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In examining the phenomenon of lack, it is essential to develop a clear and nuanced understanding of the relationship between lack and ontology. Neither the concept of lack nor the concept of ontology is unambiguous; both require exploration from multiple perspectives. Without such a multifaceted discussion, the concept of the ontology of lack—whose significance became apparent during the initial phase of research into lack—cannot be properly understood.

The initial phase of research into the concept of lack has revealed that, alongside moral evil—including moral vices, flawed intentions, and ethically compromised actions, all of which may be regarded as manifestations of moral "lack"—there exists a qualitatively distinct phenomenon: ontological lack, which arises not from human misconduct but from the very structure of reality itself. This form of lack is not the product of faulty human will or intention; it is neither inherently good nor evil, and therefore should not be regarded as something morally reprehensible or as a condition to be eradicated from all human experience.

Because ontological lack is rooted in the ontological structure of reality, its complete elimination is impossible. Though it often manifests as an inconvenience or even suffering, ontological lack should not be considered morally negative in itself. On the contrary, it often reveals its constructive dimensions, functioning as a precondition for human creativity, growth, and the unfolding of potential.

When confronted with various manifestations of ontological lack in action, human beings may attempt to overcome

or mitigate them—but only partially, to a limited extent, and in specific contexts. Such lack cannot be resolved absolutely or definitively, for ontological lack—as a negative moment within being itself—is an integral part of the very framework of being and cannot be removed by human effort.

When the individual realizes that ontological lack cannot simply be undone or willed away, and that it cannot be excluded from the conditions of existence, he must come to terms with the impossibility of ignoring it if he wishes to act wisely and avoid self-harm. What remains is the possibility of acting in spite of ontological lack: by encountering its resistance, enduring its weight, and striving toward one's goals nonetheless, a person not only advances but also strengthens and forms their moral character.

By distinguishing ontological lack from moral evil—that is, from moral "lack"—the second stage of research into lack necessitates an exploration of the various forms that ontological lack may take, as well as a more precise articulation of what is meant by the term ontology of lack. This term admits of multiple interpretations, not only because ontological lack—already differentiated from moral lack—manifests in diverse ways, but also because the concept of ontology itself can be employed in various philosophical senses.

First of all, it is important to note that ontological lack, as it appears in human experience, manifests not only as the absence of something a person ought to possess by nature or by custom—a lack typically understood as an undesirable deficiency signaling a deviation from a given norm, such as a physical defect (for example, the absence of a lost arm—a type of lack Aristotle referred to with the Greek term *sterēsis*, denoting privation or defect)—nor merely as a shortage of natural, financial, or other resources required to meet human needs, described in economic theory by the English word scarcity. Ontological

lack may also appear as a potential lack, one that arises not from any natural deficiency but from the human recognition of a new possibility.

For instance, the absence of wings—or the lack of wings—is not a natural defect (sterēsis in the Aristotelian sense) in the case of a human being, as it would be for a bird that had lost its wings, since the human being, by nature, cannot fly and has no wings. Yet, a person, upon looking up at the sky and seeing a bird gliding through the air, might feel a desire—as indeed occurred in human history—to fly like the winged creatures above. This desire, which opens up a not-yet-realized but fundamentally possible capacity to fly, may be described as a lack of potential wings—that is, in relation to the potentiality of wings, as a potential lack.

Unlike other living beings, which experience ontological lack only in the form of natural deficiency—a defect or sterēsis—the human being, due to their vivid imagination, which enables them to envision possibilities far beyond what is naturally given, and their rational capacity to address the challenges involved in pursuing what was imagined as a realizable possibility and thereby became an object of desire, is capable of experiencing ontological lack also as potential ontological lack, which may take countless forms.

In this context, the potentiality of lack refers to the fact that such lack may remain unnoticed for a long time—so to speak, dormant, like an unrealized possibility or latent potential—until, one day, it "awakens," is perceived as a lack, and may eventually, through human effort directed toward the fulfillment of a given desire, be overcome.

Bearing in mind these two distinct types of ontological lack—which are, in turn, different from moral deficiency (that is, moral "lack")—namely: (1) inherent ontological lack, a certain intrinsic deficiency or defect (possibly indirectly

connected to moral evil as its consequence, yet not directly identical with moral evil itself), and (2) potential ontological lack, it becomes evident how important the careful selection of appropriate synonyms for expressing lack is, particularly when these terms are used in contexts describing the various phenomena of ontological lack.

For example, the Lithuanian word *stoka* conveys the range of meanings associated with ontological lack far more effectively than the word *trūkumas*. After all, stoka does not necessarily indicate a deficiency (for instance, potential ontological lack is not, in itself, any inherent deficiency), whereas every deficiency is, in some sense, a form of stoka. Thus, if we imagine the semantic scope of stoka as a set encompassing diverse manifestations of lack, the term trūkumas could be seen as a subset within that broader set.

