



Research Article

The Spiritual Anthropology of Rut Björkman

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Abstract

The following paper presents the anthropology of a rather unknown religious mystic author: Rut Bjoerkman (1901 – 1988) was a women's mystic who spent her life striving for union with God. However, a closer look at the writings she produced over more than 50 years—under her pseudonym Bjoerkman (her grandmother's maiden name; Bjoerkman's real name was Bahlsen)—seems worthwhile, especially since they were not written with the intention of publication and were thus composed with emotional authenticity. Despite the tension that exists among mystics toward science as a—in her view—"merely" rational approach to reality, her underlying anthropology shall be briefly outlined. A quote shall illustrate the seriousness of her struggle for a "real life", which implies a transcendental anthropology that defines the human being primarily through their relationship to transcendence. Although its anthropology initially arose from a Christian worldview, it underwent a philosophical generalization insofar as it thematizes man in his non-religion-specific relationship to God. Man stands at the intersection of immanence and transcendence. Therefore, if immanence or transcendence is overemphasized at the expense of the other constitutive pole, there is a risk of a loss of being. This loss of being is to be counteracted by a life from the spirit of the transcendent creative power, which is immanently constitutive, by the awareness one's own ontological constitution.

Keywords

Female Spirituality, Philosophical Anthropology, Mystical Union, Fallenness, Transcendence, God, Creator, Existential Knowledge

1. Introduction

"I must confess that for years—from the standpoint of this world—my life had to be seen as a failed existence, for I remained in an inner preoccupation that proceeded invisibly and seemingly unproductively... The goals sought by people,... to build a successful life, could not stimulate me to do the same... I was inwardly available—for what? For the real life, for the creative life that was to carry me from one development to another."¹

This intense focus on mystical union² is preceded by feelings of alienation that mark a spiritually unreceptive era.³

Reinhard: Leben in der Erkenntnis. Rut Björkman im Dialog mit großen Philosophen, Andechs 1997 (=Erk); Björkman, Rut; Mook, Reinhard: Leben aus dem Ursprung. Rut Björkman im Dialog mit großen Mystikern, Andechs 1997 (=Urs). For more in-depth reading, read the trilogy: Björkman, Rut: Licht einer anderen Dimension. Bd. 1: Träumender Kosmos, Bd. 2: Träume von Gott, Bd. 3: Der Traum vom Menschen, Andechs 1992. - The English translations of Björkman's German writings are provided by the author.

² See to the role of mysticism [3]

³ „People strive in all directions to fill the vacuum of their lives in separation

¹ [4] 56. - In the following, we will rely on two works: Björkman, Rut; Mook,

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The root of such negative feelings lies in the egocentric isolation of the human beings from their transcendent origin.⁴ This is accompanied by a certain split within the person themselves, insofar as the transcendent God is also deeply immanent to them, such that the loss of God simultaneously signifies a loss of self⁵. The transcendence and immanence of God within the human being become anthropological constituents of being human, to such an extent that Bjoerkman conceives of God in a pantheistic sense as a "part" of man.

If a person now attains "knowledge" of their immanent divine source, this is already the path to mystical union with the Creator⁶: the person needs to do nothing more than "recognize"—which sounds Gnostic⁷. Thus, a universally conceived, impersonal "love" is only an accompaniment to the act of recognition⁸. The decisive factor is the self-discovery of the human being mediated through the recognition of immanent divinity. Formulated almost Augustinianly, Bjoerkman states: "Come completely to yourself!"⁹ The goal is simultaneously transcendent and accordingly expands one's own humanity.¹⁰

2. The Implicit Anthropology in the Writings of Rut Bjoerkman

2.1. Basic Elements of Spiritual Anthropology

The human being is reflected in their fundamental relationship to transcendence or in their immanent dependence on God¹¹: they are to be passive and, almost surrendering their autonomous self-determination, allow themselves to be determined by God. In the language of light imagery: they should allow the light of God to work within them.¹² The human being can then even be understood as a manifestation of divine power¹³. For this, a "resting in being" is sufficient¹⁴,

from their spiritual reality, to remove the disharmony between inside and outside. Tasks, duties, interests and so-called hobbies distract from the emptiness of life, away from the truth, which is the creative power in man" ([4] 76).

