

On the Object of Philosophy: from Being to Reality

Bernatskiy Vladilen Osipovich, Ph.D,

*Professor of Philosophy and Social Communication faculty
at Omsk State Technical University*

Abstract

The article under consideration shows wrongfulness of deriving contents of philosophy and its ontological bases by opposition between the so-called principles of materialism and idealism. The author regards methodological base of a positive resolution to the problem to be less in wrongfulness of synonymy between concepts of Being and Reality than necessity of their distinguishing due to discrepancy of cognitive objects represented thereby. The article states the problem of possibility / impossibility of institutionalizing philosophy as original universal (single) knowledge and makes an attempt to justify needs for creating methodology to understand reasons that prevent philosophy from being established as systemic knowledge about Reality due to human (creative) activity inherent therein.

Keywords: Being, Reality, object, philosophy, ontology, materialism, idealism, entity.

Few would object that thinking, or rather philosophizing, is an essential human characteristic and thus has bases shared by everyone. It is also obvious that all the peoples of the mythological period with any philosophy had common themes, problems, plots, and matching notional results of thinking but expressed according to their mentality and culture. So why hasn't single universal philosophical knowledge been formed yet? Is it theoretically possible?

Most philosophers do not consider the latter issue or give vague answers in their reasonings thus virtually reducing philosophy to an art form, a science of values (Baden School), and pluralism of postnonclassical science. However, it should be noted that these are professionals who think and make conclusions in this way and thus virtually ignore mythological repetition as well as create philosophical movements that go beyond separate peoples. The most illustrative in this regard are philosophical systems of Democritus and Plato, Thomas Aquinas and John Berkeley, Hegel and Marx. Among the modern there are, for example, existentialism,

hermeneutics, postpositivism. But at the same time in teachings of all the philosophers reasonings about the World, being, and reality not only simply exist but also act as initial objects and basic concepts thereof. However, since antiquity some have imagined the World and being on the whole as something external with humanity existing wherein and understanding therein. Others argue that reality is either own, or personal being or provided by some certain superhuman spiritual power. In the 21st century division into materialism and idealism is still present but philosophy, especially of subjectivist movement, is actually scattered among multiple aforementioned teachings. However, attempts to somehow integrate principles which are considered materialist or idealist also have a long albeit implicit history starting from Aristotle's unity of form and matter. At the same time it should be noted that of significant value for the given approach is his interpretation of matter in which it is impossible to say something definite about it.

The article proposes the thesis that during three millennia neither materialism nor idealism proved to be false or delusional on the whole since each teaching of these philosophical movements includes elements of universal knowledge as well as objective character and truth. When considering the history of philosophy as well as modern teachings from this perspective it should be acknowledged that each has some positive content. But it should be also taken into account that each present “philosophy” includes absolutization, errors, and fallacies. But this is hardly a paradox. The thing is in original, or rather unusual specific character of philosophy among all other forms of human knowledge, a large part of its beginnings as well as ways and methods of establishing their truth. There is a single answer to the abovementioned issues: opposition between materialism and idealism leads to plurality of philosophical teachings since objects of their cognition are polysemantic and relative given that interpretation of the object of philosophy requires a different, modern reflection [1]. This very fact influences, firstly, specific character of philosophical cognition that distinguishes it from all other forms thereof. Secondly,

bases for reasonings about the object of philosophy currently used in philosophical discourse do not allow to understand positives and fallacies of philosophical materialism and idealism.

Any knowledge represents knowledge about a researcher as a cognizing person singling out certain “something” as finite with its own properties. In this case a cognizing person is the subject while what he or she cognizes is the object. But since formation of nonclassical science and obviously within postnonclassical one, the object has not been conceived without the influence of the subject. Specific character of the object of philosophy is that “de facto” the world and being have no sensible boundaries (for example, Cosmos, Logos, God) and correspondingly no perceived form of elements as opposed to objects of natural science. The object of philosophy is an infinite World (nature, universe, cosmos) as well as a person and the society in their unity as a special integrity. And since cognition of “no form” is impossible, the object of philosophy is always institutionalized in one way or another by the authors as actuality in the form of being as well as natural or social reality. Therefore, there is variety of bases for formulating both being and reality. Finally, an exclusive feature of philosophy lies in another specific characteristic of the phenomenon of being as an object of cognition: while it is possible with the object of natural science, from the object of philosophy it is impossible to eliminate the subject in the form of a researcher and humanity as factors and phenomena of actualizing reality, and therefore, consciousness and activity cannot be removed from reality. That is why for philosophy human knowledge and human activity are actually equal properties of reality along with physical, chemical, and other material ones. It all determines essential basic components of the structure of philosophical knowledge: teaching about entity (ontology), teaching about cognition and truth (gnoseology), and teaching about a person and the society (social philosophy).

At present, the situation is aggravated by different approaches and definitions among followers of both idealism and materialism. It is sufficient to just compare

positivism with existentialism, Kant with Hegel, Feuerbach with Marx, Marxism of its founders with “dialectical and historical materialism” of its supporters' discussions on the object of philosophy in the 1960s and 1980s” [2].

