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Item Type	Article
Authors	Manolache, Stelian
Publisher	Dialogo / Research Center on the Dialogue between Science & Theology (Romania)
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Download date	2026-07-09 07:44:06
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/3976489">http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/3976489</a>



2017

# The Self-Knowledge and the Phenomenon of Estrangement/Alienation of the Human in Gnosticism

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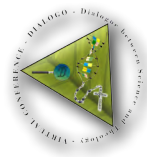
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## Recommended Citation

Manolache, Stelian, "The Self-Knowledge and the Phenomenon of Estrangement/Alienation of the Human in Gnosticism," Proceedings DIALOGO (DIALOGO-CONF 2017 SSC), DOI: 10.18638/dialogo.2017.3.2.2, ISBN: 978-80-554-1338-9  
ISSN: 2393-1744, vol. 3, issue 2, pp. 33-41, 2017

Available at: <http://www.dx.doi.org/10.18638/dialogo.2017.3.2.2>





# ***The Self-Knowledge and the Phenomenon of Estrangement/Alienation of the Human in Gnosticism***

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 20 April 2017

Received in revised form 05 May

Accepted 15 May 2017

Available online 30 May 2017

doi: 10.18638/dialogo.2017.3.2.2

### Keywords:

self-knowledge; alienation; Gnosticism;  
soul; cultural philosophical-religious  
values;

## ABSTRACT

In the dawns of the new millennium, in a world of ideas continuously moving, dominated by the super-eminence of producing material goods, in a context of a new postmodern globalising society, which presents a hedonist mercantile pseudo-spirituality and is based on the dimensions of Profit, Eros and Consume, the humanity is confronted with a challenge without precedent, due to the nihilist vision on the world, but also due to the reduction of the human being to the perspective of the economical quality, object or simple merchandise. In the context of these existentialist aspects of the postmodern neo-gnostic man, starting from the phenomenon of self-alienation/estrangement, the world has come to the point where the human is seen reduced only from the civilizational-materialist perspective of the poverty or of the well-being. In this context, from the generous thematic offered by the title of this year symposium in Constanta – The Ego – Self and Constientia – The Dialogue between neurosurgery/ neurotheology[1], psychology/psychotherapy[2]and theology, we chose as for our research the theme of estrangement/ alienation of the Self in the perspective of the gnostic literature. This old literature contains the theme of the metaphysical alienation of the soul, a theme that will paradoxically culminate, theoretically and practically, in a system that is entirely hostile to the metaphysics.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

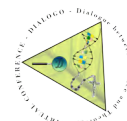
As a first manifestation of subjectivity in literature, the gnostic creation aims to be self-intuitive, as reflexive centre of the discourse, through a complete mode of

relating to the world/society and culture, where the subjective Ego gains, for the first time in literature, the privilege of citadel in the world of the letters. In other words, the Soul/Pneuma and the Self-knowledge/Rationality become organisational centres

for a new representative vision, proposed by the gnosis as answer to the spiritual and the material alienation of the world reality and the people of those times. This vision starts from a symbolic language[3] through the means/call of vocabulary words, words which are converted, where the gnostic Ego is discovered and built starting from certain images and symbols. Through a vocabulary unexplored at those times, which took the form of the words-metaphor – body/prison, spark/soul, celestial marriage/nuptial room – filled with a rich symbolic cultural signification, like gems and seal-words - the equivalent of a free pass through the world of the Archons to the world of Pleroma –, the gnostic man enters in relation not only with what was around, but with the Self, through his soul considered to be of divine origins, but fallen into the tenebrous of the materiality: “The soul wanders in a labyrinth, distressed, without the possibility to come out... trying to avoid the bitter chaos and not knowing where to go. For him [spark-soul], send me, Father! Possessing the seals, I will descent. I will pass above all Eons, [these are the Archons, creation of the Kenoma of the bad demiurge], I will reveal all the mysteries, and I will point to the faces of the Gods. I will reveal the mysteries of the holy path, calling it knowledge” (Hippolytus, Refutation V, 10, 2)[4]. In fact, the gnostic man will interiorise and take from an entire culture and society of that time a certain psycho-social- religious anxietal experience, embodied in the wandering/the alienation of the soul for the return to origins, the Pleroma. This alienating behaviour will fold (de)constructive on the facet of the gnostic Self, as a dominant psychic feature, highlighting a certain attitude manifested in a psychological-religious process, starting from the anxiety the soul and the body are subject to, in a society that he doesn't understand, reaching to detest it.

