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## Where Science Ends...On the (Non)Scientific Character of the Bnei Baruch System of Kabbalah

**Abstract:** The Bnei Baruch Kabbalah Education & Research Institute is a worldwide organization which popularizes modern version of Kabbalah. Although Kabbalah in its academic interpretation is a mystical branch of the Jewish religion, Bnei Baruch members strongly oppose to associate their Kabbalah with religion in general, with Judaism in particular, and with mysticism as well. Instead, in Bnei Baruch's texts it is commonly argued that this system of Kabbalah is a science and a scientific mode of researching the world. I will examine whether the kabbalistic theoretical terms and conceptions, that Bnei Baruch speaks of, can be given some empirical sense. In my analysis, I follow the standard of methodological naturalism.

**Keywords:** Bnei Baruch, Kabbalah, spirituality, religion, science, methodological naturalism, mysticism, scientism.

### *1. Introduction. The Bnei Baruch Institute*

The Bnei Baruch Kabbalah Education & Research Institute is a contemporary network of followers of a particular kind of teaching. They represent a group of people who share the teaching of Kabbalah ("the wisdom of Kabbalah") with the entire world (1, 186)<sup>1</sup>. The organization popularizes the so-called modern Kabbalah and therefore bears marks of a new religious movement. The Institute's headquarters is in Israel yet there are also large and significant groups in the United States and in Europe. Moreover, thanks to the internet, anyone who is interested can join the organization (real or virtual group) and participate in the Institute's classes or bigger events, such as conventions and congresses. Therefore the Institute has so many students worldwide.

What is absolutely crucial is that Kabbalah is a branch of the Jewish religion: an esoteric, mystical trend in Judaism that has existed since the Middle Ages (the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century) onwards, as defined by scholars in many publications (2, 3); (3, 12); (4, 6, 20); also in dictionaries (5, 42), and Bnei Baruch Kabbalah is not related to this academic scheme. Laitman detaches namely his Kabbalah from religion, and within it from Judaism

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(30, 98, 101); (1, 174); (21, 70, 209, 282); (52<sup>3</sup>). Traditionally and conventionally, Kabbalah has no meaning outside the context of the Jewish religion and the Hebrew Bible (Tanach). Interestingly, members of the Bnei Baruch Institute do occasionally refer to the Tanach's verses, but simultaneously maintain that Kabbalah has no connection to Judaism or any other religious tradition. Professor Moshe Idel from the Hebrew University, one of the greatest and most renowned Kabbalah scholars, said about Michael Laitman's Kabbalah (Laitman is the Bnei Baruch's founder and main kabbalist): "I don't know what he's doing and I'm not sure anyone really understands it." (7). Surveys that I know about – of Tomer Persico (8), (9), (10), (11), (12), Jonathan Garb (13), (14), Boaz Huss (15) (these authors address the neo-Kabbalah phenomenon in general), Shai Ben-Tal (16), Uri Blau (7), (17), Zeev Kam (18), and Massimo Introvigne (19) – view Bnei Baruch in terms of a new religious movement and/or a kind of "New-Age Kabbalah". The researchers locate the movement in question in the contemporary social and spiritual-religious arena in Israel. My considerations as regards to Bnei Baruch come – to complement the aforementioned valuable findings – from a little different perspective. Personally, I find the Bnei Baruch teaching system worth being in-depth analyzed also from the philosophical point of view, with an emphasis put on the character of its rhetoric: whether – evaluating its accuracy – it is scientific, as the movement claims, or religious, religious-alike, or philosophical. In a nutshell: judging by tacit assumptions underlying the conceptions of science, religion, and Kabbalah, is the doctrine of the Bnei Baruch movement an exemplification of religion (or spirituality) or science (as non-religion)? Is it a religious/religious-alike/philosophical doctrine and method or scientific doctrine and method?

The Bnei Baruch Kabbalah Education & Research Institute was set up in Israel in 1991 by Dr. Michael Laitman (born in 1946), Professor in Ontology and Theory of Knowledge (PhD in philosophy and Kabbalah from the Moscow Institute of Philosophy at the Russian Academy of Sciences and MSc in Medical Cybernetics from St. Petersburg State Polytechnic University – as stated on the organization website (20) and a student of Rabbi and Kabbalist Baruch Shalom ha-Levi Ashlag (Rabash) (1907-1991). Laitman wanted to commemorate his teacher and named the Institute Bnei Baruch, meaning "the sons of Baruch".

