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## THE PROBLEM OF COGNITION AS AN ONTOLOGICAL QUESTION

The belief that cognition still demands philosophical reflection serves as a starting point for my study. Kant's transcendentalism and the philosophies of Fichte, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Husserl, and Heidegger, which directly or indirectly originate in it, determine the theoretical field in which the question of cognition is asked in a new way, no longer naturalistic or psychological. Due to the notional content of this field and the style of philosophising elaborated in it, the problem of cognition changes into an ontological issue, i.e., it becomes possible to ask about the ontic structure of cognition.

I. Ontological Categories of Post-Kantian Philosophy

Kantian transcendentalism questioned the notional basis of traditional epistemology and its characteristic mode of conceptualizing cognition (e.g. mechanistic mode), canceled its questions, and introduced in their place its own tasks and problems.

The task of transcendental critique - as Kant himself saw it - was to clear human cognition, i.e., to demonstrate how cognition, realized by a sensual and thinking individual, became possible precisely as cognition, in its purely epistemological function, and not in practical, social, etc. ones. The problem raised by Kant was modified in the subsequent transcendentalistic theories. It was accepted that consciousness is from its very nature intentional, that it operates, as consciousness, only within the internally oppositional subjective-objective totality. Hence, objectivity does not have to be warranted cognition through transcendentalistic investigation. Besides, in post-Kantian philosophy the "ontologization" of cognition was realized.

Fichte's going beyond Kant's position resolves itself essentially - as I think - into the stating that it is not enough to reduce, as Kant did it, the formative activity of human consciousness to purely cognitive creativity, which is a constituting an object as a phenomenon relativized to human sensuality and rational mind. In such a situation, non-relativized and authentically real existence should have to be attributed to the thing-in-itself. Whereas according to Fichte, the idea of the thing-in-itself cannot be reconciled with transcendentalism which demands suspending all ontological propositions. As a consequence of this, Fichte assumes that the pure I creates the object not only as the object of cognition but as being because the pure I is in itself a unity of being and self-thought. This pure I can be empirically comprehended as the general human I, and cognition - as a constituent of activity of humanity. It is practical, ethical activity and gives sense both to its subjects and its objects. In this way, the subjective-objective totality acquires ethical content, yet is still treated by Fichte on the purely epistemological ground. It was only Schelling and Hegel who ontologized the subjective-objective totality by introducing the metaphysical idea of total, self-creative activity, i.e., the idea of historical being which creates itself through objectivity and subjectivity.

I think that exactly such a subjective-objective totality is considered in certain post-Kantian philosophical theories, though conceptualized in different ways. What I have in mind here are the philosophies of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Husserl, and Heidegger. What is more, I think that one could find in these theories a set of common to all of them fundamental qualifications of the totality. Of course, these qualifications have varied contents, and are formed into different hierarchical systems; but one can still see a certain fundamental content of these categories which they all share. In philosophy of Hegel such a fundamental qualification of the subjective-objective totality is its historicity; Marx considers social nature of the subjective-objective totality; Nietzsche analyses its axiological nature; Husserl concentrates upon transcendental consciousness, which is the base for creating a subjective-objective empirical whole, and essentially its intersubjectivity; and in Heidegger's philosophy, Da-

sein, i.e., specifically understood human being which is a subject of existence, is considered as a source of a sensible unity of man and his world. I cannot show here in a more detailed way that the philosophies which I have investigated are located in one notional field, which they penetrate and express in different ways, but I am positive that the above-mentioned notions are the main categories of these theories. A closer analysis should show also that in all of them, fundamental categories were accompanied by basically the same, yet differently expressed the idea of the self-creative character of the subjective-objective totality. The totality is treated there not substantially but dynamically, i.e., as the self-creation, the objectivizations of which are substantial subjectivity and factuality. Such is the character of Hegelian becoming as the unity of Being and Nothingness; such is the nature of social praxis in philosophy of Marx; human creativity in Nietzsche's conception; transcendental consciousness in Husserl's considerations; and Existence in Heidegger's philosophy.

