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THE SYSTEM-BUILDING ROLE OF THE THING-IN-ITSELF IN KANT'S PHILOSOPHY

All three meanings of the notion "thing-in-itself" (object, subject and the transition between them), despite the evident opposition, constitutes the object of the central problem of philosophy in Kant's system. Kant is an innovator in both posing and answering the question. This answer is agnostic but not in the empirical or scientific sense, but rather in the solely philosophical meaning of these notions. The answer to his question – regarding both the world and the human being – is infinite as human freedom of creativity.

***Key words**: thing-in-itself, polysemanticism of notions, central problem of philosophy, subject-object relation, agnosticism, cognition, humanism, moral law.*

The title of the article might cause some confusion: is it acceptable to attach such significance to a notion that, as we know, relates to the most controversial ones in Kant's philosophy and is still disputed within Kant studies? I think it is not only acceptable but also necessary, since, in my opinion, contrary to Jacobi's well-known views, without this notion, it is impossible not only to penetrate Kant's system and remain there, but also to understand it, unveil its meaning and essence, its genesis, sources and targets, its philosophical significance, etc.

Such claim seems to be an exaggeration: indeed, the notion of thing-in-itself is marked by extreme vagueness and embraces not only different but also contradictory meanings. Kant relates it to both the objective, real world, and to the subject, the human being, their souls and even to certain otherworldly beings – God, afterworld, the realm of moral, transcendental ends, etc. Even the very assumption of such notion and the way it is introduced in the system of classical philosophy is not beyond doubt: the analysis of the a priori abilities of the subject, the use of the category of causality of sensibility as a source of sensations and of the content of experience (at the same time, the very distinction of the thing-in-itself and objects of experi-

ence remain ambiguous), as well as its interpretation as an unconditioned or free causality of will or practical reason (Kausalität durch Freiheit) as the basis of moral law, etc. We should also recall the thing-in-itself as a notion of noumenon that serves only as a limitation to sensible cognition and the sphere of possible experience. We do not discuss the assignment of another "extra" function to this notion in the *Critique of Judgement,* where, alongside the meaning of the "supersensible substrate both in us and without us", it denotes the inexplicable and incognisible transition, leap from the supersensible world to the sensible, etc.

Due to these and other reasons, the notion of thing-in-itself became a symbol of agnosticism, subjective idealism, obscurantism, etc. for many (but, I hope, not the most perspicacious) researchers. Thanks god, in the framework of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, owing to some of Lenin's statements (regarding the materialistic aspect of the doctrine of the thing-in-itself, the theoretical sources of Marxism, etc), Kant was partially rehabilitated, which allowed Russian scholars to study his heritage, and publish articles and books that were far from "condemning" style.

There is another circumstance that questions the appropriateness of the article's title, namely, the wide usage of the notion of system in Kant's philosophy. Beginning with the first edition of the *Critique*, he constantly emphasised that his philosophy was a system, an integral whole built on the basis of dogmatic method with the help of lawful establishment of principles, strict definition of notions, accurateness of proofs derived from valid principles [A XXIII, XXV/B XXXV, XXXVIII etc]. He reiterated similar ideas in all *Critiques*, although, in the third one — the *Critique of Judgement*, which appeared not only much later than the previous ones, but, as Kant himself confessed, appeared unexpectedly — he presented a complete system of his philosophy in the form of the table of all faculties of the mind and a priori principles of pure reason [3, p. 144—145; 4, p. 942—943].

But it was this systematisation that provoked sharp and constructive criticism from the researchers, who indicated its extremely artificial, for the most part exterior, decorative and, to an extent, involuntary character, which, nevertheless becomes evident even on slight acquaintance with the texts of the *Critiques* and even their contents.

Nevertheless, despite these arguments, I will try to explain and justify my opinion regarding the system-building role of the thing-in-itself within Kant's philosophy. This function rests on the three above-mentioned meanings (object, subject, and the transition between them), which only as an aggregate constitute the framework or backbone of the *internal* system of critical philosophy that does not coincide with the *external* system, which is indeed rather artificial and inadequate (to his extent, I fully agree with its critics).

