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Reviews

Zdzisław Cackowski: *Man as a Subject of Activity*
by Urszula Paczocha*

Theory of cognition is a discipline which has always caused, and still does, many troubles not only because categorical solutions are not available but also on account of methodological difficulties in formulating questions. The position of the cognitive subject in epistemology is especially problematic. This question has been dealt with by Zdzisław Cackowski, the author of the book *Człowiek jako podmiot działania praktycznego i poznawczego* (Man as the Subject of Practical and Cognitive Activity).

According to Cackowski, if we want to investigate the human subject (mind) and his spiritual culture from the philosophical standpoint, we should discover his sources in the "earthly basis". Idealism "a mental attitude towards life" dealt with the thought separately from reality and practical activity. "Thinking cannot be the starting point of a philosophical analysis of thinking: it must be the point of arrival of the analysis. The point of departure must be the sphere of activities outside the mind: the sphere of material-objective activities. Materialism is therefore the only philosophy of thinking" (p. 7). Metaphysical theory is challenged by Cackowski's theory of the unity of the subject and the object in the human world in all its connections. At this point it should be noted that these reflections are not novel: Cackowski makes use of the basic theses of Marxism, having analyzed and presented them in the form and content which he thought proper.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I discusses the general problems of the subject against the Marxist background. Part II presents the epistemological reflections by French and Soviet scholars (I. Meyerson, J. P. Vernant, B. M. Kedrov, M. Detienne) and Part III, possibly the most important and interesting, discusses the views of an eminent American historian, Levis Mumford. The last chapter of Part III contains Cackowski's sharp polemic with a Thomist conception of man by Mieczysław A. Krapiec.

Already in the introduction to his book Cackowski disposes of the traditional gnoseology which treated the cognitive subject (i.e. man) exclusively as the pure cognitive subject, without taking the practical aspect of subjectivity into account.

* Zdzisław Cackowski: *Człowiek jako podmiot działania praktycznego i poznawczego*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1979.

At the same time it separated the object of cognition from the subject, failing to see a dialectical connection of subjectivity with objectivity.

For Cackowski, the subject and the object are an inseparable whole while that which joins them together is vital-practical activity. Only then can we speak of the real man, who is connected with two kinds of channels: vital-practical bonds (strong stimulation) and cognitive bonds (weak stimulation). The activity of these cognitive and practical channels is connected genetically and functionally, the development of practical activity being primary to cognitive activity. On the other hand, the application of information in the channel of practical activity is the essential factor in the emergence of knowledge. Information is only seemingly obtained through the informative channel alone. "The knowledge which does not work absolutely (i.e. is an image only) does not exist; the information which does not work absolutely is no information at all" (p. 12).

The cognition of the world is possible only when the cognitive powers are united with practical activity. The basic source of knowledge is not merely a physical action of the object upon the subject (a receptor→a nervous centre). An experience is the primary source of knowledge but only as "the reception of weak stimulation, connected with strong stimulation and with pain and suffering, which are avoided and overcome with our own activity, or it is connected with satisfaction obtained through our own activity" (p. 14).

Man therefore lives in the world of material interactions. Out of the structure of these connections human cognition and human knowledge are realized. This union of man with the world cannot be reduced to a purely cognitive, one-channel connection. According to Cackowski, it is a system of circuits: one cell is vital-practical activity, the other is cognitive-controlling activity. The author further demonstrates how a necessity to develop cognitive activity is born in the development of the basic vital activity. These two spheres of activity are inseparably united, they are the two spheres of human activity. Cackowski attempts a logical reconstruction of the active subject and the cognitive subject superimposed on the former. The active subject is for Cackowski a system which transforms another material system without itself being commensurately transformed (qualitatively and quantitatively) by the action of the latter. In order to differentiate the human subject from other living subjects Cackowski introduces a notion of the indirectness of action, which gives the acting system a great advantage over the object of activity. Owing to the working tools, man has achieved the highest subjectivity of material activity, which is dynamic and everchanging. In this sense, only man is the subject of activity "technologically and socially mediated" (p. 40). A truly human activity is characterized by indirectness, dynamism and versatility. A given system can function effectively when it possesses an internal mechanism regulating the interaction of organs and functions. Underlying the existence and the functioning of the controlling mechanism are two premises: one inheres in the structure of the active subject, the other — in the environment where the subject lives and is active. The fundamental condition of the functioning of the controlling mechanism is the many-layeredness of the active subject which is united with the many-layeredness of the outer environment. Cackowski has put forward a conception of the two-level cognitive subject. This is the subject of the practical-vital cognitive activity (primary activity) and at the same time this is the subject of cognitive activity which is currently practically redundant (secondary activity) and which is the source of the subject's cognitive activity. The subject thus understood is called the full subject. Cackowski has distinguished four subsystems in his schematic outline of the subject:

