(Religious) belief and atheism from a semiotic viewpoint

Peet Lepik

Tallinn University
e-mail: signans@gmail.com

Abstract. The article attempts to give a semiotic definition of the intellectual attributes of belief (in its broader sense), religious belief and atheism, treating all three of them as sign systems – cultural languages.

To define the formal structure of the phenomenon of religion, five aspects of the corresponding communicative act should be considered – the orientational, the sign-creating, the cognitive, the teleological and the energetic ones. Belief as an orientational act cannot be treated without including autocommunication: the I-you relation is accompanied by the I-I relation in the form of vertical and horizontal topological imaginations. The sign-creating aspect of belief is expressed, on the one hand, in the performative characteristics of utterances (utterance = act) and, on the other hand, in symbolic mnemonic programming. As a cognitive act, communication typical of belief is mythological, expressing identification with the addressee and the subjective eternity of the relation. Teleologically, belief is connected with the existential projection; energetically we treat belief as *energeia* – the creative force of man. Relying on the Scriptures and theological literature (mainly the works of Paul Tillich), the article analyses the appearance of all these communicative characteristics in religious sign-creating.

Atheism as negation of God is formally an antithetic structure of thinking, which is characterized by the symmetry of the antithetic plus-side with the intellectual characteristics of the minus-side. Based on the characteristics of belief, it is particularly interesting to observe how Marx (and his disciples) have "furnished" the orientational, teleological and energetic characteristics of atheism, and how the dedicative structure of thinking has also given birth to earthly gods.

Keywords: phenomenon of belief, religiosity, atheism, autocommunication, formal features of dedicational communication

1. Introduction

The following analysis aims to use semiotics in order to describe belief, religiosity and God-denial (atheism). This article analyses *divinitas* (divine nature) through the concept of *humanitas* (here in the meaning of 'human sign-creation'), and this is interpreted as a linguistic communicative phenomenon that manifests itself in the operations of the intellect. It is important to emphasize that such an approach does not contrast the intellect-based approach to religiosity with the theological one – for the simple reason that everything that is afterworldly and revelational can in principle reach a person's thoughts only in the form of a sign, and the intellect fixes these as sign structures. Such an approach excludes the question of questions: does God exist (as an ontological formation), since for this question the subject of analysis in these contexts can indeed only be semiosis, i.e. the formally expressed relationships of a sign (signifier, e.g. a word) with what is being signified – even if it be God himself.

2. The *status quo* of the field of research

The collision between various persuasions, of various concepts of the world, including the acceptance or denial of God, certainly is a natural and genuine part of culture. Conflicts of ideas have always been indicative of the viability of a culture. A culture with homogeneous views is destined to fail – as proven in theory and also by history; in actual fact, it is unthinkable.

One of the "voices" in the intra- and inter-cultural dialogue of humanity has been atheism – the negation of God, about which there have been various mutually contradictory teachings during the course of history. Even the faith of a foreign or a subjected (hostile) people has often been termed atheism – in contrast to one's own, "genuine" faith. In the Roman Empire, for example, there were many faiths that were generally permitted, including Christianity; but everybody who refused to follow the rituals of worshipping the Roman emperor as a god in addition to their own faith was kept under surveillance as a god-denier. Christians labelled all pagan faiths as hostile to God. Spinoza was excommunicated as an "atheist" due to his pantheistic teachings (God = Nature as the totality of everything); Goethe was vilified for the same reason. The French Enlighteners called themselves deniers of God and religion; strangely, however, most of them did believe in a universal intellect that had been concealed in the world by the Creator and was obligatory for all (in their opinion, God had simply not interfered in worldly matters since the act of creation). Robespierre supplemented this conviction with the idea of a cult: he even intended to install altars to reason… Ludwig Feuerbach, the 19th century giant of materialism

who passionately attacked the theological concept of the existence of a transcendental God, nevertheless developed a parallel theoretical schema of anthropotheism, whereby an earthly godlike person's belief in the power of his all-encompassing love for humanity is elevated to the "religion of humanity".[1] When one also considers the utopian and finalistic model of communism, as constructed at one time by the young Karl Marx, it becomes apparent that drawing a line between religion and atheism is definitely not a simple task.

Since the vagueness of differentiating between religiosity and God-denial was particularly apparent in the Soviet doctrine of atheism, I shall proceed primarily from this in describing the *status quo* of the field of research. In Soviet atheistic writings (but not only there), a tradition existed of defining religion "as a reflection of reality through fantastically illusionary pictures, imaginings and concepts" (Novikov 1985: 383). However, a "belief in the existence of a supernatural reality" was also considered a "basic characteristic" of religion (Novikov 1985: 383).

It is indisputable that the characteristic of all persuasions that bear a religious function is not a belief in the "supernatural". The definition of religion, as cited above, indicates that it is restricted in its scope. Besides a (transcendental) being or substance that is outside time and space being worshipped as a god (or as having the status of a god), historical ancestors, nature as whole consisting of objects, or single real objects in nature [animals, heavenly bodies (the Sun) etc.] have also been worshipped. In addition to the Roman emperor, the rulers of other peoples have also been deified (in Babylonia, Egypt, Russia, China, etc.). Leo Tolstoj had a profound belief in love as an eternal good but, in order to experience it, man had to first overcome his bestial nature. Love is "life itself", wrote Tolstoj, "but not a mindlessly moribund life, but a blissful and endless one" (Tolstoj 1984: 89). In his opinion "True religion is that relationship, in accordance with reason and knowledge, which man establishes with the infinite world around him, and which binds his life [including love – *P. L.*] to that infinity and guides his actions" (Tolstoj 1950: 163). Such views cannot be considered to be "belief in the supernatural" or "fantastically illusionary"; Tolstoj, however, does accept the teachings of Christ, in particular within the bounds of these views. Therefore, a "belief in the existence of a supernatural reality" (i.e. a spiritual substance that exists separately from a person) is not a characteristic of all systems that are considered to be religious, and cannot therefore be a "basic characteristic".

In addition to the scope of the definition remaining vague or questionable, the same can be said about interpreting the religious content of the terms 'supernatural',

---

[1]   Feuerbach accepts religious belief only on the level of human relationships, which means that, in his human-centred theory, the concept of religion does not match the concept generally used in theology and in atheism.

'illusionary', 'fantastic' and 'belief' (religious) (including the criteria for the mutual categorization of the first three). The above-mentioned glossary of atheism states that 'religious belief' is a "conviction in the actual existence of supernatural beings, characteristics and relationships, which is not founded on logical decisions and scientific data" (Novikov 1985: 85). This is an understanding that is also familiar to the contemporary reader. It is further explained as an "emotional attitude", an "illusionary, practical relationship" with the object; and Novikov adds that the object of religious conviction is "vitally important" to the believer (Novikov 1985: 85). By taking such determinations as a basis, however, even the repository of thoughts of a substantial proportion of humanity could be declared a religion. The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard analyses in detail the substantial content of imagination as concerns houses, cellars, attics, acute and obtuse angles, wardrobes, drawers, seasons, light and many other objects and phenomena. He treats imagination as a "psychic potency" but also as a "cosmic power". Bachelard accords the power of imagination to objects and to nature as a whole. However, he refuses on principle to prove his imaginings scientifically or to argue rationally. It can be clearly seen that such a philosophy is in precise accordance with the "basic characteristics" of religion: Bachelard relies on the conviction that a spirit exists outside a person, i.e. that the 'supernatural' actually exists; it "reflects reality through fantastically illusionary images, imaginings, concepts"; it presents prescriptions that can be applied in practice, on how to deal with "spiritual beings", describes the emotions that they arouse, and emphasizes their "vital importance" (Bachelard 1994). Nevertheless, it is also intuitively clear that the French philosopher's model of the world (understandably, one amongst many similar ones, and not the only one!) and religion are very different things, as are Bachelard's attitude to the world and religious belief.

This definition unavoidably leads to the identification of religious belief with belief in the wider context. The general concept of 'belief' needs to be commented on, using atheistic determinations as a basis. The Soviet-era vocabulary of atheism has accorded this term three meanings. The first of these – 'creed' (Buddhism, Christianity, etc.) does not generate objections. Secondly, 'blind faith' is defined. This was supposed to be "a specific attitude regarding actual or imaginary objects and phenomena (and the applicable mental state)", according to which they are considered to be "believable and true without theoretical and practical proof". Such a category of belief (or blind faith) is contrasted with knowledge. "Religious belief, where the subjects are god, angels, the other world, the immortality of the soul, dogmas, etc., is, in fact, such a phenomenon" (Novikov 1985: 84). In addition to "blind faith" a third meaning is also provided: the "term 'belief' is also used to designate the conviction based on knowledge that is held by a person, the certainty regarding the trueness of these or other scientific or social-political ideas" (Novikov 1985: 84).

