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EASTERN AND WESTERN PARADIGMS OF PHILOSOPHICAL IDEALISM

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Abstract

The traditional approach to the philosophy of the East and the philosophy of the West carries out their demarcation using cultural, historical, epistemological, anthropological as well as social and political criteria that are external in relation to the philosophy itself as a rational and theoretical type of worldview. The ideological and value criteria of demarcation are found in the doctrine of reincarnation, which makes it possible to identify and explore the eastern and western paradigms of philosophical idealism. The eastern paradigm of philosophical idealism is based on the doctrine of reincarnation and the concept of transpersonal immortality, while the western paradigm of philosophical idealism is based on the doctrine of soul salvation and the concept of personal potential immortality. In the idealistic worldview of a particular person, the recognition or denial of the doctrine of reincarnation acquires spiritual and practical value, since it determines its attitude to life and death, to current events, acts as a guiding principle in its actions. The traditional separation of philosophical doctrines into materialism and idealism must be supplemented by eastern idealism and western idealism. From the standpoint of intercultural philosophy, it should be recognized that the doctrine of reincarnation, being formed at the origins of the ancient Greek philosophy and subsequently undeservedly forgotten, has legitimate reasons for its revival in modern philosophy on an equal footing with the demarcation of the eastern and western paradigms of philosophical idealism.

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1. Introduction

The latest trend in modern philosophy is intercultural philosophy, which arose in the second half of the 20th century in connection with a critical reflection of the Eurocentric position in the philosophical community according to which the western philosophical tradition was the measure of philosophy (Belimova, 2019; Mall, 2000; Stepanyants, 2015). Under the influence of developing directions of philosophical oriental studies and philosophical comparative studies, a rethinking of philosophy itself proceeds from the principle of cognitive modesty (Fleming, 2003; Levine, 2016). It becomes obvious that the Western type of philosophy is not the only one. Philosophical thinking cannot be limited to the framework of national or civilizational cultures. Intercultural philosophy is aimed at overcoming Eurocentrism in philosophical discourse, at comprehending and solving philosophical problems through intercultural communication between East and West, and a dialogue between the eastern and western philosophical traditions (Kimmerle, 2007; Paul, 2008).

The main methodological problem of intercultural philosophy is the establishment of differences and similarities between the eastern and western types of philosophy, which is a prerequisite for implementation of intercultural dialogue according to the following rule: we are different, but we are together (Chernova, 2005). At the same time, the existing approaches to understanding the differences between the eastern and western philosophy are often superficial when differences are established at the external level of phenomena, but not at the deep level of the entities. Obviously, a lack of understanding of the conceptual differences or the fundamental line of demarcation between the eastern and western philosophies creates obstacles to the implementation of their further dialogue.

2. Problem Statement

Numerous differences between eastern and western philosophy, revealed by various authors, can be conditionally combined by the nature of demarcation lines into several groups: cultural and historical, epistemological, anthropological as well as social and political (Kanke, 2003; Virgo, 2016).

In the cultural and historical respect, attention is drawn to the fact that western philosophy is characterized by the desire for modernization and progress; future perspectives; multidisciplinary philosophical issues; dominance of material values; active, cognitively transforming attitude to the world. The distinctive features of the eastern philosophy are as follows: traditionalism; aspect of eternity; comprehension of the problems of human being; priority of spiritual values; contemplative and aesthetic and ethical attitude to the being.

The gnoseological differences are found in the fact that the western type of philosophy is characterized by rational and logical thinking; scientific and naturalistic approach; the principle of getting acquainted with the world; a man as the main subject of knowledge; focus on accessibility of knowledge; dependence of mentality on the middle class. The distinctive features of the eastern tradition of knowledge are as follows: religious and mythological thinking; mysticism and intuitionism; agnosticism; collective subject of knowledge; elitism of knowledge as a result of the gap between those who are aware and regular people.

In the anthropological dimension, the differences are found in the fact that the western philosophy is characterized by anthropocentrism as an opportunity toward improving the life of man and humanity, humanism, and consumer-oriented human being. Typical features of the eastern philosophy are as follows: theocentrism of human being and the ministry of a higher transcendental essence; man's spiritually oriented existence towards the achievement of eternity and immortality.

