

Altai and the Himalay: The Philosophical Foundations of Dialogue

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the philosophical foundations of dialogue between Altai and The Himalaya. The worldview is reflected in the similarities between the ancient philosophical traditions of West and East. In resistance to globalization, many countries, especially in Asia, have not only maintained their spiritual values and traditions, as well as their ancient knowledge, but also seek to revive and strengthen them. If society refuses to be tied to a common set of values and norms, then maintaining the outward appearance of unity can only lead to hostility. And such a worldview leads to the loss of valuation principles in all areas of human action and, thus, mistaken and unsafe decision-making at the state level.

I

Our time is one of confrontation between two major philosophical and resulting social practices. The first type of worldview is reflected in the many similarities between the ancient philosophical traditions which developed also in the West, but even more so in the East. Their basic ideas can be briefly summarized as follows. 1) The world is indivisible and whole; its basis is the Absolute Origin (God, Brahman, Tao, etc.). The Absolute Origin is the source of order, meaning, and the core values of worldly existence, and also the ultimate goal of human aspiration. Within one Reality, ideal (spiritual) and material components can be distinguished, and in fact it is the ideal which organizes the material. 2) The recognition of the deep (or divine) “I” in an individual, which supersedes the empirical (or everyday) “I.” The Deep “I” is at once the carrier of transcendental knowledge and the “spark” of the Absolute Origin, and it is associated with the *heart* as the organ of spiritual knowledge. 3) The recognition of spiritual ascent as the main purpose of an individual’s

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existence. This idea is reflected in Indian thought, for example, in the idea of “moksha” (liberation) and in the Russian concept of “deification” (ascent to godliness). The prominent Russian philosopher S.L. Frank wrote:

“The external process of development should be accompanied by an internal creative process of spiritualization, a transformation of the world, until one has reached the ideal state of completion, in which God is ‘all in all,’ and the whole world has become a ‘kingdom of God,’ as if one has merged with God.” [1].

In social and individual practice, this worldview is reflected *first of all*, in the respect for traditional spiritual, cultural, and moral values. They are perceived as *objective*, as a reflection of the principles of the ideal world order. *Second*, from this philosophy it follows that the main spheres of societal life are not economics and politics, but culture and education. These are the spheres which hold society together and contribute to the true welfare of its members. Economics, despite its importance, is a subordinate sphere, and should serve the interests of personal development, as well as the conservation of nature. *Third*, nature itself is thus understood not as a resource for the selfish needs of humans, but as the creation of the Absolute Origin, and therefore such a philosophy is the most solid foundation of environmental culture. *Fourth*, this philosophy is opposed to the falsehood of “pluralism,” and allows a clear assessment of the different trends in society and in human behavior. It focuses on the general moral ideal of humanity. And *fifth*, this philosophy leads to the unity and cooperation of different nations and cultures.

This type of outlook is opposed on the furthest end of the spectrum by the philosophy of postmodernism. Its ideas, unfortunately, are deeply entrenched in modern society, especially that of the West, and have completely transformed (distorted) the liberal-democratic doctrine, itself. The main idea of postmodernism is “destruction.” Contemporary Russian author A.P. Ogurtsov describes the founding ideas of postmodernism in this way: “Postmodernism denies that humans can be characterized by a general or common nature—which conjures the image of a person devoid of any ability to identify himself, driven by unconscious desires... Human nature is dissolved into changeable acts of communication, the acts themselves are not subject to any rules, are spontaneous and self-deterministic.” [2]. In this way, any order is rejected, and thus any ideas of unity and wholeness in the world are also rejected; there is no accepted opposition between truth/error, good/evil, and beauty/ugliness. Moral norms are denied, in the belief that each has his own morality. The integrity of a single individual is rejected, as well as the whole structure of society, and even education and culture are seen as mechanisms of repression. As a result, society disintegrates into separate “atoms,” and this condition is considered normal.

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These days, it is common to say that no concept of truth or untruth may be ascribed to the philosophy of pluralism. However, it is our opinion that any knowledge can be subjected to the most accurate test—practice. And by this criterion, the postmodernist philosophy can be safely refuted. We present our arguments.

First, there is ongoing world conflict, especially under so-called globalization. As we know, despite all declarations about forming a unified global society with goals and problems common to all of humanity, the gap between poor and rich countries only becomes more acute. Military conflicts do not cease, exacerbated by problems associated with immigration. One might ask how this relates to the postmodern worldview. In our opinion, there is a direct link: if we reject common values, common notions of good and evil, then all mechanisms that bring people together disappear. And in this situation, conflict is absolutely unavoidable.

Therefore, the notions of “tolerance” and “political correctness” appeared to solve the problem of coexistence between individuals who have *nothing in common*. But many authors, for example J. Gray, show that this problem cannot be solved. Without a common spiritual and moral basis, it is impossible to force people to make concessions to one another and reconcile their interests. Moreover, tolerance and political correctness, themselves, paradoxically become instruments of violence! After all, they not only call for the recognition of the interests of another, but *forbid* many points of view and patterns of behavior. For example, a departure from the norms of politically correct language can lead to lawsuits, to the loss of employment and reputation. And the recognition of freedom of choice in “sexual orientation” and same-sex marriage has led to a person no longer having the right to have another (negative) opinion on the matter. As V.M. Osherov wrote, emigrating from Russia at the time, the purpose of modern ideologies is to bring all to a common denominator, “...but in practice, to the very lowest, so that no one is ‘offended’...All are equal and accordingly, each has his own personal value system” [3]. We note that discriminatory motives are revealed here. Indeed, the categorical prohibition of not only judging, but even stating certain specifics (“black,” “disabled,” “female”) acknowledges that there exists some hidden standard which the judged person does not satisfy. That is why he is offended when someone commits this verbal inconsistency. This inversion of liberal ideas looks paradoxical only at first glance.