Similarly, the English equivalent lack is semantically more capacious than synonyms that more specifically denote deficiency in the sense of the Greek sterēsis, such as privation and deficiency, or the noun scarcity, which refers to a condition of rarity.

Let us now turn to a discussion of the meanings of the term ontology. Traditionally, this term refers to the science (*logos*) of being—from the Greek to *einai*, the substantivized (or nominalized) infinitive form of the verb einai, meaning "to be"—or of entity, expressed in Greek as to on (plural: *ta onta*), the present participial form of the same verb.

Even Aristotle recognized that reasoning about being—whether the being of a particular individual entity (*to on*), or being in and of itself, being as being (*to on hēi on*)—is far from straightforward. Referring to to on, Aristotle stated that being is said in many ways (*to on esti pollachōs legomenon*), namely with respect to the essence of an entity (*ousia*) and the nine additional categories designating accidents (*ta sumbebēkota*).

The ten Aristotelian categories—of which the first and primary is the category of essence, set against the remaining nine accidental or "non-essential" categories—suggest that, for Aristotle, an entity can be thought of both in terms of its essence, its ontological core or nucleus, and its periphery, like a shell surrounding that core. The very number of these categories—ten—may be seen as an early sign that ontology, from its origins in ancient Greek thought, evolved as a discipline attentive to subtle distinctions and nuances.

Nevertheless, such a conception of being—more precisely, of a being understood in substantial and essentialist terms—marked only the beginning of what would become a profoundly intricate philosophical inquiry into the nature of ontology.

From a contemporary ontological perspective, the following three distinctions should be regarded as particularly significant.

The first is the distinction between ontology understood in an essentialist sense and ontology understood in an existential sense. Essentialist ontology is the classical, metaphysical form of ontology that began to take shape in ancient Greece. When conceived in essentialist terms—as a theory of being—ontology, together with epistemology (the theory of knowledge), constitutes the domain of metaphysics. It is often identified with metaphysics itself, since within this dual structure, ontology is typically viewed as the more fundamental component.

In this metaphysical conception, the focus is on being as such—that is, being as it exists independently of human subjectivity, imagination, or desire—and as determined by the objective nature of reality itself.

By contrast, existential ontology—a post-classical development—centers on specifically human being, on the

temporality of human existence. Its concrete form is shaped not primarily by the objective nature of reality, but by the subjective, free, and volitional decisions of each individual: the striving and capacity to freely and deliberately define one's life goals and to realize them as the "project" of one's finite existence.

Existential ontology is, in essence, a product of the first half of the twentieth century, though its intellectual formation began around the mid-nineteenth century. This strand of ontology is most closely associated with thinkers of the existentialist tradition, such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus.

The second distinction must be made within essentialist—or, in other words, metaphysical—ontology itself. In the terminology of Medieval scholastic philosophy, this is the distinction between the existence (Latin *existentia*, equivalent to the Greek to einai) of an entity (Latin *ens*, corresponding to the Greek to on) and the essence (Latin *essentia*, equivalent to the Greek ousia) of that entity.

The existence of an entity refers to the fact that the entity actually is—that its essence has been instantiated in actuality, in concrete being, rather than merely residing as a concept in someone's mind, such as in the mind of the Creator. In contrast, the essence of an entity denotes the fundamental information about the entity's nature—a kind of plan or blueprint held in the Creator's mind, which the Creator could, if He so chose, realize in concrete being by bestowing the act of existence upon the essence of a potential entity, thus calling it into actual existence.

The third distinction may be drawn in both essentialist and existential ontology, though it takes a somewhat different form in each case.

In essentialist philosophy, this is the distinction between being as such—in Aristotle's terms, being as being (to on hēi on)—conceived in the most general philosophical sense, as the most abstract and fundamental ground of reality, and the

being of any particular individual entity, which is understood in terms of both its existence and essence. In the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, this corresponds to the distinction between God as the source of all concrete being (*fons entis*) and the being of each individual entity as a creation of God.

In existential philosophy, this distinction takes on a two-fold form. On the one hand, it is the distinction between Being (in Heidegger's terms, *Sein*), conceived not only abstractly but also temporally, historically, and in a non-essentialist manner, and any individual entity (das *Seiende*). This distinction—between Sein and Seiendes—expresses what Heidegger famously calls the ontological difference.

On the other hand, it is also the distinction between Being (Sein) and each individual human being, understood as a concrete, temporal "being-there" (*Dasein*), or existence (*Existenz*); as well as the distinction between each individual non-human entity (das Seiende), conceived in essentialist terms, and human existence (Existenz).

