

IGOR HRUŠOVSKÝ AND THE PROBLEM OF BEING

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The paper offers a reconstruction of Hrušovský's conception of being. The author points out that Hrušovský's aim was a new, nonclassical understanding of ontology as naturally connected with epistemology, axiology, and the theory of action. Some terminological and methodological problems brought about by Hrušovský's efforts are examined as well.

Our current discussion is entirely different from discussions held in the seventies. At that time, the crucial problem was whether Hrušovský was or was not Marxist. Some accused him of fideism, neopositivism and revisionism ([9], 456, 458, 459). Such accusations were usually followed by some administrative measures. This was also the reason why some authors tried to defend Hrušovský: they emphasized that he was, except for some terminological deviations, Marxist ([10], 398, 399, 401). Today we do not see the chief problem of the discussion in the question whether he was Marxist or not, but whether and how his work contributed to the solution of some crucial problems of philosophy and human culture as a whole. We realize that Hrušovský's work as well as any other work has to be measured according to particular conditions. We remember very well that the conditions under which his work was created, were "often very imperative", as the author himself repeatedly complained ([3], 126).

In the seventies Hrušovský tried to build up a new concept of ontology. I underline the *new* concept of ontology. The question raised in our discussion was: "How is it possible that Hrušovský moved from noetics to ontology?" The problem is that he actually did not proceed from noetics to ontology but from noetics based on classical ontology, with survivals of naive realism, to nonclassical ontology. He understood the preparation of the new ontological basis of structurology as "the second milestone in his life activities", as a completion of the process of crystallization of his whole philosophy ([3], 141; [2], 362). In addition to an article on the category of being (1971), two essays on ontology (1974, 1977) and *Dialóg s čertom*

(Dialogue with the Devil), it was chiefly his book *Dialektika bytia a kultúry* (Dialectic of Being and Culture) (1975) that was devoted to this issue. Its core was “the creation of the horizon” ([3], 11, 43–94). Hrušovský regarded our objective being, objective reality as our human horizon, practical-noetic, socio-cultural insight of humans into an infinite variety of being. A correct answer to this question was therefore central to Hrušovský’s attention.

Hrušovský’s essential presumption was that in order to know what is objective being we have to know what is being *per se*. He designated the concept of being as such as “ontic” and the concept of objective being as the “ontological” category. He looked for a solution to the problem in going from the ontic category of being to the ontological one ([1], 13; [3], 139; [2], 46; [4], 462). As an expert in the history of philosophy, he obviously knew that the word “being” is derived from the verb “to be” and that the verb “to be” is used to express both something that exists (*esse*) and has an essence, is a certain mode of existence ([1], 122; [3], 44). He connected being in the first, existential sense, with the category of ontic being and being in the second sense, in terms of the mode of existence, with the category of ontological being.

The ontic concept of being was characterized by Hrušovský as a certain formal abstraction, which we have reached by averting from the particular modes of being. In this abstraction, being is, in his opinion, merely defined in its existential reference and/or in its existential independence of our consciousness. This non-dialectical, purely formal abstraction of being was characterized by Hrušovský as an undetermined, naked, empty, unqualified, undifferentiated non-objectual, non-affirmed, imperceptible being, and/or as being which has not yet become an object of concrete consciousness, as being, in which we have not distinguished various modes of existence as yet. He understood it as an abstraction of pure being related to empty consciousness ([1], 133; [3], 44, 5, 52, 64, 15, 152; [2], 162; [4], 46, 462, 465).

Hrušovský’s characteristics of naked being is actually the criticism of cleatic being, where “one” was placed in analytical opposition to “many” but also the criticism of the Kantian concept of being, where, understood in this way, being was shifted to the domain of things-in-themselves ([3], 157; [4] 465), as well as the critique of Hegelian pure being equal to pure thought and as such it is empty nothing. Naked, internally undifferentiated being could not, according to Hrušovský, contact the active subject, it would be imperceptible, cognitive, and practically unmanageable ([1], 13; [3], 45; [6], 164). The ontic concept of being should therefore, according to him, be better defined.

Making the concept of ontic being according to Hrušovský more precise means introduction of a prerequisite of peratic being. The term “peratic” is probably derived from Greek ‘*peras*’ meaning the boundary, border, limitation. Hrušovský’s point was not the etymology of the word; he followed a certain tradition of ancient philosophy, where being was characterized as a controversial unity of the unlimited (*apeiron*) and of the limited (*peras*) and where keeping a variety of shapes of being

in harmony was emphasized. He primarily followed Pythagoras, who was the first to elaborate this limiting, delimiting, shaping side of being.