Baruch Ashlag was the son and successor of Rabbi and Kabbalist Yehuda Leib ha-Levi Ashlag (Baal ha-Sulam) (1885-1954), who is considered by Bnei Baruch members to be "the greatest Kabbalist of the 20th century." (1, 187), (52, 28; 52, 427). In fact, the frame of the Bnei Baruch system of Kabbalah is outlined by the teaching of Yehuda and Baruch Ashlag (Yehuda was a prominent Lurianic kabbalist), which was compiled, modified, and published by Laitman in many books and articles

and presented in many hours of video and audio lectures and other multimedia formats. The Bnei Baruch Kabbalah Education & Research Institute is then a worldwide network of followers of Ashlagian Kabbalah, although filtrated by Laitman. (To what extent Laitman's Kabbalah is a direct continuation of Ashlagian Kabbalah is another research problem.)

The Bnei Baruch Institute is an interesting and socially important phenomenon. Laitman has had many discussions with scholars and scientists on different subjects, moreover he has always been serious about current social, cultural, scientific, educational, economical and environmental problems, as well as civilizational dilemmas. Having constructive dialogues on extremely important issues has always been Laitman's aim. He believes that Kabbalah is a solution for human problems in every area and aspect of life. Therefore, he tries to familiarize society with Kabbalah teaching as a science that proposes a new paradigm, and within it the answers to contemporary questions.

## *2. The Kabbalistic "Scientific" Method and its Opposition to Religious and Philosophical Approaches*

Bnei Baruch's members claim that their Kabbalah is strictly scientific. Therefore, they call their system of Kabbalah a "science", even an "(applied) experimental science" (21, 224) (22), and a "scientific research of empirical perception." (23, 340).

I will now present only a few examples, but there could be many more: "Since Kabbalah is a true science, it seeks the real attainment of the universe, when no difficult question can refute a hard fact." (22), (24); "In our time the science of Kabbalah is becoming more and more popular, despite the fact that very few people understand what it is, why it is called a science, and why it reaches people in this way." (25); "This is not some esoteric, new age notion, but a scientific, empirically proven fact." (26, 297); "In truth, it is a scientific method that reveals the system behind the forces of Nature governing our world." (27, 10); "Like any other science, Kabbalah also uses exact terms and a completely scientific language." (28, 61). What interesting, one whole issue of *World Futures: The Journal of General Evolution* (29) was dedicated to Bnei Baruch Kabbalah and the explicit conviction that (and how) Kabbalah is connected to science. However, this attitude may suffer from partiality due to the fact that most (if not all) the authors are supporters of the Bnei Baruch Institute. According to Bnei Baruch, in the science of Kabbalah, a kabbalist operates in exactly the same way as a conventional scientist does, thus the knowledge obtained from the kabbalist's research is reliable and empirically proven (23, 340; 30, 115).

Consequently, Bnei Baruch kabbalists firmly distinguish their theses (which are scientific from their perspective) from religious and/or philosophical ones. They also see a difference between their system of Kabbalah and religion and/or philosophy in general. We read, “Kabbalah is a method, and that method is instruction in a process, not instruction in a philosophy or a religion.” (31, 17). In contrast to philosophy and religion, Kabbalah is said to be a “correct and empirical study of nature.” (23, 340).

The demarcation line is made here by the presence of dogmas or experiments: in natural science and in Bnei Baruch Kabbalah we are told to do experiments and verify hypotheses objectively, while in philosophy and religion we are expected to believe in some tenets. The latter disciplines are thought to provide faith, not knowledge. Furthermore, religion builds its convictions using faith, whilst philosophy only asks and consists in divagations that do not contribute much to the fundamental discourse of the meaning of life (in this point likewise religion) – however, as a counterpoint we can quote these Ashlag’s words (32, 84): “Kabbalah deals with the most important question in man’s life.”, which, in my opinion, may directly indicate the philosophical character of Bnei Baruch teaching. It is said that “The Kabbalistic perception of the world includes premises that other religions accept on faith, coupled with a scientific approach. Kabbalah develops tools within us that welcome us into a comprehensive reality and provide means to research it.” (30, 13).

It should be emphasized that the Bnei Baruch Institute separates itself not only from religion in general: “Kabbalah has nothing to do with any religion or any faith.” (30, 55), but from Judaism in particular. Laitman states, “There are others who relate it (Kabbalah – ...) to Judaism, but in truth the wisdom of Kabbalah has no connection whatsoever with mysticism, religion or any other man-made fantasy.” (30, 98); “Many people mistakenly relate the wisdom of Kabbalah to the Jewish religion. In truth, Kabbalah and religion are fundamentally different.” (30, 101); “The wisdom of Kabbalah is not mysticism. It is a science that explores the entire reality, unlike every other science that explores only our world.” (33, 312).

### *3. Natural Science and Kabbalah Science: Methodologies*

Despite the fact that Kabbalah is treated by Bnei Baruch members as a science, it is different from natural science, which explores the material world that is perceived by the five senses. Kabbalah is namely described as “a science that studies what happens *beyond* what our senses perceive.” (34, 23). Thus, something very important emerges. Kabbalah is based on and deals with studying extrasensory reality. Elsewhere we hear that “Kabbalah is the science that explores man’s origins, his purpose in life and the method of achieving a perception of reality beyond the five senses of the body.