Although these distinctions may initially appear complex, within the context of studies on lack, it is essential not to overlook the following: given the diversity of meanings inherent in the term ontology itself, the use of the expression ontology of lack requires attentiveness to two distinct dimensions. First, one must consider objective, "hard," human-independent being—whose metaphysical structure provides the ontological foundation for lack, a foundation that remains unaffected by human imagination, reasoning, desire, or will. Second, attention must also be paid to specifically human being, in the sense developed by existential philosophy. This latter form of being, while partly conditioned by objective factors beyond the individual's control, is nonetheless not determined in an absolute or unambiguous way. As such, it may be freely and voluntarily

projected and shaped by the individual in the pursuit of a chosen existential project.

These two dimensions of ontology—the essentialist and the existential—should be understood as complementary. The essentialist aspect discloses the firm, immutable framework of objective being and non-human reality, which cannot be altered by human whims or imaginative constructs, and within which human existence must locate itself and to which it must respond. The existential aspect, by contrast, opens up a space for human freedom—for subjective choice, for the variability of personally chosen ends and means. It reveals a domain of spontaneity, openness to risk, and the capacity for free maneuvering within the solid, structured terrain of objective reality.

Put more succinctly, the essentialist aspect of ontology discloses the dimension of necessity in reality, while the existential aspect reveals the dimension of freedom. These two dimensions are dialectically interrelated and irreducible to one another: freedom is impossible without necessity, and necessity cannot be meaningfully grasped without freedom.

We would neither recognize the value of freedom—nor even understand what freedom is—if we did not constantly encounter the "hardness" of reality, that is, the ever-present constraints imposed by objective ontological structure, which manifest as ontological necessity. Conversely, we can only sense this ontological necessity—the framework and resistance of objective reality—when we possess at least a minimal capacity for free movement. It is through movement that we come up against the boundary of necessity and experience its resistance.

For example, a stone embedded in a concrete wall—entirely incapable of movement—cannot experience the hardness of the wall, nor perceive it as a boundary that restricts freedom. Thus, in the familiar human sense, the stone experiences neither freedom nor necessity.

What is essential to recognize is that the dialectical interweaving of freedom and necessity is revealed not only through the two aforementioned aspects of ontology but also through the phenomenon of lack itself, when examined from the perspective of a goal and the possibility of striving toward it. After all, the very meaning of pursuing any goal emerges only through the presence of lack—especially in relation to the previously discussed potential ontological lack, which is perhaps the most powerful stimulus for human creativity.

A being that lacked nothing whatsoever—in any respect—would, from the outset, possess everything it is possible to possess. As such, being absolutely complete, it would find no meaning in setting goals or striving to achieve them. One might presume that such a being, unbounded by any limitations and untouched by the pressures of necessity, would be perfectly free. In truth, however, it would lie entirely beyond both freedom and necessity. Without experiencing the dialectical contrast between them—without the possibility of encountering one through the absence of the other (for example, sensing the pressure of necessity through the absence of freedom, or discovering the possibility of free movement through the non-absoluteness of necessity, i.e., through the lack of necessity)—such a being would be incapable of grasping the meaning of either.

We may thus assert that the very structure of lack discloses this remarkable contrast between necessity and freedom, as well as the dialectical relationship between them—grounded in their mutual irreducibility—which is likewise revealed in ontology, in the existential structure of reality itself.

This insight shows that the term ontology of lack does not arise from an attempt to conjoin two essentially different and inherently unrelated concepts—let alone from an oxymoronic fusion of logically incompatible terms, as in such expressions as

the whiteness of black, the angularity of a circle, or the roundness of a square. On the contrary, it designates a compound expression that meaningfully unites two notions already marked by a certain conceptual and structural affinity.

From what has been outlined, it becomes clear that in reflecting on the ontology of lack, one must consider not only its negative but also its positive dimensions—those of lack itself, of ontology, and of the ontology of lack understood as the very conjunction denoted by this term. In other words, both lack and ontology, and ultimately the ontology of lack as such, should be associated not only with necessity but also with freedom—that is, not only with the constraints imposed by objective being, but also with the horizons of new possibilities it opens.

It is also worth noting that a very similar dialectic between necessity and freedom—and their essential irreducibility to one another—can be observed in the very nature of economy, a fact beautifully illustrated by the ancient Greek word *oikonomia*, meaning "the laws governing the management of the household" or "household economy."

Incidentally, the first morphological component of this word, *oikos*, most often translated into Lithuanian as *namas* or *namai* ("house" or "home"), shares the same root as the Lithuanian word *ūkis* ("farm" or "household") and is also etymologically related to the Latin noun *vicus* ("village"), which may be imagined as a larger version of a household—comprising several or even a dozen homesteads. Thus, taking into account both its origin and its semantic nuances, the Greek word oikos is most accurately rendered into Lithuanian as the compound namų ūkis ("household economy").

