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e-mails: filosofie_craiova@yahoo.com; aneacsu1961@yahoo.com

webpage: http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/analele_universitatii/filosofie/

Tel./Fax: +40-(0)-251-418515

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OTTO FRIEDRICH BOLLNOW: SEARCH FOR THE FUNDAMENTALS OF EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY

Oleg BAZALUK¹

Tetiana MATUSEVYCH²

***Abstract:** Existential philosophy consists of many ideas, which are related closely to the concepts of "philosophy of life" and replace them. In this article we have analyzed key provisions of the O. F. Bollnow's philosophy of life concept. Our analyze shows that O. F. Bollnow's concept, from one hand, discovers and investigates an important succession between concepts of "philosophy of life" and existentialism, on the other hand, it specifies and tries comprehend critically the contents of the basic problematic ideas of the concepts of existentialism – the problem of human being.*

***Keywords:** O.F. Bollnow, existential philosophy, "philosophy of life", existentialism, being.*

Existential philosophy concepts by many ideas are related to the concepts of "philosophy of life" and succeed them. Otto Bollnow makes analysis of dominant philosophies' change at the beginning of XX century, deep for that time, in his concept, which is documented by him, mainly, in his work "Philosophy of existentialism" ³.

Let's note number of key statements of O. Bollnow's philosophy of life concept. First, in O. Bollnow's opinion "philosophy of life" as a direction in Western-European philosophy means the turn from the objective to the subjective, from the thinking not associated with the subjective aspect, to the thinking associated with the latter ⁴.

Originally, phenomena of life, this multifaceted and far from apodictic basis was laid in the foundation of the "philosophy of life". But what should one understand under notion "life"? First, it can be the existence of a single person or existence of universal - *human*. Second, it is, perhaps, individual lives of biological organisms or, perhaps, an existence of all "biological" (or "organic") matter as a single organism.

¹ Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky State Pedagogical University, Ukraine.

² Kyiv University of Tourism, Economic and Law, Ukraine.

³ Bollnow O. F. *Existenzphilosophie*, 5th ed. Stuttgart, 1955

⁴ Bollnow O. F. [in Russian] *The philosophy of existentialism/ translated in Russian by S.E.Nikulina. - St. Petersburg: Publishing house "Lan", 1999. p. 18*

Third, under the concept of life we can understand, for instance, connection of the individual or universal "human" with individual or universal "biological". Finally, forth, we can find the supra-individual, cosmic, universal in notion of life.

We have listed only a small part of all that variety of aspects, which a priori can be derived from the phenomenon of life as a possible foundation for a philosophical system. Infinite variety and wide range of meanings of the aspects of the phenomenon of life almost do not admit defining that doubtless and reliable basis for further contemplations on life, which one can use in the built-up of a *sustainable* philosophic system of life.

While developing as a philosophical school the "philosophy of life", according to O. F. Bollnow, has accumulated more and more the general, superficial statements, threatening to abolish completely the ultimate absoluteness in philosophy. In practice it turned out to be so that in "philosophy of life" one could not establish the reliability of this or that statement since it was impossible to attach criteria of the "true" and "false" ideas to anything. One could say anything about "Life" and nobody could refute or criticize it. O. F. Bollnow has specified that it was not haphazardly that philosophy of life with special disposition has been united with historical consciousness generated from variety of any life manifestations with different nations in different times¹. As O. F. Bollnow specifies, at the beginning of XX century relativism ceased to be destiny of lonely thinkers. It acquired mass, epidemic features threatening to destroy the objective life style.

In this concept O. F. Bollnow specified that the philosophy of existentialism appeared in the result of the deeper rethinking of the framework of the philosophy of life. Unlike "relativistic dissolution and decay", appeared as a consequence in the philosophy of life, the philosophy of existentialism "... once again tried to find solid framework, something absolute and unconditional, which would exist beyond any possible variability².

According to O. Bollnow, existentialism as rationality became vital need of *qualitative* analysis of this direction at the beginning of XX century. It is a kind of hope for a compromise: to abandon all discovered and investigated, namely this life as a "continuous flow", having rethought simultaneously fundamental and backbone things which rescues any

¹ Bollnow O. F. [in Russian] The philosophy of existentialism/ translated in Russian by S.E.Nikulina. - St. Petersburg: Publishing house "Lan", 1999, p. 18

² Ibid, p. 19

contemplations from destruction and rethinking. "Philosophy of Life" as a system, according to O. Bollnow, due to multi-meanings of its framework was too vulnerable and unstable¹².

