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**STANISŁAW BRZOWSKI'S
CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS**

*Understanding is approachable only for one who is able to force
for deep sympathy in the field of spirit and tragic history, for be-
ing perturbed by essence of life that is to be understood*

(Aphorisms, p. 52)

In his very short lifetime (1878-1911) Stanisław Brzowski's most intense activity as a writer and thinker occurred in his last ten years. His very wide interests opened up a spectacular *field of possible understanding* of philosophy, literature and critical theory. Being under temporary influence of such thinkers as Kant, Hegel, Marx, Avenarius, Nietzsche, Bergson and Spencer he has not only popularised and described their thoughts but he also modified and transformed them according to his own aims, and he always did this for the same reason: to restore all human activity – and especially a theoretical one – to origins of life's practice. We can find at least three contexts of this life's practice, for example: philosophy of an act (1901-1903), philosophy of work (1904-1907) and finally philosophy of life (1908-1911), so it is peculiar for Brzowski

that all these contexts are still various kinds of critics of consciousness. All critics, as it is understood by Brzozowski, is a questioning of consciousness' surface. But let us begin from the start.

1. The critics of immediate consciousness

What is most typical in Brzozowski's thought is its radical polemical and critical nature. The best point of departure of our presentation could be main Brzozowski's thesis, according to which our consciousness is not independent or, positively, is determined. He wrote about this point as follows: *our logic, our theory of thought and culture is still based on large and ordered nonsense, on the total reversal of existing conditions* (*Ideas*, p. 418). The first of the main consequences of that common mistake is that our social life is often treated like something external in the relation to consciousness. And the second one is that each life's influence does not form but deform consciousness – here life is like an obstacle which should be omitted and eliminated. From these two consequences follows the third and the most important and dangerous one – in the name of pure awareness process of knowing is just a way of cumulating consciousness' contents – thus content itself is being, and its expression is truth. This most popular opinion is based on and derived from direct consciousness. What is produced by consciousness – each of its products – is just reduced to the role of carrier of some objective content. But in the Brzozowski's perspective there is nothing like pure awareness in our knowledge and understanding, this is totally another logic. According to him consciousness and life are related to each other as part and whole, this is a relation between what is derived and what is its source. Social life here is what constitutes and rules the function and contents of consciousness. *Everything that is a part of consciousness is conditioned by life* (*Culture and Life*, p. 319). And this is of course a version of hermeneutical circle.

Life itself has no strict determined meaning, it is something that can not be grasped and closed in any scientific notion, because life itself is exactly what determines everything else and what is always somehow and always for the time being determined. Finally we should describe life with the help of the following determinations:

- set of biological qualities and processes;
- subconscious's and irrational;
- producing life – work;
- social life; and
- everyday life.

Thus Brzozowski's main thesis on determined nature of consciousness implies every determination that is possible in the context of these meanings, it is biological, psychical, technical, social and connected with a popular outlook on life. Being determined in all of these ways, consciousness can be grasped with the help of the following features that are the most commonly shared by direct and dependent consciousness:

1. there is true reality outside consciousness – its qualities are independent of human knowledge, Brzozowski called it *ready reality*;
2. this reality is directly given;
3. knowing consciousness has to adapt to this reality, it has to conform to it to be adequate and to represent it exactly as it objectively exists.

This attachment to the belief that there is directly given *ready world* to which we just have to adapt is what Brzozowski called *forgetfulness of subject* – thanks to these metaphysical beliefs subject forgets about itself and in this way it becomes a person in a biological meaning. Such a person is only the physiological condition of subject, it exists just in a functional way while the subject is what constitutes values. A person uses a direct consciousness, it is sure that all it has to do is to find an adequacy between its dependent consciousness and objectively existing external world. But such an adequacy is just direct mystification, because in the act of consciousness there is no reflection that could constitute a world *for us*. The subject, from the other hand, is reflectively conscious of the only existing world that is constructed by him during the process of self-knowledge. For thinking subject there is no external, objective reality – what is available for him in a direct way is only the reality of consciousness.

