this fact it is

⁴⁴ Cf. e.g. GA10, pp. 102-114; GA20, pp. 162-165; .

⁴⁵ Cf. GA10, pp. 214f.

⁴⁶ Cf. GA10, pp. 193-203; GA13, pp. 378-381.

⁴⁷ Cf. GA13, p. 380.

⁴⁸ Cf. GA13, S. 379.

⁴⁹ Cf. GA13, pp. 381-383. My dissertation contains a detailed discussion of the ways the subjectivity is eliminated on the path of developing supersensible methods of cognition (cf. Majorek, M.B.: *Objektivität: ein Erkenntnisideal auf dem Prüfstand*, pp. 444-457.

⁵⁰ Cf. GA10, pp. 210-215; GA13, pp. 390-391.

⁵¹ GA13, pp. 390f.

⁵² GA13, p. 391.

very revealing to find that Rudolf Steiner was very much concerned with providing methods able to offer the same certainty of knowledge of the supersensible or spiritual realm. Thus e.g. in the lecture held on 1st December 1921 in Christiania (Oslo) he stated that one of the key achievements of the development of modern science was that mankind could learn to develop a feeling of and for certainty (German: Gewissheit) in respect of the world of the senses. And then he continued:

Until now one has not tried to follow what is supersensible in the same way in which one follows the phenomena of the senses. One has not yet carried this certainty into the supersensible worlds. It is still believed that as regards the supersensible worlds one must restrict oneself to simple faith [...]. But in truth one needs certainty also for that which lies beyond the simply natural.⁵³

Mainstream science, the QR paradigm, and the postmodern thinkers in the light of the spiritual science

When one looks through the spectacles of anthroposophy or spiritual science⁵⁴ at both alternatives available to us in our postmodern world: formally post-positivist, but actually in its orientation and philosophy still very deeply positivist mainstream science, and the QR paradigm, one cannot but be struck by the fact that both of them seem to be imbued with the influences of the two “adversary beings” mentioned above: Ahriman and Lucifer. Mainstream science with its deep materialism and reductionism, with its fanatical faith in the power of instruments and mathematics, with its admiration for power and its ideal of the mastery of man over nature, of subjugating her to his own devices, and at the same time with its deep distrust of the human being and consequently with its attempts at eliminating man from the

⁵³ Cf. GA79, p. 168f.

⁵⁴ These two terms are often used interchangeably, but it seems to me that under the present circumstances and in view of the frequent estrangement of the current aims and public relationships policies of the AAG from the original intentions of Rudolf Steiner it might be wiser to keep them separate, and to reserve the term “spiritual science” for that endeavour which Rudolf Steiner initiated during his lifetime, keeping the term “anthroposophy” as a loose description of what his original intentions have become in the world through the work of the people describing themselves as anthroposophists.

cognitive process as much as possible, all this unmistakably reveals the distinct signature of Ahrimanic beings. On the other hand the QR paradigm with its subjectivism, with its exultation in the free and unlimited unfolding of whatever whims the human can have, with its glorification of relativism and arbitrariness, its lack of inner discipline and praise of fast results reveals its inspiration in the realm of Lucifer.⁵⁵ Looked at from this perspective Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science is the middle way between the Scylla of materialistic, ahrimanic-inspired mainstream science, and Charybdis of the subjectivist, luciferic-inspired QR.

The insights achieved through the development of supersensible faculties of cognition make it also possible to throw some clarifying light on the ideas of the postmodern thinkers discussed above. Both Deleuze and Derrida stressed in their different ways that the rational categories used in the past in the attempt to understand and explain the world are inadequate for that task. Deleuze was particularly adamant in stressing that the reality of the world is not to be found in the fixed forms of being, but rather in the fluidity of its becoming. Considered from the vantage point made possible by the research methods of the spiritual science it is relatively easy to see that the theorizing of both philosophers represents a premonition of the fluid, dynamic character of the etheric sphere of the spiritual world, the premonition making its way to the surface of consciousness through them. This basic and general insight can be deepened and sharpened if one considers the fact that we have now entered a period of human evolution when the forces which had operated since the outset of the fifth post-atlantean epoch in the 15th century are beginning to give way to forces of a different character, which impose new requirements on human beings. The initial period of the consciousness soul epoch was dominated by spiritual influences that imbued human beings in their self-conscious I or Self with abstract forces of soul life which were especially conducive to the development of the present abstract forms of intellectuality.⁵⁶ We have now entered a time of development when human beings bring from their pre-earthly existence not abstract forces but living *pictures*, images of spiritual imaginations. These cannot be assimilated into the Self (which is related to the fixed, solid realm of the mineral),⁵⁷ but have to be assimilated into the astral body of man, the body which has affinity to the plant kingdom.⁵⁸ During the initial stages of

⁵⁵ As is well known Rudolf Steiner repeatedly describes the dominant science as standing under materialistic, i.e. ultimately ahrimanic influence. He could not speak of the spiritual source of inspiration of the QR paradigm because it did not exist in his time. But he spoke of these influences within the political realm and stated very clearly that the conservative parties (of his time at least) stand under the influence of Ahriman, and the liberal ones under the influence of Lucifer. Cf. lecture given in Dornach on 6th August 1920 (in GA199, p. 24).