One notices the formal errors and the vagueness of terms. There is no effort to distinguish between "deeming something believable" = argumented reliability and 'belief'; 'blind faith' (similarly to the previously cited 'religious faith') is defined through denial; there is no point in trying to comprehend how "specific attitude" and its "applicable mental state" actually differ, and what is the content of either. What is more than questionable is making belief, as an 'attitude', dependent on theoretical and practical evidence. For example, an ordinary person in the medieval period did not see the earthly world as "natural" or as a contrast to the "supernatural" heavenly one – both worlds merged into one since the "supernatural" was indeed natural. The realm beyond was considered to be just as concrete as the worldly environment; Dante finding himself in hell – whilst still on earth – was not necessarily seen as a metaphor[2]. Combined, it was still 'reality', but heavenly and earthly reality was in a way assessed hierarchically: the world beyond the grave was believed to be (in the cultural tradition) "more real" in value because "it is not affected by time".[3]

The fact that a person's thinking (not to mention belief) cannot be reduced to scientific thought has been long confirmed. Nowadays there is increasing attention paid to the heterogeneity of thought, to various types of thinking. A person who believes that his homeland is the best place in the world surely cannot be considered to be fettered by "blind faith" just because he does not theoretically and practically prove this "specific attitude". And what is the point of evidence when a person just believes or loves? And what about 'belief' when the theoretical argumentation – from the logical aspect – is faulty, one-sided, simply wrong or historically limited? Clarity will arrive – in practice or on the basis of other theories – somewhat later, sometimes in a century (or more)! Should such a belief be considered *post factum* to belong to the category of "blind faith", where it lacks the quality of "conviction" and "certainty"? Julien O. de La Mettrie and other scholars of the Enlightenment, in accordance with their atheistic views, considered such a world view to be true according to which nature, including the human psyche, is subordinate in its entirety to the laws of mechanics. "Man is a machine", de La Mettrie opined in his book bearing the same title (1748). Pierre-Simon Laplace, member of the French Academy of Sciences and a still highly-regarded astronomer, mathematician and physicist, believed – in the same spirit of materialistic monism – that knowing everything about atoms would make it possible to forecast history unambiguously (Lyubishchev 1977: 135). It is unlikely that the lack of scientific validity of Laplace's belief could have influenced the "conviction" and "certainty" of its supporters. And who should have been the authority,

---

[2]   Cf Dante's verses *Io non mori' e non rimase vivo* ("I was neither dead nor living"). Dante Alighieri. The Vision of Hell, XXXIV: 25; http://world.std.com/~wij/dante/inferno/inf-34.html.

[3]   For more detail, see Gurevich 1985: 6, 72.

standing outside history, who could then have directed attention to his errors – from the position of (absolute) truth?

Since similar examples, in succession, can be drawn from the history of science and since there are fields of intellect (e.g. artistic, mythological, magical consciousness), where such "evidence" is excluded on principle, it must be unavoidably concluded – on reading the many atheistic definitions of belief – that humans and humanity have overwhelmingly and consistently been struck blind – i.e. fettered by "blind faith"; it also becomes apparent that "blind faith" has been a considerably wider concept than "religious belief".

The theoretical impasse that is described here has occurred because (1) one has implicitly proceeded from the presumption that a person orientates in the world only on the basis of scientific decisions and scientifically justified practices (and in doing so, everyday consciousness is unjustifiably elevated to the level of scientific thought); (2) the quality of belief ('blind faith', 'conviction', 'certainty') is made dependent on the accordance of the object of the belief to criteria that are scientific or a certain theoretical concept; (3) religious belief (and belief, in general) is analysed in terms of scientific perception, and of its practice, resulting in finding out only what belief is not: (a) belief is condemned as the opposite to science that denies the "distortion" of the world – therefore, condemned as a distortion of science, or to be more precise, as its antithesis; or (b) it is treated as an attribute of "convincing" knowledge (it is diluted in knowledge).

3. The concept of value. Religious belief as a value

The practice of the atheistic definition of religious belief, where belief is treated as a scientifically deficient act of consciousness, avoids the other and very important characteristic of religion – the existential basic essence that has been forming spiritual values and moral self-regulation for thousands of years.

Value and scientific truth are fundamentally different. Science aims to reconstruct the world, ascertain the laws of nature and observe the characteristics of ontic objects as they exist – beyond the individual opinions, sympathies and antipathies of the subject under observation.[4] Values, however, are assessable and subjective.

There is a notably large number of values to be found in any culture, where the subjects are no longer even aware of their rating (e.g. forms of politeness) but which they and/or their society consider obligatory for its members, or which are often followed automatically, as a matter of habit, as being elementary. This type of "hidden" value is termed a norm, which has quite a conservative nature, but which

---

[4]   The potential questionability of this claim is not a subject of this analysis.

also guarantees the homeostatic stability of a culture and the continuity of cultural memory.

Regarding normativity, the most obvious social institutions everywhere have always been religious institutions (in Christianity, the Church), the dogmas that have been formed on their territory, and the ethical and aesthetic norms that ensure the cohesion of generations and have taken root in the society's value systems. That the source of many of these norms is the Bible or church tradition no longer occurs to most people. Setting the culture of humanity (including the moral norms of a culture) in opposition to religion demonstrates illiteracy – even stupidity. The Bible has been the source of European culture (even the basis, it could be said), and has more or less a normative meaning for everyone. From the viewpoint of the creed itself, however, this conceals a value that is everlasting and excludes alternatives: the Truth.

Therefore, we could initially (on superficial examination) relate religious belief to the concepts of value and norms. Indeed, religiosity and religion in society is an evaluative, orientational (regulative), collective (social), culturally consistent (retrospective and accumulative) and normatizing phenomenon that is beyond scientific cognition.

However, the previous discussion has not clarified the actual relationship between 'belief' (in the wider meaning of the concept), 'religious belief' and "religious" belief (as the reader has already seen, phenomena are termed 'religious' when they differ from historically formed confessional creeds), which all could be correlated, to a varying extent, to the concept of value. Initially, we should concentrate on what is the common basis for the three concepts mentioned – belief as an intellectual phenomenon and the formal semiotic characteristics that express belief.

4. Belief from a phenomenological viewpoint

The phenomenological analysis of belief presumes the treatment of belief as a phenomenon of the intellect. Therefore, the possible object of belief that remains external to consciousness, and all phenomena and stimuli associated with belief that reside outside the intellect, as already noted, can be of interest to us when they are provided in sign form in operations of the intellect.

As formulated by Juri Lotman, the intellect has the "power, firstly to store and mediate information (the intellect has a memory and communication mechanism) – it has linguistic ability [in addition to natural languages, also other cultural-linguistic sign systems analogous to language – *P. L.*], which makes it possible to form orderly messages. Secondly, [the intellect has] the ability to transform these messages in an orderly manner with the aid of algorithmized operations. Thirdly, [the intellect has] the ability to create new messages" (Lotman 1978: 3).

Following on from this set task, we are interested in the intellect as a "grammatical" mechanism that carries out algorithmized signed operations. We proceed from the hypothesis that in various epistemological situations this mechanism "works" according to various formal rules. For example, in looking at a painting or the sun, or listening to a fugue, a shepherd's horn or a nightingale, the subject perceives (fixes) in one object at least two objects, *at the same time* (simultaneously): one generates a "playful" association with the other(s), conditionally assimilating with it (them). Thus a metaphoricity (awareness of dual meaning through teamwork) is created, which, as regards the basic formal linguistic characteristics, is the formal basis of the intellect's aesthetic perception.[5] And there is no need to doubt that this mechanism – on the basis of which the "grammar" of, for example, games, puzzles and humour, not to mention all the fine arts, has developed – is the universal sign-creating, aesthetic ability of human intellect. The same can be said about the ability to manipulate objects with the aid of certain formulae, in order to achieve (as imagined) the predicted results. This ability has been realized since time immemorial in cultural texts as a phenomenon of magic, from which in turn (in later history) the scientific research method has been developed. The fact that these abilities exist in different combinations in different individuals and during different eras, levels and significance, and are represented to various degrees of explicitness, is associated with the regulating (amplifying, taboo-setting, etc.) function of culture. It could also be considered probable that certain communicative forms of intellectual operations (there are more) may be inherent. We are of the opinion that the elementary semiotic forms, in which these abilities are realized, are formed, modified and become more complex in memorized texts (texts to be memorized) and become a part of the cultural experience of *me*.[6]

In the following we shall proceed from the postulate that the ability to believe is also universal, and is realized as an operation of the intellect within a cultural experience, which we then perceive as belief.