In social and political terms, western philosophy is characterized by ideas about the linearity of historical time, the desire for a compromise in relations between the individual and society, the state, while eastern philosophy is based on the ideas about the cyclical nature of history and the recognition of the primacy of the state over the individual.

However, the above criteria for distinguishing between eastern and western philosophies are external in relation to the philosophy itself and do not reveal its essence, which does not make it possible to determine difference between them at the essential level.

3. Research Questions

In a general sense, philosophy is understood as a rational and theoretical type of worldview. Philosophical thinking seeks answers to the most general questions about a person's place in this world, about the meaning of his existence. Unlike other types of worldview – mythological and religious – philosophy seeks answers to the worldview questions by constructing a theory through a reason and abstract and conceptual thinking.

The purpose of philosophical theory is to explain to a man his existence, that is, to make understandable and meaningful for a man the totality of significant phenomena of his being. This is what makes it different between the philosophy and science, since the task of science (natural science) is to explain the meaning of the world independently of a person's being, that is, to reveal the internal order of objective being (natural laws), which does not depend on the very fact of a person's existence and his consciousness. In other words, science only answers the question "how?" everything is organized in the world, while philosophy answers the questions "why?" and "for what reason?" something happens in my life. It is in the sense that philosophical theory is a doctrine. Explaining to a person significant phenomena and events of his life, philosophical theory insofar as even if it becomes the worldview of this person, develops his evaluative attitude to what is happening, prescribes him a certain mode of action and life.

Theoretical knowledge is intended to reveal the regular order of events, that is, to find that the events are a manifestation of a certain internal regular essence. Any theory assumes the presence in it of an initial unifying principle, i.e. a set of fundamental ideas (axioms, postulates), with the help of which the events are explained.

With regard to the problem of the eastern and western philosophies, this means that at the essential level, their differences must be found in the initial principles of constructing theoretical views on the existence of man in the world.

Moreover, it is found that in the vast majority of studies on the demarcation of philosophy based on the eastern and western principles there is no mention of the cornerstone of the stumbling point between these traditions. The question is about the idea of transformation of human soul or the doctrine of reincarnation.

4. Purpose of the Study

Therefore, the purpose of this study is as follows: to reveal the doctrine of reincarnation as the defining criterion for demarcation between the eastern and western paradigms of philosophy at the essential level of their differences in the context of possibility of their dialogue in the intercultural philosophy.

5. Research Methods

The study of the idea of reincarnation as a criterion for the division of philosophy into eastern and western one involves the use of comparative analysis methods. At the same time, there is a need for a preliminary critical reflection on the applicability of research methods within the framework of a broader methodological approach to the definition of the concepts of eastern philosophy and western philosophy.

It seems that the reason for the “silence” of the doctrine of reincarnation in the study of the differences between eastern and western philosophies is hidden primarily in the methodological settings of the traditional approach on this issue, when the historical and geographical criterion, which has rather formal than substantive character. According to this criterion, the teachings of ancient India, China and Japan are traditionally referred to eastern philosophy, and the teachings of the philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome, the Christian Middle Ages and the subsequent philosophy of Western Europe are traditionally classified as western philosophy.

Such an understanding formed a position of Eurocentrism in philosophy, according to which Eastern philosophy was assessed as not worthy of special attention “preliminary” or “regional” philosophy, in contrast to the “true” Western philosophy. This position was put by G. Hegel in his famous Lectures on the History of Philosophy when he explained that “the so-called Eastern philosophy”, although it was the first in its time, did not deserve extensive consideration, since “it represented something preliminary in relation to true philosophy” (Hegel, 1993).

It is believed that in the framework of the traditional approach, the use of the concepts of eastern and western philosophy would be methodologically incorrect. In this case, it is more correct to use the terms the philosophy of the East and the philosophy of the West, designating them as specific cultural and historical forms of philosophy that have developed in the countries of the Ancient East and in the historical development of Western Europe.

6. Findings

In the doctrine of reincarnation, a value and ideological criterion for the demarcation of philosophy to the eastern and western one is found, which makes it possible to highlight and explore the paradigms of eastern idealism and western idealism as different versions of a philosophical and idealistic worldview.