- I. immediate internal vital activity
- II. protective-offensive and assimilating vital energy
- III. informative
- IV. central informative-regulative system.

These subsystems are connected by channels performing definite functions. For Cackowski the most important is the channel performing the objective function, directed outside, and which has a double function: as the channel of purely cognitive activity (elementary cognitive activity) or regulating practical activities (material-objective activity). The two kinds of contents function at the preconceptual level of this channel. The case is analogous with the conceptual contents, which have a double function: as purely cognitive contents (theoretical activity) and as the contents controlling material-objective activity (practical activity).

Further reflections concern the problems of creative thinking, that is a type of human activity determined by the purely cognitive plane. The independent element on this plane is the informative element which, when subordinated, can function on the practical plane. Man's activity, common for the two planes, lies, according to Cackowski, in creating, revealing and solving problems. The most important constituents of personality which co-create a problem situation are: conceptual knowledge with the rules of practical or cognitive activity, cognitive sensations not formulated in conceptual structures, and the varied sphere of experiences and emotional attitudes acquired so far. Problems encountered by man in his activity have been divided into algorithmic and creative. The first category comprises the problems which man has already recognized and solved earlier. The other category covers the problems impossible to solve by previous methods. Solving this type of creative problems is, in Cackowski's view, a creative activity. Creation should be treated as a necessity that follows from the very essence of man and his life. "Thus man must be creative. A creative disposition is a necessary element of human life. (...) Could man be freed from the burden of creation? Such a possibility is conceivable but its realization would be tantamount to depriving man's life of its essence and to reducing man to bestiality" (pp. 442—443). Cackowski is then trying to answer the question of what creative thinking is, what is the complexity of this thinking and what processes accompany creative thinking.

The next part of the book is devoted to a discussion of the theory of scientific discovery propounded by a Soviet scholar B. M. Kedrov, who based it upon the results of his many-year-long studies on the history of science (especially on the history of Mendeleev's discovery), having subjected the results to methodological and psychological analyses.

Cackowski then discusses the views of the representatives of the French school of historical psychology (I. Meyerson, J. P. Vernant and M. Detienne). According to this school, the development of the human mind is understood as a process determined and possible only through the development of social relations. The school does not connect this development of mind with the basic theses of historical materialism.

The most essential is the part where Cackowski enters into polemics with Levis Mumford and with Mieczysław A. Krąpiec.

L. Mumford, an American anthropologist, expounded his views in *The Condition of Man* and *The Myth of the Machine. Technics and Human Development*, on the basis of which Cackowski has briefly presented the main assumptions of Mumford's theory.

Chapter 2 of Part III is devoted to the presentation of Mieczysław A. Krąpiec's

views expounded in his book *Ja — człowiek* (I — man), which points to the technocratic attitude of present-day culture where absolute and one-sided instrumentalism (technocratism) treats man as a means and an instrument. Krąpiec contends that "...man's noblest activities like cognition as such, love, creation, are the essential human values which cannot be treated only in an utilitarian way. The highest manifestation of human personality, the contemplation of truth and beauty and realization of good, have always been regarded as the only worthy aims of human life" (p. 668). According to Cackowski, M. A. Krąpiec assumes the Thomistic position, failing to see the bonds between the lowest and highest values.

For Krąpiec, man works and thinks in order to last, to be able to live and let others live; to lead a better and more dignified life. He prefers such values as altruism, creation, joy and fullness of life, and conscious participation in all human activities. The highest manifestation of the dignity of human life is for Krąpiec the contemplation of truth and beauty and realization of good (through which it is possible to participate in truth and beauty).