⁵⁶ GA199, p. 258.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 210ff.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 209.

the consciousness soul epoch the whole content of the spiritual life of mankind in religion, art, and science was won from the hard mineral realm.⁵⁹ This has to change now, and the forces of Imagination must begin to make their way into the structures and social institutions of human culture. Rudolf Steiner formulates this new requirement of human existence in a radical way when he says that what is willed for humanity by the leading spiritual powers of the present time amounts to an “insolent ridicule of human reason”.⁶⁰ Thus it can be said that the insights of spiritual science fully justify the frustration of postmodern thinkers with the limitation of our present form of rationality. These insights make it also clear how right Jean-François Lyotard was when he coined the term “postmodern condition”. Indeed, we have entered postmodern times in which the old forms of intellectual culture of the first period of the consciousness soul epoch, the time described – at least in philosophy – as “modern”, have to give way to a new spiritual life.⁶¹

It is truly revealing to use the magnifying glass of the spiritual science to look at the frustration of thinkers such as Jacques Derrida or Gilles Deleuze (but also of e.g. Ludwig Wittgenstein or Richard Rorty) with the inadequacies of the words of our language and the frustration we briefly touched on earlier. Rudolf Steiner describes that words are entering a phase of their development in which they will gradually detach themselves from the fixed meanings still associated with them today and will begin to play the role of mere *pointers* indicating the way towards spiritual realities which they signify. Just as today nobody is tempted to think that a lady called Smith earns her living by shoeing horses, and the lady called Cook by cooking meals for a noble family, so in the future, and particularly towards the sixth post-atlantean epoch, all words will acquire the character which today is an identifying feature of proper names only: they will become *gestures* pointing to multiple realities or beings who are the true realities merely *hinted at* by the words.⁶² Thus Derrida is exactly right: words *do* point to multiple things, but he is not quite right when he claims that they point to multiple meanings, for in reality they indicate multiple *beings*!

However, these “grains of truth” contained in the conceptions of postmodern thinkers should not mislead us into thinking that these conceptions offer healthy solutions to the spiritual

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 210. It can be claimed that the basic insight of structuralism is a conscious-unconscious reflection of this fact.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 263. (In the German original: “freche Verhöhnung der menschlichen Vernunft”)

⁶¹ Rudolf Steiner often describes this transition as “the (unconscious) crossing of the threshold of the spiritual world by humankind”.

⁶² GA199, pp. 253f.

predicament of postmodern man. We have seen that even though they are undoubtedly capable of freeing man from the narrow constraints of materialistic and reductionist prejudices, their effect is largely a negative one: they create an atmosphere of relativism, of lack of trust in thinking, of arbitrariness and indifference in the search for knowledge of the world, of lack of concern for the truth and of the meaninglessness of striving to achieve it, in short an atmosphere of a certain spiritual nihilism. Thus it can be claimed that these conceptions in a paradoxical way act to uphold the positivistic scientific research paradigm, for it at least promises to offer real, tangible, reliable solutions to our practical problem, and no doubt very often also fulfils this promise. I pointed out earlier that one of the main reasons why mainstream science remains the by far dominant form of scientific activity despite the barrage of criticism of this endeavour which has lasted now practically half a century is that it seems to be the only way to obtain answers to the question of why things are as they are, or to the explanation of observable phenomena, the way, moreover, which has proved to be immensely fruitful in a practical, technological sense countless times. Can spiritual science meet this challenge? Of course it can. Once the level of Intuition is reached the world reveals itself to be *not* an agglomerate of atoms or other elementary elements (superstrings or whatever is in vogue at the time) acting more or less haphazardly on one another in accordance with the so-called natural laws whose existence and the origin of their specific forms must forever remain an unsolvable enigma to the human mind, but a stage of work and cooperation of *spiritual beings*. The world is at bottom *spirit* and the one who reaches this insight has no longer the need to grapple for ever changing inductive explanations of the ever new and ever complex puzzles of the observed phenomena for he knows that what can be observed with the bodily sensory organs are but the fingers of the divine beings weaving the web of the universe from behind the initially impenetrable screen of sensory reality. Such a one is no longer puzzled by the curious play of fingers for he lives in community with the beings whose fingers they are. Such a one has the deepest explanation and understanding of the observed phenomena available to man. Moreover, the development of the supersensible powers of cognition enables man not only to get to know the spiritual beings who are the true causes of phenomena around us, but it enables man to enter into conscious relationship with them and thus to act in full harmony with their intentions. Such freely achieved harmony of human actions with the intentions of the gods *is* the deepest answer to the challenges of postmodern life.

Thus the spiritual science inaugurated by Rudolf Steiner turns out to be a reconciliation of the

legitimate concerns of the European rationalist thought tradition in its ancient striving for knowledge, the striving culminating in the contemporary mainstream science whose practical fruits we enjoy daily, and of the legitimate concerns of postmodern thinkers in their often sharp critique of the dominant forms of Western rationality: indeed, there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of by the (Western) philosophers (and scientists).⁶³ This spiritual science *is* the true middle way forward for mankind, between the temptations and snares of Ahriman and Lucifer.

⁶³ Adapted from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Act I, Scene 5, line 166.

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