O. F. Bollnow's thesis "existentialism as rationality" becomes more acceptable for the perception if we will set apart from its literal understanding. In its turn, in his thesis "existentialism as rationality" O. F. Bollnow understood another rationality, i.e. relativistic, relative, discovered by A. Einstein and unknown to classics of philosophy.

It is that rationality which fairly suits for consideration of notion "existence" as a methodological principle. "The incomprehensibility of existence", in fact, is incomprehensible to the rationality in the classical sense, since classical rationality considers only the statistical objects, or so called materialized (objectified, available) phenomena. Rationality in its relativistic understanding (after confirmation of A. Einstein's relativity theory), which is meant by O. F. Bollnow, describes phenomena *in motion, in flow*.

That is "rationality" of quantum physics, which deals with the discrete-continuum environment (i.e. *the motion* of particles and waves). Such rationality, as a methodological principle, can fully deal with the contents of the human life and existentia.

Fear for the collapse of the objective life principles, the need for the apodictic criteria, not subject to the elements of the universal decay made many thinkers to ponder over the search for unconditional criteria in phenomenon of life. Not having found the support in the existence of life, the philosophy of XX century concentrated on analysis of more accessible and doubtless things for interpretation of "inherent internal", i.e. on the analysis of *human factor*. Human existence, (Dasein) had become the subject for research of philosophy at the beginning of XX century.

What had been found in the result of the analysis of the "inherent internal" (that is human)? In O. Bollnow's opinion, the ultimate, deep core of a human being was discovered. This core K. Jaspers has denoted as notion "existence", which had been used by S. Kierkegor in his concept of the "philosophy of life".

¹ Bollnow O. F. Studien zur Hermeneutik. Zur hermenutische Logik von G. Milch und H. Lipps. – Freiburg; München: Alber-Brochur, 1983. – Bd. 2. – 295 p

² Bollnow O. F. Philosophische Anthropologie und ihre methodologischen Prinzipien// Philosophische Anthropologie heute. – München, 1972

In opinion of O. F. Bollnow, existential and philosophical concept existence in the final run ascends to old distinction between the concepts of *essentia* and *existentia* of things in existence. *Essentia* is something, i.e. what makes rich in contents definitions of these things in existence. Otherwise, it is *Dasein*, or, what is more accurate is substantial *Dasein* which remains only as a result of exception of all haphazard definitions of *Dasein*. In two words, *essentia* is essence of a thing. *Existentia*, according to Bollnow, as opposed to the previous, is oriented to the thing that something exists and is really available, created or otherwise present in existence. *Existentia* is (*Dasein*), reality of these things in existence/matter.

According to O. Bollnow, a concept "existence" changes considerably in existential philosophy. Foremost, it is reduced on a large scale and it is applied exclusively to a human being. In existential philosophy existence is exceptionally human existence, taking its origin from existential experience. Search for original things in existence generated philosophical systems of S. Kierkegor, K. Yaspers, M. Heidegger. And as opposed to Parmenid or Aristotel which longed for comprehension of existence itself, i.e. existence as reality which exists objectively close to a human being and irrespective of a human being, existential philosophy is aimed not at existence as existence in itself and supra-human existence. Existential existence in concept of philosophy of life of O. F. Bollnow has nothing in common with external existence. Existential existence is a specific internal kernel of human, apodeictic basis, compared to which statements of "philosophy of life" on a human look external and attributive. Existential existence – is something final, ultimate in an analysis which goes deep into human nature. In existential philosophy it is an object, thing, something final. Although as an object and as a thing it is immaterial. It is unsteady and dynamic. It is a core inside which activity bubbles.

Considering existential existence we must take into account that powerful religious layer which via S.Kierkegor was contributed to this concept. Religious constituent of concept "existence" strongly sets it off from the concept of life. In opinion of O. F. Bollnow, life can be stronger or weaker, richer or poorer, nobler or more rough, it can change, grow or fade. Existence lies on the other side of these definitions. It can be only wholly found or wholly lost. It is in essential nature indivisible and halted only when a man is dead or completely mentally ill"¹.

