

# The Category of Ideal and Its Ontological Foundations in Modern Philosophy

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## Abstract

The present article views a special philosophical category – “ideal”, realizes the constructive problematization of this philosophical category. The evolution of “ideal” is depicted dialectically: from the ancient past to the formation of the new European philosophy of the eighteenth and fourteenth centuries, which has changed many of the previously unshakable philosophical postulates. “Reformation” of thinking of the European man of modern times led to the active introduction of the category of “ideal” into the scientific and social life of mankind. The ideal is now conceived in close connection with the subject and cannot be represented beyond it. At the same time, the very understanding of the cognizing the subject is reconsidered: it bears the brunt of realizing its undoubted reality and the need to openly participate in creating and changing the world that opens to it. The ideal is seen as a way of grasping the historical reality, a way of the subject’s view of the world, society and history from the perspective of the present. The philosophical inquiries of thinkers of that time draw us at the conclusion that the ideal allows to combine in itself the fullness of the existential time: it is oriented towards the future, but also includes both the past and the present. Thanks to this, the ideal becomes the spirit of the historical process.

**Key words:** Ontology, Ideal, Subject, New time, Temporality, Axiology

## INTRODUCTION

In modern era, we discover the ideal in its classical norm - as a phenomenon and as a category. First, at that time the norm itself appeared, and, secondly, there were many attempts to fill this norm with a concrete content. There are various utopias, social projects, the science of society as such. On the threshold of the emergence of a new philosophical thought, the “ideal” as a category begins to be viewed axiologically, which can be regarded as a Copernican revolution in the evolution of understanding this term. It is the period of modern times that reveals the contradictory nature of the individual, which leads to the fact that the ontology of the “ideal” becomes a natural part of the ontology of the very man. The utilitarianism of

thinking of the new European personality is also reflected in the discussion of the practical effectiveness of the ideal: heated debates on the possibility of transforming the ideal as a phenomenon into life go on. This has entailed the emergence of the tendencies to perceive the ideal as a direct opposite of reality, which calls the very possibility of “ideal” somehow to affect the human mind into question. This article will trace the development of the relations of the ideal as a norm of thought and metaphysical ideas which define a system of thought of the period, as well as the functions performed by the ideal of the new European structure of consciousness of humanity. The paper shows a) the process of transformation of the ideal from the ontological category into axiological one and b) the valuation of the concept of the ideal as the norm of understanding of the historical time by the subject.

## METHOD

The work uses general-logical philosophical methods (the analysis, the synthesis, the method of historicism). The expositive-descriptive and systematic approach makes it

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possible to expose ontological grounds of the category of ideal in the philosophy of the New Time.

a) In previous periods, the ideal was not understood purely as a norm of oughtness. It was identified with the Platonic idea or with the norm of Aristotle and had a quite definite and quite high ontological status. The eternity of the intelligible being in ancient philosophy as the substantial basis of the constancy of cosmos, the immutability of ideas in the Divine mind as a consequence of the constancy of the Divine substance and the irrefutability of the Divine conception in the philosophy of the Middle Ages - all this was a recognition of the superhuman objective perfection of the world, the perfection of the problem-free, like any genuine being. For medieval consciousness, the difference between ideal and real consisted only in the modus of their existence. This meant that the truth was comprehended realistically. Seeking for good, for perfection is for the ancient and medieval consciousness simply the desire of being for its fullness, for full self-realization, and this self-realization is conceived as already being realized in eternity. And in immediate connection with this idea, the idea (the predecessor of the ideal) is understood as the cause of this movement, as the primary nutrient basis, as the energy that can be as such precisely because of its being full of being. It acts as a source of being empirical. "Any minimum of a function presupposes a substance, and the maximum force of action is the substance itself, i.e. being", - in this way A.L. Dobrokhotov defines this idea [1].

In the era of the New Time, the idea of the ideal is drastically changing. First, it cannot be thought irrelatively of the subject. The whole weight of the world and truth falls on the subject. The truth is recognized as such thanks to the decision of the subject, it is him who is the last instance that the objective reality appeals over the question of its truth to (Descartes). And it is no longer the idea that communicates its energy to the knowing and acting, but the knowing and acting gives the idea of being. The idea becomes either its instrument (Kant) or it is identical with the subject (Hegel).