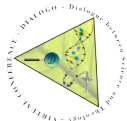
## II. REASONS AND FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS FORMING THE ALIENATING Gnostic THINKING

Through the symbolism of the theological-philosophical language, through the new myths that are proposed, through the connected powerful symbols and metaphors that are promoted, through themes as Stanger into the world, Sleep, Awakening, Travel to Pleroma and the Celestial marriage, the gnosis became a point of interest for psychologists, such as the psychology of Carl Gustav Jung, of the philosophy through Hans Jonas, of the History of Religions, through Mircea Eliade and I.P.Culianu and theology through Henry Charles Puech, Georges MacRae and Hierotheos Vlachos. All these researchers identified the major problems of the alienation of the man, as a result of a meeting between the Eastern and Western culture and civilisation during the first Christian century, where the East preferred the myth, as a natural continuation of the Revelation, and the West tended to rationalize it. Due to this collision, all the spiritual, cultural and civilizational values belonging to the Iranians, Greeks, Jews and Christians, intertwined in the cultural philosophical-religious cupel of the Late Antiquity, values that will remain under the pacifying umbrella of the Imperial Rome. The mythological vocation was highlighted in the East and the rational vocation in the West; the first opposed the dynamism to the humanism, to the Being/Divinity through a phenomenon of abstractization and rational conceptualisation of the myth, while the other opposes the Revelation of the Being/Divinity to the humanism through a passive phenomenon of mythologizing and metaphorizing the rational truths. Each from this cultures expressed above, beyond their own philosophical, cosmological and anthropological conceptions, the profound experiences of their religious identity beliefs. Thus, the first Christian century - and the late Antiquity, in general - stay under the sign of



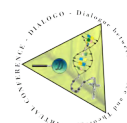
the great spiritual metamorphoses of the Hellenised Orient and under the sign of an orientalised Hellenism, which will become philosophical vocation of the dynamic Logos/Reason of Ancient Hellas and the second one through the pathos of his oriental religiosity, cultural ingredients of a new socio-political-religious society, considered to be syncretic[5]. Through the multiplication of the reciprocal exchange – in the context created by a real collision of civilisation[6], anticipating the globalising contemporary collision – a generalised syncretism will appear in a short time. Its influence was felt strongly from Rome to Jerusalem, from Athens to Alexandria in Egypt, on a base created by the Iranian metaphysical dualism, Platonism, Stoicism and the rabbinic speculation. The generalisation of the syncretism will underline, beyond the perturbation of the anthropological relations as *individual/citizen*, *psychological gnosis/pistis*, *pneuma/psyche*, two signs as symptoms for a future *psycho – somatic – anthropological crisis* by highlighting that: 1. *The philosophies and the religions of those times looked tired and disappointed in their ideal and achievements, generating an existential despair*; 2. *This aspect was correlated with the desire for a spiritual renewal, even a tragic one, but with the capacity to give meaning to life/telos, and less giving pleasure/eros and will of political power*[7]. In these circumstances, the gnostic man will accuse a crisis of *disorientation and uprooting*, by living in an atmosphere of generalised existential tensions[8], received mostly in the fields of *gnoseology, ontology, anthropology and axiology*. The reaction of the gnostic man will be proportional with the *cultural disruption* that will be dramatically lived. Thus, the gnosis will be, in its essence, an *attempt to deny*[9], to (de)construct the *Christianity and the Hellenism*, to subordinate their founding pillars to the primacy of the *gnostic Revelation of the Eon*, leading to a

delivering knowledge, globalising the accumulations of the Greek philosophy and also the Christian Idea of Logos[10]. In this situation, the gnosis, seen as a major experience of the Self, is an attempt to answer to the serious existential interrogations of the time, where “the word philosophy affirms and adopts revelations of faith, and the religious truth is enriched with rational philosophical concepts”[11]. The equation knowledge-deliverance defines the best, in the above presented context, the gnostic myth, the knowledge becoming a pretext for salvation, the equivalent of deliverance, and ensuring the connection between theology, cosmogony and eschatology. The main revelation of this gnostic knowledge is the existence of an original and absolute duality, governing the world through an *eonic bridge* – being born through emanation – the relation between God and humans. Extramundane, absolutely transcend, the gnostic God is accessible only in terms of negative – apophatic knowledge, a world understood differently from the Christian thinking, world left at the hand of the malefic inferior divinities, sometimes limited and ignorant. The gnostic anti-cosmism is reflected in a negative valorisation of the entire world, of the entire cosmos, whose architecture, even to an astral level, has a negative significance for the human. The celestial stars are homes for the demonic planetary gods, the archons, who are responsible of the world destiny, governing through the natural law and the Mosaic Law. Both laws are destined, eventually, to *keep the humans as slaves of the archons and the astral determinism plays an important role in the destiny of each human being*. The gnostic anthropology reflects, as the entire creation does, the same fundamental dualism. The human is in the same time a mundane and an extramundane reality, a mixture of light and darkness, good and bad, belonging to this world through his body and soul, the last