⁴ Thus obedience is essential: „Instead of resting in being, so that this being leads and determines his life, man apparently takes over the leadership of creation himself and seeks to shape it according to his own ideas. This is how the disharmony between Creator and creature arises" ([4] 77)

⁵ See on the reciprocity of immanence and transcendence [7]

⁶ [4] 8

⁷ See also the expert in spirituality: Falque, Emmanuel [8]

⁸ „Love is identical with life, it is a state of experienced unity with everything that lives. The experience of a real love is a synthesis in the living.“ ([5] 93)

⁹ [4] 10

¹⁰ [4] 54

¹¹ Cf. [4] 22

¹² „More important than external illumination is the inner light, which is not natural, but spiritual and divine light, in which everyone participates who silently turns inwards“ ([5] 41). „He who serves the light within himself serves the light in all living things... He who knows about the divine in himself lets the spark of holy life jump over to those who long for the sacred. From them comes the fire that will burn up the world of wickedness.“ ([4] 101)

¹³ „What are we, then, if not creative power in individual manifestation?“ ([5] 38)

¹⁴ [4] 23

which is achieved through "silence" before God to "hear what he has to do".¹⁵

Bjoerkman also tends to abandon human individuality in favor of a universal soul¹⁶ – a substitute of the „transcendental I“ of Immanuel Kant¹⁷ – which serves as the formal point of identification where God's transcendent reality manifests immanently.¹⁸ Unity with the universal soul is the concrete goal of human existence¹⁹, which can be attained without an active effort through passive "letting-it-happen"²⁰. When the universal (divine) soul comes to itself within the individual person, a true community of soulful beings arises²¹. This represents an ideal type of being human sought after cultures and eras.²²

Contrary to egocentrism, a unity of love for God and love for neighbor is promoted²³. If God is "all in all," union with Him can only occur through union with fellow creatures.²⁴ This implies an empathic participation in the suffering of others.²⁵ Gender differentiation is seen as anthropologically secondary²⁶: the genders provide a mutual complementary unity²⁷, but the decisive factor is the human being in themselves.²⁸

¹⁵ [4] 60

¹⁶ „The soul of creation remains closed to him as long as he does not live in the consciousness of his own soul. Only the soul sees the soul of the world, only the divine in us perceives the divine in all revelations and is enlivened and animated by it.“ ([5] 48) – Note: According to this, the soul of man is animated by the soul of creation when man in turn becomes aware of himself, i.e. activates his soul. Then there must be a difference between the lifting and the complete activation of the soul, between pure introspection and introspection that takes place after passing through the outside. – See also the discussion to the role of the soul: [9]

¹⁷ See Kant [10] 108, also see. [4] 95

¹⁸ „Our soul is the reality of the Creator Spirit within us, the Logos, the Word of God. This divine power inspired by man allows us to gain access to the depths of being.“ ([5] 46)

¹⁹ This is also reminiscent of psychological conceptions, especially of the universal "self" of Carl Gustav Jung: "The self is not only the center, but also the scope, which includes both the conscious and the unconscious; it is the center of this totality, just as the ego is the center of consciousness." (Carl Gustav Jung: Aion, in: Gesammelte Werke, Band 9/11, Paragraph § 123, Walten-Verlag (Olten, Freiburg i.Br. 1951))

²⁰ Cf. [4] 95. Therefore, the following applies to the soul: "See to it that God may be great for you!" ([5] 96).

²¹ Cf. [5] 50.75

²² With reference to Lao-tse, Buddha, Jesus, Paul, and even Nietzsche: "The visions of a whole human being have arisen again and again and show the inner knowledge of man that he has not yet reached his wholeness." ([4] 32)

²³ "Love you, because I am you, love your neighbor, because I am your neighbor, love creation, because my power is always present here!" ([5] 30). "Life is love. Synthesis with life. Become one with God!" ([4] 40). Cf. [5] 93.

²⁴ „To love God means to love ourselves as His creatures, it means to love our fellow human beings as to all living things around us in love, knowing that God is all in all.“ ([5] 30). See also [5] 32.33.

