

On an Approach to the Philosophy of the Sacred

Introduction. The sacred has permeated recorded history. In early literacy, the concepts of '*we, who are our own*' and '*our gods*' were inseparable. Agrarian states and their societies remained closely intertwined with various religions up until modernity. Even in contemporary times, despite widespread opposition to traditional religions – those that dominated political life during the agrarian stage of development – rituals within state organization still persist. Various scholars, beginning with R. Bellah, have referred to these as *civil religions*, a term originally coined by J.-J. Rousseau. Following É. Durkheim, the sacred has been firmly established as a crucial component of sociology. Carl Schmitt, through his intuition regarding "Political Theology," sparked discussions about the sacred components of the political. A notion emerged that *every political unity requires a sacred complex at its foundation* (Krupkin 2024/2).

Philosophy, as the first science, from which all others subsequently branched off, was destined to engage with the sacred from the moment of its formalization as the distinct *episteme* and with the dedicated *epistemic community*. The philosophical textual heritage addressing various facets of the sacred is vast: nearly every philosopher, to some extent, has addressed the question of "I and God (or gods)."

In this essay, I present my own perspectives on the topic of *the sacred and its influence on human life*.

The Foundations of the Sacred. Since the sacred is present in all agrarian cultures throughout recorded history, and archaeological evidence indicates its presence even earlier, it is natural to assume that phenomena of this class are linked to a genetically determined *centre of the sacred* in the human brain (Krupkin, Lebedev 2013), which likely emerged evolutionarily 50,000–70,000 years ago¹. The structure of this centre is *archetypal*: there exists a biologically predetermined "form" responsible for categorizing phenomena as sacred and

¹ The emergence of such a centre may have been driven by evolutionary pressure within group selection, specifically favouring the prohibition of individual overconsumption among pre-humans ("taboo on greed") during prolonged periods of severe famine (Krupkin 2010/3). Such conditions may have occurred on Earth following the Toba supervolcanic eruption (75,000 years ago) and the subsequent global cooling (55,000–75,000 years ago).

for the emotions associated with such phenomena. This form is subsequently filled with socio-culturally conditioned content during the socialization of an individual². For instance, in the case of the *archetype of a native language*, the biologically inherent ability for human speech is linked, in a child, to one of the approximately 6,000 languages still spoken on Earth. Similarly, the *centre of the sacred* in childhood is "filled" with some initial beliefs, which is later developed and sometimes entirely replaced as the person gains life experience.

The emotional aspect of the sacred centre is responsible for the following emotions:

- A feeling of grace;
- Indignation at desecration;
- Emotions of interacting with filth;
- A sense of the numinous.

It is through these emotions that one may identify the social phenomena constituting the domain of the sacred. Particularly in the realm of political life, any behaviour that deviates from pure utility should be examined for its connection to the sacred³.

The conception of the sacred outlined in this section is significantly broader than what is typically considered in discussions about traditional religions. The sacred begins to be discerned in numerous social phenomena that are generally regarded as secular – some of which will be discussed below.

Secular Soteriologies and Eschatologies. One of the clearest examples of testing the theoretical perspective outlined above is *soteriology* and *eschatology* – texts about *salvation*, which are present in every religion. Indeed, in both individual and collective consciousness, there exists a *motif of acting in ways*

² In this study, *archetypes* are understood as an extension of C. Jung's intuition to innate mental structures-forms, which are "filled" with socially conditioned content during human socialization (Krupkin 2010/3, 2012, 2013). A model example of an archetype in such understanding is the native language: the genetically predisposed ability to acquire language enables children to get one of the more than 6,000 languages existing on the planet. Other potential examples of archetypes include the injustice-management mental complex, the sexuality-management mental complex, and others – mental complexes that present in all humans, albeit with varying specific social manifestations (Krupkin 2012).

³ Generalizing: A question arises regarding the connection between aesthetics, aesthetic emotions, and the sacred. However, this issue will not be addressed in this study.

that will ultimately lead to a good outcome. The cognitive structure responsible for this motif is filled differently by each person and community. When narrated at a communal level, this structure constitutes a substantial part of what is commonly referred to as *ideology*.

In general, the religious term *salvation* can be extended to describe this mental complex, while the narrative construction of its content may be termed a *path of salvation*. The paths of salvation among urban populations in the late Soviet period were analysed in (Krupkin 2024/1). In most secular eschatologies of modernity, "*secular paradise*" manifests as "*to be preserved in someone's memory*," while among the highest personal achievements, a frequently desired outcome is to "*enter the history of the nation*."

Social Identities and Institutions. Findings from various branches of institutional social science prompt inquiry into the mechanics of institutions and their social carriers. Following D. North, some theories define institutions as the *social rules and norms* that structure human behaviour (Krupkin 2010/1, 71; 2010/2). Essentially, institutions are group-fixed behavioural patterns, where deviations are significant to the group – sometimes even prompting collective sanctioning ("*That is not how things are done here!*").