The most evident distinction between dependent consciousness and a reflective one (following A. Chmielecki, p. 58) consists in differences between their ontic levels. The first one is autonomous in its existence but in its activity is not independent consciousness – it is spontaneous, sensorial and continuous. While the reflective consciousness is not autonomous, it can occur and disappear but it always needs a direct consciousness to exist. The role of reflection is just a critics of direct consciousness' activity, therefore reflection itself breaks the continuity of direct perception of consciousness: *Man knows ready world. Moment of reflection destroys this self-possession and trust (Ideas, p. 141)*. Finally, there is no self-identity in direct and dependent consciousness – this is why it should be criticised. Critics itself is thus the tool of reflective consciousness' identity which, from its side, is the first condition of a subject's self-identity, it is of its self-consciousness.

However even reflective consciousness itself is not the first source of everything else – and this recognition should be treated as a kind of transgression of Kantian transcendentalism. Kant's epistemological discovery, his Copernican revolution, means for Brzozowski that: *It is not our concepts to be adapted to things but things are adapted to concepts [...] This means: we know nothing about things except what we recognise in the form of relations that take place between us and world (Culture and Life, p. 353)*. Using very interesting suggestions proposed by Chmielecki we can say that treating this epistemological relation in topological way one can distinguish between subject and consciousness, and the most important consequence of that distinction is thesis on undirected and mediated nature of this relation. However treating it in respect of dynamics that take place in this relation one can submit a proposition that consciousness is not a subject. Consciousness is always a derivative of some point of view, it is always a result of subjective establishing. Thus the only content of our consciousness is not *ready world* but world *for us*: *Object's dependence on such a point of view is its whole nature, its logical essence, so when we consider it independently (point of view – N.L.) then we have to fall into contradiction (Culture and Life, p. 294)*.

And this admittedly Nietzschean perspectivism in Brzozowski thought allows us to finally introduce a following distinction. Since consciousness is not the source but is established by disposed subject we can, following Brzozowski, distinguish between objective and subjective disposition. The first one is typical in sciences that suspend everything connected with subject, especially all axiological values which are neutralised or treated as facts. The second disposition, it is a subjective one, is just projection and affirmation of values – the subject here is fully engaged, it is axiologically active. As Brzozowski said this: *The man of science recognises what exists, what happens without his participation; the man of philosophy, a philosopher, rewrites, he wants to rewrite the direction of world, the first one excludes his personality, the second one lives all over the world as his responsibility and his act* (*Ideas*, p. 69).

To sum up, objective disposition is axiologically neutral and what is most important in this perspective is only an adequacy between consciousness' content and things that correspond with it. This is exactly what Nietzsche called "philological interpretation" that has two well-known distinctive features: integrity ('Redlichkeit') and fairness ('Gerechtigkeit') that often lead to dogmatism of direct consciousness. Moreover, and what is worth stressing, according to main features of an adequate disposition, it is according to its correctness, adequacy and totality, just as according to main features of its object: autonomy, objectivity and identity, we can say that it is really very difficult to find some moment of critics in such a disposition. Characteristics of objects demand a metaphysical belief in existence of external and independent *ready world*, therefore consciousness itself can not be independent – it is related just to these belief and, in consequence, it is related to some metaphysical prejudices which origins stay unknown.

Whereas subjective disposition and its object have opposite features: object here is not autonomous, not objective and not identical while disposition itself is not correct but effective, is not adequate but constructive and finally it is not total, at least not for ever – it is only for the time being. Subjective disposition, as it is axiologically active, establishes values and the only way to gain a value is not scientific knowledge but understanding. Values are not natural facts thus they can not be grasped with the help of causal cognisance. However values are valuable only for the subject of critical reflection – such a reflection is at the same time production and construction of values as relation between subject and his world, however not *ready world* but becoming one. Finally, critics is a construction of values but their spiritual and social meanings are not dependent of objective reference. What is most relevant is not intentional "what" of these values but rather their meaning in life, their social determination. And this is admittedly a Marxian element in Brzozowski's thought – but this is Marxism of a special kind – this is antinaturalistic Marxism, and social critic itself is hermeneutical one.

2. Towards the critical hermeneutics

It is a very well-known truth, but unfortunately still not outside Poland, that Brzozowski was the first thinker who interpreted Marxism in a new antinaturalistic way.

Already by 1905 he derived from so called “early Marx’s works” the following consequences:

- it is impossible to recognise superhuman world (against classical definition of truth);
- all knowledge is dependent of human practice (against pure and not historical theory of knowledge);
- nature is thus constructed by man (nature is ontological chaos);
- there is any thing independent of man (thing is just illusion of direct consciousness in *ready world*).

