

Andrei Tikhomirov

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# Philosophical Notes

Learning the world through  
philosophy

**Andrei Tikhomirov**  
**Philosophical Notes. Learning  
the world through philosophy**

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**Аннотация**

Philosophy as a type of human activity and knowledge arose more than 2.5 thousand years ago, almost simultaneously in several centers of the then cultural ecumenical center – in China, India, ancient Israel and later in ancient Greece. Karl Jaspers called this period in the history of human civilization «axial time», during which philosophical teachings arose and some of these teachings later became religions.

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# **Philosophical Notes Learning the world through philosophy**

**Andrei Tikhomirov**

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# **Philosophy as a method of cognition of the world**

Philosophy as a type of human activity and knowledge arose more than 2.5 thousand years ago, almost simultaneously in several centers of the then cultural ecumenical center – in China, India, ancient Israel and later in ancient Greece. Karl Jaspers called this period in the history of human civilization «axial time», during which philosophical teachings arose and some of these teachings later became religions.

Philosophy, if you restore the original etymology of this word, is «love of Sofia», which is often and not very accurately translated as «love of wisdom». In fact, the ancient Greek concept of «sophia» is much more capacious and complex than just «wisdom». If, in the view of Plato, having fixed the word «philosophy» in European terminology, the philosopher was just a sage or a lover of philosophizing, he would not have entered this very word «philosopher», which speaks of love for Sofia, but would have stopped simply on the word sage. The fact is that Plato, under sophia, did not mean the acquired, subjective property of the human mind, but a certain «great and befitting only deity» objective quality of a reasonably arranged and harmonious world.

Philosophy in its origin was conceived not as a simple creation

of truths, but as a striving for truth, as such an ideal mood of the soul and mind of a person that can lead to harmonious balance, both the inner mental life of a person and his complex relationship with the world.

Philosophy once could have had the status of a special science. A special form of cognition, as, for example, in antiquity, when it was, in essence, identical with the whole culture of that time. But by the twentieth century, the century of an unprecedented differentiation of knowledge, when each question moved to its own separate science, philosophy no longer had «its own land». She lost her former magical power. This, of course, is an extremely pointed position, which is opposed to the other extreme, that is, the position according to which philosophy not only did not «end», but, on the contrary, acquired a synthetic function in much the same way as in antiquity. For the first time in history, philosophy has realized its true place as the queen of sciences, replacing so long reigning religion. For the first time, she approached public life so much that she began to influence it not only indirectly, but also directly. And for the first time, philosophy gained the right to evaluate and even solve conflict problems not only in socio-political, but also in economic and even scientific and academic life. If we do not openly recognize this leading role of philosophical thinking, if we agree that the once royal building of philosophical knowledge was broken up in brick in favor of the private sciences, then we thereby lose the unity of our spiritual world, which alone can support us in our

practical actions.

The originality of philosophy as a way of understanding the world is revealed by comparing it with the mythological comprehension of reality. Mythology is the worldview of a primitive communal, tribal society. Mythology consists of spontaneously developing legends, legends about life, about the origin, about the origin of crafts, which are transmitted through generations. The essence of mythology is the transfer of community-clan relations to the whole world. Mythological ideas are developed collectively unconsciously and are a fantastic, generalized reflection of natural and social being in the human mind of a tribal society. The main features of the mythological worldview are as follows:

1. The idea of the kinship of forces and phenomena and human collectives. Anthropomorphism, i.e. transfer of human properties to the whole world.
2. Personification, personification of the natural forces and methods of human activity.
3. Mythological thinking is artistic in nature, it operates with images, but not concepts.
4. Authoritarianism, that is, the justification of what is happening through authority.

Philosophy is based on a conscious theoretical, rational attitude to the world, on the opposition of subject and object, on the subject's awareness of himself as an active figure.

Philosophy studies the universal laws of nature, society, and

human thinking. In other words, philosophy seeks to realize a certain basis for all spheres of reality, generating all the diversity of the world, but retaining stability in all changes.