Cackowski further discusses Krąpiec's views on the essence of man and his anthropogenesis. "Man is a being who, since he appeared in the earth, has been using tools as the embodiment of his mind, not only as an extension of some organ." (p. 678). Thinking is thus a fundamental disposition of the species *homo sapiens* whereas material activity is only an embodiment of thinking. The thought was given to man ("thought in itself") without changing in time. Krąpiec then develops the notion of human I and its relation to the Ego and Soul. According to him, human psyche cannot be derived from the development of material structures.

It is impossible to present the whole of Cackowski's polemic with M. A. Krąpiec. But the fact of presenting the Neo-thomist position as opposed to dialectical materialism is worth noting. This confrontation of radically different positions always opens an opportunity of sharp polemic and provides a new look at epistemological problems. The book by Cackowski is therefore useful in this respect.

Andrzej Nowicki: *Man in the World of Works*
by Marek Hetmański*

The title *Homo in rebus* — man among things — determines the problems of man's existence in the world of things understood as the works that he has produced. The existence of man in this world has the characteristics of "being within", not only of simply "being side by side". The investigation of the diverse forms of man's presence among his numerous products should answer the question what man is and what is the sense of his existence. Hence, Andrzej Nowicki's considerations approach such disciplines as history of philosophy — by presenting the appropriate material, philosophy of art — through the reflection upon the form of expression of certain contents in the essential fields of art, as philosophical anthropology, which deals with the essence of man, with his development and sense of life, and finally, philosophy of culture, which is concerned with the modes of existence of works produced by man and their interrelations. Moreover, the author's studies make claim to become a separate philosophical discipline.

The subject of the book under consideration is the concept of work understood

* Andrzej Nowicki: *Człowiek w świecie dzieł*, PWN Warszawa 1974.

as an objective material thing produced by man through his creative activity. The word thing usually carries the burden of the negative meaning of the concept of reification. For the above concept, however, has a positive and even evaluative meaning. It does not mean man's degradation to unreasoning things but it symbolizes a process by which man transfers to objects a part of his personality and stamps his existence on things so produced. The "reification" of man understood like that is at the same time the "homification" of things: a deeply humanistic process of humanizing the world. The world of things, the world of works, is not alien to man, their creator. Although he leaves a part of his personality in them, he is not impoverished thereby. On the contrary, he is enriched with the part which he has produced.

Nowicki's book is a structure of "central conceptual categories" which the author has employed in the analysis of the presented problems. This decides about the lucidity of the book and it is in order therefore to present these categories in discussing the tenor of the work.

1. The first concept is the category of function. The question about what decides about the essence of being, of thing, of object has a rich philosophical tradition and just as many diverse attempts to solve it. Nowicki adduces a 13th-century philosopher, Roman Lullus, who was the first to assert that the essence of a work is determined by its function. Out of a set of functions fulfilled by a given being we should select one that characterizes it unequivocally and thus render its essence. What is the function of a work created by man? Primarily, it seems to be an object which exerts definite effects upon its recipients. A book, a painting, a poem, a piece of sculpture do not exist until they evoke definite feelings in somebody who beholds and experiences them. A thing becomes a work when it begins to affect, move or evoke certain emotional states, that is when it is transformed from a simple object into the active subject of the development of culture. It is not without reason that we say that a thing fascinates us: it acts upon us in accordance with its function. The case is similar with the works produced by man that is the things which should attract, enchant, fascinate...

The function of a work is not static because accents can be shifted from one function upon another in historical development. The essence of the work is therefore its multi-functionality. At this point, Nowicki adduces the reflections of Giordano Bruno upon the importance of the work of Copernicus, which had an essential humanistic function: it bore witness to the greatness of its author and, moreover, it gave a scientific description of the Universe and stimulated the critical way of thinking. It is impossible to determine, finally and unequivocally, the essence of a given work although in the process of creation man gives it a relatively stable meaning. The problem is that while the creative process is unequivocal, the act of the reception of its effect is equivocal. The multitude of receptions and interpretations accounts to a great extent for the multi-functionality of a work. Nowicki discusses this problem in the chapters that follow.

