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The Concept of “The Absolute” in Eastern and Western Philosophies: Comparative Analysis

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The Paper compares the main traditions in the interpretation of the concept of “absolute” viz. Brahmanism, Plato’s philosophy, German idealism and Taoism. Clearly, they express diverse cultural practices of mind and language. However, the Brahman absolute and the German idealistic philosophy absolute are kindred spirits. The Brahman philosophy and the German idealistic philosophy say practically the same but they maybe have quite different attitudes towards life. The ancient people (Indians and Greeks) cultivated contemplative life and harmony. Accordingly, their thinking and language primarily paid attention to a fixing such conditions as chief characteristics of the absolute. Despite this attitude, people of modern history are more pragmatic and active therefore speculative images and language characteristics of their absolute become more dynamic and performativity. There is a striking difference in the account given in the Tao tradition. Tao or a limiting value of universe expresses a distinctive life experience and a specific associative logic here. Seemingly, some ancient Chinese people paid their main attention to more potentiality than actualization. There was probably a result of a strong hierarchical social order and a mystic philosophical form of escapism.

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The concept of “the absolute” belongs to such notions that express vital sphere of cognition and evaluation.

This term has some important linguistic meanings. It makes it very fit for metaphysical and moral descriptions. The term – both in Russian and in English languages – derives from the Latin words “absolutes” and usually is used in book-knowledge. The term has a quite interesting structure. It can be suggest that it is formed by combining two parts. Its stem is probably

“solute” or “solution” and means some physical or mental actions of qualitative transformation of something. There are both a process and a result that may be both chemical disintegration of some things and way out of a situation. The prefix “ab-” likely adds additional meanings of moving off and moving aside that strengthen a sense of process. So it can be concluded that main linguistic parts of the term have some clear sense outlines pointing to continual forever moving of something towards its qualitative limits.

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Paradoxically, but the word of "the absolute" as a noun is rather a formal special notion and most of all it is used in philosophy and mathematics. However, we can see a contrary situation when we will pay attention to an adjective of "absolute". As J.R.R. Tolkien has said, a power of adjective in language is mighty. In the case we will meet a lot of series of meanings that all together form a sense space of the noun of "the absolute". The absolute reminds me the Trojan Horse because on the one hand it looks easy but on the other hand it contains many latent ingredients.

Let us consider main meanings of the adjective of "absolute". The first series of them is the most important because it forms the key images of the absolute. To be absolute is to be full, complete, perfect and unconditional. This linguistic series points to universal "final" characteristics of things. There are a mature self-sufficiency or fully grown and developed. It should notice that here real ontological qualities are not only reflected in language as metaphorical mature conditions like "absolute beauty" or "absolute pitch" but language also creates imaginable conditions of quite transphenomenal things like "absolute indifference" or "absolute pure". In the last case language constitutes new mental objects and possibilities of multiplying of realities.

The second meaning concerns some political phenomena. To be absolute is to be plenary, unlimited and autocratic. We say "absolute power", "absolute monarchy" and "absolute ruler", but while we know that a power of any monarch or autocrat is always really quite conditional and they must often play their assigned roles. It is clear here that language through the instrumentality of a metaphor of absolute mythologies political power creating its social simulacra.

The third group of meanings portrays important indications of some universals. To be absolute is to be eternal, permanent and

constant. In this way we say "absolute laws of Nature", "absolute space and time" and "absolute truth". Such meanings can be also used for characteristics of some ingredients of common life. For example, there are "absolute facts", "absolute proof" and "absolute evidence". It seems to me, that here language is able to express a moving of thought to limits of imagination. Truly, this language ability is quite easy and it is a positing of imaginable positive limit of relative real ontological conditions like a concrete empirical relationship, a certain time, a discrete being or a suitable statement. Indeed, our ideas about eternal, permanent and constant conditions are very abstract and relative. Language here speculates about ideal conditional states designating unreal things like real. That is also a substantializing of some our existentialist aspirations to reach imaginable full stability and self-confidence by means of language.

Above-mentioned is resulted in the forth proper metaphysical series of meanings. To be absolute is to be prime, self-existent, total, entirely and unknowable. Philosophers say "absolute reality", "absolute idea", "absolute spirit" and "absolute ego". Special reflecting mind and special abstracting language here reach its peak or limits of many qualities and the series of adjective meanings are metamorphosed into a super abstraction of "the Absolute" or universal limit.