The subject of philosophy is the search for absolute, timeless norms, ideal standards of these types. I. Kant suggested several basic philosophical questions, which in their totality constitute the subject of philosophical knowledge: 1) what can I know? 2) what can I hope for? 3) what should I do? 4) what is a person? Moreover, Kant considered the fourth question to be final, absorbing the content of all the preceding ones. For Kant, man is a creature capable of knowledge, faith in God, and moral behavior. The mystery here is that these abilities are mutually exclusive, and therefore it is necessary to find out how these conflicting abilities are connected in the human mind, what is their hierarchy?

There is another system of philosophical issues that is widespread. These questions are as follows. The basic question – «how do thinking and matter relate?» – is divided into two relatively independent ones: «what is primary – matter or consciousness?» And «how does cognitive thinking relate to the world outside of us?» It is generally accepted that these questions are an expression in the language of philosophy of the most important problems for a person: «how do soul and body relate?», «Is there life after death?», «Is it possible to match goals and results of human activity?»

Philosophy, as a type of spiritual activity, exists, as already



mentioned, about three thousand years. And at all times there was no shortage of people who denied its social significance. The philosophers were accused in different ways, but the essence of the accusations was unchanged: they did not bring direct benefit to society. In part, such allegations should be considered fair. «Consumes» philosophical knowledge a relatively small circle of people with high education and involved in decision-making. In other words, philosophy appeals to the intellectual and political elite. Or, as Voltaire poisonously said: «Philosophy is not for shoemakers.»

It is clear that philosophy has a special role in society. Although indirectly, philosophy is usually connected to the process of making global, strategic decisions that determine the direction of human activity. Hence the main function of philosophy is the study of the ultimate foundations of human activity. «Ultimate grounds» are usually considered to be representations that are not fully realized by their carriers, but nevertheless condition their consciousness. «Ultimate foundations» determine the strategy of activity, in other words, «the meaning of life».

The disclosure of the specifics of philosophy as a form of social consciousness implies the need for disclosure and its social functions, the role that it plays in the life of society and the individual. The main functions of philosophy include: methodological, epistemological, ideological, constructive, ideological, intellectual, practical. Let us consider in more detail

the methodological and ideological functions.

The separation of the methodological function as the initial one is due to the fact that philosophy occupies a special place in the process of awareness of being in the structure of social consciousness. Each of the forms of social consciousness, acting as an awareness of the dependence of human activity on a certain sphere of reality, is a reflection of this particular side of human existence. Philosophy, considering in its most generalized form the relation of a person to the world and to himself, does not consider individual spheres of human being as such, but their interconnection through the prism of revealing the nature and essence of the world, the nature and essence of man and their interconnection. Therefore, the basic principles of philosophy are universally valid, have methodological significance for each of the forms of social consciousness in the process of a person's awareness of his attitude to all spheres of reality and to himself.

Under the methodology should be understood a system of initial, fundamental principles that determine the method of approach to the analysis and evaluation of phenomena, the nature of the relationship to them, the nature and orientation of cognitive and practical activities. These principles comprise ideas expressed in a general form about the essence of the world and man, about the ultimate foundations of their existence, and about man's attitude to the world and to himself. Of course, in different philosophical systems the interpretation of these initial principles is different. Nevertheless, in these

interpretations one can see the desire to understand the specifics of a philosophical understanding of reality and the place of a person in it. Thus, the methodological function of philosophy provides for all forms of social consciousness, for the theoretical and practical activities of man, initial, fundamental principles, the application of which determines the general orientation of the approach to understanding reality, the orientation of cognitive and practical activity. This function suggests that a person's attitude to the world should proceed from his awareness of the nature and essence of the world and man, the ultimate foundations of their existence, man's awareness of his place in the world and his attitude to him, awareness of the general structure of the world and the state in which he is.

The worldview function of philosophy lies in the fact that, arming people with knowledge about the world and about man, about his place in the world and the possibilities of his knowledge and transformation, it influences the formation of life attitudes, the awareness by social subjects of goals and meaning of life.