2. The concept of instrument, which Nowicki introduces into his considerations, refers mainly to conceptual instruments or the set of "central conceptual categories" characteristic of a particular thinker. According to this method, the analysis of a philosophical work is not reduced to a linguistic analysis of the text and to the register of the most frequent words because the central category of a philosopher is not identical with the word, which can occur many times. The example of two thinkers who, having the same knowledge, obtain different results when considering a given problem, proves, according to Nowicki, that they are applying different conceptual instruments. What is then more important for a

historian of philosophy: philosophical categories which appear in the text or the views which the philosopher proclaims in person? The general conviction is that the views which a thinker proclaims are more important than the conceptual apparatus which he employs while developing them. *Człowiek w świecie dzieł* is a book which demonstrates that this conviction is wrong. "The views of a particular thinker are addressed to those who are to become his followers whereas his conceptual instruments, selected, improved and constructed, are meant for those who want to solve new problems." (47). The concepts make up our style of thinking, our personality and views, which is why it is better to speak about them as the subjective constituents of our thinking.

This fact implies important conclusions for the historian of philosophy. Although the method of central categories is no competition to historicism or the study of the philosopher's views in the social and political aspect, yet in this arbitrary choice of concepts (always of interest to a historian, a student, less to the philosopher himself) and through an individual approach of a historian of philosophy, the method assumes the multitude of philosophizing subjects rather than one "reason in general" which would decide about the development of philosophical thought.

The method of finding the main concepts applied by a thinker permits to view his work in the context of what it could be, and moreover, what interpretation and meaning was conferred upon it by the philosopher himself. These new meanings and functions are discovered by the historian of philosophy who is in a way a co-creator of a given work, a philosophical system. This is confirmed by the replacement of the chronological order in the philosopher's presentation by a hierarchical system of central categories. This system is frequently more representative than other traditional interpretations. Later works and further development of the thinker, or successive epochs, are the key to the interpretation of earlier works and periods. The Renaissance is better understood through the perspective of the further development of its assumption rather than in reference to the "sources" in the Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Similarly, Marx's *Philosophical-Economic Manuscripts* gain in importance in their interpretation owing to the subsequent development of their author and to the development of Marxist philosophy.

3. Interiorization. "The multitude of readings and diversity of influences upon us in the process of acquiring the cultural tradition produce various tensions, clashes and contradictions, which are the factors that disintegrate our consciousness" says Nowicki (71). In philosophy there occur numerous cracks, contradictions, inconsistencies and incoherences as well as the polycentricity of views of a philosopher. It is the duty of the historian of philosophy to reveal these factors deciding about the above break of philosophy into many theories and views. The essential conditions that account for the split of both the individual personality of the philosopher and philosophy in general are the following: internally contradictory tendencies of human psyche, variability of the outside world and the necessity to adjust to it, the overlapping of successive stages of development, subjection to various influences, alienation of works already produced etc. This list, although incomplete, emphasizes the fact that subjection to various influences is a disintegrating factor, which is not, however, a negative process as it turns out to be the necessary condition of exteriorization. Interiorization as the unification in the philosopher's personality of what is by its nature diverse is man's identification with his world of works, with the activity of certain men, systems of ideas etc. It is only in that way that the development of human culture is possible from the point of the activity of its creators. It is impossible fully to acquire the values that

inhere in the world of man's products without producing them actively. There is a dialectically reciprocal connection between exteriorization and interiorization.

4. **Exteriorization** — identified by Nowicki with man's conscious activity, with all the sphere of practical activity being omitted as it is of minor importance in the book under consideration. The basis of exteriorization is the activity of human mind which occurs on two planes: the cognitive and the projecting or productive. Although the process of the exteriorization of man's personality into the world of his works is based primarily on the latter, its essence and value are decided by the tendency thoroughly to cognize what all cognition strives after — to cognize the objective thing. We should not, like all epistemological idealism, identify cognitive (projecting) practice with its product, an objective image. Nor should we agree that only a subjective contribution of the mind to the creative process were to constitute this activity, which decides about the dignity of man, contends Nowicki.

