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**THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL SENSE OF O. F. BOLLNOWS  
PHILOSOPHY OF COGNITION\***

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**I. "Archimedean" Epistemology in the Aspect of the Philosophy of life. A Proposal for a New Philosophy of Cognition**

The end of the 19th cent, means fundamental changes in philosophy: epistemology, which since the beginning of the modern era had been defining the direction and character of the development of philosophy, ceased to play this central part. That place was gradually taken over by anthropology, understood not as a particular branch of philosophy, but as a scaffolding, supporting and permeating all traditional fields of philosophy. The fact that philosophy had been based on epistemology became questioned by several simultaneous trends, all of them directed towards the reality of human life, towards practice and history. Such tendencies are expressed, by means of various categories and theoretical formulations, in the thought of Bergson and American pragmatists, and in the philosophy of life formulated by Nietzsche, Dilthey, Simmel and Klages.

The former role of epistemology being challenged, we are faced with a double question: what were the reasons that deprived it of the focal position in philosophy, and what a new way of posing the problem of cognition would meet the demands hitherto facing traditional epistemology.

To answer these questions, one must realize these features of classical epistemology which were questioned by the new understanding of human life and, consequently, of cognition resulting from the above mentioned Theories. The new position gained by philosophical anthropology, or — from [53/54] the point of view of epistemology — a new way of posing the question concerning the nature of cognition, can be noticed first of all in W. Dilthey's philosophy of life.

O. F. Bollnow's thought takes root in Diltheyan tradition: he based his proposal for anthropology on the reflections on cognition introduced into philosophy by Dilthey. One can treat Bollnow's anthropology and philosophy of cognition as a continuation of the trend initiated by Dilthey; his reflection shows us the vast contents of the field within the bounds of the philosophy of life.

The classic theory of cognition is characterized by the basic tendency to search for the "Archimedean" starting point which could provide absolutely reliable foundations for the construction of knowledge. The problem of the "Archimedean" point was posed quite clearly by Descartes at the beginning of the modern era, to become then a significant need of all modern

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philosophical systems, both rationalistic and empiric. This is the reason why modern epistemologies claim to be systems with a significant, basically similar, structure: firm foundation on the basis on which one can rely, and then progress toward the completeness of knowledge, safeguarded by the soundness of the foundations. Thus the Cartesian cogito marks not only the basis for the system of the rationalistic theory of cognition, but also the decisive moment in the choice of the building material. The empiric trend in epistemology is bound to the same model of constant and immutable foundations, with the difference, that these foundations are delimited by sensual data.

Bollnow submits to a critical examination both rationalistic and empiric starting point in epistemology. He maintains that we cannot rely on the obviousness of the ego cogito, that, while relying on it, we are doomed to be isolated from the world; that, on the other hand, sensual data do not constitute either primary components for the construction of the picture of reality, as all "seeing, hearing etc. occurs from the point of view of the precomprehension (Vorverständnis) of the world"<sup>1</sup>, therefore is by no means primary. In Bollnow's criticism of the epistemologies searching for the Archimedean starting point immanent criticism is not really decisive in his conviction about their futility; it is rather his conviction that there is no zero point in cognition, there is no absolute beginning, that cognition is not unlike life in general, that is, we always "understand to be able to understand"<sup>2</sup>; we are always immersed in the pre-comprehension of the world and cannot recollect the moment when consciousness woke in us. The impossibility of penetrating to the beginning concerns not only individual conscious life, but also "...the source of understanding the world by the individual man is lost in the darkness of succeeding generations. We do not [54/55] arrive at any beginning"<sup>3</sup>. Such a picture was meant by Dilthey when he maintained that "all beginning is arbitrary"<sup>4</sup>. From the situation of the immersion of cognition in the whole of life Bollnow concludes that "basic assumptions are not anything final that could be justified by itself, they are what is being cognized. Therefore they do not provide the safest foundation, for cognition they are something least certain, always bearing the mark of hypothesis"<sup>5</sup>.

