



## Abstracts for Akadeemia 8/2006

**Margus Lattik**

### **The revolution behind Paul Gauguin's paintings**

Paul Gauguin is one of the most controversial personae in the history of contemporary painting. His departure from Europe in both body and spirit was exceptional. The introduction of the everyday affairs and beliefs of a tropical nation in a multitude of colours constituted a revolutionary move, just like Gauguin's perception of surface. Gauguin's decision to leave Europe and seek inspiration in far Polynesia was not an impulse of a moment, however. His childhood in Peru and prior aspirations for artistic self-expression were greatly instrumental in it. Gauguin was dissatisfied with European norms and conventions to start with. He was first influenced by Impressionists with whom he sympathized for their public opposition to the established canon. In Impressionism, he also saw an opposition to the general norms of the society.

In Gauguin's mind, the central element of a work of art was always its soul, not its technical quality. He believed that without external restraint, an artist would find the means of expression that correspond to his internal vision. He personified what he believed in — that every artist should find his own way and realize his aspirations freely and madly. The further he was from the great capitals, the more he witnessed the unrefined and genuine nature of people and environment. For Gauguin, individual freedom and civilization were two inseparable ideas, yet in Europe he witnessed the removal of the former from the centre of social value systems. After short stays in Panama and the West Indies, he arrived in Tahiti in 1891. At first, he was frustrated as Tahiti's capital Papeete was another case of colonialism — seizure of market and influence.

Gauguin started living amongst rural natives, adapting to their ways of life. The life of rural Tahitians possessed greater vividness for him. It was in harmony with nature, not disconnected from it. The simple everyday scenes he depicted seemed beyond the influence of time, since the passage of time had less significance for Tahitians than it had for Europeans. Gauguin cast aside everything occasional or untypical and arrived at a generalized synthesized form that included everything essential and omitted everything superfluous.

Gauguin comments upon the revolution in his paintings in his diaries and letters. He was interested in the breakthrough in his artistic expression, but even more, he was intent on personal transformation. The refined and restricted 'Civilized' Frenchman had to be replaced with a liberated savage, a human being in its primal, unmoulded state of being. Gauguin's aspirations would be quite similar in today's society. Although he is praised for his artistic

achievements, there are fewer who are willing to undertake or understand his personal transformation. There is still room to further his spirit of revolution.

### **Henry David Thoreau Walking or The Wild**

The essay *Walking* was published in *Atlantic Monthly* in July 1862, a few months after Thoreau's death. Its history, however, dates back to more than ten years earlier. For the first time, Thoreau delivered his lecture *The Wild* at the Concord Lyceum on 23 April 1851. Later he revised the lecture and divided it into two: *Walking and The Wild*. In the 1850s, he presented them repeatedly, sometimes joining them into one lecture again. Shortly before his death, he sold the manuscript entitled *Walking to Atlantic Monthly*. Even now the beginning of the essay resembles a lecture — Thoreau emphasizes that he wishes to speak a word for nature, warning that he is going to make an extreme statement, which is too far (even physically) from his listeners' lifestyle, convictions and values. The essay's tone is both polemical and reflective; he speaks with the pride of a patriot, being simultaneously a citizen of a wild country. This is the viewpoint of one who walks the borders, of a frontiersman. *Walking* is not an essay on natural history, neither is it Thoreau's creed — it is a summary of his way of thinking and life. In its form, the essay also resembles a walk — pacing along the winding path of thought, touching upon one or another side of American culture, he analyses the relation between tradition and the New World, finally reaching the wild core of culture. From there he has to start back for home again. **Peeter Helme**

#### **Conservative revolution: rebelliousness and conservatism**

In Estonia, the term "conservative revolution" was first used by Eduard Laaman in the journal *Akadeemia* before World War II. In more recent times, the usage of this pair of words has most often been associated with the name of Haljand Udam. Nonetheless, in Estonia it represents a rather unknown and controversial notion. Laaman found the roots of conservative revolution in Henri Bergson and George Sorel. Most probably, it is nearly impossible to give a precise definition of this complicated and somewhat forgotten concept. The term is known to have been used by Fyodor Dostoyevski; it also appeared in political speeches in 19th-century Germany but acquired a fixed content later. Thus, in 1927, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, in one of his speeches, called for a "conservative revolution" striving for coherence (*die Bindung*), unity (*die Einheit*) and integrity (*die Ganzheit*) instead of individualism and disintegration. At the same time, "the ideas of 1914" were discussed and contrasted to "the ideas of 1789" that had a negative meaning.

The post-World War I era of disorientation led to spiritual searches that formed a semi-political, somewhat esoteric and expressionist conglomerate of *Weltanschauung* that only later became to be called the "conservative revolution". One of the principal researchers of the phenomenon, Armin Mohler, found that one should indeed speak about a worldview (*Weltanschauung*), defining the conservative revolution as an innovative movement the central idea of which was return — *die Wiederkehr*. In addition to Mohler's definition, attempts have been made to describe conservative revolution as a movement that is "conservative in its continuation of the tradition of the occidental idea of the state (*der Reichsgedanke*) but revolutionary in surpassing the exhausted political ideologies by actualizing them."

Outside Germany, some essential representatives of conservative revolution were Julius Evola and René Guénon; its predecessor of sorts was Gabriele D'Annunzio. Still, the centre of this trend of thought was in Germany where it was represented after World War I by Ernst Jünger, Friedrich Georg Jünger, Oswald Spengler, early Thomas Mann, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Edgar Julius Jung and Carl Schmitt.