The use of this criterion of demarcation, first of all, presupposes an anthropological revolution regarding the classification of philosophical teachings. This means that the focus is not on the ontological question “what is there in being?”, but the anthropological question “why is there something for a man?” In other words, one should get off the traditional methodological rails of the “main question of

philosophy” (what is there in being?) and embark on the path of the “main question of philosophy” about the meaning of human life: is the human soul immortal?

Obviously, the question of immortality of the soul cannot have yes and no answer. It is either the human soul is mortal, that is, my self-awareness ceases to exist at the time of the death of the body or the human soul is immortal, that is, myself continues to exist (in one form or another) even after the biological death of the body.

In the traditional classification according to the “fundamental question of philosophy”, two directions of philosophy correspond to these answer options, i.e. materialism and idealism. Materialistic philosophical theories are based on the ontological postulate “material is primary, spiritual is secondary”, from which the judgment on the mortality of the human soul follows logically. Since the existential material basis of the soul (the body dies), the derivative component of this basis (the soul dies) ceases to exist. And vice versa. The idealistic philosophy, which is based on the ontological postulate “the spiritual is primary, the material is secondary”, derives from it the judgment of the immortality of the soul. Since the material body is a derivative of the primary being of the spirit, the disappearance of the derivative does not entail the disappearance of the foundation that produces it (the spirit). The soul of a person, himself, has the ability to exist even after the death of the body due to the presence of an independent existential source – God, the Absolute, Reason, Tao, Heaven, Brahman, etc., to which the human soul returns after the death of the body one way or another way.

At the same time, the value-ideological difference between eastern and western thinking is revealed not on the question of immortality of the soul (materialism or idealism), but on the question of how the soul can become immortal. The distinction between the eastern and western philosophy makes sense only as options for an idealistic worldview. In other words, the question is not whether the soul is immortal (the immortality of the soul is recognized in both Eastern and Western philosophy), but how its immortality is possible.

Thus, in the question of the demarcation of eastern and western philosophy, it is methodologically correct to use the concepts of philosophy of the East and philosophy of the West in those cases when it comes to cultural and historical forms of philosophy that have developed along a geographical basis (Ancient East and Western Europe), then as in the context of value and ideological content, one should use the concepts of eastern idealism and western idealism, or talk about the eastern and western paradigms of idealistic philosophy.

The question of reincarnation is a stumbling rock (and, at the same time, a line of demarcation) between the eastern and western paradigms of philosophical idealism. Oriental philosophy is based on the concept of transpersonal immortality of soul, which includes teachings on the reincarnation, on karma, on the “deification” of the soul, formed in the religious views of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The Western paradigm of philosophical idealism is based on the concept of personal immortality of soul, which includes the teachings of salvation, God’s judgment, heaven and hell, formed in the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The fundamental difference between the eastern and western idealistic worldviews in philosophy is concentrated on the issue of reincarnation.

Eastern philosophy is permeated with the idea of transforming the immortal soul of man from body to body, from life to life. The doctrine of reincarnation acts as an explanatory principle of the

meaning of human being. The immortal “myself” of a person goes through the repeated cycle of birth and death (the wheel of samsara) in order to enrich with new life experience, in order to evolve. In this cycle, the soul is gets clean, because it “learns” from its own mistakes, which are returned to it according to the law of karma, i.e. the rule of retribution for good or bad actions in this or in the next life (according to the principle of “reap as one has sown”). The human soul, traveling from body to body (from one person to another person), accumulates spiritual achievements, becomes more wise, enlightened, perfect. Ultimately, as a result of numerous reincarnations, the soul reaches divine perfection and acquires transpersonal immortality which means that it breaks down the “chains of samsara” and reunites with its original source, i.e. the Spiritual Absolute (the soul becomes God). Similar to a drop of water falling into the sea becomes the sea, the soul of a person, united with the God, becomes consubstantial with him and no longer reincarnates.