Thus the beginning of thinking is not defined by its own obtrusive convincing force; instead of speaking about the beginning, Bollnow speaks about pre-comprehension which we always introduce within the horizon of the apprehended world as beings who live in the environment they understand and who are unable to place themselves outside "life". The knowledge obtained every time with the assistance of this pre-comprehension is hypothetical, i.e. open to further experiences, in which there may appear something new, not yet coded in the contents of our pre-comprehension of the world. The progress of cognition takes place in the area of tension between the contributed comprehension and the experience of the "new". Therefore the significant subtitle of Bollnow's work: *The Philosophy of Cognition. Pre-comprehension and the Experience of the New*<sup>6</sup>.

Defining his own starting point in cognition, critical towards traditional epistemologies, Bollnow refers to the hermeneutic point of view introduced into epistemological problems by Dilthey, and then intensified by Heidegger, as his proposal for *The Analytics of Human Existence*. Hermeneutic methods were initially the principles of interpreting texts, which are the objectified products of human spirit, and consisted in codifying the principles of understanding their contents. However later, owing to Dilthey, the range of the notion of under-

<sup>1</sup> O. F. Bollnow, *Philosophie der Erkenntnis. Das Vorverständnis und die Erfahrung des Neuen*. Stuttgart 1970, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> According to W. v. Humboldt's famous expression.

<sup>3</sup> Bollnow, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> W. Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Leipzig und Berlin 1931, Bd. I, p. 419.

<sup>5</sup> Bollnow, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> See note 1.

standing grew wider; from the function of a methodic tool in the humanities, it began to pertain to the fundamental phenomenon of human life. Thus, since Dilthey's works, understanding has ceased to be a particular mode of cognition, efficient especially in dealing with human spirit, and has become a fundamental form of human cognitive behaviour in general. The concept of man, whose being is defined by understanding (*Verstehen*), assumes that he exists always within the bounds of a certain understanding of the world. Our being conscious is collateral with understanding; as it is impossible to obtain a point of view on the whole of the cosmos, so it is impossible to place oneself outside our understanding way of apprehending the world. Our cognition being directed by pre-comprehension, however, should not be understood as a state of being shut in as if in a cage. Our degree of freedom from the horizon marked by the contents of pre-comprehension — thus we can formulate the main problem suggested by [55/56] Bollnow's orientation given to the philosophy of cognition. This problem will be discussed in Part III of the present paper.

Bollnow assumes the hermeneutic point of view in the belief that cognition cannot be achieved in an "one-dimensional" way, beginning from a strictly defined starting point. Cognitive behaviour is of circular character, which gives us a right to transfer to it the hermeneutic method applied to the products of culture, where in order to comprehend one must pre-comprehend.

In connection with the application of the hermeneutic point of view to the problems of epistemology a question arises whether the latter have not been re-formulated in such a fundamental way that we can no longer speak about the theory of cognition, connected inseparably with the classic "Archimedean" way of posing problems. Within the hermeneutic horizon, cognition is no longer a process based on itself and isolated from the other functions of life; neither it is, as in the case of classic epistemology, the ideal model of cognition aiming at obtaining the legitimate way of cognition. Cognition, to which we apply the hermeneutic procedure, is an element of life and as such inseparable from the context of life connections, and being immersed in them, it is unable to arrive at the point of view rising above life. Last, cognition is not a conscious expression of the attitude of purely scientific interest which would aim at liberating itself from the influence of emotional "interferences" in order to achieve impartiality. As an element of life, cognition is co-ordinated with its other elements in the way which is to be explained by the new epistemology. Thus interpreted, cognition can no longer be the subject of the classic theory of cognition, therefore Bollnow proposes a new term for the problems of cognition regarded in the perspective of its role in the whole of human life; he calls it the philosophy of cognition, defining its aims in the way the aims of anthropology used to be defined: "...its task is to apprehend the essence and function of cognition in the whole of the connections of human life"<sup>7</sup>. To avoid using the category of the philosophy of cognition from the spirit of the philosophy of life, because of the vagueness of the latter, Bollnow speaks about the anthropological approach.

The philosophy of cognition does not offer a model justifying scientific cognition, but assuming cognition as a fact, it tries to penetrate the nature of man. Therefore, while changing completely the perspective of the problems of cognition in relation to the traditional epistemological approach, the philosophy of cognition maintains the fundamental function of epistemology, since Kant understood as transcendental philosophy. The transcendental question is present in the philosophy of cognition in the anthropological modification: what is the nature of man if he is capable of cognition, which is recognized as a fact. Starting from the existing products of cognition or from precise cognitive categories (such as the notion, proposition, conclusion, [56/57] hypothesis, truth), we explore the situations in which they are created and the qualities of man which make it possible. While applying hermeneutic methods to cogni-

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<sup>7</sup> Bollnow, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

tion and its products, we do not pose questions about the technique of correct thinking, but about the nature of thinking, thus attempting to comprehend the nature of man.

