

The key difference between objective idealism and previous idealist theories lies in its claim that ultimate reality has a teleological structure.

What do we want for life? What do we want to achieve? It seems reasonable to say that our life has a purpose, and all our particular purposes are structured and aim to an ultimate purpose. This means that our life has a teleological structure. From “telos” which in Greek means end, or “finality”. We can say that this aim is our truth. The aim is to be a truthful person, not a false one. In order to know our truth, we need to become what we are in truth. Or simply what we are. For this we need to do it freely. The requirement to be what we are is freedom, but also we can say that the essence of truth is freedom. So the ultimate purpose of our life in general is freedom, or to be free. Nobody wants to be reduced to an object, to a slave. To achieve true knowledge of ourselves we need freedom, and true knowledge is the one that leads to freedom. But, what is freedom? What is to be free? One could answer that to be free is to do whatever we want do, to do what we are pleased to do? Or in terms of the reality principle to satisfy any desire we have. This could be the answer to the question of freedom for a particular person. A person who does whatever he wants is free. If everybody were free in this manner we know that this leads to chaos, and to war, because my desire could be in conflict with somebody else desire. The end result could be the contrary that we wanted, that is tyranny. Doing whatever we want, or satisfying any desire we have could work if we live alone in an island, but not in a social reality. The result could be that some, or nobody could be free. So in order to avoid falling to the contrary we wanted to have, we need to modify the concept we had of freedom, and produce a new concept, for example that to act freely is to act according to universal laws. This new conception is revised again to see what result we obtain. If we obtain a contradiction, the concept is refined again, and this process continues until we have a concept free of contradictions. A concept, or thought could work well in certain domain, but when we extend the domain of application of the thought we may obtain a contradiction. We need to revise the concept to avoid contradiction. The same process is applied to every thought in general, revealing the connections between thought, and at the same time freeing thought of contradictions. This way of thinking is called dialectic. The ultimate objective, or aim, the “telos” of dialectic is to have a self-determined, free of contradictions thought, or simply a free thought. For dialectical thought truth is coherence, coherence understood as the absence of contradictions. Now for idealism, ultimate reality is the idea, so a dialectical idealism is the one in which the dialectical

process just described engulfs, or comprehends entire reality. If we further give another step, and remove every substance, (if we are in idealism there are only spirits, and God), keeping only this dialectical process, we obtain the objective idealism, in which remains perhaps only one substance, whose description is this dialectical process of thinking. An eminent example of objective idealism is Hegel's system. I will use Hegel's metaphysics to illustrate teleology in ultimate reality.

Hegel calls to this unique substance which comprehends entire Reality: absolute spirit. Now, to call it substance gives idea of something fixed, unchangeable or immutable. A substance is something that exists in itself, Independently of being perceived. Something that has objective existence, but a substance does not have teleology. In order to have teleology it must be a subject. For Hegel ultimate reality is substance, and subject. Also it could be said that the subject is substance. The concept that sublates both opposed concepts is spirit. For Hegel ultimate reality is just one thing: absolute spirit.

This teleological structure of ultimate reality of objective idealism could be seen as the last phase of an idealism that starting from the idealism from Plato is gradually losing its unjustified assumptions and inconsistencies, until we have a system in which opposed categories, or concepts, are subsumed, or sublated in concepts of greater generality culminating in the synthesis of the absolute idea. This absolute idea for Hegel is the rationality, or intelligibility of the world. Hegel claims not that all reality is thought, like a subjective idealist, but that thought and ultimate reality share the same structure: the dialectical process. Kant, and Fichte used the terms thesis, the finite concept and its negation also finite: the antithesis. Fichte introduced the synthesis which is the concept which incorporate both antithesis and thesis, and for that has greater generality. For Hegel only the whole is true. The whole is a true infinite. So every concept is destined to reveal its limitations, and the dialectical process continues indefinitely. Objective idealism means that thought, nature and social reality can have contradictions. The teleological process is the change we have when contradictions are solved or incorporated into more coherent whole.

If we subject previous idealist theories to a critical analysis, in which unjustified assumptions and inconsistencies are removed the result is this teleological process in which ultimate reality is one and is not static, or fixed, but changes. The critical analysis reveals an ultimate reality that actually changes, and

moves in the direction in which its internal contradictions are resolved towards a more coherent whole free of contradictions. This movement would continue until ultimate reality reaches a state free of contradictions, or as Hegel calls it absolute freedom.

The first assumption that must be rejected in this path to absolute, or objective idealism is the existence of matter. Bishop Berkeley proved that it is an unjustified assumption the existence of a mind independent substance with fixed immutable properties. There is no way to prove this, because in the very act of proving it we make it mind dependent. A mind independent entity is like a thing in itself, an impossibility. After this step we are in some form of idealism.

