Western Existential Tradition and Mahayana Buddhism: Comparative Analysis of Ontological Negativity

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The course concerns the comparison of two traditions: existential philosophy (its non-theistic current), phenomenology and post-structuralism (Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Lacan etc.), on the one hand, and Mahayana Buddhism (dārsanās / schools of mādhyamaka and yogacāra), on another. The course investigates the concept of a “subjectless consciousness” and deconstruction of a classical subject in Western philosophy of the XX-th XXI-th century (especially in structuralism and post-structuralism). It also investigates the “non-dual” consciousness (jñāna), “understanding wisdom” (prajñāpārmitā) and an extra-subjective “consciousness treasury” (ālayavijñāna) in Māhāyana Buddhism (dārsanās of mādhyamaka-śūnyavāda and yogacāra-vijñānavada). It also explores a clarification to what degree the Western concepts of “subjectless consciousness”, “extra-subject consciousness”, “structural apriori”, “rhizome” etc. may be correlated with the concepts of Māhāyana Buddhist philosophy.

We pretend to examine onontological strategies of Western existential philosophy and the Buddhist school (dārsana) of mādhyamaka. We can discover similar phenomenological strategies together with extreme differences in anthropology and the value purposes (personality and deconstruction of classic European subject in the existential philosophy and radical impersonalism of Buddhism). We suppose that Heidegger, Sartre and Buddhism have comparable theories of consciousness. The mādhyamaka’s “śūnyata” (emptiness) is comparable with Heideggers’s and Sartre’s “Nothingness” (though they are not absolutely similar) and we can discover primacy of negativity in both cases. We also try to substantiate that the position of mādhyamaka was a radical nihilism and not scepticism contrary to the opinion of a number of modern buddologists. And what is also important for us is the problem of the “unhappy consciousness” (be it the Buddhist “duḥkha” or “Sorge” of Heidegger, or Sartre’s “Nausea”) and different attitudes of thinkers.

One of the most complicated themes of philosophy of consciousness is mentioned in the course – the problem of intentionality of consciousnesses and its possibility (or impossibility) to be the universal anthropological characteristic. On an example of creativity of the J.- P. Sartre and some Vedhist and Buddhist texts two philosophical positions towards the intentionality are compared: Western as revealing and describing consciousness as intentional and Indian “disposal” of consciousness from intentionality, that was its soteriological purpose.

We do not set the task to investigate the complete history of comparative philosophy which, in essence, coincides with the history of philosophy itself because the self-determination of this or that thinker or philosophical school happens in dialogue and polemic to other schools (we can remember Plato's "dialogues" or discussions of Shraman’s epoch in India). However we have to substantiate the significance of this “narrow” investigations in the whole horizon and landscape of intercultural, intertraditional and intertextual dialogue.

So, philosophical comparativistics is the area of historic-philosophical and philosophical researches, the comparative studying of philosophical traditions of the “West” and the “East”, the “North” and the “South” including studying of philosophical schools, doctrines, systems, the categorical devices and separate concepts. The comparative philosophy is also a comparison of philosophical cultures and traditions of all main civilizations of the world and, as at most, as an ideal of comparison of all philosophical representations of all civilizations.

The searches of adequate to the studied subject research strategy in many respects are closed with general cultural studies tasks. Such approach allocates a special sphere of research —
philosophical comparativistics, and also those researches which set as the purpose of identification of the certain general characteristics inherent in many independently arisen philosophical cultures.

The comparative philosophy opens philosophy in spheres of civilization, culture, mentality and conceptuality, rationally proves the polyphony of the world philosophy, reveals the general and special in philosophical cultures, develops the international projects promoting mutual understanding between people.
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Bibliography:


The Contents of Course

Theme 1. The existential philosophy: religious and non-theistic.

History of existential philosophy, its sources and main representatives. The concepts “existentialism”, “existential philosophy”, “religious” and “non-theistic” existential philosophy; their correlation and validity. Concepts “existential” and “existentialistic”. The stamps and cliches which have developed in Russian history of philosophy.

Литература:

Theme 2. Heidegger’s Being (Dasein) as the detection of a horizon of authenticity of human existence.

The departure of philosophy from ontological problematic in the 2 half of the XIX century and return to it in the beginning of the XX-th. Being as Consciousness in its historicity. Time and temporality (Heidegger, Sartre, Bergson). “Being-to-Death” as the detection of authenticity of human existence (the novel of Leo Tolstoy “Death of Ivan Ilyich). The question of Being and possibility of ultimate questioning.
Literature:


Theme 3. “Sorge” and “Angst” as a strategy of negativity

The phenomenon of “Sorge”. Negativity as the most important aspect of being of a person in the world. With specificity of his being a person is obliged just to negation. The concepts of “Nothingness” (Nichtigkeit) and “dread” (Angst) in Heidegger’s metaphysics. A person is a special way of Being (Dasein) which is constituted by negativity, according to Heidegger.

