

About the Role of Science – Between Helena Blavatsky and Ulrich Beck

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Abstract

Science is the god that politicians, public figures and the media swear by today. Despite the leading role attributed to it, science in its role and significance for human civilization has been criticized. German sociologist Ulrich Beck points out that science does not serve the people, but protects the backs of politicians. More than a century before that, the founder of the Theosophical Society, Helena Blavatsky, noted that many of her contemporary scientists and researchers were adapting the facts to their hypotheses instead of drawing conclusions based on empirical material. The article presents the views of Blavatsky and Beck on the role and tasks of science, trying to find common ground in both opinions. The aim is to point out the communities and alternatives that theosophy provides in view of the importance of science in the conditions of the world risk society, as Ulrich Beck defines modernity.

Keywords: science, role, risk society, theosophy, Ulrich Beck, Helena Blavatsky.

1. Introduction

The question of the boundaries of science has a thousand-year history and there is no single solution. The article does not consider the theories and concepts on this topic, but presents the opinions of two researchers from different eras about the science of their time. These are Helena Blavatsky with her major work – *The Secret Doctrine* (Blavatsky, 2005), published in 1889, and Ulrich Beck, with his foundational concept of a risky society (Beck, 2013) in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The two researchers are united by the critical attitude towards scientists of their time. According to Helena Blavatsky, a large part of the people of science in the 19th century created hypotheses, after which they adapted and adjusted facts and experimental results to their hypotheses. This distorts the truth and draws false conclusions. Ulrich Beck's position is clear: modern science is dependent and serves politics, often the truth is hidden.

Criticism in both stems from a fundamental motive for Blavatsky and Beck and the goal of their research – man and society, which is created, in which people live, which they change, in which they develop each selves. As the highest activity of civilization, science is called and obliged to serve people. Everything else has no real basis and is inevitably forgotten. This is a fundamental thesis (although not clearly formulated and expressed) in both the works of Blavatsky and Beck.

On this background, the bright authorial presence of Blavatsky and Beck in *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Risk Society* is noted. The two not only describe and register ancient truths or states of humanity in their time but comment with passion and a bright philanthropic position. As a result, their reasoning, formulations, and these answer the same question: How is it possible for humanity to overcome the fears in which it is immersed and which are its daily routine. Blavatsky and Beck answer this question differently, but their answers are driven by humanistic motives. For the author of *The Secret Doctrine*, the answer is related to the acceptance by scientists and researchers of the One Reality, the Absolute, the Divine Essence as the basis, essence, and the resulting dimensions of personality and society. The hope, according to Ulrich Beck, is for the mind in science to be activated and for science to change itself by restoring the values of the Enlightenment.

Putting a plane for the study of two large and seemingly different areas of human knowledge – Theosophy as a synthesis of cosmogenesis¹ and anthropogenesis² different from the accepted in science, and Risk Society as a socio-philosophical concept of the state of modern humanity, at first glance seems paradoxical and contradictory. The apparent paradoxes stem mainly from the metaphysical nature of Theosophy and the extremely specific dimensions of the risk society. Regardless of these – basically formal differences – the two areas of knowledge have the same content subject – man and the development of his consciousness. Both in Helena Blavatsky's Theosophical Doctrine and in *The Risk Society* and the subsequent works of Ulrich Beck, the environment in which the personality is formed, lives, and develops is studied and analyzed. This is done with the specific means and methods of Theosophy and Social Philosophy: description, comparison, and analogy in *The Secret Doctrine*; statistical and sociological analysis and summary in *The Risk Society*.

As in Helena Blavatsky's theosophical doctrine, so in Ulrich Beck's conception of the world as a society of risk, the monistic principle is leading – consciousness and body are ontologically inseparable, leading consciousness, no matter the body. This approach is easier to find and justify in *The Secret Doctrine*, but a careful analysis of the risk society shows that the concept of Reflexive Modernity formulated by Ulrich Beck unfolds in such a discourse – leading the human consciousness from the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. A consciousness that not only responds to ever-increasing risk situations in all spheres of life, but that seeks ways and means to deal with the reality of risk, and at the same time opens up to others and the world, overcoming its threats, needs, and aspirations.

