

## PHILOSOPHY AND MYSTICISM IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND

**К.А. Moskovaya**

*a 5<sup>th</sup> year student, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy,  
I.I. Mechnikov Odessa National University  
Tel. +38050-282-65-19; email: [e-moskovaya@mail.ru](mailto:e-moskovaya@mail.ru)*

*In this article the author analyzes the main ideas which were put forward in the Victorian era by famous philosophers William Whewell, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer. The author also reveals the great influence of mysticism on the English culture of that time.*

*Key words: philosophy, John Stuart Mill, William Whewell, Herbert Spencer, mysticism.*

*В данной статье автором рассматривается влияние философских идей Уильяма Уэвелла, Джона Стюарта Милля и Герберта Спенсера в контексте становления Викторианской эпохи. Также автором раскрывается значение мистических идей и настроений эпохи. Такое соотношение идей и настроений позволяет назвать Викторианскую эпоху одной из наиболее интересных периодов в человеческой истории.*

*Ключевые слова: философия, Джон Стюарт Милл, Уильям Уэвелл, Герберт Спенсер, мистицизм.*

*У статті розглядається становлення філософських ідей Вільяма Вевеля, Джона Стюарта Мілля і Герберта Спенсера. Також автором аналізується вплив мистичних ідей, які мали місце у часи королеви Вікторії. Такий великий спектр ідей та настроїв зривив ці часи одними з найбільш цікавих в історії людства.*

*Ключові слова: філософія, Джон Стюарт Мілл, Вільям Уевелл, Герберт Спенсер, містицизм.*

Talking about the Victorian era we should remember that this period of time is one of the most contradictory in the English history. On the one hand this period is well-known for its prosperity and peace; we can see the remarkable changes like raise of industrial power and so on. But on the other hand the Victorian era is also well-known as a period of massive upheaval and social change. All this changes created a new world and a new man with another type of social and philosophical questions.

This small review helps us to focus our attention on the topic of our article. At first glance this topic looks very developed. It is true if we are talking about the English and European scholars. Their researches are interesting but unfortunately most of them are unavailable for a free use. Even for this article we have got only a few books because it was important to use the foreign authors. According to our topic it is necessary to analyze the “Reforming philosophy. A Victorian debate on Science and Society” by Laura J. Snyder

and “Victorian life” by John Guy. Nowadays the Internet resources play influential role in every research, so we should place high emphasis on such websites like “The Victorian Web” and “Plato.stanford.edu”.

The main idea of our article is to show the changes in philosophical field in the Victorian era. As we can see during our research these changes bring new points of view and reform our understanding of the world.

William Whewell is well-known for his reform of inductive philosophy. This reform meant to apply to all areas of knowledge. The philosopher intended that his great project would provide the groundwork for the reshaping of more than natural science, but also politics, and economics. Anned with the proper inductive method philosophers could be the «lords of the earth». The philosopher gives us such a significant comparison in his autobiography and Laura J. Snyder pays our attention to this fact and notes that such a project we only can find in Francis Bacon’s works [4]. According to Whewell, all knowledge has both an ideal, or subjective dimension, as well as an objective dimension - fundamental antithesis of knowledge. He criticized Kant and the German Idealists for their exclusive focus on the ideal or subjective element. Locke and the «Sensationalist School» for their exclusive focus on the empirical, objective element. Like Francis Bacon, the philosopher claimed to be seeking some kind of a middle way between pure rationalism and ultra-empiricism. Whewell believed that gaining knowledge requires attention to both ideal and empirical elements, to ideas as well as sensations. These ideas, which he called «Fundamental», are supplied by the mind itself - they are not merely received from our observations of the world. The Fundamental Ideas are not a consequence of experience, but a result of the particular constitution and activity of the mind, which is independent of all experience in its origin, though constantly combined with experience in its exercise [4].

Another famous philosopher of that times John Stuart Mill advocated utilitarianism in ethics. He was of the view that we should each act to promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Yet he was championing individual’s rights, calling for more power and freedom for women. He argues that in the past, the danger had been that monarchs held power at the expense of the common people and the struggle was one of gaining liberty by limiting such governmental power. But now that power has largely passed into the hands of the people at large, through democratic forms of government. The danger now is that the majority denies liberty to individuals, whether explicitly through laws, or subtly through morals and public opinion.

To John Stuart Mill, a man may do anything he wishes, if he does not injure his fellowmen while doing so. The government has no right to interfere, not even for his own good. The primary function of government as seen by Mill therefore was to protect the people from force or fraud, that is defense in war, safety in peace against violence, and security against cheating [2; 4].

Talking about the utilitarianism we should remember another one famous person - Herbert Spencer. Though a utilitarian, Spencer took distributive justice no less seriously than John Stuart Mill. For him as for Mill, liberty and justice were equivalent. Whereas Mill equated fundamental justice with his liberty principle, Spencer equated justice with

equal liberty, which holds that the liberty of each, limited by the like liberty of all, is the rule in conformity with which society must be organized. Moreover, for Spencer as for Mill, liberty was sacrosanct, insuring that his utilitarianism was equally a bona fide form of liberalism. For both, respect for liberty also just happened to work out for the utilitarian best all things considered. Indefeasible liberty, properly formulated, and utility were therefore folly compossible [3].