John Duns Scotus distinguishes between the phenomenon and the basis of the phenomenon (the *ratio apparenti*), which is understood not so much the essence itself, as the reason why the thing is imagined exactly such, the meaning of its difference, non-identity, and at the same time the reason for concealing the truth of the thing. But we are interested not in this. "For You, - the philosopher bespeaks to God, - nothing else is the basis of the phenomenon, for in Your essence, being presented to You first, [everything else is presented]; and for this reason nothing subsequent for you is the basis of the phenomenon. In this essence, I say, everything intelligible is perfectly present before

Your mind" [2]. For Descartes, the same simple given was the given of being of Self, self-consciousness. But for Descartes, "Self" is not just subjectivity being in the void - on the contrary, it is the only, directly given, an absolutely indubitable reality. Man bears resemblance to the Supreme Being precisely by his simplicity and self-basicality. It is man in whom the original truth is revealed, but he himself is not such a being, and, therefore, not the source of the truth. He is only a norm, a semblance of Divine simplicity and baselessness, for being does not belong to the very person, he only finds it in himself, including the very norm of its truth. This is the sense of well-known Descartes's proposition that the principle of self-consciousness is indebted to God by its authenticity. But, nevertheless, the essence of the very person is this being and this truth. Here is the source of ontological double man. It is not entirely correct to say that Cartesian philosophy is absolutely subject-centered. The originality of man is not his property. He attains it only through the involvement of that original reality, which he finds in himself as his inherent property, but not as his own work.

This contradictory human nature, discovered in the era of the New Time, could not have yet been realized as self-actualization. An illusion has been created that man is an individuality and has a supreme power over existence. But as a result, the ontological status of a person is problematized. As a consequence of this lack of clarity, contradictions penetrate the philosophy of ideal and the ideal, which cannot be built apart from the ontology of man. At the same time, the similar paradoxes that arise when analyzing the nature and the way of human existence are disclosed. And the most important paradox is that the first step in the revision of the ontology of the ideal is its complete or partial deontologization, which is a sequent of man's being unable to endure the "Atlas's load" of being, which was lifted on by the New Times. In the Middle Ages, the fact that any absolute substance, discovered and comprehended by the human mind, necessarily takes on a temporary, relative dimension.

Having become aware of his inner relation to the Absolute principle, seeing in himself the reflection of this truly existing, in his assertion independent of this principle, man discovers the infinite emptiness and weakness of his separately asserted individuality. Despite all the dizzy nature of Descartes' discovery, at first it was clear that man has these resources only thanks to the involvement in some objectively existing being. Even then, this objectivity was understood either as a Divine being, or as a material being. In any case, the ideal was understood as deriving from the subject. It is significant that in the modern era none of the doctrines even remotely resembling ancient (Platonic) or medieval idealism does not arise. The ideal is only a

thought, and it does not exist out of the subject, out of the agent (unlike the medieval Divine ideas, of course, existing in the Divine intelligence, but being the classical principles of the independent existence of things). It was a secondary derivative product of the work of intellect and lost its immediate connection with being. Rather, a tendency to think the ideal as having no independent power, like a shadow, a reflection of reality, appears. Thus, the ideal undergoes a kind of a double separation from being: through the restriction of its domain by the sphere of subjective intellect and through the opposition of the subjective to the objective.

In general, this change is not immediately realized, since the idea and the ideal preserved, nevertheless, the features that they could possess only having the former ontological status, primarily such as invariance, universality and effectiveness.

Constancy is peculiar only to the divine mind. Kant's transcendental subject turned out not be able to play this part to the end. It had been demonstrated by Hegel for that once. Operating with definite concepts, the human mind necessarily comes to the negation of every concrete, limited contents. In it there is an inevitable contradiction between the concrete and the universal. Nevertheless, the ideal in the modern era is understood as something absolute and unchanging in direct contradiction with the already realized lack of relative reason; as the universal and, at the same time, the concrete. The thinkers, who recognized that it was impossible to construct a meaningful ideal, which at the same time would be genuine, i.e. not dependent on transient historical situations, on the empirical, treated the ideal as a purely normal construction, moreover with a problematic attitude to the reality of history.