In an idealism like Plato's we have the ideas as archetypes of sensuous things. What we encounter through senses are inexact copies of its correspondent idea. Plato offers the theory of the two worlds, the ideal world composed only of ideas which are perfect fixed, unique and eternal, and the sensuous world imperfect, chaotic and in continuous incessant change. In the sensuous world everything comes to be, to perish later. That there are two worlds is the unjustified assumption. There is no way to prove this claim. There is only one world, one reality that is at the same time sensuous and ideal. Ideas actually change. Ideas are concepts that enable us to move in the world. Removing the conceptual frame through which we see reality, reality disintegrates. It becomes nothing. So ideas, as concepts are part of reality, and change with reality. Removing this division between the sensuous world and ideal world, and making ideas part of reality actually introduces teleology to ultimate reality. Phenomena are explained in terms of causes and purposes, or telos. For example chairs exist, because they serve the purpose to sit on them.

Berkeley is successful in proving that every perception requires mind. In the process of perception the mind has an active role. He claims that to be is to be perceived. It is true that if we say that something exists then it should be possible to be perceived, but the contrary is not true if something is perceived then not necessarily it exists. What about perception under the influence of drugs, or madness. In order to account for what it makes a true perception Berkeley introduces God's perception, the perception of an infinite perfect mind. This is the unjustified, and even inconsistent assumption. He claims that to be is to be perceived, and he places God outside of the world. If being requires perception then we can't say that God exists, because we can't find him anywhere in the

world. Removing from Berkeley's metaphysics this inconsistency we only keep the claim that in effect the mind, or subject, actively produces the perception, that its role in perception is not just a passive one. Berkeley's metaphysics is inconsistent because it requires the supreme mind of God, but he places God outside the world, in the noumenal realm. Once removing this inconsistency Berkeley's Metaphysics is an incomplete theory. The question remains out of what the mind produces the perception.

Kant will answer the above question with his knowledge theory in his Critique of Pure Reason. In general terms Kant claims that external reality makes impressions in our senses, these impressions are ordered according to our external sense which is space, and our internal sense which is time. Time and space are not out there in reality, but are preconditions of our experience. Once these impressions are ordered in space and time, the mind applies them the categories, which are categories of Quantity, Quality, modality and relation. The application of categories is what produces empirical knowledge. This knowledge for Kant is a knowledge of phenomena, because it is obtained of what our senses supply, but is a limited finite knowledge because our senses are themselves limited and finite. The senses are the limits of our mind, what is outside of the senses, and acts on them, for Kant is unknowable, it is the thing-in-itself. Kant calls it project critical, but its project is not critical enough. That there is something unknowable seems to be an uncritical claim. If it is unknowable there is no way that we can say it exists.

In Kant's transcendental idealism our knowledge is limited to appearances. We can know how a thing appears, but not how it is in-itself. One way to go beyond the transcendental idealism is removing the unknowable component. Anyway, how can we be talking about something that is absolutely unknowable? For Hegel the thing-in-itself is not absolutely unknowable, but because it is defined negatively, our knowledge of it is very trivial: we can simply say what it is not. The thing-in-itself can't be an object of the senses, and to this amounts all the knowledge we have of it.

For Kant empirical knowledge is produced when the mind, or subject actively applies the categories to the empirical data supplied by the senses. This knowledge can be seen as a construction of the subject. Before Kant knowledge was thought to conform to the object, but in Kant this equation is reversed, the object conforms to the knower. Kant called this his Copernican revolution: the knowledge orbits the subject. The knowledge is a reflection of the subject, and because of the limits of

our senses, and our finite mind, is a limited knowledge of phenomena, of appearances.

The empirical knowledge is for Kant a construction of our mind, it is objective knowledge if it is constructed according the laws of the understanding which are the categories. When the categories are applied to the objects of the senses, which are given form according to the inner sense, which is time, and the outer sense, which is space they yield objective knowledge. The proof of the categories is the possibility of experience. The categories are proven, but only for objects of possible experience, which are objects of the senses. Our senses are finite, so the categories are valid only for finite objects. Empirical knowledge based on categories is limited only to finite objects of the senses. Knowledge about the world as a totality, which is ultimate reality is not possible then through empirical means. The questions of metaphysics are about ultimate reality, not finite objects. So in the inquiry about ultimate reality we have to rely on thinking, or reason alone, leaving the senses aside. The only “tools” we have at our disposition to investigate ultimate reality are the concepts of time and space, and the categories themselves. In trying to answer the question, if the world as a whole has beginning in time and is limited in space using reason alone, Kant proved that we obtain a set of contradictory statements. The thesis: the world has a beginning in time, and is limited in space. The antithesis: the world does not have a beginning in time and is unlimited in space. Kant called this contradiction antinomies. Kant proved the thesis and the antithesis.

There are three more antinomies:

- 2) Thesis: everything happens according to the law of cause and effect, antithesis: there is freedom.
- 3) Thesis: Everything is made of simple parts, antithesis: there aren't simple parts.
- 4) Thesis: There is a necessary being in the world, or as a cause of the world. Antithesis: There is not a necessary being.