Plurality of teachings and movements exist partly due to the fact that for a long time before modern era philosophy beginning with ancient natural philosophy was not relying on natural science but rather sought to reify and naturalize philosophical concepts and truths, transfer the logos to an interpretation of nature and that of the World to natural knowledge, the very being. In fact, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Pythagoras, Democritus and Plato can be examined in such way. And only in Cartesian mechanical philosophy the latter depended on truths of natural science. This is one thing. But the other is more important.

In the past and at present plurality of philosophical movements has been provoked by absolutization of one, often true, principle or judgment. At the same time philosophy schools and movements become alternate. In fact, fire, number, idea, and atom of the ancients were nothing else then absolutization of “beginnings” transferred within certain world outlooks on all forms of knowledge and objects thereof. Many decades after Descartes it took an attempt of Comte, Marx and Engels to raise the status of natural science in front of philosophy before the latter started to be based on data of natural science and findings of both natural and now humanitarian science. The thing is in original character of philosophy among all other forms of human knowledge, in large part of its own beginnings as well as aforementioned ways and methods of establishing truth thereof. By the way, it was repeatedly pointed out even within the framework of Marxism [3].

Specific character of philosophy lies already in the fact that any problem in its any area from interpretation of the object, structure, and tools to essence of a person and meaning of life is within the orbit of reflectivity. However, absolutization of this fact is at the basis of the findings about artificial character of philosophical knowledge and its axiological essence. While claiming universality of their ideas and judgements,

philosophers in any case treat a system they consider limit as the object of philosophy: The World not as formally the whole and not as impersonal “something” but such Universe that includes a personality, the society, and humanity with all their manufactured goods. In philosophy, it is a fundamental factor and a divergence point that differentiates its movements and schools due to transforming the object from “something” into the object of reality. Strictly speaking, it means that philosophical knowledge is distinguished from natural science and any other form of humanitarian knowledge by the fact that a philosopher ceases to be precisely a philosopher when stepping onto the path of researching the object “just as it is”, or “per se”. There is no such object for philosophy.

Formally, it is an old problem that also laid foundations not only for division into materialism and idealism but also plurality of philosophical teachings and movements. Therefore, it is worth to consider correspondingly Marx' famous point: “the main disadvantage of all the preceding materialism (including even Feuerbach's one) is in the fact that object, reality, sensuality are taken only in the form of the object or sight but not subjectively as sensuous human activity, practice” [4, p. 102]. In fact, it is a judgment on approximation, or rather, not about opposition between materialism and idealism. Another thing is how seriously it was perceived. It often leads to conclusions about philosophical knowledge as the one carrying individual understanding of the World and even about axiological nature of philosophy in general.

The concept of being in philosophy is one of the oldest ones. At the same time being is opposed to nonbeing (Parmenides). In the history of philosophy there were repeated discussions about presence or absence of “nonbeing”. In its wider meaning being was interpreted as comprehensive reality, but is herein regarded as a finite general notion of existence, the World, and entity on the whole. Then all the concrete forms of life, such as stars, plants, animals, and people would arise from nonbeing to become present actual being. Although there are other views. Heidegger, for example,

opposed entity to being lying in the foundations and beyond entity (that is supported by the author), i. e. rejects matching being with entity. But a positive conclusion was not made because of the same reason: those who share materialism views do not differentiate greatly between being and entity that can be considered by their opponents as inconsistency of the famous philosopher.

It is symptomatic to logically conclude that being of entity at some time comes to an end and goes back into nonbeing while losing such form of reality. In materialism, all the forms of being have matter as their limit base, so the philosophical concept of “being” refers to an objective world that exists independent of consciousness as a certain limit material object. But then it has no place for a person, subjectivity, consciousness, and a creative beginning. However, absolutizing presence of not just a subject, but a creative beginning in Being leads to either theology or both forms of idealism. Thus, another conclusion should be drawn that only significant distinguishing between being and reality allows to understand that reality is not “some” reality but “our”, or “my” reality. Also, the efficient cause of a changing picture of the world and reality itself is less “causa sui” than activity of “I”, and “us”, or, in other words, an individual, the society, or humanity.

Within entity, or reality, “something” is in fact determined by a person, humanity, or activity as a creative cause. However, the difference is in different perception of being. In idealism, determination is always carried out by movement of spirit, form, consciousness, and that is why reality was considered as nothing more than conscious reality. But for supporters of materialism such as Democritus and Spinoza, self-movement was an essential characteristic of nature.

Contradiction between the main movements of philosophy are actually virtual. It arose and exists because of conversations about cognition of different objects: some refer to being using the concept of reality while others, on the contrary, discuss reality as entity using the term Being. But the thing is not in terms. After all, the thing is that both unconsciously do not match being with reality. Could Socrates refer not to reality

by stating that “only knowable can be the object of knowledge”? Or could Spinoza refer not to being by saying that “nature is eternal present with no past or future”?

But even at present for some reality is opposed to probability whereas for others it is conscious being. But now there are bases to specify that probability is an attribute of reality and not being while reality is not conscious being but only a special part thereof. These are fundamentally different and unique objects, so hereinafter it is advisable to write such concepts with a capital letter.