The Western idealistic paradigm does not recognize the idea of reincarnation. The soul of a particular person arises as a result of the act of creation of God. The soul is infused by God into the body in which it has to live only one earthly life. After the death of the body, the soul does not receive a new earthly body in a new life. It returns to its original source – the God – to be subjected to “God’s judgment” for its “good deeds” and “sins” committed during its life in the body. Following the results of this trial (“God’s verdict”), the soul either gains personal immortality as an individual reward in the form of eternal bliss (“resurrection”, “paradise”), or is punished with the eternal suffering (“hell” by analogy with the life sentence) or in the form of destruction (“death of the soul” by analogy with the death penalty). As the Western idealism does not recognize the doctrine of reincarnation, it offers a different understanding of the meaning of human life. Due to the fact that during one earthly life a person’s soul cannot become perfect (a finite person cannot attain divine infinity, that is, to achieve a state of God), the meaning of human life is the struggle against the “sinfulness” of one’s soul, the source of which is an unauthorized desire of a person (I want). To cure this sinfulness, a person is ordered to live and act not according to his own will (according to the “I want” principle), but according to the will of the God (according to the principle “God wants it”, man is “God’s servant”), hoping that after the death of the body he will find personal immortality in paradise (a person cannot “become God”, but can gain eternal bliss “next to the God”).

In the idealistic worldview of a particular person, the recognition or rejection of the doctrine of reincarnation acquires not so much theoretical significance as spiritual and practical value, since it determines its attitude to life and death, to current events, acts as a guiding principle in its actions.

A perception of life by an eastern person can be described as the next repeating link in the chain of rebirths on the path to spiritual perfection (Melnik, 2007). For him, there is no fear of death, because the death of the body is perceived as a dream, i.e. the immortal soul “falls asleep” in order to “wake up” in a new body. He doesn’t have any fear of punishment for “sins,” since he understands the inexorability of the universal law of karma – if you are guilty, then you will be responsible for your actions in this or the next life. Besides, there is no division of people into “righteous” and “sinners”, “chosen” and “mass” in his worldview since the concept of transpersonal immortality assumes that all human souls move on the path to God through numerous reincarnations (some slowly, others – faster) and sooner or later “everyone will be there”.

A western person perceives earthly life as a unique opportunity, as the only chance for saving his soul, gaining personal immortality and eternal bliss “next to God”. At the same time, he experiences anxiety and fear of death, since according to the results of the “senior judgment” he cannot predict what decision God will make, i.e. the God can save his soul or can turn him into punishment with the eternal torment or destruction. Therefore, the death of the body is an important and exciting moment of life, since upon its onset the only opportunity for a “saintly life” with the goal of gaining the soul immortality disappears. In western idealistic worldview, people are divided into “righteous persons” and “sinners”, i.e. not all souls will be saved for eternal bliss according to the results of the Last Judgment, which gives the western person one more reason to be worried about the possibility not being included into the “chosen ones”.

The discovered difference between the eastern and western paradigms of philosophical idealism allows a more correct approach to the classification of philosophical teachings. It seems that the traditional classification of western philosophy on the “main issue of philosophy” is divided into two areas – materialism and idealism (the “Democritus line” and “Plato line”) and should be complemented by the division of the latter into “eastern idealism” and “western idealism” (or “ the line of Socrates ”and the“ line of Aristotle ”).

The indicated paradigms of philosophical idealism were formed in ancient Greek philosophy (Karasmanis, 2006). The eastern teachings on the reincarnation and transpersonal immortality are based on the philosophical views of Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Socrates and Plato, while the western concept of personal immortality of soul was described in Aristotle’s philosophy.

It is known that history is written by the winners. In the Western European idealistic philosophy, the winner was the Christian worldview, which is alien to the doctrine or teachings of reincarnation. Therefore, this idea was gradually expelled from idealist philosophy. Before, Christian thinkers could recognize the Platonic teachings on the reincarnation (Platonist, Neoplatonists, Origen). Nevertheless, in medieval Christian philosophy this teaching was declared heretical and the philosophy started to support only Aristotle teachings (scholasticism, tomism). The prevailing Eurocentrism with its missionary role (Western Christian world) had a detrimental effect on the doctrine of the reincarnation in the idealistic systems of modern philosophers. In the subsequent non-classical problems of philosophy (Marxism, irrationalism, existentialism, positivism, etc.), this doctrine was completely shifted to out of the philosophical thought.

7. Conclusion

From the standpoint of intercultural philosophy, which implies a rejection of Eurocentrism in assessing the system of philosophy, it should be recognized that the doctrine of reincarnation being formed at the origins of the ancient Greek philosophy and subsequently undeservedly forgotten has legitimate reasons for returning into modern philosophy on an equal footing with the demarcation of eastern and western paradigms of philosophical idealism.

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