²⁵ Cf. [5] 93

²⁶ The relativization of gender in the sense of deconstruction or intersectionality also corresponds to Björkman's constitutive function of mediating community among people. Cf. on the aspects of gender [11] and [12] 128–145

²⁷ „God created man in his image. The true human being is neither only man nor only female, but he is both in equilibrium and equilibrium. In the true man the spirit of the Creator rules, in which generation it comes forth is secondary.“ ([5] 122)

²⁸ „Beyond the sexual stands the human being, who fulfills his mind as the bearer of the power of the Creator, which is why no generation has to rule over the other. Man and female must place themselves under the dominion of the Creator who

2.2. Fallenness

Bjoerkman begins her anthropology with the fallenness and godlessness of human existence. The individual human being is—almost in Hegelian fashion—the antithetical contradiction²⁹, i.e., "a transition and a downfall"³⁰. Their problem is a lack of the life-giving influx of creative power, leading to exhaustion, depression, and illness³¹. The fallenness refers to his concrete being "hic et nunc"³².

Causes of fallenness which is a fact though not a necessity are identified: this fallenness results from a turning away from the divine source³³ toward an egocentric existence based on "arbitrariness" and the ego—a "pseudo-life"³⁴. It leads to isolation because people have fallen out of the original unity.³⁵ The subject-immanent reason is a disordered desire for the external, which darkens the consciousness of God's immanent power.³⁶ This desire opposes the establishment of a spiritual community among human beings: the fallen human being suffers "from inner poverty and lack of relationship with the creation that surrounds us".³⁷

The subject-immanent reason is a disordered desire for the external, which darkens the consciousness of God's immanent power.³⁸ God is "forgotten as the reality of man's life."³⁹ Man limits himself; the self-inflicted limitation seems to be identical with the negation of God in Rut Bjoerkman's work, or formally speaking: a negative difference is identified with indifference or non-difference and non-knowledge⁴⁰: the limitation of one's own being results in an abuse of the human mind.⁴¹ According to Bjoerkman, fallenness is identical to "ignorance" of God's presence. However, since "ignorance" does not establish ontological facticity, the separation exists only in consciousness and is never actually present.⁴² "For God cannot separate Himself from His creation."⁴³, but man can separate himself from God. Nevertheless, this separation

is no more a reality than the so-called evil⁴⁴.

This results in an "evil" the basis of which is not the absolute God, but the human being. Due to the identification of consciousness and being, the evil of isolation is "unreal".⁴⁵ If this difference is overcome, the human being reaches "heaven" instantaneously.⁴⁶ Therefore, there is no need for an afterlife for maximum union.⁴⁷

The fallenness or „Godlessness“⁴⁸ affects the individual rather than being universal. Through "recognition," the human becomes "the light of the world".⁴⁹ Until then, the human lives in "inner fear and restlessness" due to a disturbed relationship with the divine power.⁵⁰ Their signature is that of "meaninglessness".⁵¹ With reference to the New Testament (John 8,31–36; 12,31; 14,30), man is lived, driven, confused by the powers of this world. We are not in the truth, because the truth as identical with God is absolute, is eternal life, is holy, perfect and good.⁵²

The separation of man from his divinely immanent-transcendent foundation can be remedied by "true knowledge of God"⁵³, the one "conversion to the life that is essential in us from the creative spirit". It presupposes a corresponding "internalization"⁵⁴.

2.3. The Goal of Human Being: Transcendence Through Mystical Union

The anthropologically constitutive goal of man consists in mystical union with God⁵⁵, so that through a) the increase of the immanence and transcendence of God at the same time the immanence and transcendence of man are reciprocally increased, and through b) the increase of human individuality the universality of man are also both increased: "He who gains unity with this Spirit is one with all life, which constantly proceeds from this Spirit. This unity is rebirth."⁵⁶ In Buddhist terminology, it is about "enlightenment" and about "finding one's own self in the whole universe. He who sees unity everywhere has overcome delusion and worry."⁵⁷

Every human⁵⁸ being has the task of becoming a "mystic"

created them... They have the task of complementing each other... They are like the two sides of a coin and cannot be separated from each other without decay and degeneration." ([5] 123)