A question arises, whether in the face of the total change of the context in which the problems of cognition appear, we can still speak about the philosophy of cognition, or whether we should speak about anthropology only. It seems that the change of the sense of epistemological problems in the philosophy of cognition is not so radical that it would rule out the notion of "the philosophy of cognition". Anthropology, in the way Bollnow understands it, i.e. as a continuation of the trends deriving from the philosophy of life, seems to be the extension of the problems of traditional epistemology by their life context and the intensification of these problems by hermeneutic interpretation, so that the categories, hitherto considered as entirely epistemological, appear to be the means, owing to which human nature presents itself to us more clearly.

## II. The Anthropological Characteristics of Cognition

The philosophy of cognition, deriving from criticism towards Archimedean epistemology, develops on the grounds of the assumption that all cognitive activities are immersed in the all-embracing context of life. Cognition in the context of life becomes a practically ordered behaviour, in which the needs of practice create theory and where theoretical activity is no longer an attitude sterilized of the needs of life. It is not an autonomous product but, as it used to be expressed in the philosophy of life, it grows out of the unconscious layers of the psyche. The examination of thus interpreted products and functions of cognition is subject to the anthropological principles of consideration, among which, in the first place, Bollnow (referring to H. Plessner) mentions the principle of anthropological reduction. It consists in understanding various fields of human activity, including cognition and science, "not as independent subject fields, but always taking into consideration these human needs to which they owe their existence, on the grounds of the functions they fulfil within the bounds of human life" <sup>8</sup>. The principle of anthropological reduction reduces the sense of the products of human spirit to man as their creator; the reverse principle (called by Bollnow the Organon principle) is helpful when we attempt to answer the question, how human nature is shaped that [57/58] it may produce the whole of culture. Owing to this question, philosophical anthropology meets the requirements of transcendental philosophy.

Presenting Bollnow's views concerning his philosophy of cognition I shall have to limit myself to the representative problems of perception, intuition, common opinions and individual view; I shall leave out, however, the important problem of truth, which requires separate treatment<sup>9</sup>. In my presentation of Bollnow's views I shall emphasize the specific anthropological context of his reflection on cognition. Conclusions from the anthropological examination of the nature of cognition will serve not as a basis for discriminating the criterion for "model" cognition, but as premisses for the characterization of human nature.

In his work *The Philosophy of Cognition* Bollnow considers the stages by which we arrive at the individual view, and then at knowledge. He forms answers to questions about the role of particular cognitive skills on the grounds of analyses, both ethymological and lexical, penetrating into elementary intuitions connected with the usage of the given notion in the context of life, independently from its technical functioning in philosophy, which he expects to be rather far from the primary meaning.

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<sup>8</sup> O. F. Bollnow, *Die philosophische Anthropologie und ihre methodischen Prinzipien*, in: *Philosophische Anthropologie heute*, München 1972, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> The problem of truth is considered by Bollnow in his work *Das Doppelgesicht der Wahrheit*, Stuttgart 1975.

Penetrating into the nature of perception Bollnow goes beyond the limits of Cassirer's reflections on this subject, akin in their philosophic tendency; it was Cassirer who has pointed out that perception is not a form of primary contact with reality, as it was regarded by empiric epistemology, for reality is not perceived by people in the same way<sup>10</sup>. Access to reality is achieved not through sensual data as primary phenomena; the elementary perception of reality is obtained through understanding oriented towards expression. We are given reality by means of language and we are unable to reveal its basic layer which would not be interpretation as well. All reality is always interpreted reality, all cognition is only an interpretation of interpretation, incapable of arriving at the source. Cassirer's characteristics of man inhabiting the "symbolic universe" is a specific modification of interpreting the principle of the non-existence of the Archimedean point in cognition.

Bollnow goes beyond Cassirer's point of view asking about the role perception plays in our dealing with things; while refusing to regard perception as primary data, he puts a question, anthropological par excellence, about the function of perception in the whole of human life.