We will now attempt to clarify which are the formal "grammatical" characteristics of belief as an intentional operation of the intellect.

To begin with, some details limiting the topic need to be provided. Belief is treated as a phenomenon that is manifested in communication, and cases will be analysed where the addressee of belief is an individualized or personified addressee – *you*. To continue, instead of analysing persuasive belief (*resp.* conviction) – *I believe*

---

[5] Keeping one's distance, lack of (mercantile) interest, and other such communicative characteristics of aesthetic perception are secondary, since their existence, without the basic characteristic, does not ensure the creation of an aesthetic relationship.

[6] For more detail about these (and other) universal operations that are inherent in the human intellect, see Lepik 2008.

you, where the essence is to assert the concordance with reality of the circumstances relating to the addressee, we will attempt to analyse devotional belief – *I believe in you*, where the substance is the intellect's form of communication, an intellectual relationship *to you* with certain particular characteristics. In the former case the analysis is centred on *you* – the validity/invalidity of the circumstances associated with *you* [taking into account the measure of trueness (*resp.* 'trueness')]; in the latter case the devotional sign-creation relationship of *me* becomes the focus of attention.

Dedicative belief, as clarified below, is a considerably wider concept than *religious belief*: according to formal semiotic characteristics, religiosity (religious belief, which in this case will be examined within the limits of Christianity) can be treated as a specific sub-concept of dedicative belief[7]. Therefore, in addition to the religious sphere of dedicative belief (belief in god) another dedicative sphere of the intellect must be differentiated – one that in practice is much wider and more general, and which could in some sense be conditionally termed as devotional belief (taking also into consideration that devotion does characterize both, but there are substantial differences in religious communication, as regards functional and additional characteristics that are formed within culture). Religious belief is analysed separately, using the background of devotional belief (see Section 5). In the following, 'belief' may also be used as a term, including the case in which the formal common characteristics of both spheres of dedicative belief are being considered.

We are of the opinion that in order to determine the formal structure of the phenomenon of belief, the five aspects of the applicable communicative act must be considered – i.e. orientational, sign-creating, cognitive, teleological and energetic.

Orientational aspect

As a concept, belief can be treated orientationally as an intentional act, which has a horizontal and a vertical dimension. On the one hand, belief expresses – on the horizontal axis of orientation – the durability and continuation (also continuation as the recalling) of a certain relationship, and on the other hand – on the vertical axis – belief denotes an acknowledging, exalting, submissive relationship in the direction of a certain *you*. We defend the point of view that such a two-dimensionally interpreted mental operation is guaranteed by an intellect-based algorithm, and is universal. In cultural texts (in communication), this is manifested as an experience structure that has been carved into memory.

---

[7]   *dedicare* (Lat.) to honour, value highly, dedicate, consecrate.

Belief as a communicative relationship is simultaneously both retrospective (at the moment of the notification ~ cognition – i.e. at present – the belief already exists) and also predictive – belief in someone is accepting in advance the future of the relationship. Belief is a phenomenon that can be described in a temporal manner, which also means that it can be described topologically:[8] the durability and continuation of a relationship begins in the past and reaches into the future. The axis of the vertical, submissive, orientation can also be spatially interpreted.

Belief as devotion can be treated as an actually occurring autocommunicative act, where *you* – whom *me* assesses in a certain way in my thoughts (towards whom one experiences devotion, submission, or whom one worships) – can be retrieved by *me* from memory at the moment of the saying ~ thinking. Therefore, the *me* – *me* relationship "enters" the *me* – *you* relationship. Juri Lotman, in his description of autocommunication, has emphasized that although the bearer here of the information (*me*) as an individual remains identical with himself in the relationship act, the *me* interprets the attributed message to the "other" *me* through the assistance of code that is attributed to the text reproducing *you*. Thus the *me* – *you* relationship that in the structure of belief has changed into autocommunication becomes a vital retuning instrument of *me* (Lotman 1973: 229). In addition, the *me*, in his imagination, attributes durability and authority to that being said ~ being thought – in advance.[9]

It is worth noting that the temporal division of horizontal orientation is fixed in the grammatical structure of natural language (and also cultural languages). Roman Jakobson has described this using the term 'evidential'. He demonstrates that this term can be used to denote a category of verb that takes into account three facts: (1) the fact being notified; (2) the fact of notification; and in addition (3) the fact of notification that is being mediated, i.e. denoting the external transmitter of the actual transmission of the fact being notified. The speaker notifies an event, either based on someone else's message (a message in the form of a quote that has been acquired from someone), a dream (information acquired through revelation), assumptions (presentiments) or based on one's own past experience (information retrieved from memory).[10] An analogical formal relationship also operates in communication expressing belief. The subject of the evidentiality here is *me* who reproduces a relationship model that has been stored in memory, fixed in experience. The permanent paragon [(archaic) idol, (national) hero, *patrum more*] that has been stored in memory, whose incarnation and continuity is seen in the

---

8   Time (e.g. before, after) can always be visualized in spatial terms.
9   Boris Uspenskij has justifiably called autocommunication the "basis of cognitive thought" and the mechanism of the "objectification of subjective impressions" (Uspenskij 2007: 10).
10   See Jakobson 1990.

actual addressee of communication, can become the subject of evidentiality. The actual addressee of the communication, however, could be the same as the signified paragon, but could also be different. In such a case, there would be two *you-s*: the subject of the evidentiality stored in memory is then *you 1*, but the actual addressee is *you 2*.[11]

Sign-creating aspect

(1) Performative communication. Let us begin with *you 2* – in the direction of the future expectation. As seen above, 'believe' is a semantically indeterminate sign. It is only an act with orientational characteristics that explicitly expresses belief. The content of such a determination becomes clearer when one differentiates between informative and performative signs (*resp.* statements). *Informative* signs and statements express information about the world, but they do not directly relate to the world. They do this through natural language, which functions as a virtual, organized and relatively closed system with mutually related meanings and where each element's meaning is in a definite agreed correlation with the other elements in the system. Here the object of reference for the sign (or statement) is natural language, a certain fixed linguistic meaning. The relationship of p*erformative* signs and statements with the world, however, is direct; stating some word or thought is treated here as carrying out an action signified by that word or sentence. The object of the reference is not the linguistic *meaning*, but the signified communicative action, i.e. the external real act or object of the language system – the denoted, in this case belief in a certain 'idol' etc., as a devotive act. In grammar, performative statements are generally formed as being in the present tense, the indicative mood, first person singular (*I believe in you*) or in the imperative mood. Examples of a purely performative statement can be found in any type of cursing ('Damn!', etc.) And it should be emphasized: cursing is an action that also expresses belief in the expected effect of the action. The statement *I believe in you* is therefore performative. It is a (verbal) action forming the submissive position and continuity of *me – you 2*.

---

[11]   This relationship has been analysed by Martin Buber, in a manner that in part has relevance to the devotive treatment of the *me – you* relationship. "The world is twofold for man" Buber (1970: 53) says, writing that "When one says You, the I of the word-pair I-You is said, too" (Buber 1970: 54). Buber uses the concept of basic word (*Grundwort*). While it is usually the word that is accentuated in a word combination that is considered to be the basic word, for Buber basic words are whole word pairs, including *me – you*. Here, the *you* role can be filled by nature, people or spiritual beings (*geistige Wesenheiten*). Buber (1970: 57), however, consistently analyses these communicative relationships in a pantheistic key: "In every sphere through everything that becomes present to us [including in *you*. P.L.] , we gaze toward the train of th eternal You; in each we perceive a breath of it; in every You we address the eternal You, …"; "Man becomes me through You".

(2) Symbol-centred level of expression. The autocommunication of *me,* as well as the autocommunicative relationship with *you 1* that has been stored in the brain, is a certain continuously actual (nonconscious) state. But the *me* relationship (act) in the direction of *you 2* must be considered to be the symbol of this implicit position.