These concepts spring from the Kantian understanding of the ideal as a regulative idea of the mind, then it should be noted the neo-Kantian notion of the ideal as a value, in no way related to being, and the social and philosophical works, based on the principles of neo-Kantianism, for example the famous work of prominent Russian neo-Kantian philosopher P. I. Novgorodtsev "On the Social Ideal": "Not a belief in earthly paradise [t. e., in realizability, the reality of the ideal-A.T.]. and the faith in human action and moral obligation., not a promised land, but an unyielding personality - this is our last support" [3].

In the end, there is a final gap between what is proper and what is absolute. Imperative potential of the ideal, one of the most necessary properties, begins to be weakening in such concepts and almost ceases to exist. Striving for the ideal, the realizability of which is fundamentally impossible, carries an absolutely obvious internal contradiction in

itself, and therefore cannot be imputed to anyone, and even be declared desirable, for one must not desire the impossible. A rationally constructed ideal, therefore, faced a dilemma - either to be purely empirical, built exclusively on the shaky ground of the historical, or to turn into a powerless scheme being interesting to anyone. It is reasonable that the claim to universally binding representations about an absolutely perfect social order (social ideal) turns out to be unsubstantiated in this case.

In close connection with this, the problem of the effectiveness of the ideal appears to be. If the ideal is regarded as a value, then in this case the given value can only consist in the transformative effect of the ideal. The ideal, lacking in connection with being, and consequently, lacking in effectiveness, ceases to be a value, moreover, it turns into chimera (in this, in our opinion, the main internal contradiction of the neo-Kantian philosophy of the ideal lies, for the value according to V. Windelband and G. Rickert does not exist, but it means (gilt and acts) [4]. The ongoing discussion of whether the ideal is only an unattainable limit of development, the regulatory construction (i.e. ineffective in itself), or whether it is real, realized, again results from the confusion of the medieval and modern ideas of the ideal. The famous principle of the Byzantine Hesychasts says, "non-being has no energies", that is, it is incapable of influencing, changing. In the era of the New Time, there was a tendency to think the ideal as the opposite of the real, i.e. as some kind of declining being or, in general terms, non-existence. It remained completely unclear how this existence or partial existence can change reality.

Thus, we discovered one important contradiction of the ideal. As we have seen, the ontological ideals of antiquity and Christianity were already in the realm of existing, that is, in a sense, had already been realized. This circumstance removed the problematic nature of social action in two ways, concurrently giving it a firm foundation and paralyzing it. In fact, as already mentioned, the ontology, the reality, even the essence of the ideal of antiquity made it independent of human action, and, guaranteeing the possibility of achieving the ideal, deprived the subject of the action of motivation for the desire for its embodiment. On the other hand, it was the problematization of the epistemological status of the ideal and the ideal within the period of the New Time, that simultaneously stimulated human activity (having deprived the social ideal of ontological "assurance" and cleared a space for projective thinking), and eliminated the possibility of substantiating it, or rather complicating it. Thus, in modern philosophical discourse, the ideal can be considered as a means of constructing an intersubjective reality in the communication space [5]. On the other hand, «der neomarxistische Traum von einer

befreiten Gesellschaft etablierte die Ideale der individuellen Selbstverwirklichung auf derart breiter Front, dass inzwischen selbst konservative Werte unter der Perspektive einer besseren Selbstverwirklichung gerechtfertigt werden müssen, weil der schlichte Verweis auf die Tradition nicht mehr ausreicht» [6].

b) The ideal also acquires the features of a temporary human existence, and it itself becomes temporary, temporal. If earlier history aspired, as far as possible, to coincide with eternity as its limit, now history as if generates eternity from itself, and eternity itself is often thought of as something dynamic and evolving (so, according to Hegel, “the world is a field of contradiction. Just as the world enters the conception, time enters into it as well, and then, through reflection, infinity, or eternity”[7]). The very historical movement becomes an indispensable element of eternity. Consciousness becomes future directed. “At the heart of our worldview there is always the realization of the future. Our thoughts about the future influence how we see the past and the present” [8].