Moreover, Brzozowski, in opposition to the natural deterministic way of interpretation of Marx, said that *ready* and independent of us world of things, just as objective laws that rule them, are only illusions of consciousness or, as Lukacs called this later, “reification of consciousness”. And this illusion has economical origins thus it is not enough to fight against it only on the bases of consciousness. In the same year he wrote: *If man should be freed he has to master economism that still masters him; in an other case all emancipation will be in the sphere of illusion (Culture and Life, p. 49)*. This is of course a very clearly presented idea of alienation but this idea has also a modified meaning. According to Brzozowski, an illusion of *ready world* is strictly related to and derived from alienation – consciousness that is disconnected with the process of work in such a manner “substantialises” its own passivity. But in this context work itself is not only material production but also contains mainly all spiritual culture that grows from life and serves it. Because the first and original contact between man and world is always an active one – this is just work – everything else is secondary, especially perception and knowledge about world.

Following Kołakowski we can say that this practical dialogue with environment is absolute reality – there is no being that could show us its authentic face. World, as said Brzozowski, is *commensurable to work*. And this is probably the most important feature of Brzozowski’s Marxism – this is Marxism that is read through practically interpreted Kant – power to organise our experience is not a set of apriorical forms, it is not a product of transcendental rationality but this is a practical power – this is capability to transform the world according to our own aims. According to Brzozowski, an internal meaning of Marxism is contained not in what it describes and anticipates but in what it causes. The meaning of *praxis* can not be grasped by sociological description of social regularity, the only way to understand it is by attempting to grasp philosophy and thinking as historical *praxis*. *Praxis* is not an object of Marxism understood as theory, Brzozowski treated Marxism as a kind of *praxis* that sees a history together with itself – his Marxism is not a theory of common social history but the practice of subjective understanding of history and thereby it is subjective history of *praxis*. This history creates also nature: *Nature as an idea is an experience understood as our work, world as possible object of our technical activity (Ideas, p. 119)*. Thus nature is not a being in itself rather some level of our own power over being ourselves. But, as practical understanding of history, understanding itself is also a kind of work. In such a work time is coming into being.

2.1. Social genesis of time

Of course time and temporality are neither innate forms of human mind, nor direct representation of natural reality. They are a specific way of grasping this reality – ways that have developed through history, that are socially mediated, it is mediated by social work. Brzozowski wrote: *Ready nature [...] is a set of isolated moments and each of them is filled by some emotional content that is untied by anything and stayed outside the proper meaning of time [...] Here one could not speak about proper change. Here some content still surprises thought (Ideas, p. 147)*. This is the essence of his culture's critics that only work creates the notion of change.

However – how a time occurs? Brzozowski answered this question in the following way: *Like the emptiness of expectation of something that will satisfy needs. It is emptiness filled by need, by perception of various contents which are **not it**. When **it** is captured than the **not it** disappears, it becomes obliterated. Although it repeats itself, it is just a negative blot. But this blot means only lack, contains all that carries us away, and here time and space stand together [...] Only expectation of something that will satisfy needs, it is in an active state, and in common expectation, in common searching, lays a base for categories of time and space. And even these most general, most contemplative categories rise from practical ground. However, the section between **not it** and **it** is filled up by true content only when it depends on our activity, our work (Ideas, p. 148-149)*. Work joins different emotional states, it brings in our thoughts determined continuity and makes our thoughts proper, it is the synthesising of notions.

But already five years earlier Brzozowski, trying to cross Kant's apriorical time over, showed a reason of commonly shared opinion that time is something objective and independent of us. *What will time be for us if we forget about socio-technical order, if we closed ourselves and if for the only measure of time we will have the flux of our imaginations? [...] What we usually take for objective time is just socio-theoretical order constructed by putting some external courses at the place of subjective feeling of time. Assumed that we deal with work that is dependent of, for example, sea's tide and ebb-tide [...] Our elementary ways of measuring time would not be enough, time would short or extend itself according to the various human dispositions [...] In the place of individual measure, of changeable flux of feelings and impressions, common measure has to occur (Culture and Life, p. 448)*. Therefore time is neither the natural container of events nor independent of us relation between events. We create the category of time to understand our own possibility of master over the fate. Past time is all we did, future time is unfulfilled field of our hope and projections. As tersely wrote L. Kołakowski: *[...] human efforts, that are already crystallised in history, oppose to freely projecting energy and just this opposition we call time (Main Currents of Marxism, p. 547)*. According to Brzozowski, it is nonsense to search some eternal laws that are actualising themselves in time and therefore to think that man is dependent of some highest powers for which man is just slow performer.