Lotman (1987) has written that "historically, the most active symbols have been characterized by a certain indetermination between the level of expression of the text and the level of content. The level of content of the symbol always belongs, as regards meaning, to a more multi-dimensional space. Therefore, the level of expression does not denote the content as a whole, but only hints at it". Nevertheless, the "memory image of a symbol is always more ancient than the memory image of its text surroundings that are external to the symbol". A symbol is not a sign that can be culturally located. Symbols "appear from the past and flow into the future"; they reach us by passing through cultural layers without losing their "enclosed meaning". Despite preserving invariancy, the symbol also correlates actively with cultural contexts, "is transformed under their influence and it also transforms culture". The core group of symbols can be "traced back to the era predating humanity's written language, when certain (and elementary, as regards the method of their portrayal) signs expressed *compressed mnemonic programs* about texts and scenarios that the collective had preserved in oral memory" (emphasis mine – *P. L.*). Symbols have a "deeply archaic character" (Lotman 1987: 11, 12). Let us consider, for example, the modern custom to seal marriage with a ring. This symbolic act is an ancient phenomenon, and we know that in the time of primitive communities and group marriages the marriage vow was sworn to clan members who stood in a circle. The circle (> ring) could also, it is believed, symbolize (NB! on the vertical axis) the sun as *you (resp. you 1),*[12] and the sun is an object of worship in ancient mythology.

The relationship expressing belief of *me* thus finds an explicit expression via the *me – you 2* topological position. As a symbol, this relationship reproduces the worship of a cult object and/or the (archaic) *patrum more* (*you 1*). We will proceed from the presumption that the devotive act of belief has always been one of the most important, and probably central, elements of the mnemonic program. Since time immemorial, the initial addressee of belief in different cultures has been a certain *agens* – a personified, sacral symbol – a certain *you.* And a submissive relationship with this has been saved in memory as an implicit, nonconscious cliché. The experiential schema described, fixed in cultural memory, seems to be one of the factors forming dedicative belief in all people.

A striking example of this is Hamlet's communication with the ghost of his poisoned father in Shakespeare's tragedy. The father's ghost – *you 1* – is indeed

---

12   Cf. Hoffmann-Krayer 1987[1935–36]: 703. 713. In addition: the words *deus* (Lat.), *θεός* (Gr.) ja *deva* (Hindi) are derived from the root *div*, which means 'to shine'.

explicit here, and the relationship with him has been presented as real and deter-mined in time: Hamlet communicates with his father "In my mind's eye" and as willed by Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, Act 1) in the courtyard. This relationship culmi-nates as an autocommunicative approach towards *you 2*, whom Shakespeare has as a projection of *me* (*resp.* autocommunicative *me 2*!) that wants to aspire to the heights of *you 1* (the father). *Me 1,* who comprehends the high principles of *you 1,* submissively addresses himself, filled with profound belief and hope in the success of his revenge that will be unfolding over the five acts. Hamlet, talking to himself, believes that only the *me*, cleansed of "trivial fond records" – and in whom only the "commandment" of *you 1*, carved into memory and serving the future, "shall live" – can become *you 2* (*alias me 2*):

> O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
> And shall I couple hell? O fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
> And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
> But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee?
> Ay, thou poor ghost [---]
> Yea, from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
> That youth and observation copied there,
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of mu brain,
> Unmixt with baser matter: yes, by heaven!
> (Shakespeare 1996: 678)

Hamlet's further actions (The Mousetrap, etc.) are encouraged by a belief in *me*, ex-hibited as *you 2*, who must restore the continuity of the high principles of *you 1* in the kingdom.

Cognitive aspect

The relationship of *you 1* with *you 2,* as a cognitive act of *me,* is *mythological.* Mircea Eliade confirms mythological thinking, saying that in this "an object or an act becomes real only insofar as it *imitates* or *repeats* an archetype. Thus, reality [in our example, the relationship with *you 2* – *P.L.*] is acquired solely through repetition [remembering – *P.L.*] [of the *me* – *you 1* relationship – *P.L.*] or participation; everything which lacks an exemplary model is 'meaningless', in other words – it lacks reality" (Eliade 1959a: 34). The relationship to *you 1* can be experienced as a certain initial state.

In describing cultural phenomena, Lotman has emphasized that the generally recognized mythologism of a child's consciousness "does not disappear, nor should it do so, from the consciousness structure of an adult. This continues to function as a generator of associations and as one of the active modelling mechanisms. Ignoring this would render it impossible to understand adult behaviour" (Lotman 1978: 8). This line of argument permits the treatment of the *me* relationship with *you 1* and *you 2* as communication acts that are simultaneous, logically on the same level and mythologically *identical*. At the same time it can even be intuitively grasped that there is a hierarchy of values between *me* and *you 2*, which finds expression in the fact that *me* puts into words a relationship with *you 2* (be it anyone specifically) by "looking up to him" [by equating it with a normative (*resp.* archetypical) *me* – you *1* relationship]. Belief in the addressee is an exalting or submissive act being repeated by *me*.

Teleological aspect

Indeed, belief symbolizes, exalts and mythologizes durability and continuity. The attentive reader has no doubt noticed that the analysis so far has not posed the question as to whether *exalting continuity* is only limited to the concept of 'belief' or if its field of implementation and function is wider than 'belief' in the structure of the individual and culture? It is even intuitively clear that the relationship, for example, of *hope* and *love* with the object of attention, whom one places hope on, and/or loves (and why not also *honours*, *worships, exalts,* etc.), is not conceivable without belief in this object. And vice versa – devotive belief in someone is invalid without hope and devotion. The same can be said for magic. It is apparent that this particular nest of concepts is mutually connected, both structurally and functionally. Paul Tillich has indicated that the wise people from the late ancient period considered faith, hope and love to be "spiritual gifts" that are characteristic of "the internal purpose of being human" , i.e. of the *telos*, and we could add – of the existential projection to the future, keeping in mind the *patrum more* values[13]. It can therefore be admitted that belief as an ability of the intellect has an extensive existential basis in the structure of identity. The autocommunicative nature of this internal purpose becomes apparent particularly vividly in Hamlet's speech. Belief is one of the measuring sticks for human self-determination.

---

[13]   Tillich, in differentiating between the concepts 'existential' and 'existentialism', claims that in contrast to the latter, which refers to the school of philosophy, 'existential' denotes an attitude and an act of thinking where the thinker has not distanced himself from his object but has merged with it (Tillich 1963b: 26).

Energetic aspect

Another aspect of the intellectual ability under observation is associated with the structure of belief – the energetic potential directed at and focused on the addressee – *you 2* – and in certain cases it could be called the power of belief. In language philosophy this intellectual aspect interlocks with the problems associated with creative energy (*energeia)* and with what is created (*ergon*), to borrow from Wilhelm Humboldt. Pavel Florenskij, keeping in mind the word 'magicality', has claimed that, on the one hand, a word is closed "in a powerless and unreal subjectivity", but on the other hand, a word is a signal, a certain 'energy'. As soon as a word happens to enter a "live flow of speech", it "becomes alive and is filled with an internal power and meaning" (Florenskij 1999: 231, 233, 239). The source of the wide-ranging energetic potential of belief can be the 'creative power' that is equated to *you 1*, the mythological fellowship relationship with certain values-symbols, the orientational position of the object of the belief in the *me* value system, and of course the possible (conscious or unconscious) projection of *me* on the amplifying orientational axis. Concentrating on belief tends to change the *me* into an energetic dominant.

It follows on from the above arguments that devotional belief is a submissive relationship with the addressee, who is perceived as a symbol of the existential continuity of me.

Belief as an ability of the intellect and an applicable experience is realized in communication as a semiotic code. It should, however, be said that this code should be interpreted as a 'grammatical' norm. In actual (auto)communication (in texts) it may be dispersed into variants, in which the various aspects of belief are manifested with various intensity and explicitness, and may merge with the rational characteristics of persuasive belief. But this is already empiricism, whose typological and sociological field of implementation remains outside the bounds of this analysis.

5. Phenomenological boundaries of religious belief

Next, it is our task to examine whether and how the five aspects of belief, as an ability of the intellect that we have considered above, are manifest in the religious belief that over the centuries has crystallized into canonical form.

We claim that all belief-based communication characteristics hold a central meaning – including in the religious form of dedicative belief, and that they find there a signed expression in communication acts, where the participants are derived from the scriptures.