Often, when it comes to worldview, its characteristic as a generalized system of ideas and views on the world, a person, on his place in the world, etc. is highlighted. Such an approach is important, since the worldview is always based on a certain mental material, on a certain system of knowledge. However, in this case, the worldview is reduced only to an objective system of knowledge, divorced from the social subject. Often when characterizing a worldview, attention is actually drawn to the

etymology of the word – and then it appears as a general view of the world.

The worldview should be considered not only from the point of view of its content, which is the result of the reflection of reality in the minds of people, but also from the point of view of the relationship of knowledge about the world and about a person with a social subject, with his attitude to reality based on this knowledge. With this approach, the importance of knowledge for human life is highlighted. Therefore, worldview should be understood not only as a system of generalized knowledge about the world and a person, but as a system of knowledge that for a social subject acquires the value of its own way of seeing, understanding, analyzing, evaluating phenomena, determining the nature of a person's attitude to the world and to himself, consciousness of goals and the meaning of life, the nature of actions and actions. It is a way of spiritual and practical development of the world.

Philosophy performs a number of cognitive functions related to the functions of science. The immediate goal of science is to describe, explain and predict the processes and phenomena of reality that make up the subject of its study, based on the laws it opens. Philosophy has always, to one degree or another, performed functions of the methodology of cognition and the philosophical interpretation of its results in relation to science. Philosophy is also united with science by the desire for a theoretical form of building knowledge, for the logical proof

of its conclusions.

The European tradition, dating back to antiquity, highly valued the unity of reason and morality, at the same time firmly connected philosophy with science. Even Greek thinkers attached great importance to genuine knowledge and competence, in contrast to the less scientific, and sometimes just lightweight opinion. Such a difference is fundamental in many forms of human activity, including philosophy. So what are the results of the intellectual efforts of philosophers: reliable knowledge or only opinion, a breakdown, a kind of mental game? What are the guarantees of the truth of philosophical generalizations, justifications, forecasts? Is philosophy entitled to claim the status of science, or are such claims groundless? Let's try to answer these questions, turning to history.

The first attempt to outline the circle of tasks of philosophy, in the face of the existing and just beginning to take shape specific sciences, was made by Aristotle. In contrast to the private sciences, each of which is engaged in the study of its own field of phenomena, he defined philosophy as a doctrine of the root causes, first principles, the most general principles of life. Her theoretical power seemed to Aristotle incommensurable with the capabilities of private sciences and aroused his admiration. He called this field of knowledge «the mistress of sciences», believing that other sciences, like slaves, could not say a word against her. Aristotle's reflections reflected the sharp divergence of philosophical thought and

special disciplines characteristic of his era in terms of their theoretical maturity. This situation has persisted for many centuries. Aristotle's approach has been firmly established in the minds of philosophers with the titles «queen of sciences» and «science of sciences».

In ancient Greece, philosophy was born as a comprehensive science. This science was aimed at everything that was generally capable or seemed capable of becoming an object of knowledge. Being at first a unified and inseparable science, philosophy, with the differentiated state of individual sciences, became partly an organ combining the results of all other sciences and one general knowledge, partly a conductor of moral and religious life. In the 19—20 centuries, at a new stage in the development of knowledge, opposing opinions about the greatness of science and the inferiority of philosophy sounded. At this time, the philosophical current of positivism arose and became influential, casting doubt on the cognitive possibilities of philosophy, its scientific nature, in a word debunking the «queen of sciences» into «maidservants». In positivism, the conclusion was drawn that philosophy is a substitute for science, which has the right to exist in those periods when mature scientific knowledge has not yet developed. At the stages of developed science, the cognitive claims of philosophy are declared insolvent. It is proclaimed that mature science is its own philosophy, that it is up to it to take power and successfully solve the intricate philosophical issues that have been exciting minds for centuries.

addition, the difference between philosophical knowledge and others is that philosophy – the only one of the sciences that explains what being is, what is its nature, the relationship of material and spiritual in being.