Literature:


Theme 4. Sartre’s doctrine of consciousness: “Being-for-itself” and intentionality
Sartre’s transfer of a classic (i.e. accepted in the Western philosophy) dualistic relation of being and thinking, nature and spirit, matter and consciousness, object and subject, world and human being, external and internal, signified and signifying, unreasonable and reasonable, natural and artificial, real and virtual to a plane of two "regions" of Being: “Being-in-itself” (l’être en-soi) and "Being-for-itself” (l’être pour-soi). Intentionality of consciousness. “The transcendence of Ego”

**Literature:**


9. Лев Филиппов Л. В. Философская антропология Ж.-П. Сартра. М.: Наука, 1977


**Theme 5. Freedom and negativity in Sartre**


**Literature:**


**Theme 6. Ontological foundations of Mahayana Buddhism**


**Literature:**


**Theme 7. The doctrine of dukkha and soteriological project.**
The concept of duḥkha in Buddhism: empirical and ontological aspects. The radical difference of Judeo-Christian concept “suffering” and Buddhist “duḥkha”.

The differences of soteriological projects of “salvation” and “release”. Duḥkha as an ontological “groundlessness” of the person, “inequality” to himself, a basic dissatisfaction with any form of empirical existence. Correlation of Buddhist “duḥkha”, Heidegger’s “Sorge” and Sartre’s “Being-for-itself”.

**Literature:**

1. Лысенко В. Г. Духкха // Философия буддизма. Энциклопедия. Москва: Восточная литература, с 303-305
3. Торчинов Е. А. Пути философии Востока и Запада. Спб., Азбука-Классика, 2007

**Theme 8. The doctrine of shunya in Nagarjuna and strategy of negativity**

Nagarjuna’s concept of “sunya” as the ontological strategy of negativity. The idea of the "annihilating" function of consciousness in Nagarjuna and it’s correlation with Sartre and Heidegger. Understanding the human consciousness as unequal to itself, non-self-sufficient, groundless and in this sense suffering, "unhappy". The aspiration to finding by a person of a certain true knowledge of himself and being.

**Literature:**


The themes of papers and essays

1. The failure of scientific knowledge for conceiving of reality. Primacy of personal over the all-embracing in the existential philosophy.

2. The sources of existential philosophy: the ethical and religious searches of Soren Kierkegaard, phenomenology (E. Husserl), the “philosophy of life” (F. Nietzsche, W. Dilthey, G. Simmel).

3. The non-theistic and religious versions of existential philosophy^ unity and contradictions.

4. The departure of philosophy from ontological problematic in the 2 half of the XIX century and return to it in the beginning of the XX-th. Being as Consciousness in its historicity.

5. The phenomenon of “Sorge” in Heidegger.

6. The concepts of “Nothingness” (Nichtigkeit) and “dread” (Angst) in Heidegger’s metaphysics.

7. A person is a special way of Being (Dasein) which is constituted by negativity, according to Heidegger.


10. Husserl’s influence on Sartre.

11. The Buddhist doctrine of anatmavada.

12. The unapplicability of the concept “samsara” to Buddhism.

13. The concept of duhkha in Buddhism: empirical and ontological aspects.

14. The radical difference of Judeo-Christian concept “suffering” and Buddhist “duhkha”.

15. Duḥkha as an ontological “groundlessness” of the person, “inequality” to himself, a basic dissatisfaction with any form of empirical existence.

Questions for the estimation of quality of understanding the discipline.

1. The doctrine of S. Kierkegaard and existential philosophy.

2. “Existential” and “existentialist” philosophy: the nuances are important.


4. Correlation of Buddhist “duhkha”, Heidegger’s “Sorge” and Sartre’s “Being-for-itself”.

5. The question of “meaning of Being” in Heidegger’s philosophy. Being and entity. Being and Nothingness.

6. The critic of classical metaphysics in Heidegger’s philosophy.

7. The analytics of Dasien (basic existentials).

8. The interpretation of time and temporality in Heidegger’s philosophy. Human being as a “time-creating” creature.

9. General ontological foundations of Mahayana Buddhism.


11. The concept of “Nothingness” and the problem of freedom in Sartre’s existentialism.

12. Nagarjuna’s concept of “sunya” as the ontological strategy of negativity.

13. The idea of the "annihilating" function of consciousness in Nagarjuna and it’s correlation with Sartre and Heidegger.

14. Understanding the human consciousness as unequal to itself, non-self-sufficient, groundless and in this sense suffering, "unhappy".

15. Aspiration to overcoming of any binary oppositions and hierarchies the mādhyamakas.
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