In beginning the comparison, it should be emphasized that the reduction to the formal characteristics described in Section 4 creates a schema that understandably

simplifies a religious discourse that is complex, capacious, and thousands of years old. But our task is indeed limited to differentiating the structural characteristics of religious communication, in order to assert their analogy, and the intellect-based experience's relationship with devotional belief. The expected analogies should permit the claim that the *intellectual ability to believe is also the natural precondition for forming the experience of religious belief.* In doing so, the argument of semiotic analysis should always be kept in mind: the possible *me*-external powers (here the teachings of God, the actions of Christ and the power of the Spirit) can be described as such since the *me* intellect fixes them in a signified manner. At the same time, an understanding should also arise that devotional and religious belief, which are analogous according to their formal characteristics, are indeed present in the practice of cultural communication, side by side with sovereign discourses, which nevertheless may merge with one another in the practice of communication.

Orientational aspect

The orientational aspect applies closely to the topological position of *You* in relation to *me,* on the horizontal and vertical relationship axis. Such a positioning of the question proceeds from the hypothesis (see Section 4) that the experience of devotional belief is based on the algorithm of the intellect and has been fixed in the memory of culture (or an individual) into a relationship with a certain durable *you.* And this is highly rated in experience, proceeds from the past and reaches into the future (on the horizontal axis) and has a submissive relationship denoting steadiness (on the vertical axis). Both axes of orientation also hold a central meaning in the dogma of Christianity, and are recurringly accentuated.

On *the horizontal axis* the passing of time, together with the appearance of a biblical God, acquires, in the consciousness of individuals, a linear and purposeful direction of movement from a definite (although indeterminate in time) starting point (world creation) to a definite end point (Day of Judgment). This is a "historical" development path with many unique key points "before the birth of Christ" and "after the birth of Christ". It is related to Providence (centrally through the atoning crucifixion of Jesus Christ), and is also eschatological, and its existential accent is on the future.

In mediating the word of the Bible from the past to the present and the future, the Christian message acquires characteristics denoting durability on the horizontal axis,[14] which is given a specific meaning by the fundamental concept of the Trinity.

---

[14]   This claim will be clarified in the course of examining the cognitive aspect of religious belief.

According to this, the Trinity is divided into hypostases (states): Father – you, Beginning With No Beginning, whose attributes are memory and the past; Son – Me, Logos, Absolute Thought, whose attributes are thinking and the present, and the Holy Spirit – Him, Source of Resurrection, whose attributes are love and the future (Averintsev 1982: 527) – "genuineness of the expected one" (St Paul).

But in addition to the devotional relationship with God, and the Christ-event on the horizontal axis that can be 'historically' interpreted, its reflection in the religious existential relationship to *me* – which can also be analysed in time-space, durability-related categories, embracing both the 'beginning' and the 'end' – is just as important. In this context, it is important to ask what has been the universal and specific purpose of religious belief from the point of view of being human, the durability of *me*, the human self-image – keeping in mind the beginning and the end of life. It is indeed clear that belief in God and Jesus Christ could not consistently survive just being supported by the Bible as story-telling, by mystical curiosity, fear, manners or mass behaviour. History convinces us that, for the religious, religiosity had to be in a certain way consistently, even inherently necessary from the point of view of durability. Religious communication is accompanied by the religious person's constant, everyday predisposition to share in the grace of You, to listen to teachings, repent, confirm the faith, atone for sin. Tillich emphasizes that the word 'sin', which has become simplified and made "unfit for use" in the popular-religious language use, does not denote morality in classical Christianity but is a "religious concept that incidentally also has moral consequences". He notes that the "contrast between oneself and one's true nature – alienation from oneself – is the inevitable manifestation of human existence" (Tillich 1990: 256). The horizontal relationship axis, as the temporal and historical path of becoming free from alienation *resp.* atoning for sin, is in Christianity a complex of acts that are cult-like in formation, and celebrated with rituals and sacraments. It is, according to religious tenets, the path through which a person attains humanness and his own essence.

The *vertical relationship axis*, and the heavens, located above and the source of the warmth and the water that gives life, has been the most important part of the *expanse,* starting from ancient imagination. On the semiotic plane, the topological characteristics of heavens can be divided into spatial (height, distance, size, immutability) and evaluative (unattainable, vigour, severity, subordinating, majestic, sovereignty) ones. The heaven has also been considered to be the home of the gods, and the described vertical characteristics have always – in this or that variation – characterized gods as the sublime addressees of the *me – you* relationship. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is called upon to create and mediate communication between the earth *below* and the heavens *above*.

In the context of these topological opinions, the communication between the individual and heavenly powers is also examined. Taking into account the extent,

superiority and indeterminateness of these forces, a person cannot treat these by excluding the submissiveness and devotion of *me*, or the giving of oneself or the reverence.

Sign-creating aspect

(1) Performative communication. Paul Tillich writes that the term "God" is best understood as the answer to the ultimate concern of a finite human being, and adds two noteworthy comments. Tillich claims that "this does not mean that first there is a being called God and then the demand that man should be ultimately concerned about him. It means: *that,* which undoubtedly concerns a person, *becomes* for that person a God (or idol)" (Tillich 1963a: 211). Tillich continues to explain his claim thus: "[g]ods are not objects within the context of the universe. They are *expressions* of the ultimate concern which transcends the cleavage between subjectivity and objectivity (here and above, my emphasis – P.L.)" (Tillich 1963a: 214). Proceeding from the communicative and sign-creation context, it can firstly be concluded that the 'ultimate' must be something that has left a trace in the *me* memory – this is either the intellect's programmed relationship model and/or the symbol or code text that can be taken from a person's experience;[15] and secondly that, which the "ultimate concerns", is not decipherable on the level of informative signs – it finds expression in the communication between *me* and God – in a certain devotional a c t. And, thirdly, since this devotional act is not decipherable on the level of informative signs, it is then a case of informative *indetermination* – a performative communication act in which the meaning can be reduced to the expressed act, *ad hoc*. This act is generally called prayer. Tillich emphasizes that the "me-you relationship between God and man [holds] a fundamental meaning for the religious experience" (Tillich 1963a: 222). Religious belief is not knowing or philosophizing about God, it is communication with God as an act. The informative indetermination of this act is interpreted in theological writings as a phenomenon, which lies beyond the limits of "ordinary experience": "[g]ods are beings who *transcend the realm of ordinary experience* in power and meaning, with whom men have relations which surpass ordinary relations in intensity and significance (my emphasis – P.L.)" (Tillich 1963a: 212).

---

[15]   Lotman called code text a certain syntagmatic whole, where the code itself has risen to fulfil the role of the content of the text, reducing the informative proportion of the text to a minimum (as it occurs for example in a fairy tale or a crime novel). See Lotman 1988: 4–6.

2. Symbol-centred level of expression

As a symbol (here we are referring to Lotman's symbol analysis, as discussed above), God (the sign) belongs to the complex "mnemonic program" of culture, in which the level of expression only "hints at the level of content", which, in the memories of *me* and culture, belongs, compared to signed expression, to the "more multidimensional space" and which is actualized in religious communication.

Therefore, an 'act of God' 'in us' or an expression 'about God' is a symbolic sign expression recorded in the memory of *me* about God as *You*. But God as *You* reaches the actual imagination of *me* mostly through referencing – mediated by other *yous,* which means that communication repeats the evidential (*you 1*) and actual (*you 2*) relationship schema (See Section 4, Orientational aspect) as described by Roman Jakobson. The other *yous* are firstly Jesus Christ, whom God, according to the scriptures, let be born on Earth, "for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2: 9). However, there are other *yous* that could also have evidentiality to God (through Christ): Christ's disciples and prophets or priests from a church pulpit. Evidentiality to God reaches (have reached) *me* either in the form of normative texts from the scriptures and/or in the form of rhetoric, or through the symbolizing medium of written and visual art, and music. Thus does the word of God and Christ reach the mind of the believers, through multiple mediations.