For Kant the antithesis affirms more than simply the negation of the thesis. That is why, for him both can be true. Space and time are not thing in themselves, and only apply to representations.

Kant interpreted this antinomies or contradictions as a limitation of our knowledge. This limitation consist in that, when in our knowledge we try to go beyond the limits of possible experience, and try to inquire about the totality of the

world, or ultimate reality, our thinking falls in contradictions. He called these contradictions: transcendental illusions, and the discipline that studies them transcendental dialectic. The dialectic is the art of sophistically prove an assertion, and at the same time its opposite.

In Kant's view this limits our knowledge to phenomena, the noumenal realm is unknowable. This is a serious limitation, but the good thing is that in that way Kant opens up space for belief, and personal freedom. There is in Kant Metaphysics the possibility of self-determination, because our knowledge is limited to appearances.

The unjustified assumption in Kant's theory is the claim that contradictions can only be found in our knowledge, but not in ultimate reality. This is an unjustified assumption because there is no way to prove this claim. We can't make any claim about mind independent reality. Once we make the claim it is mind dependent. It is like finding an unheard of truth. Once we find the truth it is not unheard of. For Kant the phenomenal knowledge is a construction of the transcendental subject. The object correspond to our knowledge in phenomena. Why could not be the same for ultimate knowledge? If in the process of inquiring about ultimate reality we find a contradiction, a finite concept that when applied to the totality splits in the concept and its negation, and we modify the concept to include the concept and its negation, then this process is called dialectic. This logic of dialectic, gives the features of ultimate reality.

For Kant this transcendental dialectic gives the logic of illusion, for Hegel it gives the logic of ultimate reality.

With this last step we are already in objective, or absolute idealism. The difference then between objective idealism, and transcendental idealism is that the limitation of our knowledge to objects of possible experience is removed. The phenomenal knowledge of transcendental idealism is kept, but it is extended to the phenomena of consciousness. That is, the unknowable component that is the remainder of transcendental idealism is removed. The result is a unitary phenomenon of consciousness that must be analyzed. Ultimate knowledge in objective idealism is possible. This consists in the knowledge of the contradictions that result when our finite concepts are applied to the domain of totality. For example when the concepts of time and space are applied to the totality of the world. Resulting in the contradiction that the world is finite, and is not finite. For objective idealism empirical knowledge is always limited. Absolute knowledge is gained when reason examines itself and find its own limitation and inconsistencies.

Absolute knowledge then is for objective idealism the insight of the illusions in which reason itself falls.

“Telos” means reason. For objective idealism absolute knowledge comes through reason’s self-examination, and self-determination. It interprets this self-determination as freedom. One is free when is able to self-determine itself. That is when we gain autonomy. The aim of our practical engagement with the world is freedom. The aim of our theoretical engagement with the world of concepts is also freedom understood as self-determination. In objective idealism the concepts are actually embedded in the world. Our concepts change, and what we understand as the world actually changes.

Objective idealism equates both aims, practical, and theoretical. It makes one with both. The ultimate end, or telos of ultimate reality is: freedom. For objective idealism the knowledge of physical sciences is a limited knowledge. In this coincides with transcendental idealism. This is right, we can’t understand historical phenomena, for example a war, using quantum mechanics. In this objective idealism is correct. Historical phenomena are better understood in terms of purposes, or aims. For example, a particular war is understood in terms of its aim. Hegel understands history as the development of the idea of freedom. He is able to explain historical change in terms of resolution of contradictions. The form, or structure of this resolution of contradictions is similar to the dialectics of contradictions we find in thought. Hegel explains history in terms of a dialectic of freedom. In terms of actual people, in terms of the fight of who is free, and who isn’t. The fight in thought is reflected in the fight in reality, and vice versa. The stability of a particular historical period is in function of its level of freedom. History starts form imperial china, where only the emperor is free, and its rule is based in family bonds. To Persia with only the emperor free in a theocratic state that has laws, to the Greek world of free citizens and slaves, Roma where we have an emperor and free citizens that actually have rights, but has slaves, and finally to the Christian world, where all man should be free. The dialectic consists here for Hegel in that the idea of freedom of previous state of affairs is not totally discarded, but subsumed, or sublated in the actual state. In the modern world for example we have democracy similar to the Greeks, rights as the romans. This is similar to the dialectic we have in thought in which contradictions are subsumed in a more general conception. Hegel then is an idealist not because he claims that ultimate reality is thought, but because for him ultimate reality and thought have the same structure. This structure is the dialectic. Truth and freedom understood as

self-determination. Freedom understood as the recognition of the reason, or telos we find in the world as ours. For objective idealism the essence of Truth, is freedom. The “telos” for us, and for that, ultimate reality, is freedom.

#### Citations

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