The setting of the topic of science between Helena Blavatsky and Ulrich Beck is based on the fact that both in the 20th century and at the beginning of the new millennium in different areas of scientific knowledge is moving in the direction of formulating and using a new research approach. This new paradigm brings consciousness to the forefront and gives matter a secondary role without diminishing its significance. Such an approach can be found in the works of world-renowned scholars in the field not only of the humanities, but above all of the sciences such as Albert Einstein, Max Planck, Joseph Bohm, Fritjof Capra, Stanislav Grof. This new paradigm is in full accordance with the attitude and the way Helena Blavatsky writes and presents the theses of theosophy – in their totality they are entirely in the field of consciousness as World Mind, Absolute, from where the phenomenal world periodically arises and returns. In this phenomenal world, human life is in fact a constant development of his consciousness as part of the World Mind.

¹ Blavatsky entitled Cosmogenesis the first volume of *The Secret Doctrine* and so called the process of formation of cosmic bodies.

² Anthropogenesis is the title of the second volume of *The Secret Doctrine*. The name summarizes the process of origin and evolution of man on Earth.

2. Briefly about Helena Blavatsky and Ulrich Beck

From the 19th century until today, Helena Blavatsky is an ambiguous person, and criticism and denial (Ignatiev, 2012) of her prevail over the approval and impartial analysis of her books and activities. Her life path is not long – she died at the age of 61. During the last decade of the 21st century, Blavatsky's life has been studied in the History of Theosophy, a field that is developing rapidly in Western Europe and the United States.³

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky was born on 31 August 1831 in Ekaterinoslav (today's Ukraine, Dnepropetrovsk). Her father is an officer – Peter von Gan, and her mother is a talented writer – Helena Fadeeva, who died young while Helena was a small child. At the age of 17, Helena married general Blavatsky, but soon left his home. She has traveled extensively in the United States, Mexico, South America, India, Tibet, Egypt and Europe. In 1873 she settled in New York, where she met colonel Henry Olcott. Here they founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. In 1879 Blavatsky and Olcott left for India. They opened the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, East India. In 1884 Blavatsky returned to Europe and founded in 1890 the European headquarters of the Theosophical Society in London. He died during an influenza epidemic in London on 8 May 1891. Two years earlier, in 1889, Blavatsky's seminal work, two volumes of *The Secret Doctrine*, was published. The third volume was published posthumously with her unpublished articles and detailed biography. Helena Blavatsky is also the author of over 1,500 pages, entitled *Isis Revealed* (1877), *Key to Theosophy* (1889), *The Voice of Silence* (1889), *The Wizards of the Blue Mountains* (1886) and over 100 articles, which she created mainly for Theosophist magazine. Blavatsky “writes 12 hours a day, often without bothering to eat” (Raynov, 1991). All her life she has been forced to overcome the severity of various diseases, and in the preface to the first edition of *The Secret Doctrine* she even apologizes for the late publication, explaining: “The reason for this delay is poor health and the scale of the undertaking” (Blavatsky, 2005).

The statements and theses of the German sociologist Ulrich Beck also provoke contradictory comments and are not always accepted. Ulrich Beck was born in 1944 and died on 1 January 2015. Beck is a professor at the University of Munich and the London School of Economics. He is the author of the concepts of Reflexive Modernization and Risk Society. He is best known for his books *The Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1986), *Reflexive Modernisation. Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (1994), *The Reinvention of Politics. Rethinking Modernity in the Global Social Order* (1997), *Democracy Without Enemies* (1998), *What is Globalization?* (2000).

According to Beck's concept, the risk is not an exception and consequence of social life. Risks are constantly produced by society and cover all spheres of life – economic, political, and social. They are a direct consequence of modernization, and the risk society is a new paradigm of social development. The rising production of risks undermines the principle itself of the market economy and private property and threatens the fundamental foundations of the rational behavior of society and the individual – science and democracy. At the same time, globalization requires the creation of new concepts and societies. Ulrich Beck is convinced that global capitalism undermined the foundations of democratic freedoms, radicalizes social inequality, and eliminates the principles of social justice and security.