In summarizing this discussion using semiotic terms, it could be said that communication with addressees in a religious discourse is symbolic, indeterminate as regards information, and, as a rule, evidential ('hinting'). This symbolicity is also emphasized by the later formation of texts ('books', 'acts', 'gospels') as 'chapters' and 'verses'. Each fragment of texts (also verses) in the Bible can in principle be treated as an independent symbol since it has both an iconic (pictorial) as well as an indexical (referencing) formal structure. The iconicity of the verse consists in the sameness of the excerpt of text that is seen or heard with that whichis holy in the eyes of the believer. The indexicality of the verse consists of referencing, the 'evidence' of something/someone greater, more multidimensional, undetermined in words. This is analogous to the way in which, for example, the *me* listens to the national anthem standing up references the state as something whose value "cannot be expressed in words" – something that is in the "heart" of *me*, as is customarily said in such cases. As is, in principle, any verse in the Bible, as well as the index of the entire scriptures, just as the title of a book is the index of the work that it denotes. We join Mircea Eliade in also keeping in mind that in communication a "religious symbol conveys its message even if it is no longer *consciously* understood in every part. For a symbol speaks to the whole human being (the "multidimensional" and "indeterminate" person – P.L.) and not only to the intelligence" (Eliade 1959b: 129). A person, as a

being "created in the image of God" can (if s/he can…) in this context be considered as a (divine) symbol of God.

Theologians generally agree that the semantic common denominator of religious symbols, which differentiate them from the other, profane, symbols, is that which is holy. "Holiness is a *quality* of ultimate concern", claims Tillich and adds that "humans cannot have ultimate concern in something unless it has the quality of holiness [emphasis – *P.L.*]" (Tillich 1963a: 215). Topologically – on the value scale – the *me* relationship with holiness is therefore definitely a characteristic of submissive devotion. This viewpoint is also in accordance with the standpoints in Section 4, which could now be extended with the realization that the objects of devotional belief (e.g. the one being loved) may also acquire, as regards formal characteristics, the symbolic halo of holiness.

Cognitive aspect

Communication with the *yous* in religious discourse, as regards cognitive characteristics, is mythological – analogous with the relationship in devotional belief (see Section 4 for details). In the context of mythological communication, this is a case of a certain proto-form, archetype repeating/being repeated. And the equalizing mechanism, which is characteristic of mythological thought, permits the *me* to feel in these events a fellowship in the present, to devotionally identify with them.

The act of mythological thought changes the past and the future into the present on the horizontal axis and brings God from the heights 'into' *me*. The evidential *Yous* merge, with the support of mythological thought, into One – the Holy Trinity addressee, with whom the believer identifies in prayer and feels a submissive fellowship. It is quite clear that mythological thought and myths as the subject of mythological thought, is the organic, central characteristic of religious belief.

In such an act of mythological thought, *me* perceives holy objects (including devotive *you 1*) as a part of oneself. This is *autocommunication*. Due to fellowship and being-as-one with this autocommunicative image, the *me*-picture rises, in *me* eyes, to an uplifted position on the value scale. An autocommunicative relationship with moral values that are considered to be holy leaves an unavoidably valued mark on the self-image of *me*. Lotman emphasizes that a "text in the communication canal *me – me* has a tendency to be saturated with individual meanings and to become an organizer of dispersed associations that have been deposited in a person's consciousness. It retunes the person that has entered autocommunication" (Lotman 1973: 236).

Teleological and energetic aspect

In the existential sense, the religious worldview is completely teleological: the believer's life process and its structure are determined, from the viewpoint of *me,* by God's Providence, prophetic signs, the act of resurrection and awaiting the Messiah, which has a transcendental destination. The Bible's vision of this process is dramatic, but directed towards the future and selectively optimistic – for those who feel faith, hope and love towards the Creator, find in themselves their *telos* as their inner purpose ["For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" (Matt 10: 20)], and in submissive accordance with this go to meet their salvation. The *energetic aspect* of religious belief is also expressed in the above, which provides a sanctified force and a constantly real purpose to the strivings and words of the believer, creates a certain absolute projection, which, as regards the profane reality, has dimensions that are distant, high in the value sense and cosmic in the spatial plane. This projection is the path that is followed in the form of mythological reference, and mostly in autocommunicative form. In addition, the energy force of belief is, in interaction with mythological reference, capable of dominating 'blindly' in a person's consciousness.

Bringing the above into the context of the characteristics we have been analysing, it can be stated that *sin* is a teleological and energetic concept. Sin is the symbol of not being in conformity with the inner purpose of *me*. This seems to conceal the significant point of contact between *divinus* and *humanus*, between the devotional belief that rises above the profane everyday consciousness and religious belief. The problem in humanistic culture of not being in accordance with the essence of a person has remained constantly on the agenda, and religious belief must be considered to have played a major role in this.

Hopefully we have succeeded, through this analysis, in proving that religious belief (religiosity) is, according to its formal characteristics, analogous with devotional belief, which is the natural ability of a person's intellect, and whose formal characteristics have been described here as elements of a universal algorithm. In contrast to devotional belief, religious belief focuses on the relationship with the unique *You*, which on the vertical axis of communication embodies absolute values, and on the horizontal axis – eternity. Religious myths, as a plentiful, organized collection of symbols that has been formed over the centuries and deposited in the cultural memory, is a sovereign world, where all the *Yous* are oriented to show the way for the mythological realization of the inner purpose (*telos*) of *me* and for binding fate with eternity – in the name of *the immortality of the soul*. Such an orientation could be said to raise religious discourse to a higher level than the profane level of culture and to attribute to it an exclusive position on the value scale. The submissive relationship with the scripture's *Yous* that is expressed mostly in autocommunicative acts permits

the *me* to feel fellowship with the world, which through devotion dignifies and harmonizes the notion of *me* of himself and creation, and binds him with the universe. For a believer, God is the symbol of the existential durability of *me*.

Devotional belief is one of the recorded forms of the relationship between *me* and the (concealed) world.

6. How to describe the formal characteristics of atheism?

Unfortunately we must begin with admitting that a concept of atheism that is complete and scientifically creditable just does not exist. And atheism's apologists, in emphasizing the scientificity of atheism, have chronically missed the mark because, firstly, they have not taken into account that, once they are taken out of context, the facts of a myth lose their initial meaning and function that is based on a certain and definite structural whole. The facts of a myth (also the myth of Christianity), as we have recognized, are symbolic and cognitively mythological: for example, immortality, the resurrection of Christ etc. cannot be interpreted in terms of natural science (and the believer indeed does not interpret them so); and, secondly, scientifically competent arguments to dispute or prove the actual existence of God and immortality do not exist.

Nevertheless, the attempts to criticize religiosity have always been based on science – always in the mantra-like context of "common sense" and "progress". Atheists, as we know, have always considered faith to be "medieval mind blindness" and have emphasized the triumph and priority of practical, "earthly values".

Let us now look at how to formalize the characteristics that have been used to describe atheism.

It is noticeable how the authors of atheistic texts tend to compensate for their scientifically fragile arguments with an emotional and aimless, sometimes even mocking, feeling of superiority. The roots of this style go back to the Enlightenment. Theoretically speaking, this is an antithetic structure of thought, using a thought algorithm that is inherently characteristic of the intellect – a mirror projection, according to which the addressee, in this case the explicit 'contemptibility', 'inadequacy' and 'sinfulness' of priests *resp.* believers, is contrasted with the addresser who has self-evident dignity, intelligence and morality. The content of the meaning of the addressee, as a sign, is formed in a contradictory manner: following on from the "minus sign" *alias no alias left* there is the "plus sign" *alias yes alias right* – as an automatic symmetrical antithesis – in a mirror, so to speak.[16] The field of implementation of such a thought process in culture is rather extensive, and

---

[16]   For more detail on the antithetic operations of the intellect, see Lepik 2008: 62–91.

characteristic of not only atheism. It begins, metaphorically speaking, in the kitchen and extends to the political ideology of totalitarian regimes.

Karl Marx has quite knowingly and explicitly used such polarization and judgmentalism in defining atheism. Even up to this day, his atheistic thought schema has had a widespread effect, which justifies our delving into the topic.

In analysing God-denial in the workers' movement, Marx claims directly that "atheism is a *negation of God*, and postulates *the existence of man* through this negation" (Marx 1975: 306). In the Introduction to his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx, in the spirit of materialist monism, denies God as a "fictitious person", a "non-person", the distorted reflection of a person, and contrasts to this a person's "true earthly being". He also denies the "fantastic reality of heaven", contrasting it to the "true reality that man seeks and must seek". He calls the 19th-century bourgeois society, in which a person must do the seeking, a 'false world', which encourages the survival of a distorted worldview, but which – again a contrast – would disappear once socialism is born. This claim, however, is topped by Marx's line of argument on the 19th century bourgeois society's 'general theory'. This, he claims, is religion, which also is the "encyclopaedic compendium" (i.e. a summarized handbook) of society, "its logic in popular form /.../ its moral sanction" (Marx 1970: 3). In using such a thought construct, Marx then equates religion and political ideology. He also equates religiosity, as a form of communication, with the ideological actions of (religious) institutions.