In my opinion, the three meanings of the thing-in-itself convey clearly and unambiguously the general structure or content of the so-called central problem of philosophy, which, however, for me and, it seems for Kant too, is dominated not by the question of "primacy" but rather by its triunity, i.e. the simultaneous "presence" of all three components: the subject, the object and the transition between them — a "tripartite alliance" instead of monism and dualism. The internal system of Kant's philosophy is constituted by these three meanings of the thing-in-itself, or, otherwise, these three meaning underlie the emergence and existence of the internal system of critical philosophy comprising its links, components, moments, i.e. fulfil the function of the system-building factors.

The Copernican turn carried out by Kant in the history of philosophical thought consisted, in my opinion, not in the rejection of the traditional or "dogmatic" central problem of philosophy, but in its agnostic interpretation, i.e. the indication of the incognisable character of all its three links (object, subject and the transition between them). And, I think, it is the only reason why the problem mentioned could acquire the status of a truly philosophical one, i.e. get rid of inadequate, extraneous elements borrowed from the everyday or scientific experience, mythological, religious and other traditions, within which philosophical thought had abided before Kant. In my opinion, it is that what Kant spoke of in his numerous references to the "change of method", with the help of which he hoped to "strike a blow at the root" of materialism, fatalism, atheism, freethinking, fanaticism, and superstition [B XX, XXXV, etc].

Here, the reader might feel bewildered: does Kant's major contribution to philosophy consists merely in... his agnosticism, i.e. boils down to the statement of the incognoscibility of all: the subject and the object, the human being and the world, as well as the relation between them? I dare assert that it is the case! I only want and have to add or ask or even demand that the reader scrutinise this principle of Kant.

I do not want to return to the popular but erroneous interpretations and assessments of Kant's agnosticism, however, once again, I would like to draw attention to the fact that, in this case, he speaks of the negation of cognoscibility of the world, the human being and their relation not within concrete, empirical or scientific cognition, but in solely philosophical meaning and content of these notions. Strictly speaking, they are not notions in the "usual" logical sense: it is philosophical postulates or hypothesis that human mind is forced to formulate, put forward, admit and take into account in the perpetual process of cognising the world, themselves and their relation to nature and the world in general.

A "regular" person does not have to do it, as they do not have to become and be a philosopher (although, from time to time, all of us turn out to be and become philosophers). But if, willing or not, for reasons unknown, we became philosophers or started philosophising, we inevitably stumble, feel the "bottomless abyss" (Kant's expression!), the eternal incompleteness of the problem, its connection with something incomprehensible and inexpressible, i.e. to face an infinity that does not reply. This is the horror and the splendour of philosophical thought, about which Kant figuratively and expressively wrote in the Conclusion to the *Critique of practical reason*: "the starry heavens above and the moral law within" [1, p. 728].

However, I admit that the word "horror" was hardly an appropriate one. And that is why. Kant speaks of not only the beauty and splendour of the limitless starry heavens, but also of a human being, and this reveals the deep humanistic sense of his philosophy. A human being as a sentient being is infinite. Being a mortal element of the infinite universe, an "animal creature", a human being is infinite within their invisible I, their personality, within which the moral law, or more specific, the underlying freedom moral law "reveals to me a life independent of animality and even of the whole sensible world, at least so far as may be inferred from the destination assigned to my existence by this law, a destination not restricted to conditions and limits of this life" [1, p. 729—731].

I would like to mention that it concerns not only and mostly the moral law and the problem of immortality, it concerns the inexhaustibility, infinity of human freedom, the human ability and faculty to set and achieve different goals in

the process of cognising and transforming the world, nature, and themselves, i.e. to hold the title of lord of nature, the creator of the whole human civilization and culture, etc. [2, p. 699 etc.]. It is hardly the place to discuss Kant's concept of culture, which crowns the grand edifice of Kant's philosophy, but it is necessary to emphasise once again that it is underlain by his teaching on human freedom as a faculty for infinite creative activity.

In my opinion, it constitutes not only the pathos, but also the problem content of the whole system of critical philosophy and it is the actual problem meaning and system-building role of the notion of the thing-in-itself considered within the inseparable unity of all its three main meanings.

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