3. Helena Blavatsky against crude materialism in science

It is clear from the introductory parts of *The Secret Doctrine* that the extensive exposition is also directed against the “gross and anti-materialism” (Blavatsky, 2005) that

³ See Theosophical History, on: <https://theohistory.org/>

conquered 19th-century science. Blavatsky does not hide that she expects attacks and even complete denial from her modern scientific community, especially as regards the main source of her Opus magnum – the Book of Jian. Blavatsky agrees that scholars have the right to deny its existence and, consequently, the Secret Doctrine, since they cannot see and be convinced of the existence of the Jian Book: “For the majority, she does not dislike them, as they, in turn, have the right to deny, as she asserts, as they view the truth from two very different points of view” (Blavatsky, 2005).

In fact, by accusing her contemporary scholars of creating these without evidence and adapting the empirical material to the theses, Helena Blavatsky may be accused of the same. In many places in the extensive exposition of *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky presents facts that are completely new both to the science of her time and to humanity in general. Some of these facts or allegations are only mentioned without being explained and without revealing their essence. A typical example in this regard is the concept of the evolution of the Planetary Chains – a group of seven “globes”, “spheres”, or “planets” linked together into a single scheme of evolution. No matter how thorough attempts are made to clarify this issue, in the end it becomes clear that Blavatsky only marks the concept and does not fully explain its essence.

The Doctrine of the Planetary Chains (or Rings) of the Worlds in the Solar Space is one of the unique problem areas not fully presented by Helena Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*. The doctrine is based on the sevenfold principle in which everything in the “metaphysical and physical worlds” is built, and according to which each star or planet has six fellow globes. Evolution takes place on these seven globes from the first to the seventh in seven rounds or seven cycles. Thus, according to theosophical doctrine, our planet Earth has six fellow globes and it is the fourth in the planetary chain. This theosophical fact is cited as indisputable in *The Secret Doctrine*. But Helena Blavatsky does not fully present and clarify the question of Circles, giving only parts of the apparently more multifaceted picture of the doctrine of the Planetary Chains. This is explained below by the words: “In this work we only talk in passing about the other Globes” (Blavatsky, 2005).

It is clear from Blavatsky’s comments that the evolution of phenomena in their various forms and types begins on the first globe of the Planetary Chain and gradually improves on each subsequent globe in the chain. In the passage of the phenomenal, manifested, world from one globe in the chain to another, there is a Little Pralaya or a period of rest. Blavatsky mentions nothing of its duration, but by analogy with the Maha or the Great Pralaya between two manvantars, the period of rest between the evolutions of the globes in the Planetary Chain must be the same. As small in duration should be the Little Manvantars for the evolution of each of the globes.

At the same time, the evolution of the shapes and types of each of the Globes is also based on sevenfold principle and goes through seven rounds. There are also periods of rest between them, equal in length to periods of active life. According to the doctrine, the Earth is now in its fourth cycle of evolution, evolving through seven human races. Each race has seven sub-races. Today’s humanity is a representative of the fifth race of the fourth earth circle. According to the Secret Doctrine, the beginning of the fifth race must have been sought about 80,000 years ago. The time and duration of the existence of each race and sub-race of the Earth’s circles are not explicitly stated by Helena Blavatsky, but it is clear that the periods of their active life are hundreds of thousands and even millions of years.

What happens when the evolution of all species – minerals, plants, animals, people on all seven globes of the Planetary Chain – is over? This is one of the few questions answered in *The Secret Doctrine*. Blavatsky notes: “When the Seventh and Last Circle of one of these rings has begun, the highest (or first) Globe A, and with it all the others in sequence until the last, instead of entering a more or less prolonged period of rest or “Obstruction”, as in previous Circles, is

beginning to die. Planetary Disintegration or Pralaya is approaching and its time is coming; each Globe must transfer its life and energy to another planet” (Blavatsky, 2005).