Let's see how science and philosophy interact with each other. The scientific and philosophical worldview performs cognitive functions related to the functions of science. Along with such important functions as generalization, integration, synthesis of all possible knowledge, discovery of the most general laws, relationships, interactions of the main subsystems of being, which were already discussed, the theoretical scale, logic of the philosophical mind allows it to carry out the functions of forecasting, forming hypotheses about general principles, development trends, as well as primary hypotheses about the nature of specific phenomena that have not yet been worked out by special scientific methods.

On the basis of the general principles of rational understanding, philosophical thought groups every day, practical observations of various phenomena, forms general assumptions about their nature and possible ways of cognition. Using the experience of understanding, accumulated in other areas of knowledge, practice, she creates philosophical «sketches» of various natural or social realities, preparing their subsequent concrete scientific study. In this case, speculative thinking through of fundamentally admissible, logically and theoretically possible options is carried out. T.O. Philosophy fulfills the

function of intellectual intelligence, which also serves to fill cognitive gaps that constantly arise in connection with the incomplete, varying degree of knowledge of certain phenomena, the presence of «white spots» in the cognitive picture of the world. Of course, in the concrete – scientific plan, the gap remains to be filled by specialists – scientists of a different general system of world outlook. Philosophy fills them with the power of logical thinking.

Specialists studying all sorts of specific phenomena need common, holistic ideas about the world, about the principles of its structure, general laws, etc. However, they themselves do not develop such representations – in specific sciences universal mental tools (categories, principles, various methods of cognition) are used, but scientists do not specifically engage in the development, systematization, comprehension of cognitive devices or means. The worldview and cognitive foundations of science are studied, practiced and formed in the field of philosophy.

So, philosophy and science are pretty much interconnected, they have a lot in common, but there are significant differences. Therefore, philosophy cannot be unambiguously ranked as a science, and vice versa its scientific nature cannot be denied. Philosophy is a separate form of cognition that has scientific foundations, which manifests itself in those moments and in those areas of scientific knowledge when the theoretical potential in these areas is either small or even absent. Bertrand



Russell on this occasion said that all exact knowledge belongs to science, all the dogmas of inaccurate knowledge are religion, and between them is «nobody's land», which is attacked from all sides. This is philosophy.

Meanwhile, the question of the relationship between philosophy and science cannot be resolved unambiguously. The fact is that in modern public consciousness, complex relationships have been established between philosophy and science, in which, on the one hand, an equal sign is not placed between them, and on the other, an impenetrable barrier is not placed.

Also, one cannot strictly distinguish between the aesthetic and moral orientations of philosophy. They fit together and coexist in a cultural context. Culture as a phenomenon of social life is an object of study for many sciences. It is explored by history and aesthetics, psychology and sociology, archeology, ethnography. Each science realizes its specific interest in the study of this complex phenomenon. Philosophy also studies culture, but not its individual manifestations. She considers culture as an integral and multidimensional phenomenon of social life. Philosophy seeks to answer questions about what culture is, what place it occupies in the historical process, and what role it plays in the socialization of man. Philosophy is interested in the most common problems concerning the essence of culture and its role in public life.

The term culture is very ambiguous. In special and fiction

literature, many dozens of his interpretations can be found. So, in everyday life, culture is usually understood as the level of education and upbringing of a person, in contrast to non-education and lack of education. For aesthetics, culture is the numerous productions of professional art and folk art. For the first time this term was used by the Roman orator and philosopher Cicero. By culture, he understood the positive impact of philosophy on the human mind. In his opinion, philosophy is a «culture of the mind,» a subtle tool for understanding the world and man in it.

In Russian philosophy, the concept of culture has traditionally had primarily a high moral content. This manifested the spirit of Orthodoxy with its ideas of goodness, mercy and justice, solidarity between all people and nations. Evil is that which destroys world harmony. On the contrary, Good is the creation of life and harmony in it. This is the main purpose of human culture as a bunch of morality and wisdom. In Russian philosophy, the originality of Russian culture in all its manifestations was emphasized – a way of life and tradition, a form of economic life. In the culture of Russia, a very important role is played by the spiritual principle, the cult of good and justice. Russia is at the intersection of two streams of world history and culture – East and West. That is why it is «doomed» to dialogue with other cultures and has the richest opportunities for spiritual enrichment through such a dialogue.

