

Theory and History of Ontology (www.ontology.co) by Raul Corazzon | e-mail: rc@ontology.co

Key Terms in Ontology: Introductory Remarks

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Introduction

The following pages are an attempt to give a synthetic panorama of the current research on some main concepts of ontology, both from an historical and from a theoretical point of view.

The main authors who contribute to the philosophical refinement of the concepts will be cited, with special attention paid to the relevant contributions from linguistics, when appropriate, and Bibliographical references for further study; attention will be given to the linguistic relativity hypothesis: i.e. what influence (if any) the structure and lexicon of language had on the thought. The "question of being" initially evolved in Greece and India (1), (Greek and Sanskrit are both Indo-European languages), but not in China or Islam (the difficulties of translating the concept of "being" in Arabic are illustrated by the well-known Al-Farabi's chapter in his "*Kitab-al-huruf*" - *The book of Letters*) (2).

Philosophers, with few exceptions (e.g. Wilhelm von Humboldt, or Adolf Trendelenburg's work on the grammatical origin of Aristotelian *Categories*) have generally neglected this problem, or have spoken of the excellence of Greek language to explain the historical origins of metaphysics (e.g. Martin Heidegger: "For along with the German language, Greek (in regard to the possibilities of thinking) is at once the most powerful and the most spiritual of languages") (3). I think that a consideration of the recent results of linguistic research would provide a better evaluation of the question.

In some cases an attempt will be made to give a brief information about the equivalent concepts of Arabic, Chinese and Indian philosophy to offer a comparative vision of the problems.

I will made these additions only with much hesitation; I am not an Orientalist and my only justification is the lack of relevant information available on the Internet about this important subject; perhaps experienced scholars will supply more advanced contributions to complete, and if necessary to correct, my job.

I hope to add other items in future; suggestions and criticism are equally welcome.

Notes

(1) "There is no equivalent to the Aristotelian project of a 'science of being qua being' in the Indian philosophical tradition, nor the Platonic perplexity about being and nonbeing; nor is there an explicit counterpart to Wolff's conception of 'ontology'. Yet being is one of the central and pervasive themes of Indian thought. It is the object of intense reflection, discussion, and disagreement, and a catalyst of debate among the competing schools of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism." Wilhelm Halbfass, *On Being and What There Is*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 21.

(2) See: Amina Rachid, "Dieu et l'être selon Al-Farabi: le chapitre de 'l'être' dans le *Livre des Lettres*", in: Centre d'Étude pour la Religion du Livre (ed.), *Dieu et l'Être. Exégèses d'Exode 3,14 et de Coran 20.11-24*, Paris: Études augustinienes 1978, pp. 179-190.

(3) Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2000 p. 60.

Some resources for Asian philosophy

1. Reyna Ruth. *Dictionary of Oriental Philosophy*. Philadelphia: Coronet Books 1977.
2. Grimes John. *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy: Sanskrit Terms Defined in English*. Albany: State University of New York Press 1996.
3. Leaman Oliver. *Key Concepts in Asian Philosophy*. New York: Routledge 1999.
4. Dainian Zhang. *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press 2002.

Related pages

[On the website "Theory and History of Ontology" \(www.ontology.co\)](http://www.ontology.co)

In parenthesis the Greek / Latin original term.

[Being](#) (*Einai, Esse*)

[Existence](#) (*Hyparkein, Existentia*)

[Nonexistence](#)

[Substance](#) (*Ousia, Substantia*)

[Mathesis universalis](#)