Natural language suggests to Bollnow an interpretation of perception independent from the context of hitherto recognized philosophical problems; perception is closely connected with caution, but the opposite of inspection and observation. Only few things stand out as perception in this grey world to which we got used and where we are reluctant to introduce anything "new". Still, the lack of caution in dealing with the world we got used to serves the [58/59] purpose, it makes possible our proper responses to what is important in life. Perception produces in us a response to the changes in our environment, and provoking an answer it is transformed into practical action. Perception is not a neutral and independent activity, it is an alarm, a report about a change in the environment, about the appearance of something new, not yet coded in the anticipation of our pre-comprehension. Perception in the context of life connections (*Lebenszusammenhänge*) is an interruption of the normal course of things, causing a gap in the usual flow of life. It could be called, by means of analogy to Dewey, a phenomenon of the awakening of consciousness under the influence of interference in the functioning of custom.

As an element of life connections, perception is always of transitory nature; it appears suddenly and retreats immediately, having fulfilled its function of awakening man to sensible response to disturbing changes in his environment. Owing to perception, a new factor appears in our customary picture of the world, and having been calculated into our attitude to the world, marks a new horizon of its apprehension. Thus, the vision of the whole world cannot be achieved on the grounds of single perceptions, for perception itself must be pre-apprehended from the point of view of the assimilated world. On that fact, among others, could Bollnow found his critical arguments against the empiric attempt to found cognition on single sensual data.

Only singling out something new and unexpected from the monotonous horizon of everyday life and commonness makes it possible to look at it closely. Looking at something (*Ansehen*) is not a primary act either, as it is founded on the activity of discerning against the background, which is carried out by perception. We look closely at, for example, the engine when we notice that it does not work well. Looking at, in result of which we arrive at the "theory of error" of the engine, is by no means "pure" looking, free from practical assessment; it is a border case, in which some life connection become a cognitive connection. The conviction that theory is born out of practice and serves its needs is typical of not only the philosophy of life. It does not mean, however, that this philosophy does not allow for the possibility of disinterested insight, completely free from practical "covetousness". Bollnow recognizes the existence of "free" insight (*Anschauen*) and sees in it a possible key to the understanding of hu-

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<sup>10</sup> In: *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, III Th.: *Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis*, Berlin 1929.

man nature.

In the moments of insight "suddenly the world appears to us as if in the first day of creation, untarnished yet by man's purposeful thinking. There is something commanding respect in this pure seeing..."<sup>11</sup> The moments of insight occur when we are able to look at reality with eyes undimmed by the demands of practical life. The moments of intuition do not occur at the beginning of our process of cognition (as they are apprehended by Kant); they are complex cognitive processes which appear on the developed stages [59/60] of the process of cognition. While not primary in time, they are primary in the order of essence and importance. Owing to intuition, we are capable, in the state of wonder, of looking at reality at the source, which Plato regarded as the beginning of philosophy. The moments of pure, imperturbable insight are not a gift given to us by nature, we do not owe them only to the ability to see; they are the result of creative effort. The significance of artistic achievements consists, through refreshing our outlook by insight, in bringing us closer to "primeval" reality: "poets have been teaching us the feeling of respectful wonder at the pure, intact, ever matutinal reality which has escaped us in the turmoil of everyday things"<sup>12</sup>. Fighting his way through this world marked by practice, man returns to his beginning. The road to the hidden sources leads through resisting the interpreted world, the world of common opinions, while the act of intuition is possible, not owing to man's cognitive curiosity, but owing to something more: to his personal involvement in re-discovering reality, made possible by "imperturbable cheerfulness" and disinterestedness. Through developing his capability to deal intuitively with things, man regains "the youthful openness towards the world", which he has lost in the anonymous, interpreted world.

This apprehension of the nature of intuition puts Bollnow within that trend in the philosophy of culture which, following J. J. Rousseau, maintains that man accomplishes his essence not by means of rectilinear progress, but through continuous, full of moral effort, return to the source. Bollnow considers it a rule, deeply rooted in human nature, that the source is not given at the beginning, but that in man's development there appears the requirement, and thus a task, of finding this source; in his return to the source man accomplishes his innermost essence. Intuition, if obtained once, never remains with us for ever, it does not supply us with stable foundations on which we could form our contact with things at the source; hence the requirement of effort in the gradual approaching the source.