Thanks to these theories we obtain the theoretical sphere, the dimensions of which are the above-mentioned categories of historicity, of what is societal, axiological, and of inter-subjectivity and "existential subjectivity". Inside this sphere, cognition can be understood as an ontic phenomenon, as an event or a process essentially contributing to the human world which is treated here as an ontic primordiality. Cognition, understood in this way, appears to be a constitutive element of the self-creative subjective-objective activity.

## II. Cognition as an Ontic Phenomenon

The recognition of the fact that cognition is an element of the self-creation of the ontic totality, may - though not necessarily - lead to an understanding of cognition as the process of self-creation. It does not have to lead to this since the assumption that parts have the same qualities as the whole to which they belong is not a necessary prerequisite. Treating cognition in such a way seems, however, indispensable if the conceptualization

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of cognition as an ontic phenomenon is to be possible. The conditions for the possibility of cognition can be found in the ontic structure of cognition itself.

In transcendentalistic philosophy, which uses the term of pure consciousness and pure cognition, the idea of the autodynamic and self-creative character of cognition manifests itself in treating the latter as self-cognition realized by the powers of consciousness. It is an interpretation in which - in brief - the form of the process (its historicity and autodynamics) is identified with its content understood as self-cognition. Such an identification is evident in the philosophies which - as Hegelian - express epistemological ontology, i.e., in those in which being becomes identified with thought, or is treated as reducible to it, and the self-creation of being becomes identified with cognition, which - as the result of the sameness of being and thought - has to be understood as self-cognition. In such an ontology, the notions of traditional epistemology are transcendently purified, and play the role of fundamental ontological categories.

Let us, however, depart from conceptualizing cognition in Hegelian manner, as self-cognition, and concentrate on the historicity of cognition as its formal aspect, leaving for a moment the problem of what cognition really is.

If we treat cognition as self-creative, we prejudge only its autodynamic historicity. It means that we treat it as a historical process, whose particular events and stages of development follow the preceding events, and are caused by historical transformations. The fact that cognition is autodynamic historicity means, however, something more. If it is an autodynamic process, then not only historical events, stages of development, or concrete transformations are produced in it, but also the very regularities, the principles of these transformations. The logic of the process is not external to it, nor attributed to it as a sense, an aim, or a programme to be made incarnate. The logic of an autodynamic process is its historically created structure.

When it is agreed upon that the historical character of cognit-

ion is autodynamic, it must also be accepted that the essence of the process of cognition is the creation of its being a cognition, i.e., the attributing to itself the sense of cognition. This assumption is a necessary consequence of treating cognition as autodynamic, since the fact that it is its own product means that it creates itself precisely as cognition. The sense of its being cognition is not attributed to it from the outside by any human or non-human authority. Cognition attributes the sense of cognition to itself taking on reality in its own particular historical shapes, independently - one could add - of where the cognitive activity directs itself. In the course of objectivization cognition constitutes its sense as an ontic fact, and not a cognitive activity directs itself. In the course of objectivization cognition constitutes its sense as an ontic fact, and not a cognitive one. It becomes a cognitive fact only when there appear epistemological considerations which give the definition of cognition. Undoubtedly, epistemological reflection also contributes to the ontic formation of the sense of cognition, since it is a part of cognitive activity. It does not mean, however, that by formulating epistemological statements it constitutes the sense as an ontic fact, nor that it recognize this sense adequately. Epistemological ascertainties are in each case only history-bound articulations of the sense which is created by a given historical cognition. Therefore, their function is to turn this real sense into a cognitive fact.

Let us turn towards the problem of the ontic structure of cognition, taking once again transcendentalism as our point of departure.

Transcendentalism broke the traditional, naturalistic and psychologistic, interpretation of cognition. It differentiated between cognition as the subject of a philosophical question and the psychic acts studied by psychology. It also introduced the notion of pure, transcendental consciousness, i.e., such a consciousness which is neither the immanent consciousness of the empirical subject, nor the consciousness which transcends it and is given to the empirical subject solely through objective manifestations. This transcendental consciousness was treated as a condition for the possibility of existence of empirical cognition

with its subjective and objective correlatives. Transcendentalism, however, problematized, as Heidegger noticed, neither cognition nor the transcendental consciousness itself. Transcendentalistic philosophy discovered that in order to avoid the dangers of individualistic subjectivism, one has to ask about the dangers of individualistic subjectivism, one has to ask about the conditions for the possibility of cognition, assuming the multiplicity of cognitive subjects. But transcendentalism did not try to reformulate the traditional individualistic notion of the cognitive subject in a way that would lead to the concept of cognition adequate to the situation in which the multiplicity of empirical subjects appears. The introduction of the notion of transcendental consciousness as something universal does not mean creating a new concept of subjectivity, but only modifying the traditional one. The effects of the shortcomings within transcendentalism can be seen in post-Kantian metaphysics; there is no ontology of cognition in it, no attempt to fill the pure epistemological categories with ontological content.