As you can see, in the history of philosophy, various aspects

of culture were highlighted and studied. Summarizing all of the above, we will answer the question about the essence of culture from the perspective of philosophy.

The term «culture» is translated from Latin as «cultivation», «care», «cultivation», «reverence», etc. The basis of culture is human activity as the main way of its existence in the world. This activity is very diverse in form and in the areas of its manifestation, and therefore, culture is also multifaceted. However, culture is not only a living activity of man, but also its substantive manifestations, as well as relations between people as its creators. Culture is a complex social organism that is born, lives and dies, giving way to new cultural phenomena.

Culture is a philosophical concept for characterizing the development of the forces and abilities of a person as an actor. In reality, it includes the essential forces of man; the process of their application (labor, activity); objective embodiments of this activity (ideas, things); relations between people as members of society (traditions, traditions, etc.). Culture is everything created by the hand and thought of man, the world created by man. This is the «second nature», existing along with ordinary nature. In its reality, it is a complex of achievements of mankind.

From the point of view of its internal structure, culture has two layers. Firstly, it is the material culture of mankind – tools and equipment, housing, communications and appliances, food, the very skills of people's labor. Secondly, it is a spiritual culture

that includes aggregate knowledge and methods of cognition, forms of thinking. This also includes public consciousness, the system of education and upbringing of a person, language, law, etc. There are also such forms of culture that are, as it were, at the junction of these two layers (layers) and represent their organic synthesis. They can be attributed to political culture as a unity of political consciousness and political activity. This is artistic culture as the world of works of art, each of which carries one or many artistic images that have found their substantive embodiment in books, paintings, sculptures.

The spiritual layer in culture plays a particularly important role. By definition, S.L. Franka, culture is «the sediment of the spiritual life of mankind».

Each national culture always has its spiritual core, a kind of core, around which the whole system of culture is formed. Throughout the past millennium for Russia, Orthodoxy as a worldview and morality as a way of life has been such a core. It left a huge imprint on art (for example, icons as a genre in fine art), on the life of people and their traditions, on political life and statehood, on forms of economic activity and labor morality, on other aspects of culture.

The multidimensionality of culture as a social phenomenon is also manifested in its functions. First of all, it performs a cognitive function, which allows you to get knowledge about the world and the person in it. This role is played primarily by science and other forms of knowledge – myths, art, religion.

The practical function suggests that culture serves the purpose of transforming nature through knowledge and tools. This function symbolizes the isolation of man from the rest of the animal world and his elevation above him as an active and creative being.

The axiological function means that culture is a «receptacle» of values, i.e. positive products of a person's spiritual activity – ideas, ideals, images, etc. For centuries, society has accumulated universal values expressed in the moral ideas of goodness, justice, conscience and others.

Finally, the socializing function indicates the role of culture in the formation of the human in man – high needs and noble deeds. Without familiarization with culture (science and art, the traditions of society), there cannot be and cannot be a man brought up. A cultural person, from the point of view of philosophy, is a person who has mastered all the wealth of human culture.

Very often in philosophy, along with culture, the concept of civilization is also used. Not infrequently, these concepts are applied in the same sense. But, although these concepts are somewhat close, such an application is incorrect. Civilization is a definite major epoch in the history of mankind, a step in the development of man as an agent and creator. Culture is the content of a particular historical era, expressed in the totality of spiritual and material values. Each civilization has its own specific culture.

In the cultural aspect, it is also necessary to say about the interaction of philosophy and religion. Today, the issues of religion, its place in modern society, its role in it, its amazing «vitality» are attracting universal attention and make us take a fresh look at our history. Culture and religion are historically determined social phenomena. We can say that religion has some very deep roots and is not a «delusion» with which science can easily cope. Religion is closely related to the extra-logical form of consciousness; it is involved in the formation of the extra-logical knowledge of man. However, religion is not at all limited to the knowledge of the world; the range of its tasks is much wider. The behavior of a person in the world is based on knowledge about him. This knowledge is formed, as it were, in two interconnected spheres – one where logic has a decisive word, and the other where feelings, compassion, love for one's neighbor dominate. In harmoniously developed people, both sources of knowledge – both logical and non-logical – are in a certain equilibrium and determine behavior. Humanity needs a holistic worldview, the foundation of which lies both the scientific picture of the world and its extra-scientific perception.