Related to this answer is one of the most paradoxical points in *The Secret Doctrine* – about the Moon as the “Mother” of the Earth. “The moon plays the largest and most significant role both in the formation of the Earth itself and in its population of human beings”, said Blavatsky (Blavatsky, 2005). The Moon, like the Earth, has six fellow globes. The Lunar Planetary Chain is older than the Earth’s, and according to the doctrine, the Lunar chain has passed on its life principles to the Earth and its six fellow globes. Its animals have become people on Earth, its plants have become animals on Earth, its minerals on Earth are now plants – a process that, according to theosophy, will develop with the earth's inhabitants when the Earth chain passes its life principles to another Planetary Chain. It has moved to a higher and more perfect evolutionary level. The monadic multitude, which is transferred from the Moon to the Earth, gives rise to humanity, but only as a physical form and not as a rational and spiritual being.

These entirely new to 19th-century science, as well as to current 21st-century science, are still awaiting evidence from astronomers and researchers in various fields of knowledge. Whether they will be confirmed or rejected remains a question and a challenge for the future of the world scientific community. The fact is that *The Secret Doctrine* is a relatively confusing read that requires considerable effort to sort out and clarify the dozens of statements and entirely new concepts in this fundamental work. However, the effort is worth it, because after two or more readings of *The Secret Doctrine* before the eyes of the unprejudiced researcher reveals an extremely interesting, unusual and at the same time full of humanity picture of life on Earth and space. Which in turn does not eliminate the unresolved issues and problems of Blavatsky, but maintains research curiosity, which according to Einstein is most important for science.

Perhaps a suitable comparison in this regard is a quote from the Chinese philosopher of the 4th century BC Zhuang Zhou: “The web is used for fishing. When they catch fish, they forget about the family. The trap is used to hunt rabbits. If they catch a rabbit, they forget about the trap. Smoke is used to express meaning”. Associate Professor Antoaneta Nikolova notes in this regard that the “texts of Taoism are to a large extent such an example of capturing the meaning beyond words. This is especially true for the short *Daodzin*, whose language is deliberately vague, omitting connecting words and connections and therefore allowing for even more variations of meaning, making it even more opaque to linear thinking. it's all a process, a change, a novelty” (Nikolova, 2017).

Despite the controversial concepts from the point of view of modern science, Helena Blavatsky constantly tries in her *Opus magnum* to present evidence through comparisons and analogies. Of course, it is clear that the analogy is not yet an officially accepted method of scientific research, but according to Helena Blavatsky it is mandatory for discovering and proving the hidden ancient knowledge, as she calls *The Secret Doctrine*. Blavatsky refers to texts from the *Rig Veda*, some *Upanishads*, *Puranas* and *Brahmans*. In the Prologue to the First Volume, she points out his main source – the unknown to science *Book Jian*. But along with it, she points out that there are other books and manuscripts that “still exist today in secret shrines and libraries in complete safety from the defiling hands of the West to reappear in a more enlightened time” (Blavatsky, 2005). Blavatsky does not say how she became acquainted with these hidden sources of knowledge. Instead, she focuses on the destruction and distortion of ancient written monuments by the Christian church fathers and points out: “These documents are now lost to the uninitiated, as this measure is not dictated by selfishness or a desire to monopolize the Life-giving Secret Knowledge. There were parts of the Secret Knowledge that for many centuries had to remain hidden from the eyes of the ignorant. But this was necessary because giving many secrets of such great importance to the unprepared would be tantamount to giving a lighted candle in the hands of a child in a powder keg” (Blavatsky, 2005).