Heidegger attempted ontologization of cognition, yet his going beyond transcendentalism and metaphysics, together with his attempts to build ontological epistemology within the limits of what he himself called the fundamental ontology of the finite being, cannot be treated as fully satisfactory. When the notion of truth appears in his conception, the weaknesses of Heidegger's attempt become conspicuous. Truth, ontologically understood as the openness of being, has no normative character, is neither a value nor a criterion for evaluating the patency of being. An attempt to ontologize cognition was made also by Gadamer. In his hermeneutics cognition is a constituent of being. Historicity and language are both fundamental conditions for the possibility of cognition and its structural qualifications as well. And though for Gadamer language really exists only in conversation, this belief does not entail any modifications of the notion of cognition within his theory. It remains for him, as it did for Heidegger, a relation joining subject with object, and not the one between subjects. It seems, however, that what demands problematization is the very belief that cognition is a subject-object relation. It has to be problematized if the transcendentalistic assumption of the multi-subjectivity of cognitive situa-

tion is to be treated as the fundamental premise of the ontology of cognition. Such a problematization becomes possible only with the help of the notion of the social nature of the subjective-objective totality.

Generally, on the basis of the concept of what is societal, social world is the fundamental reality in which man exists. It is then a human world, but not in the sense of being a correlative of individual consciousness, such as e.g., the Cartesian sense. The substance of which human world is made are social activities and relations. They condition each other and form a historical as well as autodynamic totality. This totality, seen in the perspective of the activities which constitute it, is at the same time collective subject and social objectivity. In both aspects, the individual man, whose existence is being-in-social-world. He exists in this world inasmuch as he is socially formed, incorporated into the network of social relations, and acts in socially established manner within the limits of these relations and institutions created on them. Man exists in the social world so far as his activity is the participation in the activity of a supra-individual subject, and his subjectivity, which is the condition for his being the performer of ontic activity, is a particular and individual actualization of a supra-individual, social subjectivity. Man, understood in this way, shows himself as having been "thrust" into the social world, and doomed, in ontic sense, for acting in it. And this is to be the activity of the entire man. As a whole, man is subjectivity-in-acting which includes subjectivity-in-cognition, i.e., his sensual and intellectual equipment. From now on, I will differentiate in this paper between subjectivity-in-acting and subjectivity-in-cognition. Man's subjectivity-in-acting is both the condition for and a product of social activities. It means that subjectivity, together with his usage, is socialized in a historically particular way. The social character of human activities means not only that activities are done within the limits of social relations and according to social patterns but - in fact - that activities are always relations which bind man with other people, even when he is directed at things. Human activities remain always - essentially - social interactions, and this gives them an intersubjective character: they establish contact between indivi-

dual subjectivities-in-cognition. The condition and the product at the same time of these interactions, seen from the perspective of their intersubjectivity, is supra-individual, interpersonal consciousness.

Having accepted the notion of what is social as the constitutive category of the ontology of cognition, we must agree that cognition is - in its ontic structure - a social phenomenon, and that it has interactional, dialogical form. It is a dialogue, and not in such a metaphorical understanding according to which while exploring nature we ask questions and nature answers us. Cognition is a dialogue in a literal, human, sense. Strictly speaking one can say that cognition is in its ontic structure a system of social interactions which take place among the individual subjectivities-in-cognition. The system is autodynamically historical and forms the ontic structure of the self-creating cognition.

The cognitive act, understood as social interaction, can be thus described, to use Hegelian expression, as "subjectivity directed against subjectivity". Subjectivities-in-cognition which direct themselves to each other or against each other are not their own creations in the sense of being given to themselves in the act of the inner-consciousness as pure self-knowledge. They are socially created.