The second morphological component, *nomos*, means "law." In modern languages, including Lithuanian, both the term *ekonomija*, derived from the Greek oikonomia ("household management" or "the laws of household management"),

and *ekonomika*, derived from the Greek *oikonomikē* (*tekhnē*) ("the art or science of household management"), are in use.

The interconnection between necessity and freedom in the nature of economy is revealed by the fact that economic activity presupposes both: on the one hand, the limitation of resources imposed by ontological necessity, which compels us to economize (this aspect is particularly evident in the semantics of the word economy—cf., for instance, the distinction between economy class and business class, as well as the English verb to economize, meaning "to save"); and on the other hand, the possibility of rational choice grounded in ontological freedom—that is, the capacity to decide freely how, and by what specific means and methods, we should economize in order to achieve the most favorable outcome in our economic activity. This process requires taking into account both our desires and goals, and the resource limitations determined by ontological necessity.

If we were not constrained by ontological necessity, there would be no need to economize at all or to manage the resources of the household (oikos) wisely. Conversely, if ontological freedom did not exist—if necessity were absolute, allowing for no margin of choice in setting goals, pursuing them, or selecting the means to achieve them—then we, as rational agents, would lack the ability to freely and intelligently choose the optimal option from among available alternatives. As a result, we would be unable to effectively manage our limited household resources or realize the best possible outcomes in our actions.

It is especially important to note that ontological necessity does not unambiguously determine which goals we ought to pursue in our actions, nor the specific means by which we should realize them. Rather, it delineates certain ontological boundaries within which we, through rational deliberation and "calculation," are able to freely choose the optimal trajectory

toward our goals—one that allows us to reach them in the most reasonable and effective way.

In setting goals and striving to achieve them, we rely both on our awareness of the objective ontological structure of reality—ontological necessity—and on our personal freedom as dignified moral agents. This freedom, in turn, arises from ontological freedom, an irreducible dimension of being itself, which underlies and sustains our ethical, aesthetic, and religious orientations.

What is most striking, however, is that the dialectical contrast initially observed in the first phase of this analysis—between ontology, representing necessity, and ethics, representing freedom—emerges again in the second phase, this time as an internal feature of ontology itself. Specifically, this contrast appears in the distinction between essentialist ontology, which reflects necessity, and existential ontology, which reflects freedom.

Thus, the dialectic between necessity and freedom—clearly visible in the broader dichotomy between ontology and ethics—reverberates within the ontological domain itself. This internal echo manifests in the contrast between essentialist and existential ontology, thereby revealing that the tension between necessity and freedom is not merely external to ontology but also structurally embedded within it.

The fact that the same—or a very similar—dialectic of necessity and freedom can be discerned within the structure of the phenomenon of lack, within ontology, and even in the very nature of economy itself, highlights why research on lack—particularly reflection on lack from an ontological perspective—is so vital and promising for enriching economic theory with new conceptual insights and nuances.

Finally, let us return to the home—or more precisely, to the image of home, previously invoked in the discussion of

economy, understood as the art of managing the household. Martin Heidegger, the most prominent figure in existential philosophy, beautifully stated in one of his later writings, the Letter on Humanism, that language is the house of being. This statement, which carries a distinct philosophical meaning, may also be interpreted in a unique way within the framework of the present analysis—though not necessarily in the exact sense Heidegger himself may have intended.

To say that language is the house of being means that being dwells in language—that is, what is ontological lives through and within language. Notably, in language itself—in its very nature and in the mode of its operation—we once again encounter the same dialectic of necessity and freedom that has been repeatedly emphasized.

Let us recall the episode from the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament, where it is said that God, having created the animals, brought them to Adam, the first human, so that he might name them (Gen 2:19). Although Adam, according to the narrative, does not create the animals themselves, he does, in a certain sense, "create" their names by choosing them freely.

On the one hand, God creates the entities—their objective ontological existence—as well as language, the medium through which the human being is destined to speak about these entities. On the other hand, God grants the human being the freedom to determine how, and by what specific names, to designate that which objectively exists.

The fact that God creates both the entities and the human capacity for language—both of which lie beyond the human's control—points to ontological necessity. Yet the remarkable detail that God does not name the entities Himself, but instead entrusts the first human with the freedom to choose their names, reveals within language not only the trace of ontological necessity but also the presence of ontological freedom.

Thus, if being, as Heidegger argued, truly—or at least in a certain sense—dwells in language, one may conclude that being—and, with it, all that is ontological—resides within an element in which a mysterious dialogue between ontological necessity and ontological freedom unfolds. This conclusion holds particular significance for any reflection on lack, ontology, and the ontology of lack.

About the Author

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The Lithuanian Free Market Institute (LFMI), established in 1990, is an independent, non-profit think tank dedicated to promoting individual freedom and responsibility, free markets, and limited government through interdisciplinary research, education, and policy analysis.

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