Marx's words "man is the world of man" render the essential thought of Nowicki's book. Exteriorization, distinctly separated from alienation, denotes the manifestation outside man of what is the most valuable, materialization in the real world rather than imaginary in the philosopher's mind. Besides the constitution of thoughts into a work, the full realization of exteriorization is also its transformation into life, its influence and thus the fulfilment of the fundamental function in accordance with the essence of the work. The world of works, values, the world of culture, is as real as the real world. However, it is not an autonomous being, that is why exteriorization should be analyzed in the context of social conditions which will ultimately decide about the sense and value of the exteriorized constituents of personality.

The creator exists only in the creative process and in its effects. From a "being in itself" he becomes "a being for himself", "a being for others". To satisfy its essence, the work must continue its unchanged form whereas the creator, to be one, must change all the time. Therefore, the condition of creation, is a constant disintegration of what has been integrated before — an integration at a higher level.

5. **Sense.** All thoughts and works, into which thoughts are transformed, have their sense and meaning determined by their context. On the basis of the context we can speak of notional sense, presentational sense, or of autobiographical, philosophical, cultural or polemic senses. Every cultural phenomenon belongs thereby to many contexts and has many meanings. It is possible, Nowicki says, to tear out a work from its basic context and to transfer it into a new one. All these changes of contexts produce changes of the senses of a work under consideration. A large part of Nowicki's book is devoted to this phenomenon.

Traditional studies on the problem of the context of works and their sense distinguish two basic kinds of contexts. The horizontal context decides about "the present of the work", that is the creator's personality, the formal structure of the work, its social-historical conditioning, the methodical and cultural affiliation of the work to a current, a tendency or a school, the polemic character towards other works etc. The vertical context, as a complement of the former, refers to the past or to everything the creator's life experience stems from. According to Nowicki the two contexts form the genetic context, which, however, does not exhaust the entire interpretation. Apart from the origin, it is necessary to see the dimension of the future life of the work, and this may depend upon many cultures.

While the creator confers a relatively stable sense upon the work, the historian of art, literature or philosophy must seek to discover the many contexts in which

the work is found and also the contexts where it can and should be, even against the author's intentions. From a philosophical text, through paintings and sculptures and to the analysis of programmes, proclamations and ideas, every work should be investigated in the socio-political context outside which it does not mean anything. It is the directive of a materialist pursuit of philosophy and its history. This directive is consistently applied in *Człowiek w świecie dzieł*. A conscious student of the traces of man's presence in the world of his products should follow the history of the work which, in the active process of its reception, undergoes continuous concretizations and interpretations or acquires new senses and meanings. As a historian of philosophy and philosopher of culture Nowicki is primarily interested in the modification of the work, its structural composition and possibility of being imbued with new contents, and in the addition of a new sense to it. Such a proposition of the problem and its actual realization in the book poses to Nowicki a question about the interrelation of the roles of a historian of philosophy and a philosopher, or to put it broadly, of a theorist and a creator. A historian of a discipline of culture is not merely a biographer, a philologist or an interpreter. His study contains an interpretation, a critical analysis of the work under consideration, an effort to concretize, reproduce (and thereby co-create) the history of the work, and it also contains a general reflection upon the discipline the historian pursues. The historian of philosophy and of other humanities becomes a conscious philosopher, while the theorist himself becomes a creator. These are the unavoidable consequences of the work of a student of culture. Nowicki as the author of *Człowiek w świecie dzieł* confirms this truth.

The world of works, the products of man's conscious creation and man himself as their active recipient constitute the essence of culture. Its essence is not a homogeneous continuum of objects, creators and traditions. Its character is more of a quantized whole, says Nowicki. Its portions and parts are determined by thoughts, ideas, concrete works, their creators and recipients and their lots — past, present and future. The creator's presence in his work has a character of potential existence which depends upon the conscious reception of the contents which have been exteriorized into the work and upon the appreciation by posterity. The potentiality of works requires that they be interpreted in a diverse and deeper way, and indirectly, also cocreated. The world of man's works does not exist without and outside him.

What Nowicki postulates and actually carries out can be called comparative philosophy of culture. The list of thinkers, their views and works, the revelation of analogous functions fulfilled by different creators in different epochs, the demonstration of the line of development, hierarchization and evaluation of works — all these do not just serve an erudite presentation of the material but corroborate Nowicki's essential theses and ideas.

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