The founder of the Theosophical Society acknowledges that the evidence for processes and laws, as she calls karma and incarnation, can only be indirect, but this does not negate the theosophical statement that these laws are immutable. As she has repeatedly pointed out in *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Key to Theosophy*, the doctrine she presents to unbelievers and ultimate materialists can only remain a “working hypothesis”: “If people, even the most educated, believe in Gravity, the Aether, the power and the like, non-Science abstractions and “working hypotheses” that you have never seen, touched, smelled, heard, tried, why can’t other people, on the same principle, could to believe in their immortal Ego, a „working hypothesis“ far more logical and important than any other” (Blavatsky, 2005). This quote is an ironic objection by Blavatsky against her contemporary critics and is not the only reaction. Many times, in *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky ironizes the approach of her contemporary scientists, who adjust the facts to their hypotheses and deny everything that does not fit into these hypotheses.

4. Ulrich Beck: Science keeps the backs of politicians

In the study of the risk society, Ulrich Beck notes the special role of science, emphasizing that its importance for technical progress is mixed and transformed into an active participant and accomplice in the creation of multifaceted risk situations. In the professional society of the new modernity, which survives the risks, through the risks and despite them, the scientific reaction is accepted as the last resort in the assessment of the degree of danger. But in the analysis of the German sociologist, science is “off the pedestal” of absolute infallibility, moral purity and political correctness: „Science is not able to respond adequately to the risks of civilization, as they are actively involved in their emergence and increase. Rather, they are becoming – partly with the consciousness of “pure science”, partly with growing remorse – a legitimizing patron of global pollution and poisoning of air, water, food, etc., and related with this universal disease and extinction of plants, animals and humans” (Beck, 2013).

Beck is extreme in his assessment of the role of science in the risk society, describing it as treacherous and the behavior of scientists as quackery. The sociologist calls natural science and technology rationality “risk-blind”, subject only to “increasing productivity”. Beck goes even further by formulating the assessment of „a secret coalition between rigorous science and the threats to life it has allowed or encouraged” (Beck, 2013).

It is science that in the conditions of a society with an increasing concentration of various risk factors in all spheres of life determines the so-called limit values of toxic substances in food, air and water. In this way it legitimizes the doses of poison. When the scientific community decides that certain amounts of harmful substances are possible for humans to absorb, any group and societal resistance to toxins in the air, water or food is effectively blocked. According to Beck, this protects the backs of politicians, but the long-term effect is to “keep open the gateways through which the universal threat to life passes” (Beck, 2013).

Beck’s assessment of science in a risk society leads Beck to conclude that risky reality is a new “realm of shadows”, that turns rationality into “irrationality” in terms of whether the same thinking and action takes place in the coordinate system of wealth production or risk production” (Beck, 2013).

Beck’s entire almost fairy-tale-occult vocabulary is connected with the definition of science as “a substitute for the global infection of man and nature”. He talks about sorcery, ghosts, destiny and clairvoyant abilities. The meaning it attaches to such characteristics is only metaphorical. This vocabulary is intended to symbolize the absent humanity in the risk society, subordinating the collective poisoning of global financial interests. The reality he analyzes forces the sociologist to resort to irrational comparisons and to use language inherent in other verbalism and expressiveness to the invisible. With the Risk Society, therefore, begins a “speculative epoch

in everyday perception and thinking” and “the role of spirits is taken over by invisible but ubiquitous harmful and poisonous substances”. The realm of shadows created by the risk society is like “the realm of gods and demons of previous ages, which is hidden behind the world of visible things and threatens human life on Earth” (Beck, 2013).

Ulrich Beck notes the modernity and countermodernity of the belief in progress and its use as a source of better social life and more economic benefits. The statement that “progress is made beyond consent or rejection” comes to the fore. Scientific teams, development companies, enterprises are fully involved in the modernization of life through the achievements of scientific and technological progress. Their actions are guided and subordinated to the belief in progress and the full benefits of it, regardless of the negative side effects. But Beck’s belief in progress, led to maximalism, goes hand in hand with its countermodernity. This clash is called the “earthly religion of modernity”, and its outlines are presented by the German sociologist with the following arguments: for the belief in progress “all the signs of religious faith are valid: trust in the unknown, the unseen, the imperceptible. The place of God and the church has been taken by the productive forces and those forces that develop and govern them – science and economics” (Beck, 2013).