The idea of the interactional structure of cognition allows us to problematize the seemingly obvious conviction that cognition is a relation between subject and object, and shows in a new light the old transcendentalistic problem of the objectivity of cognition. It is the problem of the conditions which enable human consciousness to go beyond itself towards the transcendent. First of all, two non-identical issues can be noticed: the problem of an individual subjectivity-in-cognition going towards another subjectivity, and the problem of a subjectivity-in-cognition transcending towards what is objective-in-cognition.

In relation to the first problem, one can say that the tendency to transcendent towards other subjectivities is the condition for the possibility of the cognitive acts which are social interactions, and that this tendency is an indispensable ontic qua-

lity of human subjectivity-in-cognition. Since individual consciousness is only a particular actualization and an element of interpersonal consciousness, then the going towards the other people's subjectivity, is a movement which takes place within a social subjectivity, i.e., within the given, historically concrete supra-individual subject of social life. The same applies to the tendency to assimilate the objectivized contents of other subjectivities-in-cognition. The transcending towards other subjectivities and the assimilating the content of social consciousness are constituent processes of cognition. They occur for such is the very nature of cognition as a social process.

The tendency to transcend towards other subjectivities-in-cognition cannot be treated as a proof that cognition refers itself to things. The problem of the factual validity of cognition demands separate inquiry.

The issue of the factual validity of cognition becomes the question of primary importance for these theories which treat cognition as subjective-objective relation. In the light of what was said here about the autodynamic character of cognition, such a treatment is neither the only possible nor the only existing one in philosophy. It is just one of the forms in which cognition constitutes itself as cognition and recognizes its own activity in epistemological theories. In order to see the historically limited character of the idea that cognition is learning about factuality (thingness), it is enough to remind us of those theories of the pre-Kantian epistemology in which cognition was understood as a relation between human subjectivity, human mind and (divine) objective knowledge. In these theories, internalizing rather than transcending was problematized. Questions were asked about the conditions in which human subject can acquire objective knowledge rather than about the conditions in which human consciousness or knowledge would refer to objectivity, factuality.

Can we say, however, that the recognition of the historical limitations of the subjective-objective conception of cognition enables us to cancel the problem of objective validity of cognition in a version proper for this conception? I think we cannot, because this version of the problem is characteristic of the modern reflection on cognition. All the current epistemological inquiries ought to take this conception as their obligatory

point of reference, they have to take into account its problems and settlements, if only to overcome them. Otherwise, there is a danger that they may be recognized as inquiries concerning cognition only and exclusively from their own point of view.

Let us then analyse the problem how the question about the objectivity of cognition and its factual validity can be asked on the ground of the suggested understanding of cognition.

When we ask about the objectivity of a cognitive interaction, we want to understand how it is possible that there exists a relation between cognition and what is external to the subjectivities-in-acting. When asking about the factual validity of cognition we want to learn how it is possible that things interfere in the interactions between subjectivities-in-cognition. In other words, what seems strange from the point of view suggested here and what requires explication is the fact that interactions among subjectivities-in-cognition are not closed in themselves, that they are open to what is socially objective, and that things take part in human dialogue and become objects to which subjectivities participating in the interactions direct themselves intentionally.

In order to answer these questions, one has to start with a statement that on the ground of the accepted here ontological assumptions, cognition cannot be considered as the activity which constitutes by itself what is factual. Man's contact with what is external to him cannot be reduced to the creative activity of his subjectivity-in-cognition. The process of constituting human reality is itself an ontic process, in which man participates as a whole, and is engaged with all his subjectivity-in-acting. In this process that which is objective to man, i.e., what is the object of his interest, longings, operations, etc., is being formed. The reality, the thingness which objectivizes itself to man is always human factuality. It is already socialized and exiologicial in the sense that it has ontic relevance for man and concrete supra-individual wholes, that it can be valued from the point of view of social being. Hence, the very social creation of the human world gives cognition its factual validity and makes it refer to things. Things interfere in cognition, they become its objects. Thanks to them, cognition is the cognition-of-something because cognition is an element of human subjective-objective activity, and cannot be extracted from it. In other words, cognit-

ion is related to what is objective and becomes possible as factually valid so far as it is determined by the entire social life to which it belongs. If total autonomization of cognition were possible, it would be pure, direct interaction of subjectivities, i.e., such an interaction in which no things would mediate, and subjectivities would in no way be determined or limited by the necessity of referring to things.