carrying inside *pneuma* or *nous*, the metaphorical form of the spark fallen into materiality. The man is destined for the gnostic knowledge, which is, in fact, a doctrine of deliverance, where the dualist essence of his own condition is revealed, showing him, in the same time, the modality to regain his lost state. This gnostic knowledge may be revealed by one or more transcendent saviours, whose mission starts to the creation of the world and continues during history, until the eschatological perfection. This gnostic knowledge requires a specific morality, reflecting the anti-cosmism specific to the system, meaning the negation by all means – Ascetism or libertinage – of the natural and social laws – anti-Nomism – to obtain the liberation from flesh and materiality of the pneumatic man and, in the end, of the divine spark, prisoner inside him. The new gnostic vision will benefit of a certain mark to make objective the realisation, a mark that is nothing else than the Self-knowledge, worshiped beyond any limit/sacralised. It starts from an interior choice, which is the equivalent of Self-knowledge, which will reveal to the gnostic man, through the de-construction/ dissolution of the concept of Cosmos – a reality previously under the signs of order and beauty – a new path of deliverance and immortality[12], through the inner Self with the divine of the Pleroma, which epiphanizes/ manifests/ discover in Salvator Salvatus[13] or saved Saviour. It is necessary to observe in this context that, the term of knowledge will have a totally different meaning that those of cognitive process, accredited by the Greek philosophy. It is not a simple intellectual knowledge, it is rather a pseudo-saving teaching situated to the limit between philosophy and religion[14], which operates with myths and maintains several cultic forms, a fact that include it in the religious category, but which, in time, gives a special importance to the intellectual speculation, even if this is not resolved in the mythological

register. It is a parasitical and mutant religious knowledge[15] of the ultimate and unrecognisable realities inside, as the concepts of soul/Self and God. It is a paradox which shows the essence of the Revelation, its characteristics of sacred doctrine communicated to the chosen/predestined man, called to be delivered through a special charismatic channel. In its essence, the gnostic thinking starts from a reverse exegesis of the Gospel, where the Creator and the Providential God leave space to an ontological duality irreconcilable with God Transcendent – Demiurge, the original sin leave space for the antecedent, and the harmonic world to the bad one. In these conditions, the gnostic thinking, as self-knowledge will not be only extra-mundane and transcendent, but will be, in the same time, anti-mundane, accessible only in the terms of a negative apophatic knowledge. For the Christian religion, the Fall and the Suffering are the result of the Sin and of the rupture in the Dialogue of the human with the Divinity, the equivalent of a disorientation and of the weakening of the listening attention of the man (John 5:27). For the gnostic thinking, the fall into the world and the suffering are the results of a crisis inside the divine. This will be concretised in a material plan due to the actions of the bad Demiurge, which brings to life the Aeons of Ignorance, Lack of knowledge or Oblivion, making the man to forget who is he and where he comes from. A similar rupture is produced to the human level between body and soul, a rupture later extended to the level human-cosmos; the gnostic anthropology reflects the same fundamental dualism and the same interior conflictual state. The man does not feel, in these conditions, at home in the world whose rationality is perceived as hostile and fearful. This fundamental experience, passionately lived by the human, takes him out of the happy cohabitation with the nature and the cosmos, by proclaiming the end of Pantheism and of the rebound to an archaic mythological

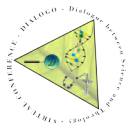


mentality with anti-divine characters, oppressive to the humans. Still, in its assemble, the gnostic vision is not pessimist, nor optimist, but eschatological: if the world is bad due to the Demiurge – the creator of Kenoma's world, there is beyond a good world created by the Good God of Pleroma; if the human is prisoner in materiality, there is salvation and a saviour. In this eschatological tension, in the polarity between the world and the human, the gnostic cosmos will gain its religious character of knowledge[16]. The effect of this action is the deliverance, taking, through the expression of the forms of gnosis, a double theoretical and practical aspect[17]. If, through the content of the theoretical forms mirrored in the soteriological gnostic myth, the gnosis/ knowledge is the one giving the bond of the system through the new vocabulary of the language, connecting the theology, the cosmology and the eschatology, through the practical aspect, the gnosis/Self-knowledge is in contact with the symbolic world of the sacraments[18]. To these ads up the techniques for the decryption and the understanding of several names and passwords[19] used in the ascension of the Soul/Pneuma to the Divine Pleroma, after meeting several Bas Powers of the Archons, trying to stop the soul in the bad world of Kenoma.