The dominance of science and economics means that technological decisions are not made directly in the political system, which, according to Beck, “puts the state in a secondary position”. Thus, the “twinning of technology development solutions with investment solutions forces companies, because of competition, to make their plans without making a lot of noise. The consequence of this is that decisions are put on the table of politics and publicity only when they have already been implemented” (Beck, 2013).

The German sociologist emphasizes the possibilities of small groups - mostly professional, but also civic, to influence the political process in the Risk Society and gives an example with the medical community or nuclear engineers. In this regard, it is concluded that “creative power is shifting from politics to sub-politics (...) The construction of the future is not in parliament, not in political parties, but in research laboratories and boards”. In the following works and researches the question of the subpolitical factor excites more and more clearly the German sociologist. According to Beck, the role of subpolitical “players” in Europe and around the world is growing against the background of ever-deepening and multifaceted global risks, individualization and, with it, reflective modernization in the Global Risk Society. As Svetla Marinova notes, he called “subpolitics” a kind of policy of non-political actors and movements, in which he saw the chances of the Europe project over the last decade: a project for a new type of solidarity, despite borders, differences and conflicts to exist” (Marinova, 2015).

5. Some conclusions

The constant and serious efforts of researchers from all over the world to find a definite, indisputable and accurate answer to the question of the boundaries of science, non-science, false science, necessarily “pass” through the theosophical doctrine of Helena Blavatsky. And not as an attempt to protect Blavatsky’s works, but as an obligation to impartially analyze these works. Only after such an analysis, which requires time and effort of researchers from different fields of knowledge, more definitive assessments of the place of theosophy are possible. At this stage it is known that Blavatsky’s fundamental ones as the One Absolute Transcendental Essence of Everything and Everyone in the Universe, as the leading and fundamental role of consciousness, are proven by quantum physics in the 20th century and transpersonal psychology, as well as by scientists the whole world⁴.

⁴ See Grof, S., *Psychology of the future*, as well as Capra, F., *Tao of physics*.

The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott, places special emphasis on research. The three main goals of the Theosophical Society are: (1) To form the core of the Universal Brotherhood of Mankind, without distinction of race, religion, sex, class or color; (2) To support the comparative study of religion, philosophy and science; (3) To study the unexplained laws of nature and the hidden abilities of humanity.

“Theosophy does not question scientific facts or the authority of science in solving life’s problems”, said Churuppumulullaj Jinarajadasa (1875-1953), the fourth president of the International Theosophical Society (1946-1953). He added that the scientific method is a necessary part of man’s higher education and his spiritual growth. “The application of theosophy in science means that scientific facts are considered not in the light of their practical value and convenience, but above all because their understanding shows man the true harmony of the great whole, part of which is himself”, the linguist-philosopher said (Jinarajadasa, 1910-1914).

One of the leitmotifs of Ulrich Beck’s research is the need for a qualitatively new scientific approach in the analysis and forecasting of social and socio-political issues of the globalized world. Reflection and self-reflection are cited by Beck as key tools in the necessary new methodology of science – especially in relation to the problems of the global risk society in the 21st century, such as financial crises, migration, Euroscepticism, etc. Beck emphasizes: “A reflexive sociology that practices doubt but also makes suggestions and reworks it all self-reflexively (...) could offer a new type of use of science and a new kind of collaboration. For example, I thought that the financial crisis was an analogue of Chernobyl in the economy, and now sociologists have a chance to offer alternative interpretations of the situation.”⁵ Ulrich Beck demonstrates the reflection and self-reflection he writes and calls for in his books – at the heart of his research are not only the negative and harmful effects of globalizing environmental, economic, social, terrorist traits, but also the roots of a new worldview. What is happening in it. This new attitude is manifested primarily in the individual, in personal existence, reflection and self-reflection to the world. Beck discovers and shows how society – local, national, global, manifests and lives in and through man. This is the great hope that forms not only the optimism of scientists, but also the light of the path in the development of human civilization.

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⁵ See On the way to a cosmopolitan sociology. S., 2019.

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