While dealing with elements currently beyond our perception, it is actually a very practical methodology that can be implemented here and now.” (35).

Therefore, and because of the statement that “the science of Kabbalah” is similar to all other natural sciences, only its range of perception is broader (23, 341), an important question arises: how can something that focuses its attention on what is, in essence, non-corporeal, non-material, and not sensed/experienced by physical senses, be called science (and compared to natural sciences)? In addition, how is it possible to research this non-material domain scientifically with empirical repeatability and testability, which are the very foundations of science? These scientific and Bnei Baruch kabbalistic methodologies should be compared more precisely presently.

According to the Oxford Dictionary (36), a scientific method is a method or procedure consisting in systematic observation, measurement and experiment, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses. This has defined natural science since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Due to this, with reference to Bnei Baruch Kabbalah we may ask, how can spiritual (i.e. non-material) “objects-forces”<sup>3</sup> be tested, measured and observed? How is it possible to combine materialism/naturalism with spiritualism? Is it ultimately justifiable for Bnei Baruch members to use the expression “scientific method”? (as used by Laitman (38, 110) and (21, 446).

Laitman (30, 55) says that the kabbalistic “scientific method” provides accurate, mathematical and measurable tools. What is being tested, discovered, and mathematically measured is what is inside man, not outside him. He states (30, 55): “When I document data pertaining to one state, another Kabbalist can perform the same act – with his or her own tools – and experience the data I was referring to. The wisdom of Kabbalah provides an accurate measurement of human emotions.” This differentiates Kabbalah from conventional science. A kabbalist studies himself: his or her feelings and desires, not an objective part of the visible reality (38, 111).

To be more precise, what is being experimented on, measured, and analyzed in Kabbalah is the so-called Upper Light, the upper force (called the Creator), as it is attained inside a person, and its actions, “no less accurately than in the study of the material.” (22; 23, 341). The external force (the Creator) in its essence is unknowable, unperceivable by people. What people can feel and hence measure is their inner reaction to this force. From this, it follows that human perception can be detected inside people and people are like “black boxes”, dependent on human organs of perception (37). (Incidentally, this concept speaks in favor of the epistemological standpoint of antirealism, and hence is Bnei Baruch’s argument against the epistemological standpoint of realism.)

It is important to know that the Creator (the upper force) in its essence (called *Acymuto* (*Atzmut*)) cannot be perceived; hence, the only thing that can be experienced and tested is the way in which the Creator “unfolds”

itself in human souls, in emotional and spiritual reality. Therefore, the fundamental difference between the kabbalistic mode of research and the ordinary scientific method is that in conventional scientific research one attempts to penetrate the same reality he or she is in, but in Kabbalah the researcher rises above the present level and studies the former, lower level, dressed in human sensations (30, 158).

#### *4. Bnei Baruch Kabbalah as a Science and its Methodology Continued. The Sixth Sense*

The scientific character of Bnei Baruch Kabbalah is often highlighted in the Bnei Baruch Institute's interactive online sessions. According to the Institute's instructors, Bnei Baruch Kabbalah is a science, because, as listed in (39):

- 1) there is a teacher (*rav*) – as in school,
- 2) there is something that is being experimented on; there is an idea that has to be taken under the procedure of “falsification” (someone is experimenting on his or her own feelings, thoughts, and desires),
- 3) there is no faith, only “attainment”; there is no believing in God/Creator, but the act of feeling (= experiencing) it; hence Kabbalah is said to be no religion, and no philosophy (40, 99). See Section 2 of this article.

In another lesson (41), we were told that Kabbalah is a science because in science there are laws (for example, the law of gravity) which are observed by the researcher, and in Kabbalah there are laws that are observed by the researcher-kabbalist (the synonymity of scientists–kabbalists occurs for example in Laitman (42)) – however, these are spiritual laws, as Anthony Kosinec (43, 347) calls them, “the upper, governing laws of nature.” In both cases, research is based on experiment, but in Kabbalah, it is an internal experiment, because the measurement tool is the human organism, or more precisely: its soul. In the end, it is believed that it is possible to see the results of Kabbalah “experiments” as in natural science, with the notion that the object of research and the tool of research are different, while in Kabbalah the object and the researcher is one and the same: “me” (41).

To emphasize – the fundamental difference between classical science and the science of Kabbalah is that kabbalists examine the interior (desires and thoughts, which is where the second name of Kabbalah – “the science of desire” (44)), while conventional scientists examine outer phenomena (45).