There are any transcendental or existing rules that give value of what we are able to produce and construct as what is understood and consequently known or as religious myth or as work of art or finally as philosophical thought. Thus proper understanding of culture has to be functional – considering job, and genetic – considering time and history.

2.2. Critical hermeneutics

Based on the primordial situation of work Brzozowski's ontology of culture is directed against two standpoints, it is positivistic evolutionism and romanticism. Both of them agreed that reality has no meaning but it is rather submitted to its own laws that are independent of man. Philosophy of work has to cross over both the positivistic faith in progress and romantic attachment to the self-sufficient consciousness, it has to understand world as something which meaning is derived from common human efforts. Such a humanity is for Brzozowski a collective absolute that is responsible for its own fate because any ready and given laws can not secure human victory in the faith with fate. And, as observed Kotakowski, it is modification of Kantianism in Marxist manner: *nature, as we know it and which we can meaningfully think about, occurs as human work however its human factor does not originate from transcendental conditions of experience but rather from work* (MCM, p. 541). Thus humanity has no ground, there is nothing beyond working humanity: *Current state of humanity is deepest metaphysical work of man, deepest reality and reality above all. Our cities, wars, factories, works of art, science – these are no dream behind which is something deeper, that could make us free. This is an absolute, irreducible reality* (Ideas, p. 443).

Thus the main task that stays before an honest thinker is to bring the source of meaning – it is working life – to the light of day. And we could repeat what has been already said that meaning of human activity depends not of objective reference but rather of forms of human coexistence and work that lays behind notion and thought. *The meaning of each thought, each notion is based on [...] what they are for human ability to work, human courage and will to survive* (The Legend of Young Poland, p. 171). And therefore social meaning of spiritual contents does not contain in the semantics' field and the more not in the syntax but in *praxis* – understanding of this meaning does not belong to the semantical analysis but to the critics, and exactly to hermeneutics. *As long as we will search the source of thought in the thought itself and not in life we will not move beyond the well-known, still repeated commonplaces* (Ideas, p. 437).

The most important hermeneutical notion of Brzozowski's thought is "ideogenetic type": When we determine some system of beliefs, notions, values, it is very important to understand with what kind of life's process they are connected. This process or fact we can call ideogenetic type of given culture (The Legend of Young Poland, p. 98). For example "ideogenetic type" of Renaissance's man was man freed from medieval social and philosophical limitations. As we see, "ideogenetic type" is such a kind of understanding that double move of thinking takes place: from given work to its "ideogenetic type", and back to the work, but after the second move we can interpret this work in the light of its determination: beyond each notion we are looking for the group that has constructed it, and character of this group is the only measure of its ideological works (Letters, v. 1, p. 410). What is worth noticing is that hermeneutical category of Brzozowski's critics is not reductive one – it does not serve to destruct given work and to treat it as meaningless, but to better understanding of this work. Brzozowski wrote in his peculiar style: Man is deeper than any thought, any sentence spoken by him: to find life beyond thought, to show it – meaning to disclose its deepest content (The Legend of Young Poland, p. 171).

Hermeneutical *field of possible understanding* pointed out by life and work is here the only one possible ontology but not metaphysics. The difference between these two notions are crucial to understand what Brzozowski had in mind when he wrote that: *there are no relation to the world, to the nature, to the logic, but only inner-historical, inner-social relation between different efforts, spurts and directions of will. What we consider to be the world is just some quality of human will, we consider it to be the world itself because we do not so much create it as we found it and still do* (*Ideas*, p. 443). Thus ontology we mentioned about is a hermeneutical field that is created through our work and life, this is mediated ontology that grew up from the field of our own *praxis* – this is an ontology of practical life. And hermeneutical critics is all we can do in such determined world – it is construction of life's meanings. The deepest meaning of Brzozowski's critical hermeneutics can be expressed in his own words: *Both our (polish – N.L.) romanticism and German philosophy are interested in the same thing: freedom and freeing the man. However principal direction and aim that determine all development of our romanticism is to make this freedom, to fight for it and to realise it. German philosophy strives to know this freedom [...] Freedom, according to consequences of German philosophy's assumptions, should become man's possession without his own engagement. He does not realise it but it is realised in him, whereas he understands process of this realisation* (*Culture and Life*, p. 405).