It is worth to bring attention to concrete definitions of the absolute as designations of scientific practices. Scientists like philosophers are also inclined to fix some limits in their specific mental scopes using the adjective of absolute. They say "absolute scale", "absolute value", "absolute construction", "absolute zero" and so forth.

As we have said, the concept of "the absolute" is rather actively used in metaphysics, in the postulate part of philosophical and religious

ontologies, in which the coordinate concepts of the world whole understanding are being defined. These concepts are: "world", "reality", "essence", "existence", "subject", "object" and "universe". Many of them have equal semantic volume and can substitute each other on condition of appropriate semantic correction. They do not bear unambiguous conventional contents; on the contrary, these contents are vague and indefinite. They become clear and definite in individual philosophical practice. But the concept of "the absolute" is specific in a comparison with other philosophical concepts. Its specific character is in understanding of absoluteness. It is possible to say about many philosophical concepts, that they close by themselves, limit by themselves some global semantic areas: "spirit", "substance", "subject", "object", "essence-existence", etc. The concept of "the absolute" limits in a bit different way. The limit of the most general philosophical concepts is self-closure of the formal boundary: an imperative request-assurance – everything, that has a place to be, is included in concepts "reality", "world", "universe" and so on., like in some static frameworks, embracing by themselves all possible meanings.

There are three main metaphysical versions of an understanding of "the absolute". The first of them is formed in Brahman philosophy. The absolute is a hypostatized self or a subject who was freed of all its concrete empirical indications and viewed as a true invisible ideal basis of objective reality. Self is an authentic subjectiveness stabilizing and organizing a content of consciousness.

As it is well known, ancient people had a specific interpretation of universe. They believed, that the physical world is similar to human soul in essence therefore it is also based on a stable inner organizing principle like self. Such universal Self is the supreme divine reality of cosmic consciousness.

As appears from the above, the absolute is a stable axle of universe which manifests itself in two hypostases. The absolute or universal Self is a general cause of changeableness of the world. Consequently, material objects are a sublimation of universal subjectiveness. As it has turned out, the absolute is the aseity.

Paradoxically, the being of the absolute in these doctrines is simultaneously ubiquitous and illocal. Such interpretation is a direct projection of similar status of self in consciousness. Testifying self illuminates consciousness but it is never included in there, Samkara said. What I must suggest in order to cognize object is not cognizable as object, Kant said. Subject can't turn round and fix itself, Comte said. Perry named such situation as "egocentric predicament". Consciousness and cognition is primarily centered by self. Following the logic of substantialized self, the absolute is a dispersive center of the universe.

Further, we can meet the second interpretation of the absolute in the Taoistic philosophy. Metaphysical portrait of Tao is really a metaphorical philosophical description of spontaneous processes of realizing apprehension and meaning which take place in a potential eternal indeterminate condition of consciousness without an ego-form. The ego-form or self-consciousness causes an order of definiteness and naming in a content of consciousness. However, a primordial origin of all that exist – consciousness and the physical world – is non-existence or great Emptiness. This is an indefinite plurality of potential possible forms. Tao is both empty and inexhaustible. Tao is only relatively intelligible to human consciousness. A meaningful Tao or expressed in words Tao is always only a little part of Tao and that is not a total eternal Tao. Namelessness is an origin of heaven and earth. A great image has not a form. Tao is hidden from us and has not names. Being, order and names were born in non-existence and non-organized

content. Using a metaphor of mind as the world, this content is a part of consciousness that is not illuminated by meaningful attention of ego. Setting up of an order and an origin of names are the same.

By the way, we can see such senses in Genesis. An establishment of being is identical to a verbal activity of naming. Key affirmations of God are simultaneously the creation of the world. In spite of Tao, there is a personal ontological verbal activity of Ego. Chaos or possible primordial non-organized condition of essence is completely set aside here. It can be said, that a Western tradition of the understanding of the absolute is similar to a Brahman tradition and seriously differs from a Chinese mental tradition.