The developing human activity which gives cognition its factual validity, makes it a value. It relativizes itself to cognition, it makes cognition the condition for its own creative character. To the degree that this social activity refers to things, i.e., as far as it affects things, it relativizes itself to knowledge about things, and whether it transforms or creates realities, or rules over them, depends on its knowing them. One could say that epistemological reflection on the conditions of factual validity of cognition is just an articulation of such a factual functioning of social activity. Social activity has a factual nature when it establishes the identity of objectivity and factuality, thingness, adding value to the latter. Epistemological considerations express just the situation in which things become the point of reference for evaluating both the concrete operation, which is evaluated according to how it affects things, and the cognitive act, which is evaluated in respect of how it refers to things.

To recapitulate, cognition is an element of social reality and has the structure of a dialogue. Consequently, it takes place in the space among individuals, and not within human minds, although the latter are its necessary correlatives. Cognition is a historical whole, since it is, in its ontic structure, the autodynamic system of social interactions. Individual subjectivity participating in cognitive interactions becomes a subjectivity-in-cognition, has a socially created nature, and is characterized by the tendency to transcend towards other subjectivities-in-cognition and to internalize the contents of an interpersonal consciousness. Such a supra-individual consciousness is co-created (preserved, modified in some fragments, etc.) by concrete cognitive interactions, and is in the same time a condition of each of these interactions. What is objective to individual subjectivities, i.e., what is the object of cognition and acting participates in cognition because cognition is an element of the entire

activity of human beings. The way in which objectivity participates in cognition is proper for the given, historically determined manner of social self-creation. Particularly, objectivity participates in cognition as thingness. Cognition gains its axiological aspect, becomes a value through participating in social creative activity.

The above considerations may raise the feeling of insufficiency. One might say that they do not answer the question what cognition really is. To qualify cognition as the autodynamic historicity, which in its ontic structure is the system of social interactions, may appear unsatisfactory and - essentially - non-epistemological. However, one has to remember that creating an ontological conception of cognition in the sense suggested here means changing the whole style of asking about cognition and qualifying it. One cannot qualify cognition by defining it, since this procedure must lead either to naturalistic or psychologistic conceptions; or to the methodological conceptions in which cognition turns out to be a correlative of some methodological rules; or it ends up with building epistemological metaphysics in which cognition is not problematized at all. If one wants to avoid these positions, there remains only one solution - to look for the answer to the question of what cognition is, by penetrating the realm in which it constitutes itself in the forms of concrete historical cognitions. This realm is the historical world of social subjective-objective activity.

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#### PROBLEM POZNANIA JAKO PYTANIE ONTOLOGICZNE

Punktem wyjścia moich rozważań jest przekonanie, że poznanie nadal wymaga filozoficznego namysłu. Kantowski transcendentalizm i wyrastające z niego bezpośrednio lub pośrednio filozofie Fichtego, Hegla, Marksa, Nietzschego, Husserla i Heideggera wyznaczają obszar teoretyczny, w którym pytanie o poznanie stawiane jest w nowy sposób, już nie w szacie naturalistycznej czy psychologistycznej. Ze względu na zawartość pojęciową tego obszaru i wyprac-

wany w nim sposób filozofowania, problem poznania staje się w nim zagadnieniem ontologicznym, tzn. możliwe staje się pytanie o to, jaka jest ontyczna struktura poznania. Odpowiedzi na to pytanie mogą być oczywiście różnorodne. W artykule przedstawiona jest jedna z nich. Fundamentalną kategorią pojęciową proponowanej konceptualizacji poznania jako fenomenu ontycznego jest pojęcie społecznienia. W perspektywie tej kategorii poznanie jawi się jako autodynamiczna historyczność, która ma strukturę interakcji społecznych włączonych w całość ludzkiej działalności. Dzięki uwzględnieniu szerszego kontekstu ontycznego, w którym realizuje się poznanie, możliwe jest wyjaśnienie sposobu uczestniczenia w poznaniu przedmiotów.