¹ Bollnow O. F. [in Russian] The philosophy of existentialism/ translated in Russian by S.E.Nikulina. - St. Petersburg: Publishing house "Lan", 1999, p. 37

So, coming from the concept of philosophy of life of O. F. Bollnow, fundamental principle of human life is existential existence. By O. F. Bollnow it is the final ultimate condition in "human aspect". It is initial discrete unit everything is built of. One can rely on it, one can attach the criteria of "truth" and "falseness", as it exists. It is the fact. The framework is being build after the initial unit is defined . The result is the system.

Thirdly, as O. F. Bollnow considers, universal initial position of existential philosophy is:

- 1) inferiority of thinking/cogitation in face of contradictions of reality;
- 2) relatedness (соотнесенность) of thinking" with tasks that sprout from own life experience of a thinker¹.

O. F. Bollnow in his concept of "philosophy of life" underlines that an assertion on inferiority of thinking compared to existence of life considerably brings together existential philosophy with "philosophy of life". "Philosophy of life", in opinion of O. F. Bollnow, tries to understand thinking/cogitation relying on its result for life practically by the same method, underlining here insufficiency of any notion- based understanding in the face of its inexhaustibility ². Thus, O. Bollnow summarizes, origin both of "philosophy of life" and existential philosophy is very close in nature and interchangeable, it is a motion beginning by the same way.

However, characteristic distinction oozes subsequently. In opinion of O. F. Bollnow, it consists in "...by what method human existence is interpreted in them and how does it find its expression in the inherent to them fundamental concepts of life and existence"³. If in a concept "life" an accent is done on the variety of sense-bearing definitions, on the moment of flow, on universal character of life, in a concept "existence" ascetic "what" of existence remains. It exists, and it is perceived as the fact, as obviousness, in its true colures and without epatage.

This ascetic "what" of existence opposes existential philosophy to the "philosophy of life" in terms of inferiority of thinking as well. "Philosophy of life", as O. F. Bollnow considers, generally believed that cogitation with its universal concepts was a "rough instrument" for the exhaustive understanding of reality in completeness of its subjective and specific definitions and in its constantly alive motion. "Philosophy of life" was more tolerant, sociable to different philosophical opinions.

¹ Ibid, p. 32

² Ibid, p. 33

³ Ibid, p. 33

Existential philosophy, like "a new type of rationality"(in terminology of O. F. Bollnow), became more principal and judgmental. It claimed, according to O. F. Bollnow, to apodicticity, actuality of its conclusions. The smallest hints on relativism and uncertainty were removed for this purpose. To avoid possibility of re-thinking of key statements, it was initially assumed to question the process of re-thinking itself as the act of thinking. Exactly for this purpose thinking was presented as the "dead-end motion" which is unable, under no circumstances, to clear up the existential existence and a number of other important concepts for philosophy of existentialism.

Fourth, analysing fundamental principle of existential philosophy, O. F. Bollnow in his concept of "philosophy of life", finally, comes to a conclusion important for our research: in existentialism understanding of the phenomenon of life has been changed radically. This change follows from attitude towards the world in "philosophy of life" and existential philosophy.

Thus, under concept "world" not only external reality where a human being is but also realities of human life itself are understood. The world – is all that, that a human sets for himself as factualness and all the things he objectifies. The world is objectified existence; it is all that is revealed in contents, that one managed to establish in a flow, elusive motion of life.

According to the definition of K. Jaspers, a concept the "world" covers aggregate of subjective life and objective reality¹. So, in "philosophy of life", as O. F. Bollnow marks, we see the following attitude toward the world: by virtue of that the basic framework of the system of "philosophy of life" is built on that separate lives are inlaid in uniform all-embracing life, confiding attitude of a human toward the world is clearly traced, his closeness to the things, support on the part of superior unity. In «philosophy of life», in opinion of O. Bollnow, a human is in a "maternal" environment, and it depends only on him to what an extent harmoniously he will "blend" in this environment². He can oppose his activity to the "flow" of life, but it will turn against him in the form of destructive manifestations, negative things in the everyday way of life. He can "listen to" this flow, succumb to it, not to resist the flow of life, and in this case his existence will be harmonious to existence of life. All are in hands of a human being. The choice is within him.