In general, we can summarize, if society refuses to be tied to a common set of values and norms, then maintaining the outward appearance of unity can only mean violence. Second, such a worldview leads to the loss of evaluation criteria in all areas of human activity and, therefore, misguided and dangerous decision-making at the state level. For example, there is an active debate in Russia today regarding “juvenile justice.” Its main positions are wholly derived from the postmodernist paradigm: parents have no right to discipline children, as this is considered “violent.” And on this basis, parents may be deprived of parental rights. Another good example is the degradation of the

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quality of education not only in Russia, but in the whole world. That knowledge is a “commodity” sold to students on the market, is a notion whose spread is hardly by chance. It is easy to see that such an idea is associated with the denial of classical ideas of truth and the value of knowledge, itself. As a result, we risk exchanging deeper personal development, which gave us classical education, for the production of a “cog” in the governmental-commercial machine.

And third, the decentralized approach of postmodernism is refuted by modern science. Science demonstrates both the deepest laws of the world, and the existence of deep connections between everything that exists (that which F. Kapra called “the web of life”). For example, here are truly revolutionary conclusions based on research by the Institute of HeartMath, California, USA:

“The heart is not simply a ‘pump,’ but a very complex, self-organizing information center with its own ‘brain’...Messages that the heart sends the brain affect not only physiological regulation, but also perception, emotion, behavior and health...”

- The heart plays a critical role in the generation and perception of emotions, and is also involved in the functioning of a unified system model (structure) of emotions whose main components include the brain, nervous system, and hormonal system... The heart and brain carry an ongoing bilateral dialogue, each influencing the functioning of the other.
- The heart creates a strong, rhythmized electromagnetic field around the body. The brain and the cells of the body are constantly “washed” by this field, which can be detected by sensitive instruments within a few feet of the body. Our studies of the heart as an energy system revealed that the cardiac field is the carrier of emotional information and bio-electromagnetic communication inside and outside the body. These studies showed clear changes in the cardiac field, depending on the emotions we experience, and these changes are detected by the brains of other people around us and are able to influence the functioning of cells, and influence water...
- The heart has its own logic, which is very different from that of the autonomic nervous system... The heart has an extremely complex nervous system which can be classified as a “little brain.” The complex scheme of this brain allows it to operate independently from the cranial brain—to learn, to adapt, and even to feel and experience.
- There is growing evidence that the energy interaction, including that of the heart, are the basis of the phenomena of intuition and other aspects of human consciousness...The heart affects our intellect and knowledge.” [4].

II

In resistance to globalization, many countries, especially in Asia, have not only maintained their spiritual values and traditions, as well as their ancient knowledge, but also seek to revive and strengthen them. Therefore, interaction between them becomes increasingly important not only for themselves, but for the world as a whole. This interaction is most successful when the interacting countries have similar cultures.

The Russian philosopher and Slavophilic ideologist A. Khomyakov demonstrated the fact that India and Russia are culturally and ideologically close to each other. The 19th Century saw an intensive increase in the study of Indian culture and philosophy, giving rise to dozens of researchers: A.F. Hilferding, D.N. Kudryavsky, then I.P. Minaev, who made three trips to India, Ceylon, Burma, and Nepal (in 1874-75, 1880, and 1885-86), and others. From the end of the 19th thru the first half of the 20th Centuries, there was a school of prominent Indiologists in Russia, amongst whom were F.I. Shcherbatskoy, G.M. Bongard-Levin, S.F. Oldenburg, and others. These scholars influenced the exceptional Roerich family, whose lives became closely tied to India. N.K. Roerich, himself, and especially his son Yu.N. Roerich, made an invaluable contribution to the rapprochement of the two peoples and to the demonstration of the two countries' similar cultural and spiritual foundations.

But, this similarity is most evident in comparative analysis of Indian and Russian philosophy, especially the idea of so-called “metaphysical unity,” which was developed in Russian in the late 19th to the first half of the 20th Centuries. The works of V.S. Solovyov, the brothers Trubetsky, P. A. Florensky, N. O. Lossky, S. L. Frank, and other prominent philosophers revived the line of philosophical thought discussed earlier in this article. They oppose the modern philosophy of philosophical and political pluralism, as well as simple materialism, when a person is treated solely as a biological and social being.

Even more important is that the philosophizing, the search for life meaning in both India and Russia, has not been conducted only by philosophers. More precisely, the philosophers have expressed the general spirit of their people. Not by accident, S. Radhakrishnan writes:

“Spiritual motives dominate Indian life. Indian philosophy is interested in the lives of people, rather than transcendental spheres. It originates from life, passes through various philosophical schools, and returns to life [5]” These words echo those of N.K. Mikhailovsky: *“It seems that only in Russian are “right”-truth and “right”-justice one in the same word, as if to merge into one great whole [6]”*

The search for truth, both earthly and divine, has always been considered a dominant feature of the Russian character.

But real cultural dialogue and fruitful interaction must also build on generally positive issues, to solve specific problems. And it is from this point of view that the budding cooperation between Altai and the state of Himachal Pradesh is so important. It should be emphasized that these mountainous regions hold special places in their countries. And this not only lends higher chances of success, but also imposes additional obligations. It is even more important that in current conditions, the cooperation must take place on multiple levels: not only on an official level –that is, at the government level (since there are many complications in the two regions’ domestic and foreign political situations), but even more so on the level of various social groups and individuals. Cooperation in scientific, cultural, and educational spheres is sometimes more important than large government agreements. In fact, the interactions on these levels are actually the ones that till the soil which will eventually bring forth the flowers of mutual understanding, which will blossom into good and useful fruit.

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