The New Time is a period in which a person strives for living only “here and now”, and this principle acquires a completely different meaning in comparison with the classical “carpe diem”, when man dissolves in enjoying the moment. Within the modern period man seeks to build himself. But, trying to find the whole self in the present, man realizes that in every new moment he falls into the unknown, and each time he must defend himself again. Every moment he makes a choice, he gains a foothold, every moment of his life becomes decisive, and the person begins to realize his temporary character. Self-collecting can never be conceived as a final, incompleteness of own project is a necessary condition for temporary existence. Therefore, there is a fusion of personality with time, and time becomes subjective, personal [9].

Then the present is not just a given, it is (ideally) an indispensable given. It does not arise spontaneously. It is the result of purposeful efforts of the person, so there is a claim for the rational justification. Personality strives for complete self-transparency and absolute power over oneself and the outer world. This is not the will to power for the sake of power itself, where reason is only its tool (as it was believed by F. Nietzsche already at the end of the modern era and is believed by many modern philosophers), on the contrary, it was the will to reason as the supreme reality, having an absolute existential power in itself. Only the rational could receive the right to exist, only the rational could be worthy of existing (and man). For a genuine substantiation of the present, its relation to the past and the future is necessary. In the *carpe diem*, the person seemed to shirk the responsibility. Now it becomes clear that the

present is justified by the past and, which is of no lesser importance, by the future, only in relation to them it can acquire a personal sense. The past, the tradition become at best a jumping-off place, the future becomes the goal. And, nevertheless, both the past and the future are actually present in the present. The unity of time begins already to come true on this side. In principle, ideally, every moment should be saturated with the fullness of eternity, without losing, at the same time, its dynamics.

Time becomes a bridge into eternity, or is opposed to eternity. In both cases, time is understood as the environment (and perhaps even as a substance) of personal choice, and the unity of time as the unity of the past and the future in the present correlates with the unity of the individual. The form of the unity of time in consciousness is the social ideal. Although, first of all, the ideal refers to the future (the future is thought to be paradoxically both simultaneously eternal and never able to come), but the past (as the negated, criticized) and the present are present in the very ideal in a hidden form. The ideal is the absolute conceivable fullness of the times, with which the present must now overlap and into which the present must partially be realized. The present is meaningful only through belonging to the ideal, and the ideal itself becomes a means of actualizing eternity in time. There is a rejection of the medieval dualism of the earth and the heaven. Moreover, the ideal should raise the very empirical reality, give it an immanently absolute contents. Both the Kantian and Hegelian concepts of the ideal are in agreement here. The motion to the ideal takes place at every moment, it has value only because of this, and it can and should have this value only if it is involved in the transcendent. The limit of the ideal here becomes the limit of action, its maximum.

## SUMMARY

The social ideal is not only a way of the given of the society in its superempirical integrity, but to a large extent there is also its “historical a priori” as a way of grasping this historical reality, a way of seeing the world of society and the history from the perspective of the present, taken as a measure of the vision of the absolute truth of history. Further, the ideal as a product of the mind is super-individual, transcendental. Sociality, which is a measuring of human subjectivity, exceeds the limits of subjectivity. The social dimension becomes a trans-subjective world of senses and relations, a subject, but not a subjective, becomes the horizon of the world. It is not without reason that the largest social movements of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as Marxism, were opposed to religion. Within the framework of such vision, it became possible to transcend without leaving the plan of immanence. Here

is the projectivity of human consciousness, its inevitable aspiration for the future. The action attributed by the social ideal is an action in the present and in the future at the same time. It is the means of preserving the human, the means of finishing and retaining wholeness, completeness. Man (and society) can exist as completeness only with the help of a temporal fixation in the categories of the ideal and the perfect.

The ideal should become a sphere and an instrument of the actual unity of society. Hegel protests against the destructive power of the mind of the Enlightenment and, as J. Habermas writes, tries to “project the mind a priori as a force that not only differentiates and breaks the system of life relations, but also reunites them” [10].

The processes of changing the senses of the category of the subject described in this article are, in our opinion, the key to understanding the “destiny” of the category of ideal in the epoch of crisis of subject-centric philosophy.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, we see that the ideal in the Modern Era is transformed from the category that fixes timeless, transcendent senses into the category that serves as a means of forming not only a holistic picture of the reality but also the subject that

realizes oneself, acts in this reality and acquires the ability with the help of the ideal to move the senses previously held exclusively in the scope of the Divine, the absolute, the temporal into the plane of history.

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