²⁹ Cf. Hegel [14] 176: „The antithetical contradiction in the sick soul is that between the individuality, which is caught up in its performance, and the general subjectivity that becomes for itself.“

³⁰ [5] 125

³¹ [5] 119

³² See also [13]

³³ [4] 112

³⁴ [5] 71; [4] 98

³⁵ [5] 52

³⁶ Cf. [5] 76

³⁷ [4] 96

³⁸ Ek 32f

³⁹ [4] 42

⁴⁰ „We limit ourselves and consider ourselves incapable of bringing about salvation because we are not led to the knowledge that we, as God's creatures, are bearers of His power... We judge ourselves and our fellow human beings by the state of our separation from the power of God.“ ([4] 12)

⁴¹ „Without submission to the creative spirit, man abuses the mind. This is the cause of all misery and ruin of human life.“ ([4] 52)

⁴² [4] 32f

⁴³ [4] 37

⁴⁴ See [15]

⁴⁵ [5] 88

⁴⁶ Cf. [4] 23

⁴⁷ The afterlife functions as a universal perfection of salvation when the entire creation is completed with the Creator: "We wear the frail garment of earthly life for a time, in order to one day be clothed with the garment of light of our divine soul." ([4] 116)

⁴⁸ [4] 175

⁴⁹ [5] 71

⁵⁰ [4] 174

⁵¹ [5] 101

⁵² [4] 17

⁵³ [5] 44

⁵⁴ [5] 104f

⁵⁵ „Mysticism is to be linked to God.“ ([5] 18)

⁵⁶ [5] 100, „Like a transparent light, my soul floods the reality of invisible life.“ ([5] 53)

⁵⁷ [5] 53

⁵⁸ Cf. [5] 11

by discovering his life from "our truth as children of God, heirs of eternal life".⁵⁹ Then the "outer appearance" is "pierced" by the power of God at work in the inner realm of all being and especially in the universal soul of man⁶⁰. The mystic man finds God in himself⁶¹, when he seeks himself "in truth", i.e. in God, and recognizes man's "divine nature".⁶² This does not mean an identification of anthropology with theology⁶³, but the description of a mental transformation process on man's path to God, the "universal concretum", which is still reflected as "the essence of all things, the innermost reality in everything that works".⁶⁴

The driving force for true knowledge is existentially situated: it is love as the motor of the search for God and meaning.⁶⁵ Its characteristic is a total devotion of man carried and made possible by God, so that man "unbinds" the "life of God in himself and around him" in order to make us "God-loving and God-worshipping people", "who fulfil their purpose and become the revelation of God through themselves".⁶⁶

Union with God is a dynamic process⁶⁷, which comes to an end in a state: "Mysticism is the state in which man experiences the unity between himself and the force that enlivens him."⁶⁸ In this state, man's own activity is now suspended, so that God is not man's goal that makes selfhood possible: human activity is no longer integrated into the divine work.⁶⁹ In order to truly love, man should first listen to and obey God⁷⁰ and become receptive to His instructions and destinies. In this way, the "grace" of God is emphatically emphasized monocausally.⁷¹

Ultimately, this is the existential-ontological consequence of Bjoerkman's pantheistic anthropology: the individual becomes a transit station of divine self-discovery through the process of self-alienation to self-alienation with a subsequent

negative-dialectical existential movement of return: God is to be "redeemed" from his "invisibility"⁷². In a negative-dialectical way, however, through divine self-realization, man himself is also realized, so that through the abolition of man's individuality nevertheless his individuality is also increased. Bjoerkman leans on Aristotle here⁷³: the mystic man is filled with the "desire" to remain in the "nearness" of the beloved, in this case: to remain with God in order to be able to be "in constant exchange" with him⁷⁴. If you think about it further, it means a dialectical inversion⁷⁵: the human subject and divine object of love are replaced by the human object and divine subject of love.