In the science of Kabbalah, we no longer deal with the five corporeal senses (called five “vessels”-*kelim*), but operate with another: the sixth sense (an additional “vessel”-*klî*). However, it should be pointed out that this

sixth sense is presented as something very far from paranormal, esoteric, or mystical. This is another mode of experiencing and, as such, is an organ of perception (or research), but it is spiritual, or “hidden” (46). It is an additional sensory organ (also called the returning light-*or hozer*, screen-*masach* (25), or simply “soul”) used by kabbalists, and Kabbalah is believed to be a method that can develop this additional organ of perception (37). It is said that this sensor, in conformity with the general laws of nature, makes it possible to attain the entire universe (42). Although this sixth sense does not operate in the physical domain (“This organ allows us to see, feel and investigate the part of the Universe that is not perceivable through the regular five sense organs.” (25)), it is maintained that the wisdom of Kabbalah has “empiric, scientific approach (...) based on the same research principles that apply to other fields of research.” – despite the fact that the subject of kabbalistic research “is the higher part of reality.” (30, 182).

The scientific aspect of Kabbalah is believed by Bnei Baruch kabbalists to lie in the existence of the objective spiritual reality that is innerly perceived by kabbalists. Some kabbalists have written about this in their books (because they “were there” – in accordance with the kabbalistic formulas “come and see” and “what cannot be attained cannot be named”; or “the unattainable can have no name” – because a name implies a beginning of some sort of attainment (22); or “Only the true attainment can be described and named. Whatever is unattained cannot be defined by words” (47). Such objective reality is thought to be attainable for everyone with the right knowledge and equipped with the right tool. We are told that “The wisdom of Kabbalah, unlike all other sciences, researches a realm whose existence eludes an ordinary person. To research this realm, one must be equipped with another sense, a sense that perceives the ‘Upper World.’ With this additional sensory ability, one can gather information about the Upper World and experiment with it. Like any ordinary scientist, a Kabbalist can record reactions to actions. Kabbalists are researchers of the Upper World, and as such, they have recorded their findings over thousands of years of research. The collection of their records constitutes the wisdom of Kabbalah.” (30, 92).

To summarize this point, Kabbalah’s scientific approach is understood by Bnei Baruch members to be a way of experiencing, knowing, and understanding the upper force, the law that is said to be behind everything, the Creator. The sixth sense is then used to investigate one’s own feelings, sensations, and desires. Even the study of the material world is believed to be a study of the inner “me”, and therefore a spiritual study. Such inner observations, which are thought of as the outcomes of the scientific mode of Kabbalah, are said to have been conducted and confirmed over many centuries by many kabbalist researchers (48). Kabbalah is also said to be a science because everyone who goes through the same level of attainment

finally reaches the same point, which is presumed to be an indication of the objectivity of science (49). In the philosophy of science, this is known as intersubjectivity. Jaegwon Kim made intersubjectivity one of two main indicators of conventional science (or more strictly: of the conventional wisdom about science). He namely set apart two features (ideas) associated with science in general and these are: science as intersubjective (or objective) – which means that “scientific properties must be cognitively invariant across different perceivers and cognizers”, and science as nomological (or nomothetic) – which means that “scientific properties must be nomic/causal powers.” (50, 95). And Kabbalah is by “the sons of Baruch” taken as an empirical method by which everyone – regardless of race, faith, lifestyle and so on can attain a higher level of reality (51, 60); (52, 19;54); (53, 10).

#### *5. Creator. Seal-Imprint/Root-Branches (Cause-Consequences) Dependence. Inner Examination*

As has been shown, the kabbalistic mode of exploration is said to allow a person to “penetrate the level of causes.” (30, 86). Kabbalists are believed to achieve, in their inner sensations, the root level of existence that is the same for everyone. This root level of existence is the Creator, sometimes called God (21, 35; 242; 356), (33, 50; 246; 318), (1, 17), (51, 96), (53, 31), (27, 100; 216), (31, 146).

However, we must be careful, as Bnei Baruch teaching is not theism. If it were, this Kabbalah would immediately, at the very beginning, be disqualified as science, since science does not deal with the theistic, divine, supernatural realm. The Creator in Kabbalah is a set of (in essence spiritual) laws that governs all reality. The Creator is “the design of creation as it is expressed at any level.” (31, 146). It is the root-*shoresb* of all things, it is unchangeable, it is, as kabbalists say, “in complete rest” (meaning it cannot be influenced), and it is called a universal law and a law of existence (27, 58). In other words, the Creator is the “law of cause and effect that influences nature as a whole and every individual in particular.” (27, 35).