However, let us return to Tao. When names appeared, limits set up. But there were relative limits of particular things. An authentic limit that is never reached is Tao. In some way, every thought that may be long time examined includes potential infinitive content and has only itself as finish. So Tao is a consciousness not using ego-form.

The third version of "the absolute" is presented in high philosophical idealistic demonstrating (Fichte and Hegel) is a self-closing movement of thought. The description of "the absolute" concept as a matter of fact is a philosophical project of self-description of a mental way of author's reflecting consciousness, who is sure in a total idealistic nature of universe. The limit, the focal point of philosophical attention is constantly moving here. It is moving sequentially, regularly, step by step fixing landmarks of this movement in categories, and what is most important – in the text. Therefore the expression – the absolute is a limit of universe, which has no limit itself – expresses this special kind of a limit – pulsing, moving in a self-closed thought.

Let us try to compare the above-mentioned three points. Clearly, they express diverse cultural

practices of mind and language. However, the Brahman absolute and the German idealistic philosophy absolute are kindred spirits. The Brahman philosophy and the German idealistic philosophy say practically the same but they maybe have quite different attitudes towards life. The ancient people (Indians and Greeks) cultivated contemplative life and harmony. Accordingly, their thinking and language primarily paid attention to a fixing such conditions as chief characteristics of the absolute. Despite this attitude, people of modern history are more pragmatic and active therefore speculative images and language characteristics of their absolute become more dynamic and performative.

There is a striking difference in the account given in the Tao tradition. Tao or a limiting value of universe expresses a distinctive life experience and a specific associative logic here. Seemingly, some ancient Chinese people paid their main attention to more potentiality than actualization. There was probably a result of a strong hierarchical social order and a mystic philosophical form of escapism.

Another important form of "the absolute" concept in our vital practice is value. Many conventional values of a human society have the absolute status. The values, as it is known, represent the special kind of ideal reality. Though they can have a physical embodiment and cause psychical and emotional effect, however their essence is in their significance. The significance should be understood as the special class of meanings. Their specificity consists of a serious amplification of psychical and emotional interest of a person in assimilation of a given object – condition, which has the tendency to become appropriation.

Different groups of people master their environment; create their own vital worlds, peculiar symbolic realities that express the features of their history and dominating kinds of activity.

These worlds are given to us in concepts, which are always simultaneously factual, representing unity of a thing and exposure of its definiteness (necessity, presence) for people. The known concepts, because of their utilitarian character, cause stable heightened interest, initiate aspiration for individual (and collective) appropriation, fixation in privileged possession. People strive not only for their neutral assimilation, for bringing them into the field of vital practice (understanding, taking into consideration), but for setting more

intimate, psychically and emotionally more intense relationship of appropriation, inclusion into own definition. The calmness of designation is replaced by partiality of evaluation.

So “the absolute”, the absolute values in common interpretation are the orders, conceptual regulators objectively originating—spontaneously—and-conventionally – in vital practice of human consciousness, being as a matter of fact a projection of individual experience of becoming ego, self-consciousness in it.

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Понятие “абсолюта” в восточной и западной философии: сравнительный анализ

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В статье сопоставляются основные традиции интерпретации понятия “абсолют” в брахманизме, платоновской философии, немецком идеализме и даосизме. Понятно, что они выражают различные культурные практики мышления и языка. Вместе с тем можно отметить родственность абсолюта брахманской философии и немецкого идеализма. Так, брахманизм и немецкая идеалистическая философия говорят практически схожие вещи, при достаточно отличающихся интерпретациях жизни. Древние (индийцы и греки) культивировали сочетание жизни и гармонии, соответственно, их мышление и язык выдвигали на первый план такие же характеристики в качестве основных у абсолюта. В противоположность этому современные люди более прагматичны и активистски настроены, поэтому их абсолют выражает себя в языковом и спекулятивном отношении более динамично и перформативистски. И совершенно отличные характеристики наличествуют в даосской традиции. Дао или предельная ценность универсума есть опыт выражения иной жизни и специфической ассоциативной логики. Похоже, что некоторых китайцев более интересовало потенциальное, нежели актуальное, что являлось следствием жестко организованного социального порядка и мистических форм эскапизма.

Ключевые слова: абсолют, предельные значения, брахманизм, философия Платона, немецкий идеализм, даосизм.