However, according to Hrušovský, even in the abstraction of thus defined ontic being, the concept of concrete being was still lacking. It is still naked being, although now comprising the potential possibility of concretely determined being ([3], 45; [4], 462). It is now being, in which ‘some’, although not yet concretely defined differentiation, order, law is presumed ([3], 45, 46, 47, 141, 150; [2], 363; [4], 462). Thanks to the prerequisite of peratic being, it is not understood any more as internally undifferentiated, eleatic “one”, or as a chaotic plurality of “many” but as a sort of, although not yet well determined, antichaotic unity of the different. Such a definition of the concept of being leads us closer, according to Hrušovský, to understanding the concrete being which becomes an object of concrete consciousness. Such a step is, as Hrušovský puts it, “objectification of being” in human practical-cognitive activities.

‘Concrete being’ is characterized by Hrušovský primarily as ‘objective’ being; objective means, according to Hrušovský, that it becomes an object of human action and human knowledge; being is affirmed, acquired by a creative power of the practical subject ([3], 43, 49–50, 151; [4], 462). Concrete being is, according to Hrušovský, being which has become an ‘object’ of the concrete consciousness of the practical subject, its objective reality ([3], 46, 50, 84, 150, 152). In other words, it is being which has already been integrated into the structure of practical and cognitive human activities, being, which has already become of some social importance and personal sense to humans, that is being which has become of some value to humans.

Being, which has become an object and thus also of value to humans, is also co-determined “by the participation of the socio-human subject” ([3], 46); thanks to the onto-creative activity of the subject, being-in-itself becomes being for us ([3], 47). The topical value of various modes of being presumes then, according to Hrušovský, a tension between the subjective-human value norm and the object of evaluation; “it emerges” in confrontation of both poles, the object (objective reality) and the subject (value norm) ([3], 32, 33–36, 152, 156).

According to Hrušovský, concrete being is ‘determined being’, not only in relation to human action and human knowledge but also in terms of its characterization as something that has a concrete form, where various modes of being are differentiated, its special forms and levels (abiotic, biotic, socio-cultural). The form of being itself is thereby understood as an abundant form, as a mode of the existence of the genetically structured content of different modes of being [3], 48, 64; [6], 166).

Within the ontological category of being, even the ‘concrete order’ of different modes of being at a certain universal level is defined, firstly by means of the categories of space and time and then also by means of the whole system of philosophical categories. In the ontological category of objective being, being starts to

be characterized as 'our reality', as 'the world where we live', as the 'facticity' of our world, as our own 'horizon' ([3], 51).

In brief, this is the rational core of Hrušovský's interpretation of the category of being. The characteristic features of his concept of new, non-classical ontology are as follows:

1. an effort 'to interconnect ontology and noetics'. If objective reality is being, which has become an object of cognitive human activities, then it cannot be defined without gnoseology or noetics;

2. an effort 'to interconnect ontology and axiology'. If objective being is being, which has become of value to humans, it cannot be defined without axiology;

3. an effort 'to interconnect ontology and the philosophy of practice', the theory of action. If objectual being is being, which has become an object of action, of human practical activities, then it cannot be defined without the theory of action, without the philosophy of practice;

4. Hrušovský's ontology is a critique of philosophical essentialism; it does not recognize the existence of the individual or universal being, which has been shown to be a sort of invariable essence given for ever of all other beings ([2], 364; [6], 165). It justifiably denies, however, also the conception of anti-essentialism; it recognizes that there are binar oppositions, genetically structured essences of special modes of being. According to him, to define the essence of the thing, the process, the living idea, event, "means to know its inner binar opposition, the dynamic interaction of its constituents" ([3], 61);

5. Hrušovský's ontology is a critique of classical substantial ontology; it rejects the traditional understanding of substance as subsistence, a rigid substrate, bearer of properties, as a sort of pre-substantial essence of being, as a sort of invariable, and thus also non-analyzable fundamental entities. He does pass, however, quite unambiguously to the positions of non-substantial ontology as it is sometimes reported ([7], 177). He admits (apart from a possibility of leaving the term of substance) also the possibility of re-definition and re-interpretation of the category of substance as "an inner dynamics of an object", as inexhaustibility of the relations of mutual actions, self-motion and self-development ([1], 126; [3], 59–60, 33, 89; [2], 366; [4], 466; [6], 162, 168).

