

Ontology or Epistemology: A Debate on the Philosophical Implication of Information [†]

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Abstract: Whether in the nearly 40 years' researches on Chinese Philosophy of Information (PI), or in the conversation between Chinese and Western PI, there has always been a fundamental topic, which is the discussion or definition about the philosophic nature of information, focusing on whether philosophical meaning of information is a "ontological" concept or not, and how could it be possible to become into an issue of ontology. Is there "objective information" ("information-in-itself") and how to establish a world of "binary-unity of matter and information"? How could the information be possible to exist in the ontological sense, or how to establish the ontological status of information? Is "Ontological information" a kind of "ontological informationalism" or "Pan-informationalism"? etc. It is of great significance for the study on PI to sort out and reconsider these arguments.

Keywords: philosophy of information; ontological information; epistemological information; information-in-itself

1. Introduction

Whether it is the course of research and development of Chinese information philosophy in the past 40 years or the process of dialogue and communication between Chinese and Western information philosophy, the question of the nature of information philosophy is the most central issue of whether philosophy of information can be established and what kind of philosophy can information philosophy become. The subject status of information philosophy, as well as all other aspects of information philosophy, depends on the way of answering this question. Thus, the philosophical meaning of information has always become the fundamental topic of the study of information philosophy, many scholars have conducted fruitful arguments. One of the focuses of discussion and debate is whether the philosophical meaning of information is an "ontological" problem. For example, Professor Wu Kun and Professor Xiao Feng's debate [1], Professor Wu Kun and Professor Huo Youguang's debate [2,3], Professor Wu Kun and Zhou Liqian, Søren Brier's discussion [4] and so on.

2. The Existence of Objective Information

During the exploration and Creation of the Study of Information Philosophy, it seems that objective informative is not a problem. "On The eighties of the 20th century, there is no market for the theories that unscramble the information subjectively in the field of philosophy of China. In recent years, to appeal to the ideas of some western scholars, a few academicians started to interpret

information using phenomenological subjective field approach. The most representative scholar is Xiao Feng."

All the arguments widely approve that "information is itself but material or energy" posed by Wiener. Thus, in the general philosophical sense, information does not equal to the material itself and the structure and form of the material. Whether from the specific science or from a philosophical point of view, when the researchers distinguish information from materials, they admit that the information can not be separated from the material and the information must be carried by the material. Whereas this idea accepted widely also leads to different opinions. For example, Xiao Feng pointed out that either the information attributed to something or something of a property, or to the information for "epistemological understanding." Obviously Xiao Feng chose the latter. Another example, Professor Huo Youguang bluntly pointed out that the information is only a "epistemological concept": "If the definition of a philosophical information to the information, then the so-called information is the material (things) attributes, the law and the use of the cognitive results of the sum of"; "Information 'as the subject (person) on the object' understanding"; "The message is that people perceive the product after the object, before the generation of human society, nature is not 'nothing' can perceive the information, only the eternal material movement."

In this regard, Professor Wu Kun made a very wonderful "defense" [5]. He first pointed out that "can not be attributed to the material, does not mean that there is no objective information." Because "objective" and "material" are not the same concept, "objective" and "real" are not the same concept, if the material as "objective reality", the objective is not all real, objective are not all material. Professor Wu Kun thinks it is a mistake considering Information Field to "Information existing in field form is a substance." Material Field possesses its own material structure, function and feature. Material Field is a direct and concrete existence form of substance. However, competing with other objects, every object is of infinite difference. On the other side, the infinite difference of internal composition, structure and gradation is in every object. For the two infinite difference, every object and its field show the infinite difference characteristics between its own self and other objects. As for the characteristics of infinite difference of field, an object expresses and externalizes its own existence and condition. Thereby, granting Material Field the ability to fetch information. As a result, every field is of two existence consequences simultaneously. One is the direct existence of material of field itself, it defined Material Field. The other is the indirect existence of a direct existence, revealed by the field. Based on this, the field is defined Information Field. Material field and information field are the same field of two different meaning and value of the two different angles of the abstract. This not only reveals the difference and unity of the material field and the information field, but also reveals the difference and unity of the directness and indirectness of the field itself, also reveals the universal connection, transformation, transition and universal interaction of things.