Religion, like philosophy, is a form of social consciousness. Religious consciousness is a «compensator» of a person's social weakness. It is characterized by belief in the supernatural and thinking by dogmas. The main object of reflection in religious consciousness is God as allegedly the Creator and Savior of the world and man. Reflection of the world in this form of social

consciousness is carried out in the form of fantasies and beliefs, feelings and motivations, cult actions.

Philosophical consciousness is accessible, as a rule, only to the most educated part of society. It includes not only accurate knowledge, but also the wisdom of a person as a generalization of his life experience. Unlike the exact sciences, philosophy is always inherent in a personal attitude to the phenomena of social life. None of the sciences explores the most complex worldview questions about the meaning of a person's life, about his death and immortality, about his calling in society. For philosophy, all this is one of its most important tasks.

Briefly speaking, philosophy develops a person's ability for theoretical thinking and the formation of one's own worldview. In this sense, as noted by G. Hegel, «there is no worse means for obtaining daily bread than philosophy.» It is primarily the art of thinking, designed to help a person gain wisdom, or «good mind» as an important intellectual characteristic. True wisdom is, in the words of Heraclitus, «to speak the truth and, listening to the voice of nature, to act according to it.» A wise person is one who not only thinks correctly, but also acts correctly.

So, philosophy is a very ancient and multidimensional phenomenon of the spiritual culture of mankind. Its specificity and a special role in the life of society and the individual (the development of the ability to theoretical thinking and the formation of a worldview) requires a serious and thoughtful attitude to it. Philosophy is a synthesis of Truth, Good and

Beauty, the core of the spiritual culture of human society.



# Philosophical ideas of the East

Philosophical ideas in ancient India began to take shape around the second millennium BC. Humanity does not know earlier examples. In our time, they became famous thanks to the ancient Indian literary monuments under the general name «Vedas», literally meaning knowledge, knowledge. The Vedas are a kind of hymns, prayers, chants, spells, etc. They are written approximately in the second millennium BC. e. in Sanskrit.

For the first time, the Vedas make an attempt to approach the philosophical interpretation of the human environment. Although they contain a semi-superstitious, semi-mythical, semi-religious explanation of the world around a person, nevertheless they are considered as philosophical, or rather pre-philosophical, pre-philosophical sources. Actually, the first literary works in which attempts are made to philosophize, that is, to interpret the world around a person, could not be different in content.

The philosophical works corresponding to our ideas about the nature of the statement of problems, and the form of presentation of the material and their solutions, are the Upanishads, which literally means sitting at the feet of the teacher and receiving instructions. They appeared approximately in the 9th – 6th centuries BC and in form represented, as a rule, the dialogue of the sage with his student or with

a person who seeks the truth and subsequently becomes his student. In total, about a hundred Upanishads are known. The religious and mythological interpretation of the environment in the most famous Upanishads develops to a certain extent into a differentiated understanding of the phenomena of the world. So, there are ideas about the existence of various types of knowledge, in particular, logic (rhetoric), grammar, astronomy, science of numbers and military science. Ideas are also emerging about philosophy as a kind of field of knowledge. Although the authors of the Upanishads failed to completely get rid of the religious and mythological interpretation of the world, the Upanishads and, in particular, such as Brihadaratsyaka, Chandogya, Aytareya, Isha, Kena, can be considered»,» Katha «the earliest known philosophical works.

In the Upanishads, primarily in the works mentioned above, an attempt is made to pose and discuss such significant philosophical problems as clarifying the fundamental principles of nature and man, the nature of man, his place and role in his environment, cognitive abilities, norms of behavior and role in this human psyche. Of course, the interpretation and explanation of all these problems is very controversial, and sometimes there are opinions that are mutually exclusive.

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