Hrušovský had probably known (at least through e.g. M. Suchý) "Útecha z ontologie" (Consolation from ontology) by Z. Fišer and anticipated some conclusions from the discussion on the so-called end of ontology which took place almost twenty years later (in 1994) in the Czech *Filosofický časopis*. Unfortunately, he was not able to bring his efforts to build up a new non-classical ontology to a close. He was hindered not only by unfavourable disputes which annoyed him, but also by some problems of a terminological and methodological character.

Let us give just a concise account of some problems of a 'terminological' character. For example Hrušovský claimed that concrete, objective being is formed "in the process of objectifying the naked being" ([3], 51). It is not clear how objective

reality can be formed by objectifying the formal abstraction of naked being. The problem evidently consists in an insufficient differentiation between being and the concept of being as well as in the identification of objectification with affirmation ([3], 49). According to Hrušovský naked being is “existentially independent” of consciousness ([3], 44, 150). It is not clear how our abstraction of naked being can be existentially independent of our consciousness; on the other hand, it is not clear, why we should delimit our consciousness (and the ideal as a whole) from being as such, since our consciousness is, it exists. The problem consists in the identification of the two different things: the ‘ontological’ question about being as naked existence (cns means *esse habet*) and the gnoseological question about the independence of objective being, the objective reality of our consciousness. Hrušovský emphasizes the necessity to distinguish between these questions ([1], 122), but he calls the ontological concept of being as such (as naked existence) “ontic being” and connects it with the underlying gnoseological question (the question of the existential independence of being of consciousness), while the gnoseological concept of objective being (related to our consciousness) is called “ontological being” including also “being of consciousness” ([1], 122, 133) although our consciousness is a relative gnoseological opposition to objective being (and one of the key principles of human action is the principle, according to which objective being cannot be identified with the consciousness of being).

Hrušovský also argues that the topical value is “the effect of the process of assessment” ([3], 33). It is not clear why we should regard the value only as the effect of our evaluation. Such an argument would only be justified if we would reduce the onto-creative or value-creative activity of the subject to the process of evaluation. It is, however, difficult to agree with this, even from the position of Hrušovský’s ontology, where he underscores the onto-creative mission of cultural creation ([3], 23). These and similar arguments by Hrušovský were evidently logically inconsistent and provoked useless ideological reactions.

However, it is not only terminology that is involved, but also a deeper ‘methodological’ problem. Hrušovský was right to indicate, as we have already mentioned above, that the concept of concrete being cannot be derived from the pure abstraction of naked being. In spite of this, in his conclusions, Hrušovský again returns to his reasoning that “the dialectic relation between objective being and concrete consciousness” is based on the formal abstract relation “naked being – empty consciousness” in “the process of practical activity” ([3], 150). It appears that in his interpretation of the concept of being, Hrušovský was unable to distract from the method following the procedure common for the definition of the concept by genus and difference. But such a procedure (although recalling the procedure from abstract to concrete) is not suitable where elucidation of the formation of the opposition between objective being and consciousness is at issue. Scientific explanation has different logical structure than the definition by genus and difference.

It is true that for defining the concept of objective being, we need a concept of being but the formation of the objective being cannot be derived from the concept of being, just as the creation of man cannot be derived from the concept of animal. Humans were not created from the concept of animal but from the real type of animals, who began to produce tools, to act, to realize their objectual life activities. Nor was the relation between objective being and consciousness formed from the concept of pure being related to pure consciousness but from a certain type of natural being, that preceded humans and which found in humans, their practical and cognitive activities, a new, socio-cultural form of its existence and its self-knowledge. The real elucidation of the process of the creation of the binary opposition between objective being and the consciousness of being sought after requires a deep analysis of the interaction of nature and human history, as indicated by L.S. Rubinstein ([11], s. 355, 439), to whom Hrušovský himself often referred.

One of the basic mistakes in the disputes of the seventies was that they were based on the literal wording of some of Hrušovský's arguments; they usually did not even try to understand what the author's intended to say. One of the advantages of our current discussion is that it tries to understand Hrušovský and only later formulate some critical objections. Without understanding the work, it cannot be continued successfully; without critical relation to the work, its further creative development is not possible.

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