From the logic of antithetic constructions there follows the symmetricity of the plus-side topological characteristics of antithetic postulates with the minus-side characteristics. The characteristics affirmed by Marx can be clearly positioned on the vertical and horizontal axes, on the basis of the same logic that we described in the analysis of religious belief. For Marx, the vertical axis discloses the "true earthly essence" of a person – analogous to the minus-side's true essence as created by God: "The criticism of religion disillusions man, so that he will think, act, and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses, so that he will move around himself as his own true Sun," writes Marx (1843–1844)[17]. Of course, the symbolic expression "true Sun" should be interpreted as a person's freedom, the highly rated social value, and dignity, because "man is *the world of man* – state, society" (Marx 1843–1844). Keeping in mind symmetricality, I cannot agree with Paul Tillich's claim that the vertical axis is missing in Marxism (Tillich 1990: 260). Indeed, whereas in Marx's mental image of the 19th century the imaginary "true earthly essence" can be considered, with reservation, to be "vertically transcendental", then in the Marxism of totalitarian societies, a "forever

---

[17]   Karl Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* is available at. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm.

living" image of a dictator is created, that supersedes the functions of God and embodies all of the essential (= godly) virtues, and is appointed as an obligatory and the most highly rated reference model in the "world of man". The horizontal axis of Marx's thought schema – the course of history from the present (capitalism) to the future (communism) expresses the inevitable purposefulness of a person's *existence*, which is analogical to the trajectory of existence from the earthly realm to the realm of a thousand years of peace. According to Marx, religion that has been connived by the "false world" will disappear with the coming of socialism (communism) that is revolutionary in substance, just as, in the Christians' opinion, the sinful "fallen existence" will disappear.

In introducing the future dimension of existence, Marx poses a question about how to achieve the "true essence" of a person by "changing" the world. "Revolutionary practice" is placed on the agenda, man interfering in the formation of his future: the conflict between *the essence of a person and existence*, and the problem of how to overcome this (Marx 1958: 5–7). In this conflict, Marx proceeds from a noteworthy analysis of *alienation*.

The phenomenon that is encompassed by the concept of alienation has two aspects – a historically inevitable one, which in Marx's opinion is interlocked with the development in society of production relations and production forces, which are outside a person's will; and an instrumental one, which depends on a person's revolutionary will. Marx proceeds from the postulate that man is born free, but in class society, due to the pressure of private property and particularly of the capitalistic production relations, he has become a commodity, has been objectified, has lost his personality, and, instead of "real happiness" is prepared to be satisfied with "illusory happiness" – and this is primarily religion (Marx 1970: 3). An actual phenomenon is therefore examined: a person in a capitalist society has become *alienated from his essence. Reverting to the essence* can, in Marx's opinion, only take place in a class-free society that is free from exploitation.

A person's liberation, including liberation from religiosity, becomes the finale of historical development in Marx's analysis. Then social and individual harmony will enter into force. Since historical materialism does not recognize an alternative path of development for society that would exclude communism, and since communism is portrayed as an antithetic future projection that is in contrast to the present, one must admit that, according to formal characteristics, this finale is analogous to the overcoming of religious alienation in Christianity. Paul Tillich, who has rated Marx's alienation-themed arguments highly, notes that "Marx persists in the prophet-like tradition" (Tillich 1990: 260). To this, Tillich adds a profound observation on the structure of culture: "it is only possible to comprehend *humanum,* to its proto-roots, through *divinum* – even when it has knowingly uprooted itself" (Tillich

1990: 260). Indeed, in both Christianity and in Marxism, "man as the final freedom comes into conflict with his essence during the process of moving [from paradise *resp.* from pristine communism[18]. P.L.] into reality" (Tillich 1990: 252). In both cases, the teleological finale that follows can be treated as a utopian *resp.* eschatological phenomenon – as crossing the bounds to communism *resp.* the thousand-year realm of peace. Christianity, too, has the "idea of the 'historic moment' [---] the coming of the times when the decisive historical event becomes possible [---] the 'right time' – *kairos*, which is unique and during which the turnaround from the existential fall to a state of salvation [i.e. the true essence – P.L.] takes place" (Tillich 1990: 259). All this has permitted Bertrand Russell claim that "Marx professed himself an atheist, but retained a cosmic optimism which only theism could justify" (Russell 1945: 789).

Tillich states that the "smart theologians have always been reluctant to say anything specific about paradise, i.e. they have not offered thorough teachings on the essence of man" (Tillich 1990: 254). The same could be said of the communist formation, which in Marx's vision is an indistinct antithetic reconstruction of the capitalist world. However, all this does not provide us with a reason to equate the formal structures of Marxist and Christian alienation, or of atheism and theism.

What is much more important for the whole of our analysis are the structural differences between Marx's atheist and the Christians' religious ways of thinking. Marx treats the alienated essence of a person as an historical precedent – the universal characteristics of this phenomenon do not interest him since he treats the essence as a result of historical formation. In setting such a criterion, however, he comes into conflict with the initial presumption: if a person is *born free*, then this freedom must also have certain universal characteristics that proceed from the person himself, of which one can be aware even before the "re-setting" of the essence.

Tillich treats alienation in Christianity as a universal fate and guilt that has been accompanying man throughout the ages (Tillich 1990: 251–254). The cardinal difference from Marxism is also that, for a Marxist, the "right time" comes as a result of the teamwork between many societal factors, and is projected onto the future, whereas, for every Christian the "right time" is also the everyday striving towards this essence, with personal, intimate efforts – through prayer and despite all external factors. Being freed from Marxist and Christian alienation is, in the former case, being freed from God – denial, and in the second case, reaching God – affirmation.

But nevertheless, the structure of Marx's atheism – as strange as it might seem – as regards the general formal characteristics, is recurrently in accordance with

---

[18]   Reference to pristine communism (this would understandably be the formal analogy to paradise) does exist in Marx's manuscripts, but this idea nevertheless remained marginal for him.

the characteristics of devotional belief as described in Section 4. The character of the horizontal and vertical orientational axes of Marx's atheism was also discussed previously. On the sign-creation plane, Marx describes communism, using symbols ("true sun", "genuine happiness", "true reality", "man's true earthly essence", etc.), which implicitly mediates the *patrum more – you 1* values from primeaval communism. On the level of informative signs, the referenced symbols are in their meaning elements of indistinct performative constructions ("that man could revolve around himself as his own true sun"; "true reality that man seeks and must seek"; "the point of departure for socialism is man's theoretical and practical sense consciousness and nature as essence", etc.). The atheistic discourse presented by Marx is also mythological on the cognitive plane since the sentences and concepts that he uses lack meta-linguistic equivalents. Expressions used to describe communism are object-linguistic, they do have an output to the metalinguistic level. The finalistic, teleological character of Marx's communism has already been discussed above.

The circle has been completed, and the moral is straightforward: the rational, scientifically organized world is not the only world "that man seeks and must seek". In denying religion and religiosity, atheism has chronically ignored the intellectual specifics of religion and religiosity, the communicative role in the structure of personality and human community, and the functions in culture. On the basis of the analysis, we could realize that, as a singular ability in relating to the world, dedicational belief – and devotional and religious belief, as its sub-categories – is one of the indisputably central intellectual instruments of an individual's self-regulation (positive self-image and its projective duration), intellectual homeostasis and empathy. The "blindness" that excludes the rationality of belief is disturbing only for those who think that the intellect of a normal person consists wholly of rational and "scientific" thought and that a person is born into this world as a blank canvas.

References

Averintsev, Sergej 1982. Troitsa. In: *Mify narodov mira*. Vol 2. Moscow: Sovetskaya Entsiklo-pediya, 527. [Аверинцев, Сергей. Троица. In: *Мифы народов мира*, т. II. Москва: Советская Энциклопедия, 527.]

Bachelard, Gaston 1994[1958]. *The Poetics of Space*. [Jolas, Maria, trans.] Boston: Beacon Press.

Buber, Martin 1970. *I and Thou*. [Kaufmann, Walter, trans.] New York: Scribner.

Eliade, Mircea 1959a. *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*. [Trask, Willard R., trans.] New York: Harper.