What classic epistemology regarded as primary, immutable, given us by nature, Bollnow in his anthropological approach regards as a highly specialized creation, obtainable by effort, which cannot be possessed for ever.

The limits of the world circumscribed by perception and intuition, whose nature we have discussed, concern only its visible and audible layers. Now we shall pass to Bollnow's analyses of our mode of existence in the world as creatures producing culture. Within these problems Bollnow concentrates mainly on the relation of individual views to common opinions (ethical, religious, political, philosophical and others).

Bollnow is primarily interested in the relation of common opinions (Meinungen) to individual views; to contrast them he uses the symbols of doxa and episteme. In an unorthodox way he criticizes the undermining of common opinions and regarding them as a superfluous and useless burden to man aiming at the authenticity of his existence. This criticism refers [60/61] among others, to Heidegger, who has termed the sphere of commonness and inauthenticity as prattle (Gerede).

While speaking about common opinions, Bollnow means "a certain order within which life flows according to some moral and ethical principles... here belong the concepts of what is

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<sup>11</sup> Bollnow, *Philosophie der Erkenntnis*, p. 73.

<sup>12</sup> Bollnow, op. cit., p. 77.

done and what is not... All that belongs to the medium of the community in which we live. This medium was not created — in the sense of general no-beginning — by the individual in conscious effort; on the other hand, man has grown into this world, acquired these concepts without noticing how" <sup>13</sup>. Man accepts the opinions of his environment concerning the world and life, and only a situation which Bollnow calls a crisis forces him into formulating his own opinions. Still, the existing opinions provide the indispensable starting point, without which his own solution would be suspended into void. Common opinions, moreover, play the role of a spring-board in the development of science. Even when one questions a considerable number of common opinions, one cannot question them all, as Descartes did, but must leave some ground under his feet. If we tried to resort once more to the Cartesian attempt at radical doubt, it would not be possible, because of the recognition of the fact that our thinking is immersed in the pre-discursive sphere. Moreover, the opinions commonly considered rational, according to Bollnow, only rarely achieve the level of clear consciousness, while the prevailing part of our thinking is submerged, like an iceberg, in the dark ocean of pre-logical thinking. Rising to the highest level of rationality, we do not achieve in it absolute truth either, merely a certain level of cognition, subject to critical elimination by other theories. Summing up the above discussion in order to define the relation of common opinions to individual views and to knowledge, we state that both individual views and knowledge are created by means of introducing clarity into existing opinions, i.e. common opinions, which play the vital part of auxiliary support. This their feature is apparent not only in relation to collective cognition, but it also concerns the individual, with the difference, that what for a community is something already found and existing, for individual man is something given at the source.

In anthropological spirit puts Bollnow the question about the circumstances when the individual passes from common opinions to individual views: what is the significance of individual views in man's life. They are achieved not through theoretical curiosity, but through a crisis brought about by the impossibility of living with passively accepted common opinions. In the situation of a crisis, what has been considered obvious, becomes critically examined: from an uncritically accepted opinion one arrives at an individual view. Such a critical situation serves as a catalyst to this change, compelling man to look for "a new beginning" <sup>14</sup>. This "critical" nature of cognition [61/62] is by no means incidental and unnecessary interference in its development; it is, according to Bollnow, an essential factor in human life, and as such, it reflects on cognition. "Man in his depth is determined by the requisite of crises, and the ideal of life devoid of crises does not mean godlike perfection, it means for man the renouncement of greatness and responsibility, it means unhuman life, pure vegetation" <sup>15</sup> — concludes Bollnow.

Genuine cognition not only increases our knowledge, but also compels us to revise the foundations of our life, to renounce uncritically accepted opinions in favour of convictions to which we have become committed. These circumstances make Bollnow define man as a critical being, which expresses his nature better than when we define him as a rational being or as a being producing tools.

### **III. The Dialogue of Pre-comprehension and the Experience of the New. Demand for a New Enlightenment**

In the presentation of Bollnow's philosophy of cognition I have limited myself to the forms of cognition concerning the natural world (perception, insight) and the "mode of being" in the

<sup>13</sup> Bollnow, op. cit., pp. 84, 85.

<sup>14</sup> I refer here to the title of Bollnow's pedagogical treatise, *Krise und neuer Anfang*, Heidelberg 1966.