It could be noted that group outrage over social deviance resembles collective emotional reactions to the desecration of sacred objects, which suggests a close connection between social control and the sacred centre introduced above. The plausibility of this hypothesis is further supported by written records from agrarian societies, where gods were frequently invoked to ensure public morality.

Another hypothesis emerges: social institutions are carried by social identities. A social identity is a psychosocial complex that defines a person's emotionally significant self-affiliation with a certain group or community. This identity determines the group's behavioural norms, the rules for inclusion and exclusion, and criteria for distinguishing "us" from "them" (Krupkin 2010/1, 122; 2014). The necessity of embodying institutional roles and norms shapes social identities, imposing upon them a structure analogous to that of a totemic tribe (Krupkin, Lebedev, 2013): complete with group values ('gods'), foundational myths, salvation narratives (concepts of group survival and prosperity over time), etc.

The Legitimation of Social Order in States. In contemplating the evolution of Earth in its entirety from the emergence of life to the present (*the Big History*) the theoretical framework of N. Luhmann proves particularly useful. According to Luhmann, there exist three planetary environments: the biological, the psychic, and the social, within which spatially bounded *self-reproducing (autopoietic) systems* can arise, maintaining both their existence and activity for a prolonged period⁴. Within the biosphere, such systems include cells and organisms; within the psychic sphere, they include consciousnesses; and within the social sphere, they manifest as social organisms or *sociors*.

In macroevolutionary terms, different elements have taken leading⁵ roles within ecosystems across Earth's Big History: Single-celled organisms → Multicellular organisms → Groups of organisms → Cities → Agrarian states → Modern nation-states → Modern states with advanced social systems → A still-undefined but already emerging new structure⁶.

The periodic collapses of modern states (e.g., the USSR in 1991, Libya in 2011, and Syria in 2024) and/or revolutions indicate a fundamental issue in Luhmann's theory. In his model, *trust* is viewed as a derivative of routine communication within state subsystems – ensured by regularity, pattern repetition, predictability, transparency, etc. However, on the eve of revolutions and state collapses, all these elements may be present, yet *trust erodes*. What was once considered credible information suddenly becomes disinformation. The state, instead of being perceived as a means of salvation and a protector against chaos, is now seen as an oppressive assembly of corrupt criminals leading the populace into ruin. Etc.

⁴ From a physics perspective, these are systems capable of expelling entropy beyond their boundaries while maintaining internal homeostasis at entropy levels significantly lower than the thermodynamic maximum for their occupied space.

⁵ The definition of *leadership* in this context is an intriguing question. In existing macroevolutionary theories, leadership is typically linked to high complexity and the idea that the leading element of one stage inherits something from the leading element of the previous stage.

⁶ An observed principle suggests that the leading element of the next evolutionary stage usually emerges in earlier stages, "gaining power" within the ecosystem of its predecessors. It is hypothesized that the potential leader of the next macroevolutionary stage may be clusters of states coordinated by elite orders or movements, akin to the communist system of the 20th century or the Western coalitions of the early 21st century (Krupkin 2025).

This realization suggests that in the self-reproduction (autopoiesis) of states, there must exist routines for the reproduction of trust⁷, ensuring the hegemony of the ruling elites, as theorized by A. Gramsci (Krupkin 2024/3).

Examining the mechanics of these trust-reproduction routines necessitates introducing a fourth environment alongside Luhmann's three: the sacred environment. As demonstrated earlier, limiting social cohesion solely to specialized communication within a society proves insufficient – trust is a phenomenon that extends beyond communication, supplementing it. Furthermore, certain groups do not form conventional social organisms (sociors) but still display mutual affinity, assistance and solidarity, often identifying themselves under an "imagined banner." Examples of such groups include Jews in the late Soviet Union, gays and some pro-west outsiders in contemporary Russia.

Understanding the emergence and persistence of trust within such groups – which possess weak collective identities – may provide insights into the theory of self-reproducing/autopoietic systems within the sacred sphere. In esoteric literature, such formations have already been conceptualized under the term "*egregores*."

One thing is evident: for a state to sustain itself in a "strong" condition, it must maintain its own *egregore* as a fundamental component of its autopoiesis. Without the trust of its people, a political entity cannot endure for long, no matter the advantages it may have accumulated in the past.

Conclusion. The proposed approach expands the philosophy of the sacred with new meanings, linking it to previously unexamined aspects of reality. Many concepts here require articulation for the first time, which is precisely one of the *raison d'être* of philosophy as a discipline.

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⁷ One should not assume that N. Luhmann's concept of legitimacy in social order is incorrect – it is merely insufficient for understanding all aspects of the phenomenon. Luhmann focuses on what can be termed "*benefits from already long-term existence*", which undeniably contribute to trust reproduction. However, this alone is insufficient, particularly during periods of state crises.

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