

Esotericism, Rationality, and Scientific Thought in the Early Modern Period and Beyond

09:00 - 11:00 Saturday, 28th June, 2025

Dinne Room 304 (Universiteto str. 9)

Andrius Kaniava

130 ANCIENT WISDOM UTOPIANISM: ESOTERIC TRADITIONS IN EARLY MODERN UTOPIAN THOUGHT

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Abstract

A significant yet largely unexplored feature of Renaissance and early modern utopias is the presence of ideas and practices linked to the *prisca sapientia* (ancient wisdom) tradition. Philosophical utopias by authors such as Georgios Gemistos Plethon, Tommaso Campanella, and Francis Bacon reflect this influence. Intriguingly, even thinkers like Francesco Patrizi and Johann Valentin Andreae were deeply invested in ideas connected to ancient wisdom, though their ideal cities do not overtly display these elements.

In my presentation, I will first address the definitions and boundaries of 'utopia' and '*prisca sapientia*'. These will serve as the foundation for exploring why ancient wisdom resonated with Renaissance and early modern utopian authors, and what this connection implies for the rationality of ideal societies and their esoteric dimensions.

Additionally, I will examine aspects of *prisca sapientia* that could themselves be considered utopian, such as the pursuit of immortality and deification. As a case study, I will discuss the *Crater Hermetis* (1505) by Lodovico Lazzarelli. Although not a utopia by conventional definitions, this philosophical dialogue envisions an idealized society of deified individuals through a synthesis of Christian, Hermetic, and Kabbalistic wisdom.

This study is part of my ongoing PhD research within the ERC-funded project VERITRACE (<https://veritrace.eu/>). As an example of evolving methodologies in the study of philosophy and Western esotericism, VERITRACE aims to trace the influence of ancient wisdom writings (e.g., the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Chaldean Oracles*) on early modern natural philosophy through digital research techniques. At ESSWE10, I plan to present a preliminary overview of how digital humanities tools can help reveal the influence of ancient wisdom across early modern utopias.

209 THE ROLE OF ESOTERICISM IN EARLY MODERN SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON RATIONAL THINKING

Mykhailo Hryshko

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Abstract

The scientific revolution of early modern time marked a profound transformation of human thought, laying the foundation for modern science. Often, this phenomenon is presented as a triumph of rationality over superstition, but this narrative misses the role of traditions and schools of thought such as: alchemy, hermeticism, astrology and Kabbalah, which shaped the worldview and philosophy of such great figures of science as: Johann Kepler, Isaac Newton and Robert Boyle. This paper examines the question: How did esoteric practices contribute to the development of modern science?

After analysing the historical context, expert opinions and historically important texts, we can conclude that esotericism provided methodological tools and metaphysical assumptions that were reflected in the science that we see today. It is worth noting that Hermeticism inspired many cosmological models, and alchemy, in turn, formed the basis of experimental approaches to research.

In this study, it is argued that combining such seemingly opposite cultural phenomena as esotericism and rationalism is an integral part of scientific revolutions. Understanding these connections allows us to take a fresh look at the epistemological foundations of modern science.

22 THE RATIONAL KERNEL OF CHRISTIAN ATHEISM

Linartas Tuomas

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Abstract

Philosopher Slavoj Žižek recently (2024) formulated a seemingly paradoxical position of Christian atheism, evolved from his previous research (2000, 2003, 2008). This provocative notion is largely inspired by G.W.F. Hegel and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, although we can find similar reflections in such 20th-century currents as mystical-kabbalistic messianism of Walter Benjamin, revolutionary-theological utopianism of Ernst Bloch, and Nietzschean-occultist *atheology* of Georges Bataille. However, more Lacan-influenced contemporary theorists, such as Adrian Johnston (2022) and Lorenzo Chiesa, propose a different approach: they're working together on a project on "agnostic atheism" (forthcoming 2025).

For Žižek, Christianity is irreducible to religious belief or the institution of the Church: it is rather an epistemological-ontological category, based on the rationalist and secular legacy of the Enlightenment. Likewise, atheism here is understood not as crude and vulgar rejection of God, but as a specific – dialectical-materialist – articulation of immanence. Žižekian Christianity is "the true religion of the death of God", and this thesis, along with Alain Badiou's (2003) universalist interpretation of Saint Paul, has not only philosophical, but also political implications. For example, Holy Spirit is "the egalitarian emancipatory collective which cancels any organic-hierarchical social link" (Žižek 2012: 114).

Žižek formulates his position of Christian atheism by using and/or criticizing a historically varying and interdisciplinary field of ideas: Buddhism, quantum physics, post-humanism, cosmism, Afro-pessimism, etc. Thus we can assume that the concept of Christian atheism suggests a peculiar tension between "rationality" and "irrationality". Perhaps the most important issue, which will form the aim of this presentation, is a methodological one: what exactly allows for a dialectical synthesis of Christianity and atheism? Furthermore, does the critical method of discovering "the rational kernel within the mystical shell" (Marx) apply in this case? If Christian atheism is a consistently rational notion, then *how*? What kind of rationality are we talking about?

228 Crafting Secularized Religious and Spiritual Identities in the Turkish Context

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Abstract

This paper, drawing on political and anthropological research, explores how secularization dynamics interact with emerging religious movements and spiritual approaches in Turkey. In a country where the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) plays a pivotal role in shaping state-led secularization and de-secularization processes, religious identities often display fluidity.

In the 1930s, within nationalist circles, some individuals who did not adhere to Islam, whether atheists or theists, adopted Tengrism, the ethnic religion of the Turks, as a means to obscure their actual beliefs. This phenomenon appears to have given rise to an early form of neo-Tengrism. By the 2000s, given the fact that atheism became institutionalized through association, a new wave of neo-Tengrism emerged, this time as a nationalist secular identity largely detached from religious practices. Field research suggests that some neo-Tengrists attempt to rationalize ancient Turkic beliefs and shamanic traditions by framing them in response to contemporary social and environmental issues.

This process of legitimization through alignment with modern concerns is also evident among neo-Spiritists. A key example is the book *The Divine Order and The Universe (İlahi Nizam ve Kainat)*, written in the 1960s through decade-long seances with a medium but published only in the 2010s. According to the Neo-Spiritism society in question, the book was kept in notary and bank vaults for 54 years after it was written and was published "when the time was right". Its delayed release following the rise of popular interest in quantum physics, which in turn played a significant role in establishing its legitimacy and scientification.

This study examines how these evolving religious and spiritual identities influence social cohesion within Turkish society under Islamo-conservative governance. Additionally, it explores the factors that contribute to either the mainstream acceptance or marginalization of these rationalized spiritual and religious movements in a Turkey currently undergoing multifaceted de-secularization.