It seems to me that the idea of the Creator being equivalent to the (spiritual) laws of nature and the root of all things, but existing only in and for the kabbalist’s inner sensory organs, substantiates the Bnei Baruch teaching of the concepts of the inner “me”, the reality that is perceived inside a person, and of the ostensible outside reality, perceived by five senses (which, at the end of the day, is only a projection of inner attributes). We are told that when the forces that operate behind matter are perceived, what happens to matter is also perceived, since the spiritual forces become



the researcher's (kabbalist's) own domain (30, 158). This is explained in the following way: "The wisdom of Kabbalah describes the actions that originate in the Creator and hang down to our world through all the Upper Worlds. It also describes how they expand through the corporeal reality that we can all perceive with our five ordinary senses." (30, 92).

The corporeality, or material realm, is here a replica, a projection of spirituality (30, 131), and it is studied by science. However, in Kabbalah corporeality is not real (according to Laitman (30, 23), "(...) nothing exists outside of us, but our picture of reality appears *as if* it were outside of us."); although reality manifests itself physically, this manifestation is not full and fully real (25); everything people see only seems real. The world is only a projection, and a product, of human inner sensations as they relate and correspond to the Creator (54, 52). Spirituality in its essence cannot be studied like a physical object, because, as we read, it is unconnected with time, space and matter – it is a force, not vested in a body; spirituality has no contact with materiality, but generates material and sets it in motion (22).

Therefore, the important problem of how the illusionary physical reality can be studied and perceived is solved by a person studying him or herself. Physical, material reality is treated and studied as the projection of a person's own nature and is only a mode in which spiritual reality manifests itself to people's sensory organs. In Bnei Baruch terminology, materiality is an offshoot and blueprint of spirituality. Corporeality is an imprint of the seal: spirituality/Creator (this is an exemplification of the law: "Every spiritual root must touch a corporeal branch." (33, 28)). A scientist observes, measures, formulates, and tests, as does a kabbalist, who studies the immediate projected reality in the same way (seeing, as stated by Laitman (33, 28), that every spiritual origin and force must build its final corporeal manifestation in the physical world). Therefore, the method used by kabbalists is believed to be parallel to that used by scientists: "Just as scientists delve into the structure of materials with microscopes, or probe into deep space with telescopes, so Kabbalists penetrate the thought that surrounds reality using the wisdom of Kabbalah." (30, 86–87).

A kabbalist examines him or herself and gets to know the entirety of reality. He or she perceives the order of forces that works on people, the laws (in essence one spiritual law) of nature, because Kabbalah is said to penetrate to the cause of existence. (Causality is also presented as speaking in favor of the scientific character of Kabbalah teaching, because in conventional science causality is one of the fundamental determinants (55, 335). In order to do so, the researcher (kabbalist) needs to discover the cause of the phenomenon: the root, the Creator - the so-called comprehensive law of nature (56, 20), the all-inclusive force of nature (27, 41). A scientist investigates the cause of something *via* the material world,

while “Kabbalah scientists”/“scientists of Kabbalah” do it through their inner sensations (26, 292), (23, 340).

In Bnei Baruch Kabbalah, there is a conviction that when a kabbalist knows him or herself, he or she knows nature and hence the Creator, because in Kabbalah there is a synonymy of God/Creator and nature/the whole of reality (we can say that it is a kind of pantheism – however an idealistic/spiritual pantheism). The Hebrew word for nature (*ba-teva*) has an identical numerical value (86), in the system of gematria, to God (hebr. *Elohim*), i.e. the kabbalist Creator (30, 179), (57, 265). (Gematria is a hermeneutic system in which every letter and word of the alphabet is assigned a special numerical value. Jewish kabbalists – “Hebrew gematrists” – search for words that have the same values using the Tanach as a baseline, and claim that such words, even whole phrases, bear some relation to each other, which they then try to find. This cryptographic system contains many permutation methods.) Nature is the way in which the Creator affects people, showing them the dependence of cause and consequences. This is why when kabbalists talk about the Creator, they discuss the nature, the way the Creator has an effect on people.

The scientific dimension of Kabbalah is also believed to lie in Kabbalah’s determinism of nature (cause-consequence relationship) (49) – so, as it seems to me, due to the predictable theses that can be proclaimed about nature/Creator. Determinism is the determinant of the scientific character of a hypothesis (i.e. the repeatability of test results due to one pattern of behavior). We should admit that in Bnei Baruch Kabbalah, there is a kind of determinism in nature. Hence, Creator/Nature is a universal law and everything is determined by the cause-effect consequence relationship/order of descent of the upper force, or in the words of Kabbalah, root-branches correspondence (58, 25). However, this determinism comes from (and starts in) the upper force (i.e. spiritual reality), so it does not suit the natural science paradigm, which seeks the explanation of all phenomena “here”, in the natural/physical plane. Furthermore, the kabbalistic idea that “from the lower one can know the upper” means not that every level of spirituality is perceivable. *Acymuto* (“Creator’s essence”) is not (59) (cf. 54, 52); therefore, the whole of reality is not perceivable in Kabbalah, whereas in science it is.