### III. THE Gnostic EGO AND THE SELF-KNOWLEDGE

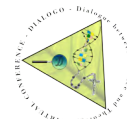
In the last period of the Antiquity, the human, seen as individual – based on the philosophical and religious development of Athens, and citizen – based on the Roman vision on the world – feels not only (de) sacralised, but also disrupted from his natural-personal and cultural-religious identity. In a context marked by the attempts more and more radical of rationalising the biblical Revelations, through the reduction of the paradoxical logics of personalist and

antinomical type of the Christian theology, to the formal mechanisms of logics of the human intellect, the gnostic rationalism ends in a archaic-oriental mythology attitude, which has a nihilist and destructive attitude toward existence. Forced to live in this world, the gnostic man, suffocated as in prison and far from feeling the manifestation of the Real God, will carry the stigmata of the antecedent sin, of a crisis to the level of divinity appeared in illo tempore and for which is not responsible the man. Unless the Greeks and the Christians, when speaking about God and the world, connect the two realities through the conjunction *and*, the gnostic opposes the world of God and the world, making dissociation through the conjunction *or*, seeing them as two autonomous and irreconcilable ontological realities. Thus, the gnostic thinking will give to the human an alienated identity equivalent to a pseudo-identity, leading him to negate life and its meaning, generating despair and existential fear[20]. This vision will manifest gradually by passing from the pseudo-morphs of the political-philosophical-religious utopic ideas to the spiritual alienated pato-morphs of the gnostic world, equivalent with a loss of the ultimate meaning of life. Seen and described with a gnostic language as emptiness, Theodot (2nd century) uses the concept of seed of light of Jesus the Logos, our Light (Frag. Theodot, 35:1) and writes that the gnostic alienation is generated by the religious intervention “of God (Demiurge) descending and establishing new paths [of knowledge] and deliverance, beyond the primordial Revelation existing before” (Frag. Theodot 74:12)[21]. The state of the gnostic man is seen as a nightmare, a heavy sleep, disturbed by contradictory dreams presented in the gnostic literature with a rare psychological finesse: “They never knew the Father, because they never saw it [...] as if, when asleep, we are in the middle of a nightmare, we run in a direction, incapable of escaping the one following us or we are hit



by another in a fight or fall from somewhere high, swept by the air, without having wings. Sometimes we have the impression that we are killed, without being followed, or the neighbour is killing us and the blood covers us until we wake up. We see nothing in the middle of this turbulence, because these things mean nothing. Those rejecting the knowledge are like that, appreciating that the knowledge does not mean anything. Anyway, they do not consider anything else as real. They behave like in dreams [...]; this is the behaviour of a person without knowledge; as asleep. In exchange, the one with knowledge is like an awoken person. Blessed the one who opened the eyes of the blind man" (NH I, 28, 32 – 30, 15). In these circumstances, the gnostic work *The Gospel of Truth* describes Jesus as a Saviour Aeon, among others Aeons, The One that opened the eyes of the blind man: "Jesus Christ projected the light upon those in darkness, due to the Oblivion. He illuminated them, showed them the Path: this Path is the Truth [...]; through Him, the people discovered the Father inside them" (NH I, 3, 18, 15 – 22). Due to the divine spark of the soul, even if buried in materiality, the gnostic becomes conscious of him, discovering that he is predestined for deliverance, as a divine gift reserved for the Chosen Ones, granting the access to God and the reintegration in God: "The living Word of the life, written in the thought and in the mind of the Father appeared in their heart [...]; the living ones mentioned in the Book are destined for knowledge, they know each other, recognising themselves from the Father and going back to Him" (NH I, 3, 9, 34, 21, 1 – 3). To the coming of the Aeon Jesus Christ, the materiality will disappear and the existential emptiness will be filled with pleroma: "Where there is envy, there is emptiness, but, where unity is, there is perfection. When the Father will be known, the emptiness will disappear [...]; as the Darkness disappeared when the Light came, so the emptiness will become plenitude. From that moment, the Kingdom