Not only the field has the meaning and value of the dual existence of material and information, and all objects have the meaning and value of this double existence, that is, all objects are both material and information body, is the unity of material body and information body. It is also because of the lack of understanding or misunderstanding of this point, Mr. Xiao Feng and Mr. Huo Youguang strongly denied the existence of objective information.

3. Whether the Information Is Belong to Ontological or Epistemological Categories

As mentioned above, the inevitable consequence of denying or not understanding the nature of the dual existence of matter and information in the world is that it can not only understand the true meaning of "information and materialism", but also fall into the reality and non-reality of so-called information, Information objectivity and subjectivity of the paradox, and ultimately must take the subjective way of information, that information can only be an epistemological concept. For example, in order to emphasize "there is no so-called 'ontological information', but only in epistemological sense of information."

Mr. Xiao Feng identified: epistemological information definition is the ultimate definition of information, and even the unique definition. Information can only be explained from the epistemological point of view. The key of regarding information as the definition of the

epistemological level and even the ultimate definition is to directly equate “meaning” with “information”. Regards that all the meaning is generated by the interpretation, and the meaning and information is equivalent. The information is the product of interpretation and (or) the meaning, and only people can justice and interpretation.

To this end, the response of Professor Wu Kun is that, (in the sense of information philosophy) information epistemological definition is redundant! Because knowledge as a kind of information phenomenon, the not a form of native information, but a form of advanced information activities which born in the integrated construction and virtuality of the multiple information intermediary selection, compound, matching and reconstruction. While the meaning of information and information can exist in the form of information, but the two are not equal in the extension. The “meaning” produced by know way in essential is the kind of existence form of information, but we can not boil all information down to “meaning” form information. Because there is more non-meaning information that is information that displays and represents the facts. For example, what commonly referred to as “meaning”, in the three-level information theory, is just relevant content of the third level of information, and not all of it.

4. The Perspective and Significance of “Ontological Information”

It seems that Xiao Feng also have “Ontological” message, which is “Ontological informationalism”. Xiao Feng believes that information philosophy that adheres to infoemationalism is the philosophy of ‘new breakthrough’, otherwise it can not afford this title; The philosophy of materialism or idealism is not a new breakthrough in philosophy; The philosophy of information that insists on informationism can only be the philosophy of information that insists on the ontology of information or advocates ontology.

This assertion presents a quality criterion for the philosophical revolution which argues that there are two different paradigms of the ontological philosophy by now, one is the materialism and the other is the idealism. If the information philosophy revolutionized philosophy of the new. It is unescapable to replace the two philosophical paradigm fundamentally. That is to say only by adhere the paradigm of information philosophy can bring “new philosophical revolution”. Whether it is a materialist doctrine or an idealist doctrine, there should be a prerequisite theory, which is what kind of phenomenon constitutes the world, and the relationship between these phenomena, which is the originality, who has the Derivative.

In fact, ontological information does not absolutely means ontological informationism, nor “pan-informationism”. Because traditional philosophy insists the principle of separation of mind and dichotomy, all that of the world can be attributed to two major areas, material phenomena and spiritual phenomena. This kind of division of the field of existence is the most basic ontological principle of traditional philosophy. Under this ontological principle, there is a materialism or idealism doctrine that interprets material and spiritual relationships. In view of this, the paradigm of philosophical ontology is hierarchical. The division of the field of existence is the highest paradigm, and the interpretation of the specific relationship between the various areas of existence is a secondary paradigm. It does not constitute a fundamental philosophical revolution if there is no change in the way of existence, but only in the material and spiritual relations.

The diversion of Information philosophy to philosophy is different from the shift of philosophy in the past, and it is, first and foremost, the change that triggers the highest level of philosophy in the way of division. The philosophy of information regards information as a third phenomenon that distinguishes between material phenomena and spiritual phenomena revealed by traditional philosophy. It is also in the existence of the division of the revolutionary changes, we have the criterion that the philosophy of information may be the fundamental shift in the history of human philosophy.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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