Last but not least, we are told that both ordinary science and Kabbalah discuss the laws of nature. Science looks at what is observed by humans while Kabbalah says that there is something more than what humans can see (meaning there are spiritual laws with one law defining reality in general: the Creator/Nature law). Both approaches are thought to be scientific methods: traditional science is what is observed physically, and Kabbalah is the sensations of the deeper, original reality. However, conventional science observes the laws of nature, whilst Kabbalah *additionally* states that those

laws have a purpose whose origin is in the spiritual domain (60), which is unacceptable by natural science.

#### 6. Bnei Baruch "Kabbalah Science" Versus Methodological Naturalism

We have been told that Bnei Baruch Kabbalah is described by the Institute's members as a scientific methodology, or "science" par excellence. Although science as a whole is defined by Laitman (and Bnei Baruch) as "a research of the surrounding reality, which can be registered, repeated, reproduced" (48), Kabbalah is also shown as something that suits the label "science", due to its assumed empirical base and reproducible results. However, Bnei Baruch Kabbalah cannot actually be referred to as science if we define science as "The intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment." (61). Kabbalah deals with spirituality, meaning the inner world of sensations, emotions, and feelings (thus not the natural world), which are then projected onto the physical/natural reality.

Today's science, more strictly natural science, is a discipline that investigates natural phenomena. Science deals with the problem of how nature works. In other words, science does not use supernatural hypotheses, and, as Robert T. Pennock (62, 290) put it, "if we could apply natural knowledge to understand supernatural powers, then, by definition, they would not be supernatural." What is more, theses (or statements) in science must be objectively testable (as Michael Shermer (63, 211) stated, "An explanatory principle that by its nature cannot be tested is outside the realm of science."). Shermer refers to Nobelists' opinions concerning the dispute on whether creationism can be called scientific theory, and whether it is legitimate to speak of a "creation science". Empirical, visual experiments are needed and, therefore, testability is the main criterion for science. This is called falsifiability (best known thanks to Karl Popper).

Kabbalah studies the spiritual world, not the natural one, because the apparent physical world is, according to "the sons of Baruch", in essence non-physical (super-natural). Even members of the Bnei Baruch Institute themselves claim that people cannot *judge* the upper force (the Creator) objectively (37) (what, however, does not contradict the former presented Bnei Baruch's thesis about the existence of the ultimate, objective spiritual reality, attained by kabbalists). For these reasons, Kabbalah cannot be called science, despite the fact that Bnei Baruch members believe that the empirical status of Kabbalah (and precise attainment) is contained in the slogans: "The judge knows no more than his eyes see", "One testifies not according to what he heard, but according to what he saw", and "That which is not attained cannot be named" (23, 340).

There are no reliable empirical tools to measure the kind of experiences which Kabbalah talks about. Despite the fact that Bnei Baruch kabbalists try to encompass the category of experiment in their methodology (see Sections 2, 3, 4 of this article), it is very hard to maintain the assumption that something spiritual or non-material can be examined, observed, or objectively tested, and hence propounded theses can be falsified. If a science experiment is defined through objective observation and fundamentally the use of the five human senses, and in Kabbalah we deal with the sixth, non-physical sense (see Sections 4 and 5 of this article), we cannot talk about Kabbalah (and the spiritual reality it is related to) as the scientific one.

In the last section of our considerations we should point out that there is indeed a big problem with defining “science” in the philosophy of science. “The problem of demarcation” should be mentioned, a label coined by Karl Popper (64, 34), which determines what type of hypotheses should or may be considered (as) scientific and what science actually is (in other words, where the line should fall between science and non-science or pseudoscience). In the history of demarcationism, various orientations have prevailed. Starting in contemporary discourse with fallibilism, we come across the logical positivism and logical empiricism of the Vienna Circle (verificacionism), then Popper’s (65) falsifiability condition (falsificationism). It has even been said that there was a demise of the demarcation problem in contemporary (66, 111–127).

Let’s quote questions put forward by Bruce L. Gordon and William A. Dembski (67, XIX): “(...) shall we say that science is only concerned with giving natural explanations of the natural world and that any *other* sorts of explanations, whatever their merits, are *not* scientific? Or shall we say that *any* rigorous reasoning based on empirical evidence and theory construction is scientific?” Such perspective, which possibly suggests that there is no obligation to give natural explanations of the natural world, is however very rare among contemporary philosophers of science and scientists. When they talk about science, they are obliged to base their considerations at least on one necessary condition. Such a condition should be based on sufficient epistemological criteria. It should be epistemically warranted and accessible to epistemic evaluation. Such a *sine qua non* (condition) is considered to be methodological naturalism by most scholars: (Griffin (68, 8, 11); Craig and Moreland (69, XII); Johnson (70, 59–76); Scott (71, 30–32). The term “methodological naturalism” comes from Paul de Vries (72). Moreover, Larry Laudan (66, 117–118) said that it is not permitted to allow for a non-paradigmatic meaning of science and one should take as scientific what is treated as such by most people.