of appearances will no longer exist, because it will be erased by the harmony of the unity" (NH I, 24, 25, 6)[22]. In the same time, through Self-knowledge, discovered by the Aeon Jesus Christ, the gates of the Kingdom of Truth/Pleroma are opened: "The kingdom is inside you and not outside you. If you know yourselves, you will be known and you will know that you are the sons of the living Father. But, if you don't know yourselves, you are poor and the poorness is you" (Gospel of Thomas, 3, NH II, 2). From a soteriological perspective, the gnostic knowledge will be different from the knowledge proposed by Christianity. Unlike faith – *pistis*, the gnosis aims the salvation through a pure rational knowledge, characterised by a certain way of being, and by a particular perspective of becoming, resulting an original vision on the destiny of the humanity and of the world. Long before Martin Heidegger or Jean-Paul Sartre raising the problem of the existential crisis in writings as *Sein und Zeit* and *Letter el le Neant*, the gnostic man discovered and experienced the drama of estrangement, transforming him into a prisoner of the existential despair. He lost the consciousness of carrying the image of his Creator with all that means for the human condition, limited to his own image, ascending only to the level of an estranged person. The revelation communicated by the angel Youel, described in *Allogenes*, reflects this state: "Youel says: We cannot hear all these words, oh, *Allogenes*. You were given a bigger power from the Father of All [...] so you may discover what is hard to understand and understand what is hard to know for the majority, to ascend again to the One that is yours". The content of the revelations and the participation to knowledge transform the initiated one in a chosen one, because "...I was returning to myself, contemplating the light around me and the good inside me. I become God, says *Allogenes*" (NH XI, 3). The gnostic ego tries to (re)integrate in Pleroma, identifying himself with certain Self-consciousness, containing



not only knowledge, but conscious and unconscious aptitudes toward the material and spiritual values. In the same time, seen as an organiser of knowledge and regulator of behaviour, the gnostic will start the search for Self from a powerful emotional base[23], reflected completely by the writing *The Gospel of Truth* (NH I, 3), dated around 350: “The unity searched the Totality it came from, but the Totality was inside it. The ignorance of the Father provoked fear and the fear grew as the fog, so no one was able to see. The error became stronger, it formed its own materiality in emptiness, not knowing the Truth; it forms a beautiful creature, but an unreal one [...] Uprooted, the Error remained in fog [...]. Meanwhile, its author produced fear and oblivion for seducing the ones in the middle and make them prisoners. The oblivion appeared because the Father was not known, but, when he will be known, Oblivion will no longer exist” (NH I, 3, 17, 30, 1 – 7).

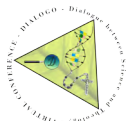
#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

The gnostic man was, first of all, an inquisitor; he was not a searcher limited to observe that the philosophies and the religions of its era lost, partially, their attractiveness and prestige; he searched for solutions for the major interrogations of the human nature. Denying the sustainability and the value of the theological-philosophical systems around him, he confronted the immediate specter of alienation. Lacking the support of the divinity, accusing the incapacity if the proposed soteriological solutions and convinced of the incompleteness or even of the lack of authenticity of the ontologies in use, the gnostic man is a stranger in relation to the human world – the society and the materiality – the Cosmos. He is a stranger because he feels dominated by a world he cannot explain and, lacking any “solution,” he may not leave it. The gnostic man is

constrained to live the acute drama of estrangement, to experience the tragically loss of the normal state of communion – *koinonia* with the fellow beings and with God. All the theological, ontological, cosmological and soteriological interrogations have no answer and the insolvable problems of the evil, death of the meaning of life will profoundly affect the existence of the gnostic man, preoccupied to understand: “what we were, what we became, the place we’ve been, the place we are in, the path to follow, the one that once liberated us, the real birth and the real rebirth”[24]. In these circumstances, the gnostic man will accuse first of all a cognitive deficit, which, besides preventing him to understand his place in the human world and in the universe, will prevent him to understand his own Self. From this presumed understanding of the authentic identity of the Self, the gnostic systems will start building solutions for overcoming the alienation; placing the Self in direct connection with the divinity, the Gnosticism will find an answer characterised by an amazing simplicity to any general human fear; learning that the salvation follows to the process of rediscovering the authentic condition of the soul through the reintegration in Pleroma, the gnostic systems will appease the consciousness marked by the existential fears, explaining the world, localising the origins and the modalities of manifestations of the evil and, especially, giving meaning to life, even if it is negative in it’s essence.

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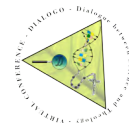
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- [20] The Manichean Psalms, especially the Psalm CCXLVI, highlight this state: From my entrance in the dark, I had to drink water, What I was bitter, bearing a burden that was not mine / beasts that surrounded me, full of anger rose against me, I was like a sheep without shepherd to catch me. / I was in the midst of enemies, and beasts of burden surrounded me. My burden that was wearing, was the Lord and power! / Can you liberate me from this deep abyss, from dark abyss that is kneading, where nothing is but torture / death and wound up, where even a friend, or savior is not? / Matter and her sons, among whom I was torn, burned me and a likeness apparent, to us, they gave me. (translation by Stelian Manolache).
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