¹ Jaspers K. Einführung in die Philosophie. München, 1971

² Bollnow O. F. Philosophische Anthropologie und ihre methodologischen Prinzipien// Philosophische Anthropologie heute. – München, 1972

Existential philosophy gives completely another attitude to the world (reality). According to O. Bollnow remarks, the reality is independent of a human being and that's why it resists him in many cases. It itself is like a monster, alien for others. In no way it allows thinking to conquer itself. A human being and life is independent from each other, therefore they do not have chances to find harmony in coexistence. Life doesn't need it, while human thinking/cogitation can't do this. Instead of confidence, hope for life as on base of support, the «world» seems to a human "... in a form of quite unknown before anxiety and alienations, threat and danger which attack him and which he must survive"¹. Illusive and iridescent attitude towards the flow of life as to the "maternal" principality, able to protect and help, in existential philosophy is replaced by utilitarian, sober, rational attitude. Life is perceived without illusions, hopes and faith.

It is the severe and uncompromising reality, which we need to fight with in order to exist to the utmost. In existential philosophy, as follows from the concept of O. F. Bollnow, life for the first time appears in front of a human being as the stranger and gloomy phenomenon one needs to fight with rather than coexist. Life, which is like an enemy, is a new image, which started to be observed in existential philosophy. An enemy is strong and cruel, knowing no pity and mercy. A human has no chances practically to win it, as O. F. Bollnow remarks. So, basically, irreparableness of human existence and passim is men chaining the internal gusts for creativity derives from it.

Thus, not phenomenon of life is the subject of research in the concept of existentialism, but "life as the existence of a human being". Having taken out human aspect from life, the authors of the concepts of existentialism began studying the fundamentals of human existence. Generally, philosophy of the beginning of XX century had set two types of contents in the phenomenon of life: "life" according to understanding of existence of the organized matter (or live substance, like scientific constituent part of life according to the terminology of V. Vernadsky), and "being", like life-existence in understanding of human existence, or rational matter (anthroposphere – as a sphere of existence of human brain), if it is said on space scale. Let's try to consider an issue: to what extent term "being" is in compliance with the definition of existence of life like a rational matter or, what can be compared to human existence in the cosmic space scale? In

¹ Bollnow O. F. [in Russian] The philosophy of existentialism/ translated in Russian by S.E.Nikulina. - St. Petersburg: Publishing house "Lan", 1999, p. 59

philosophy "being" designates a category, fixing basis of existence: both world as a whole and any kind of existing thing.

Variety of things was understood under "being" as a backbone of everything: water, fire and air, uncertain things or atoms. It was asserted that life was the first "being", and all the lifeless things means only falling off from it. At times a spirit was considered for the first "being" for which things are its manifestations. K. Jaspers, on the basis of all ideas of being, singled out a number of the world views shaped in history: "materialism (everything is matter and natural, mechanical event), spiritualism (everything is spirit), hylozoism (everything is the living matter)"¹.

From one hand, "being" like existence of "human aspect" corresponds to generally accepted understanding of existence in philosophy, from the other hand, "being" in understanding of the existential philosophy restricts and narrows this notion. Until recent times one can speak of "being" of matter, as well as on "being" of living matter, and on "being" of Macrocosm as a whole.

In concepts of existentialism it is suggested to use the notion "being", mainly in relation to the human existence or, if we consider the large space scale, to the existence of life-like-rational-matter. Non-classical philosophy, according to the researches of I. Kant, on one hand, begins to cut out a human factor from a concept "life", passing to the analysis of being in understanding of Dasein (human objective reality, or human existence) rather than life, on the other hand – non-classical philosophy passes from the search of the essence of life to consideration of existence of life (through existence to essences). As a basic problematics, the phenomenon of life in non-classical philosophy regresses on the back burner, giving a place to deeper analysis of "being" in its extrapolation to transcendental and human aspects.

Undoubtedly, one can assume that emphasizing of concepts of existentialism as to disclosure of the contents of "being" is caused by the wish of the authors to cognate the essence of the Macrocosm (cosmic space), first principle of the world, which will entail disclosure both being of matter and living matter, as well as being as "life-like-living-matter". One can suppose that conceptualizing "being", the authors of the concepts of existentialism were searching fundamental existing principle.

Actually, as it appears from concepts of existentialism of O. Bollnow, K. Jaspers and other, it is not quite so. Yes, quite often, analyzing being, the

¹ Jaspers K. Einführung in die Philosophen. München, 1971.