–   1959b. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. [Trask, Willard R., trans.] New York: Harcourt.

Florenskij, Pavel 1999. Mysl' i yazyk. In: *Sochineniya v chetyrjoh tomah.* Vol. 3(1*).* Moscow: Mysl', 104–363. [Флоренский, Павел. Мысль и язык. In: Флоренский, Павел. *Сочинения в четырёх томах*, т. 3(1). Москва: Мысль, 104–363.]

Gurevich, Aron 1985. *Categories of Medieval Culture*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Hoffmann-Krayer, Eduard (ed.). 1987[1935/36]. *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 7. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter.

Jakobson, Roman 1990. Shifters and verbal categories. In: Waugh, Linda R; Monville-Burston, Monique (eds.), *On Language*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 386–392.

Lepik, Peet 2008. *Universals in the Context of Juri Lotman's Semiotics.* Tartu Semiotics Library 7. Tartu: Tartu University Press.

Lyubishchev, Aleksandr 1977. Ponyatiya sistemnosti i organizovannosti. *Trudy po znakovym sistemam (Sign Systems Studies)* 9: 134–141. [Александр Любищев. Понятия системности и организованности. *Труды по знаковым системам (Sign Systems Studies)* 9: 134–141.]

Lotman, Juri 1973. O dvuh modelyah kommunikatsii v sisteme kul'tury. *Trudy po znakovym sistemam* (*Sign Systems Studies*) 6: 227–243. [Лотман, Юрий. О двух моделях коммуникации в системе культуры. *Труды по знаковым системам* (*Sign Systems Studies*) 6: 227–243.]

–   1978. Fenomen kul'tury. *Trudy po znakovym sistemam* (*Sign Systems Studies*) 10: 3–17. [Лотман, Юрий. Феномен культуры. *Труды по знаковым системам* (*Sign Systems Studies*)10: 3–17.]

–   1987. Simvol v sisteme kul'tury. *Trudy po znakovym sistemam* (*Sign Systems Studies*) 21: 10–21. [Лотман, Юрий. Символ в системе культуры. *Труды по знаковым системам* (*Sign Systems Studies*) 21: 10–21.]

–   1988[1981]. Text within a text. *Soviet Psychology* 26(3): 32–51.

Marx, Karl 1958. Thesen über Feuerbach. In: Marx, Karl; Engels, Friedrich. *Werke, 3*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 5–7.

–   1970. *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

–   1975 . Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844. In: Marx, Karl; Engels, Friedrich. *Collected Works. Vol. 3.* London: Lawrence & Wishart, 229–348.

Novikov, Mihhail (ed.), 1985. *Ateisticheskij slovar'*. Moscow: Politizdat. [Новиков, М. П. (ред.) *Атеистический словарь*. Москва: Политиздат.]

Russell, Bertrand 1945. Karl Marx. In: Russell, Bertrand. *The History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 782–791.

Shakespeare, William 1996. Hamlet. In: *The Complete Works*. Oxford: Wordsworth, 670–713.

Tillich, Paul 1963a. The reality of God. In: *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 211–289.

–   1963b. Existence and the quest for the Christ. In: *Systematic Theology. Vol. 2.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 19–96.

–   1990. Der Mensch im Christentum und im Marxismus. In: *Main Works/Hauptwerke, Bd.2, Kulturphilosophische Schriften*. Berlin: Gruyter, 249–262.

Tolstoj, Lev 1950. Chto takoe religiya i v chom sushchnost' eyo. In: *Polnoe sobraniye sochinenij v 90 tt. Tom 35.* Moscow: GIHL, 157–198. [Толстой, Лев. Что такое религия и в чем сущность ее. *Полное собрание сочинений*. В 90 тт. Том 35. Произведения 1902–1904 гг. Москва: Государственное издательство художественной литературы, 157–198.]

– 1984. O zhizni. In: *Sobranije sochinenij v 22 tomah. Tom 17*. Moscow: Hudozhestvennaya literatura, 7–135. [Толстой, Лев. О жизни. – *Собрание сочинений в 22 томах*. Москва: «Художественная литература», 7–135.]

Uspenskij, Boris 2007. *Ego Loquens. Yazyk i kommunikatsionnoe prostranstvo*. Moscow: RGGU. [Успенский, Борис. *Ego Loquens. Язык и коммуникационное пространство*. Москва: РГГУ.]

(Религиозная) вера и атеизм с семиотической точки зрения

В статье предпринята попытка исследовать с точки зрения семиотики интеллектуальные характеристики веры: веры в широком значении этого слова (как признания чего-либо истинным), религиозной веры и атеизма. Эти три аспекта автор рассматривает в качестве знаковых систем – языков культуры. В результате анализа выявляется специфическая «грамматика».

Чтобы определить формальную структуру феномена религиозной веры следует учесть пять аспектов коммуникативного акта: ориентационный, семиозисный (*sign-creational*), когнитивный, телеологический и энергетический. Вера как ориентационный акт немыслима вне автокоммуникации: отношение «я – ты» преобразуется топологически, выявляя вертикальные и горизонтальные проекции отношения «я – я». Семиозисный аспект веры проявляется в коммуникации с одной стороны в качестве перформативных признаков высказывания (высказывание = поступок), а с другой – в символически построенных мнемонических программах. Вера как когнитивный акт мифологична, она выражена в идентификации себя с адресатом и в субъективно понимаемой вневременности этой связи. Вера как телеология связывается с экзистенциальной проекцией и вера как энергия интерпретируется в качестве созидательной силы – *energeia*. На основе изучения Священного Писания и богословской литературы (главным образом работ Пауля Тиллиха) в статье рассматривается присутствие указанных коммуникативных особенностей также в религиозном семиозисе.

В случае с атеизмом формально налицо структура антитетического мышления, признаком которой является симметричная противоположность интеллектуальных характеристик сторон со знаком плюс и знаком минус. Особенно интересно наблюдать, как Маркс (вкупе с его последователями) не пренебрегает структурной логикой явления, которое он отрицает, и как дедикативная структура мышления рождает земных богов.

(Religioosne) usk ja ateism semiootilisest vaatepunktist

Artiklis kirjeldatakse usku, religioossust ja jumalaeitamist (ateismi) semiootilisest vaatepunktist. Vaadeldakse nende kui kultuurikeelte – seega siis märgisüsteemide – formaalseid, "grammatilisi" põhitunnuseid. Usku käsitletakse intentsionaalse fenomenina ja selle formaalse ehituse määratlemisel arvestatakse vastava kommunikatiivse akti viit – orientatsioonilist, märgiloomelist, kognitiivset, teleoloogilist ja energeetilist – aspekti. Niisugune lähenemine ei vastanda religioossuse intellektipõhist käsitust teoloogilisele, sest ka kõik teispoolne ja

ilmutuslik saab põhimõtteliselt inimese mõtteisse jõuda üksnes märgilisel kujul ja intellekt fikseerib need märgiliste struktuuridena.

Usku kui orientatsioonilist akti ei saa käsitada autokommunikatsiooni välistades: *mina–sina* suhtesse "siseneb" *mina–mina* suhe vertikaalsete ja horisontaalsete topoloogiliste kujutelmadena. Usu märgiloomeline aspekt avaldub ühest küljest lausungite performatiivsetes tunnustes (lausung = tegu) ja teisalt sümbolipärases mnemoonilises programmeerituses. Kognitiivse aktina on usuomane kommunikatsioon mütoloogiline, väljendades adressaadiga samastumist ja suhte subjektiivset igikestvust. Teleoloogiliselt on usk seotud eksistentsiaalse projektsiooniga ja energeetiliselt käsitame usku *energeia*na – inimese loova jõuna. Pühakirjale ja teoloogilisele kirjandusele (valdavalt Paul Tillichi teostele) toetudes analüüsitakse kõigi osutatud kommunikatiivsete tunnuste esinemist religioosses märgiloomes.

Ateismi puhul on formaalselt tegemist antiteetilise mõtlemisstruktuuriga, mille tunnuseks on pluss-poole sümmeetrilisus miinus-poole intellektuaalsete tunnustega. Usu tunnuste alusel on eriti huvitav jälgida, kuidas Marx ja tema jüngrid on "sisustanud" ateismi orientatsioonilisi, teleoloogilisi ja energeetilisi tunnuseid ning kuidas mõtlemise dedikatiivne struktuur on sünnitanud ka maised jumalad.