The result of the mystical union is a state of eternity in the midst of man's temporal limitations: Bjoerkman advocates a present eschatology: "The 'I Am', the power of being in man, is eternal life. Only when we become aware of this power that lives in us and turn to it does 'eternal life' begin to take effect."⁷⁶ The heavenly state⁷⁷ of eternal life is a universal completion of the entire creation.⁷⁸ The completion of the world means the revelation of God in his creation.⁷⁹ But Bjoerkman thinks less of a final completion of the universe itself, but of the completion of creation in and through the perfection of the individual human being. The mystic possesses this perfection within himself and becomes a sign of it in his humanity.⁸⁰

3. Summary

Bjoerkman outlines a transcendental anthropology, according to which the divine is maximally immanent and transcendent to man at the same time, so much so that the pantheistic and panpsychic universal soul uses the individual human being as a means to the end of self-realization through his negative-dialectical suspension⁸¹ – and vice versa.

In fact, however, man is turned outwards, so that the immanent-inner effect of the transcendent God cannot come to the existentially constitutive – and yet only passive – effect in man. This state of turning away from the immanent-transcendent divine source is now remedied by an act of

⁵⁹ [5] 22

⁶⁰ [5] 27

⁶¹ „Wo suchst Du Gott? Soweit ich mich Ihm hingebe, soweit finde ich Gott in mir. Der Gott, den Du suchst, der ist ja um Dich; Er liegt ja in den Menschen, und Du brauchst nur die Menschen und damit Gott zu erschließen.“ ([5] 12)

⁶² [5] 12

⁶³ See [16]

⁶⁴ [5] 13f

⁶⁵ "For what you did not love, you would not seek. But he who loves always wants to be united with the object of his love, with God." ([5] 12). Cf. [5] 91

⁶⁶ [5] 14

⁶⁷ „I am in the hands of a creative event that constantly demands me.“ ([5] 20)

⁶⁸ [5] 15. Rut Björkman explicitly compares this with other mystics, whom she understands as a paradigm for union with God: "The Zen Buddhists call this state Satori, the Indians Samadhi, the Christians speak of the Unio Mystica, the becoming one with the Divine... In this way, the mystic reveals a way of life that people do not yet know." ([5] 15)

⁶⁹ See to differentiate between synergetic, monergetic and energetic relationship between divine and human work: [17] 341

⁷⁰ „There is no other way to the life of God than the way of listening to and obeying the instructions of the voice of the Absolute.“ ([4] 107). Obeying presupposes conscience as a self-identifying directive: "Man's listening to the voice of conscience and Absolute in him can only begin when man awakens to the presence of this conscience and Absolute in him." ([4] 43) – Conscience here means certainty and becoming aware of the Absolute in man.

⁷¹ „Grace" is "the effect that the Spirit unfolds in and through the human being, who recognizes himself as this power and remains in it." ([4] 70)

⁷² [5] 37

⁷³ [18]. 7 (1072 b 3): „But he [the unmoved mover] moves like a beloved, but what is moved by something moved, it is possible that it may also be different.“

⁷⁴ [5] 85

⁷⁵ Incidentally, this is reminiscent of the Trinitarian inversion of Hans Urs von Balthasar, according to which the divine persons only achieve full union with each other by reversing their "role". ([19] 167–175)

⁷⁶ [4] 159

⁷⁷ „Heaven is not a place, but a state, it is the state of real life from the creator spirit. Heaven breaks into our lives as soon as God's life is accepted and let in by us.“ ([4] 38)

⁷⁸ At some point, the whole of creation will be redeemed; unconsciousness as a sign of fallenness is just as "natural" and "lawful" ([5] 139) as it will result "that man will be transformed into a divine man once the orientation towards the reality of God that is essential to him man has been completed, when man recognizes his truth and confesses it." ([5] 139)

⁷⁹ Cf. [4] 65

⁸⁰ Cf. [4] 153

⁸¹ To the „negative dialectic“ see [20]

"cognition" of one's own existential ontological constitution⁸²: since the mystical union is a purely spiritual process, "cognition" is sufficient as awareness and internalization, which means nothing other than the return of the spirit to its inwardly immanent divine ground.

Author Contributions

Imre Koncsik is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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⁸² Winfried Weier repeatedly outlines this existential constitution of being human and the dialectical self-fulfillment of man that results from it [21]