Putting it descriptively, science is preoccupied with the methodological examination of the objective natural reality. According to this, science only

deals with naturalistic explanations of phenomena. There is no place here for non-natural references and explanations. Simply put, methodological naturalism rejects appealing to God (under any name), some upper force, or some spiritual causality to explain the laws of nature. Here, when talking about the causation of phenomena, science is limited to explaining the world only through natural causes and processes. A scientific researcher cannot refer to any intelligent providence or guidance. Nancey Murphy, for example, writes (73, 33) that methodological naturalism forbids “creative intelligence” when speaking of scientific theories (Murphy is cited by Stephen C. Meyer (74, 113), who also elaborates here that “Methodological naturalism asserts that to qualify as scientific, a theory must explain all phenomena by reference to purely material—that is, nonintelligent-causes.”). In short, “According to this principle of ‘methodological naturalism,’ science is inherently limited to providing natural explanations for the natural world, and it does not (nor can) traffic in supernatural claims.” (75, 84).

Dembski (76, 169) speaks about methodological naturalism as “the regulative principle for science”, which protects it (namely science) from transforming into supranaturalism. Methodological naturalism, also called “methodological materialism” (71, 30–32) is today a crucial part of the definition of science (Thomas H. Huxley in 1892 coined the term “scientific naturalism”, which he used for describing a philosophical outlook that disallowed supernatural causes and adopted only empirical science as the reliable basis of knowledge about the world – “scientific naturalism” is in accordance with methodological naturalism/materialism (77, 62); hence, such a condition was accepted in my analysis of the Bnei Baruch Institute’s assumed scientific mode of Kabbalah.

Although methodological naturalism has a long history, it was Charles Darwin who established that when examining reality, one must consider only the phenomena of this, i.e. material, world. Darwin inserted naturalism into his field of research. As Gordon (78, 25) puts it, “Darwin did more than introduce methodological naturalism into biology, however; he contended that it was an indispensable criterion for any theory to be regarded as *scientific*.” (79, 488). Gordon (78, 25) also quoted William North Rice (80, 608) in this matter: “The great strength of Darwinian theory lies in its coincidence with the general spirit and tendency of science. It is the aim of science to narrow the domain of the supernatural, by bringing all phenomena within the scope of natural laws and secondary causes.” Also Francisco J. Ayala (81, 4), (82, 10033–10039) emphasized that Darwin’s greatest accomplishment was following natural processes in his explanations, without any need to resort to some external, non-natural agent (God/Creator/upper force). Since Darwin, being a scientist means that one is researching this world, is dealing with what is empirically tested in this world, and that explanations of phenomena should come from natural law.

There must be observability and testability of mundane laws and phenomena.

Kabbalah will be the final point which I will turn to. As has been shown, Kabbalah cannot be called science if it examines the inner, spiritual reality (as emphasized many times in this article), rather than physical reality as the ultimate one. However, as was shown earlier too, Bnei Baruch Kabbalah also deals with external reality, as nature is of interest to a kabbalist too – which might seem paradoxical – but Kabbalah (or the kabbalist) takes physical reality only *as if* it were real and as a kind of ephiphenomenon of the unfolding of the spiritual realm. The whole teaching of Kabbalah studies the material reality only as a projection of the inner attributes of a person. Physical reality is not the first, last, or the only domain in the process of explaining the natural world and the laws that govern it. This last statement is crucial. Even though the synonymy of Creator/Nature (as the whole of reality) contains the presupposition that the Creator affects humans through nature, and that nature is the mode the Creator “uses” to show people the relationship between cause and consequences (49), the Creator is in essence a spiritual “being” that is experienced, perceived, and “realized” only through human spiritual sensations. This does not allow us to treat Bnei Baruch’s concepts as the rationale of methodological naturalism. Kabbalistic theoretical terms and conceptions cannot be given an empirical (in terms of physical experiment) sense and hence Bnei Baruch Kabbalah cannot be labeled “science”.

## *7. Conclusions*

In the work above, concerning the problem of Bnei Baruch Kabbalah being a science and a scientific mode of researching the world, I follow the standard of methodological naturalism. From such a perspective, Bnei Baruch’s statement that Kabbalah is a science which uses scientific methodology to research not our world, but the spiritual one, is not correct. The theses proposed by the Bnei Baruch Institute do not fulfil the most common “scientific condition”.