Spencer as much as Mill, then, advocates indirect utilitarianism by featuring robust moral rights. For both theorists, rights-oriented utilitarianism best fosters general happiness because individuals succeed in making themselves happiest when they develop their mental and physical faculties by exercising them as they deem most appropriate, which, in turn, requires extensive freedom. But since we live socially, what we practically require is equal freedom suitably fleshed out in terms of its moral right corollaries. Moral rights to life and liberty secure our most vital opportunities for making ourselves as happy as we possibly can. So if Mill remains potentially germane because his legacy to contemporary liberal utilitarian still inspires, then we should take better account of Spencer than, unfortunately, we currently do [3].

The theme of the mysticism looks a little bit strange after such serious philosophical theories. As we declare in the beginning of our research, the Victorian era has many faces. That's why we should understand such kind of tone among the Victorians as another important «face», which helps us to reconstruct the spirit of the age. But we also have another one important question - a question about the place of the religion in Victorians lives. According to John Guy and his book "Victorian life", this question was more than important. To most Christians, up to Victorian times the Bible was taken as a literal truth and a few people questioned its authenticity. The author pays our attention to the fact that when Charles Darwin and others challenged this view with their revolutionary theories of evolution by natural selection, they shattered the beliefs of ordinary people and clergy alike. And what is more, many people were unable to reconcile their religious feelings with the new scientific theories and Darwin suffered open derision from the public throughout his life [1].

Nevertheless, mysticism played his big role in Victorian times. Many Victorians were prone to the paranormal, supernatural and occult, of which the most popular forms in the late Victorian period included mesmerism, clairvoyance, electro-biology, crystal-gazing, thought-reading, and above all, spiritualism.

Spiritualism emerged in Britain in 1852, when the American Maria B. Hayden visited London. Maria Hayden attracted a lot of criticism and antagonism from the British press and the Church, but she carried on with her spiritual work regardless, holding seances and demonstrations of mediumship. The public interest in spiritualism continued to grow in Britain and in 1853 the very first Spiritualist Church in Keighley in Yorkshire was formed, followed in 1855 by the first spiritualist publication to be published in the UK «The Yorkshire Spiritualist Telegraph. The question of education and studying spiritualism as a

religion and philosophy led to the founding of the first Spiritualist Lyceum in 1866 in Nottingham by Mr. J Hitchcock [5].

Spiritualism is based on the Christian tradition, as a service includes Christian prayers and hymns. But a service in a spiritualist church focuses on giving proof of survival after the physical death of the body, by having a medium give a demonstration of spirit communication and clairvoyance. There are also some noteworthy differences of doctrine as spiritualism does not subscribe to the notion of heaven and hell, but believes that the afterlife is made up of different layers of spiritual experience that an individual soul can progress through as they gain wisdom and knowledge [5].

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert participated in Spiritualist seances as early as 1846. On July 15 that year, the clairvoyant Georgiana Eagle demonstrated her powers before the Queen at Osborne House, on the Isle of Wight. In 1861, the year when Prince Albert died of typhoid, a thirteen-year-old boy living in Leicester, Robert James Lees, who took part in a family seance, passed a message from Albert to the Queen in which he called her by the pet name known only to her and her late husband [6].

It should be noted that Victorian Spiritualism was particularly attractive to women because they were regarded as more spiritual than men. A female medium was often considered a better communicator than a male medium because she had allegedly a better predisposition to spiritual perfectability. Interestingly, spiritualists were concerned with the Woman Question and called for the recognition of women's rights [5; 6].

In the 1860s, Spiritualism became part of Victorian subculture with its mediums, specialist newspapers, pamphlets, treatises, societies, private and public seances which included table rapping, table tipping, automatic writing, levitation, and other communications with spirits. The Victorians were haunted by the supernatural. They delighted in ghost stories and fairy tales, and in legends of strange gods, demons and spirits; in pantomimes and extravaganzas full of supernatural machinery; in gothic yarns of reanimated corpses and vampires.

Even avowedly realist novels were full of dreams, premonitions and second sight. It was not simply a matter of stories and storytelling, though, for the material world they inhabited often seemed somehow supernatural. Disembodied voices over the telephone, the superhuman speed of the railway, near instantaneous communication through telegraph wires: the collapsing of time and distance by modern technologies that were transforming daily life was often felt to be uncanny [6].

To sum up our research, we can say that the Victorian era is full of serious philosophical ideas, and they are still popular even nowadays, because we should remember that philosophy is based on the strong statement about the importance of every idea. Talking about the role of the mysticism in general and the influence and popularity of spiritualism in Victorian era, we should notice that in spite of all the strangeness this event formed the unique and interesting era.

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О.С.Петриківською; к.ф.н., доц. О.Я. Присяжнюк  
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