Being is not realized at all as it exists eternally, and any probability is senseless for it. We, humanity, or a personality can delve into Being only in a “cocoon” of Reality while creating, changing, and expanding the latter by our cognitive and practical activity. Figuratively, Reality appears as a (scientific) picture of Being constantly appended and rewritten by an individual, or humanity whilst education and technology of human activity are developing. Only Reality has the three following global components (parts): humanity (the society, a person), nature and cosmos. It should be understood that Reality does not exist without a person, or the subject. However, Being as a problem and a research object does not exist without Reality since various forms of aliens are eternal and transcendent within Being as Cosmos whereas Reality is always concrete and nothing more than a separate, although specific and limit to us, me, or humanity object which is changing but always finite in space and time. In contrast to Being, Reality has dimension, form, content, and regularities as machinery of its development.

The stated above allows to more efficiently interpret views of philosophers and note causes of absolutization and fallacies, e. g. “The material world exists in itself”, “The World has neither beginning nor end”, “Matter always has some form”, “In wildlife, species are a result of transition from less adapted organisms to more adapted ones”, and other such “eternal” truths. The first two judgements are actually true in relation to interpretation of Being but false in relation to Reality. The last two are unrelated to Being (false), but true in relation to Reality.

Idealism exists not because of recognizing the will, feeling, the subject, and spirit as a “beginning” of the world. It is caused by considering Being and Reality synonyms with personifying some independently active factor either as the only (single) objective beginning (Platonic idealism, Hegel's Absolute idealism, or religious God) or as a personal beginning in subjective idealism. Materialism actually does not distinguish strictly between Being and Reality and therefore rightfully removes a creative subject from Being thus bringing a fallacy into philosophy by eliminating the subject from the object of philosophical cognition which is Reality and in fact also making being and reality synonyms. In fact, the principle of philosophy is not in opposition between idealism and materialism or in “primary being and derived consciousness” or vice versa but in primary Being and derived Reality. Reality comprises practicability, creativity, the sublime, spirit, and a creator: a personality, the society, and humanity.

Strictly speaking, Reality is the problem of entity where activity factors are represented by subjects as carriers of activity in a world of objects: natural things, social formations, and objects of needs. Reality does not presuppose but confirms presence of the subject and its activity therein. Reality as a special state on the basis of Being is formed, changed and formulated by activity of humanity, or its subjects.

There can be no abyss between Being and Reality. There is no Reality without Being since Reality itself is (“floating”) in Being while also containing the phenomenon of Being therein. All “new” discovered by us is in one way or another connected to Being, and defining essence of things and subjects of Reality results from human activity. Hence Reality is not a chaotic multitude of objects but just the opposite, systemic unity of things, images, objects, and knowledge.

Only Reality has the beginning and the history, the present and the future (as well the past). Being has neither beginning nor end and no history! Being has neither boundaries nor a horizon while Reality possesses both. Hence it is logical that although Reality of earthlings is other than that of “Martians” or any other aliens, the

core of natural science and philosophy in all advanced civilizations in the galaxy should be similar, if not identical. People of the Earth are only at the very beginning on the way to it.

In conclusion to the above said, philosophy can be interpreted as not only knowledge of beginnings and the universal in Reality but identified with it. Philosophy should be considered as knowledge of Reality, a developing limit system of integrity in the infinite and timeless Being and humanity as a cause and driving force of development of Reality. Reality itself is perceived as a changing and evolving world of objects, subjects and results of their activity, a systemic unity of things, images, objects, and knowledge as products of activity of subjects and generated by their needs. It should be also stated that one can confidently assume that in the past many philosophers obviously intuitively understood necessity of distinguishing between Being and Reality and importance of their interpretation both in terms of ontological and metaphysical principles. And following our distinguishing between Being and Reality, it can be argued that such guesses were also present in “spontaneous materialism” of the ancient time (including Ancient Eastern Philosophy) and was more explicit in Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and Marxism. But for the most part emphasizing a problem one can agree with neither of them except with Kant to a certain extent. He was the closest to the point with his apriorism and agnosticism.

References

1. For details see V. O. Bernatsky, “Onthology: being or reasoning about reality?” in *Bulletin of Omsk Academy for the Humanities*, 5 (2000), 6-14, in Russian.
2. See, for example, *Historical materialism* (Moscow, 1965), in Russian; *Marxist-Leninist Philosophy* (Moscow, 1969), in Russian; *Fundamentals of Philosophy* (Moscow, 1988), in Russian.
3. A famous instruction by V. I. Lenin, “Materialism and Empirio-criticism” in *Collected Works* (vol. 18), 148, in Russian. A. F. Losev writes about the same: “..materialism

and idealism are just necessary limit opposing views of philosophical inquiry that can be very rarely found in their pure form but without any doubt are criteria for assessing all intermediate links between them.” (A. F. Losev, *Plato and his epoch* (Moscow, 1979), 9, in Russian.

4. Marx and Engels, *Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook* (Moscow, 1966), in Russian,