<sup>15</sup> Bollnow, *Philosophie der Erkenntnis*, p. 99.

spiritual world, subject to either common opinions or to the individual view. In the characteristics of perception a significant part was played by contrasting the familiar monotonous horizon of reality with the "new" which we are occasionally able to extract from it. The analogous contrast between the horizon of existing opinions, which make up the natural background to our life, and individual views is based on the principle of contrasting the existing with the new. This couple of opposites determines the fundamental problem of the philosophy of cognition in Bollnow's apprehension: how it is possible to maintain the thesis of the no-beginning of cognition, that is, of its being immersed in a certain pre-comprehension of the world, and yet to claim that cognition is not limited to the explication of pre-comprehension, but transcends it, towards the cognizance of new matters which exceed the bounds of the pre-comprehension of the world. Otherwise, it is a question concerning the feasibility of cognition tout court. The specific sense of this question is determined by Bollnow's use of the new fundamental category of "pre-comprehension", which has been repeatedly used in this paper and which I shall now proceed to explain and to emphasize these cognitive results which make Bollnow unique among the thinkers who use this notion in other meanings. Pre-comprehension, or as it has been termed, primarily possessed comprehension, means the comprehension that precedes proper, clear and conscious [62/63] comprehension; it is its undeveloped phase that manifests its power precisely in that state of underdevelopment and concealment. Its role consists in the fact that "all human understanding of the world, all perceiving and experiencing etc. is always illumined and directed by it" <sup>16</sup>. The task of the hermeneutic interpretation of pre-comprehension consists in realizing and emphasizing the matters that are "always understood".

A question arises whether the a priori cognitive horizon is a burden which makes it impossible to transcend the limits of the interpreted familiar world, i.e., it marks the limits of cognition, or whether, while being an indispensable preamble, it makes possible the cognition of the new, i.e., serves as an a priori factor, mobile and open. If our pre-comprehension of the world were only a burden, an armour which makes us insensible to changes, then we should not experience situations when inexorably pressing facts become integrated into our comprehended world. However, such situations when the new and alien enter the interpreted world occur, and are known as experience.

In the anthropological context of Bollnow's reflections experience means a confrontation with facts which mark the bounds of our interpreted world, a confrontation which, owing to its unexpectedness, disturbs the order of the confined world. We resort to experience when facts fail our expectations, when on the road to our goal there appear unexpected obstacles which must be overcome. Such facts are, according to Bollnow's picturesque expression, an alien body in the tissue of our concept of the world. The answer to experience, i.e. to our controlling facts, is synonymous with their integration into the world we understand. The integration of our familiar way of understanding the world with alien experience takes place when in the future we change the content of our pre-comprehension of the world. The situation of controlling the facts is possible owing to the open character of the horizon of our comprehension, capable of assimilating radically new experiences, which exceed the bounds of the former horizon. Bollnow's apprehension of this "insoluble tangle of pre-comprehension and the experience of the new" emphasizes, in an a priori way, growth and development. Such an apprehension seems to be in unique concord with the notion about the historical character of man's nature.

Bollnow's philosophical achievement consists in his substantiating, on the grounds of analyses within the philosophy of cognition, the "open" character of human nature, i.e. its historical character. This notion expresses the postulate: "To be always open to the unexpected new..."

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<sup>16</sup> Bollnow, op. cit., p. 104.



and to resist all attempts at the final determining of man's essence" <sup>17</sup>

Bollnow apprehends pre-comprehension as the opposite of the Kantian a priori, given to man by his very nature, immutable both in individual and collective history. Our cognition of the world is accomplished as a dialogue between pre-comprehension and the experience of the new which, intruding [63/64] in the former, works changes in it. Cognition understood as a dialogue is the opposite of the concept of cognition encompassed by cognitive possibilities resulting from the content of pre-comprehension; the openness of its horizons directs us towards the future we do not know yet.

In his analyses Bollnow perceives the pre-conscious character of pre-comprehension as its transitory feature; he sees the aim of the interpretation of cognition in "realizing and emphasizing of what, in fact, has always "been understood"<sup>18</sup>. It means that cognition, starting from not-yet-conscious sources, arrives at the realization of its foundations, that, in connection with the context of the philosophy of life, life as the foundation and context of cognition becomes realized, to which process is liable even that tangle of unconscious forces spoken of by Dilthey.