In addition, when determining the scientific character of Kabbalah, something that has to be questioned is: Has anyone made an effort to disprove this claim, or has only confirmatory evidence been sought? (It is one of the lines of demarcation between science and pseudoscience according to Shermer (63, 217).) Have researchers from the Bnei Baruch Institute tried to falsify their claim that Kabbalah is a science? Or do they accept their claim as a “fact”? It seems to me that they only do the latter. As a matter of fact, the alleged scientific (or naturalistic, i.e. in accordance with methodological naturalism) status of Bnei Baruch Kabbalah cannot be maintained.

The system of thought, Weltanschauung of Bnei Baruch, this innovative worldwide contemporary movement, a type of new religious-alike movement, remains then a kind of philosophical and/or religious-alike (or better: spiritual) kind of teaching – not a science. Actually, Bnei Baruch Kabbalah appears not to be far-distant from religious thinking because of the character of God (the Creator), which in both cases is a spiritual/supranatural entity. And therefore we can, as far as I am concerned, call Bnei Baruch Kabbalah phenomenon an emerging new manifestation and form of de facto spirituality.

Although the 20<sup>th</sup> century abounded in revived kabbalistic thinking and new mystical Jewish schools (present both in Israel and in Europe), Gershom Scholem, a probably most prominent Kabbalah researcher so far, protested over labelling them “kabbalistic”, or more precisely, as a “real kabbalah” (83, 1; 84, 71). His attitude greatly influenced the approach to Kabbalah of succeeding scholars. When it goes about Bnei Baruch Kabbalah, it is crucial to take a position towards Scholem’s thesis about modern Kabbalah. Scholem could not make a stand towards Bnei Baruch Kabbalah (he died in 1982 and Laitman’s organization was established, as said at the beginning, in 1991), but in his line of thought Bnei Baruch doctrine would not fit the category of “real Kabbalah” too – the Institute’s teaching is not the extension of “real” kabbalistic paradigm. It is, of course, its aftermath, includes substantial elements from Jewish mysticism, but deprived by its proponents of religious (Judaistic) context it becomes in fact a spiritual, but philosophical (and not religious in a strict sense) kind of teaching.

Laitman’s and his organization’s members accent on presenting their Kabbalah as a “science” is, as it seems to me, on the one hand a kind of marketing technique to enhance the appeal of the movement to modern humans (perhaps especially secular Israelis) – we live, after all, in a society that to the great extent respect what is explained academically; on the other, however, may be the outcome of the psychological interpretation of this Kabbalah (viz. the crucial concept of the inner “me” and internal psychological/spiritual qualities). Psychology, in a matter of fact, is namely – as a discipline – abounded in naturalists (as stated by Kim (50, 85). Maybe this is also the reason why „the sons of Baruch” insist on calling their Kabbalah a scientific procedure.

At this point it would be worth mentioning that similar to Bnei Baruch’s claims of scientific validity have been a quite common discourse in contemporary new religious movements, New Age movements, and spiritual forms of teaching, so Laitman’s Institute is no exceptional here. One can even say that drawing on the authority of science is a pattern found often in alternative religious movements. Huss (15, 118) recognizes

that the blurring of boundaries between spirituality or religion on the one hand and science on the other, is symptomatic both for New Age movement in general, and for Neo-kabbalistic movements.

Such tendency does not only expose a loss of traditional (in the sense of theistic) religion's power and traditional religious beliefs' plausibility in contemporary society, but is also a mark of modern-day legitimacy and "sacralization" of science. It is in fact an expression of religious attitude and estimation (only the object of the highest meaning differs from that in religion). It looks like a paradox that the "sons of Baruch" try to distance themselves with their Kabbalah from religion, but are not able to avoid such parallel on every plane. Bnei Baruch do not keep away from the sacralization tendency, although they do not sacralize some religious "thing" (God), but something from the apparently opposite dominium – namely science and scientific procedure.

Due to a great number of concepts borrowed from traditional, especially late medieval and early modern era, Jewish Kabbalah – however adapted to modern times – the teaching of Bnei Baruch appears in fact to be a kind of modern mysticism and one whole modern myth. And a science-sacralization tendency that echos from this neo-Kabbalah creates additionally a kind of "science myth".

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Considering the particularities of the sources used by the author, the editors have decided not to change the system of in-text citations and to modify only the bibliography according to the Chicago Citation Style. In-text citations of the type (1, 26) refer to the entry in the bibliography and to the cited page. Final references are placed in the order in which they appear in the text, for a better readability.

<sup>2</sup> See also Laitman's article: "The Difference Between the Science of Kabbalah and Religion", <http://www.kabbalah.info/eng/content/view/frame/2373?eng/&main> (Mar 17, 2017). All of Laitman's articles, available in electronic version, which I quote come from this site and from this day (unless otherwise specified).

<sup>3</sup> Concerning such "objects-forces", Bnei Baruch Kabbalah namely says: "There are no material objects in the Upper Words, just only forces that give birth to the objects of our world and to our sensations." (37). See also Ashlag (32, 111).

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