All-Unity

Всеединство, vseyedinstvo (Russian)

Thoughts about All-Unity, often discussed in proximity with the quest for harmony of faith and reason, are not simply philosophical protests against the ecclesiastical "egoism" of Protestants who are said to affirm a "multitude without unity," but most often represent direct attempts to overcome the entire intellectual machine of Western metaphysics by Eastern Orthodox means.

The term "All-Unity" is used as the official translation of the Russian philosophical term *vseyedinstvo,* which represents a "unity in multiplicity". Russian philosophers who were interested in All-Unity are, for example, pre-revolutionary "organicist" thinkers Vladimir Soloviov (1853-1900) and Lev Lopatin (1855-1922), but also more modern thinkers like Semën L. Frank (1877-1950) and Nicolai Berdyaev (1878-1948). I use the idea of "All-Unity" for an analysis of contemporary themes.

All-Unity is not an invention of Russian philosophers but has an essential place in Eastern as well as in Western philosophy. The ambition to grasp the world "as a whole" through a phenomenon so powerful that it is able to unify all diversity within it, is linked to one of the most primordial philosophical impulses or instincts. The idea of All-Unity subsists until today in the realm of posthumanism, for example in the contemporary vision of the earth as "one cyborg creature […] including the procreation of other metamen throughout the galaxy" (Gray 2001: 10).

In India, truth is thought of in relation to "the unity of things", and such ideas of the whole universe being manifest in each atom are recurrent. Classical and modern Indian philosophy (Advaita Vedânda) sees Brahman (the Absolute) as a single reality, and systems like the one of the Yogâcâra conceive reality as undifferentiated.

In the West, Parmenides' "One Being" and Heraclitus' *logos* represent the starting points of philosophy. These ancient ideas of All-Unity, although indirectly and by first passing through

Plato's dialectics, are present in Western "rationalist" philosophy to date. Among the most explicit attempts to grasp the idea of All-Unity are the writings of Russian philosophers of the nineteenth century. All-Unity became here a major philosophical concept, culminating in Vladimir Soloviev's concept of *vseyedinstvo* meant to be a cosmic process in the sense of the "soul of the world". Russian scientific elaborations such as Vladimir Vernadsky's "noosphere" (from Greek *noos*, mind) go in the same direction.

While "All-Unity" can be found at the beginning of many philosophical reflections, it can also be found at many a reflection's end. What can be added, aspired or examined, once this All-Unity has been spelled out and officially given the status of an ultimate philosophical truth? Still two more things can be done: (1) All-Unity can be transformed into a more sophisticated dialectical, cosmological, monadological system; and (2) All-Unity can be defended against diverse attempts to formulate the world as nothing more than a random accumulation of single elements.

In Western philosophy both things have been done in various, often highly sophisticated ways. Spinoza, Bruno, Eckhart, and finally Hegel are the best known examples. The overall impression in these philosophies is that All-Unity is conceived of as simultaneously attractive and repulsive. In other words: it is *not* seen as an end in itself. Spinoza, for example, held that even though there is only one substance, this substance has infinite attributes. A large part of Western philosophy is indeed fuelled by a stimulating tension between descriptions of the world composed of clearly definable singularities on the one hand, and a unifying All-Unity on the other. In this sense, All-Unity as the expression of an ontological or existential self-contradictoriness, or even of an aporia simultaneously affirming the existence of single elements *and* their unity (an idea widely reflected by Idealism) has been philosophically fruitful. However, if the philosophy of All-Unity does nothing more than negate any difference it becomes mysticism. It becomes mysticism simply because it contradicts "reality". As "mystic" is understood the attempt to think All-Unity as a self-sufficient intellectual phenomenon, carrying with it the "end of philosophy", meaning the dull repetition of identical intellectual models.

The last time the idea of All-Unity was put forth in a straightforward fashion was during Romanticism with its nostalgia for the unity of God, nature and man. In some respects, this discredited, for our age of science, further attempts to grasp any All-Unity. On the other hand,

Hegel's Absolute Spirit announcing the "End of History", remains attractive even today (see Fukuyama 1992). Yet, the fact to consider a uniform unity as "real" and as the culmination point of philosophical thought still represents nothing more than pure mysticism.

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See also in ODIP: Organic

Further Reading:

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