Bollnow's concept of "pre-comprehension" appears to us as an attempt at the rationalization of foundations. It tends to go beyond the irrationalism of Dilthey's philosophy of life, while retaining the starting point of his philosophy of cognition. Bollnow accepts the fundamental notion of the philosophy of life about the non-existence of the Archimedean point in cognition as the belief that we approach every experience with a certain knowledge about the world and not as a virgin subject, that we always bring some pre-comprehension into the understanding of what happens to us. That pre-comprehension not only makes it possible to know the unknown world, which initially lies beyond the bounds of our understanding of the world, but also can itself become a subject of cognition. The foundations of cognition become realized with the increase of knowledge and individual experience. Unconscious life, being the ground from which cognition draws vital juices, is itself subject to cognition and control. In that way irrational forces become controlled, so that we are no longer their prey in the process of cognition.

The so called enlightenment of irrational forces within Bollnow's philosophy of cognition is accomplished through a dialogue between pre-comprehension and the experience of the new in cognition, which results in the enrichment of understanding and in a clearer realization of what has been unconsciously accepted. Illumination takes place when, in the situation of a crisis, we come across facts which, when we attempt to assimilate them, compel us to re-analyze our understanding of the world and to realize its hidden and obscure contents.

In Bollnow's philosophy we encounter the apology of faith in reason which philosophy has been gradually shedding since Romanticism, through the philosophy of life, until existentialism. The enlightenment inclinations of Bollnow's philosophy seem the more interesting as they grew out of the philosophy of life, contradictory in this respect but otherwise accepted by Bollnow.

Bollnow comments in the following way on the relation of life to reason in Dilthey's philosophy: "The notion about harmony between man's cognitive [64/65] power and the cognized reality is entirely ruled out. Accordingly, the feeling of security and safety in the world disappears as well. The transparency of the world seems dubious, i.e. it becomes doubtful whether various states of reality [...] can be combined into a homogeneous picture [...] The unity of the world and human life becomes destroyed" <sup>19</sup>. Bollnow's endeavour to control the sources of our cognition and thus to regain the "transparent" picture of the world constitutes the funda-

<sup>17</sup> Bollnow, *Die philosophische Anthropologie und ihre methodischen Prinzipien*, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> Bollnow, *Philosophie der Erkenntnis*, p. 106.

<sup>19</sup> Bollnow, *Dilthey. Eine Einführung in seine Philosophie*, Leipzig u. Berlin 1936, p. 20.

mental trend of his philosophy. Referring to Bollnow's own attempt to revalue opinions on the Enlightenment<sup>20</sup>, his notion of the return to reason could be termed as "neo-enlightenment", which points not only to the author's standpoint but also to the limits within which he accepts the philosophy of life. Bollnow is convinced that the Enlightenment may prove to be the greatest discovery of the future. Modern man, following his loss of faith in reason, began to feel a prey to irrational forces, which brought about the feeling of existential threat. Thus a need for new reasonableness appeared, and consequently, a need to revise our attitude towards the Enlightenment, since Romanticism considered an insipid and jejune epoch.

The Enlightenment appears to Bollnow first of all as the epoch of faith in the feasibility of shaping human life and the world according to the rational order. The thinker who has experienced irrationalism is unable to share the optimism of that faith, as he has become convinced that conscious life is only one of the many elements of our spiritual life. This conviction, however, has not destroyed the faith in the feasibility of a partial, "insular" order, which, while failing to encompass the whole of the human world, would still retrieve some areas of reasonableness from total darkness.

Pre-comprehension, the keystone of Bollnow's conception, allows us, owing to the opening of its horizons to the new, to pass from the pessimistic precincts of the philosophy of life onto the field that promises hope in regaining "the unity of the world and human life", inaccessible since the loss of faith in reason.

The anthropologically oriented reflection on cognition makes us realize its function of familiarizing the new and unknown world, thus strengthening our belief in the feasibility of forcing the reasonable order on the chaos of the world.

(trans. J. Piatkowska)

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<sup>20</sup> See O. F. Bollnow, *Vernunft u. die Mächte des Irrationalen*, in: *Mass und Vermessenheit des Menschen*, Göttingen 1962.