After the national socialists seized power, the representatives of conservative revolution turned their backs to society and went into "internal emigration", which can be seen as the last public political step of the loosely connected movement. To characterize the post-war situation, Haljand Udam has stated that "the opponents of conservative revolution have acted so persistently and efficiently that this concept is not mentioned in a single course of political science."

Still, this does not mean that there is no room at all for traditionalist rightist worldview at present. In this respect, the reception of conservative revolution in the United States and in Asia should be emphasized. Although conservative revolution as a term may be forgotten, the works of Julius Evola, Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt still show high sales figures; the thinkers of the new right like Alain de Benoist or Alexander Dugin also have their niche. **Jaak Valge**  
**Influential Estonian businessmen: Jüri Jaakson, Joakim Puhk, Otto Strandman**

The article is based on the lecture delivered at Friedebert Tuglas Society in Helsinki on 28 February 2006 — *Merkittäviä virolaisia talousmiehiä: Jüri Jaakson, Joakim Puhk, Otto Strandman*.

When selecting influential businessmen, in both Estonia and Finland, we should exclude the last 15 years for which it is still too early to make any assessments as well as the period of more than 300 years ago when a serious businessman could act at a local level only. Differently from the Finns, the Estonians should also leave out the years 1950—1990, just the period when Finland became a strong and economically prosperous country. Earlier history, too, has been less favourable for the Estonians than for the Finns. Estonians could find fulfilment in business only from the second half of the 19th century, when peasants were massively allowed to buy their farms for perpetuity. Until Estonia gained independence in 1918, this self-realization was mostly limited to one's own household. From 1918, capable Estonians also got a chance to realize their economic talents in politics.

The three main characters in the article were born during the economic emancipation of the Estonians; they achieved their peak and had the greatest influence on economic processes during Estonia's independence and perished as businessmen as well as statesmen and even physically with the loss of independence.

Jüri Jaakson was born in Karula municipality, Viljandi County in 1870. He graduated from the Law Faculty of Tartu University, worked as a lawyer in Viljandi, Riga and Tallinn, was successful and prosperous. We have reason to include Jaakson among the three leading Estonian businessmen because of his activities as Head of State from 1925—1926, the years that were difficult for Estonia both economically and politically, and as Governor of the Bank of Estonia from 1926—1940.

Otto August Strandman was born in Undla municipality, Viru County, in 1875, graduated from the Law Faculty of St. Petersburg University. He was also a successful lawyer and socialite. He was among the Estonian intellectuals who founded the clubs of radical autonomists, the predecessors of the later Labour Party. When Estonia became independent, he was Prime Minister and from 1929—1931 Head of State. He was one of the most influential economists because, as Minister of Finance, he saved Estonian economy from collapse in 1924, choosing a new and effective orientation in economic policy — instead of the Soviet Union, he strengthened trade relations with Western Europe.

Joakim Puhk was born in Viljandi in 1888, studied at a business school in Riga. As a leftist, he participated in the events of the 1905 revolution, but later delved into business. He was one of the richest people in Estonia. The Puhk family participated actively in the process of gaining independence; among everything else, they financed the Estonian Provisional Government. Joakim Puhk was a great behind-the-scenes influencer of economic processes and the main promoter of economic liberalism in Estonia.

### **Wilhelm Dilthey**

#### **The understanding of other persons and their manifestations of life**

The manuscript is devoted to analysis of different forms of understanding. Dilthey classifies these forms according to three principles. First, as a legacy of Dilthey's earlier reflections, we can notice the division of understanding into introspection and expression—understanding. Additionally, he classifies understanding according to classes of manifestations of life and levels of understanding. The first class comprises expressions of developments of scientific thoughts, the second — actions (*Handlungen*) and the third — expression of experience.

By dividing understanding into its elementary and higher, including scientific, forms, Dilthey attempts to show that human—scientific cognition grows gradually out of life's immanent striving for self—interpretation. Dilthey characterizes elementary understanding as the understanding of an individual, isolated manifestation of life. Here the external manifestation of life and the internal life expressed by it merge to such extent that it is impossible to differentiate between the internal and the external. Transition to higher forms of understanding happens according to the extent the distance between the manifestations of life and what is expressed by them increases. This makes the understanding of an individual manifestation of life more uncertain. To overcome such uncertainty, the understander tries to relate an individual manifestation of life with other ones. Gradual broadening of the horizon of understanding — towards the totality of the whole life connection — must create better conditions for the more adequate grasp of each individual manifestation of life. In Dilthey's eyes, human—scientific understanding is nothing else but continuation with methodological and critical procedures of the above—mentioned tendency that grows out of life itself. Terminologically, Dilthey calls this stage of understanding "interpretation" (*Auslegung*).

Dilthey's later work is characterized, on the one hand, by the endeavour to substantiate the strict general validity of human—scientific knowledge and, on the other hand, the acknowledgement that in human sciences the concept of "objectivity" has a specific meaning that differs from what it means in natural sciences. In the manuscript, Dilthey emphasizes expressions of experience as the most versatile manifestations of life. Among them, the definitely truthful ones are the expressions of artistic, religious and philosophical creativity.

Among those, however, he highlights written expressions of experience as foundations of objective knowledge; in them, the individual meanings of words in a concrete sentence are combined to form the sense (*Sinn*) of the sentence. Meaning and sense are the underlying categories in Dilthey's treatment of understanding and interpretation. As word meanings are related to the sense of the sentence as parts to the whole, then, from the very beginning, understanding is characterized by the link between the two fundamental operations: the sense of the whole derives from its constituent parts and that of the parts from the whole. In the following, Dilthey builds on the premise that these categories of understanding the language are applicable to the interpretation of objectivation of life in general. An individual manifestation of life has a meaning if it stands as a sign that refers to something different from itself. Therefore, in the given system of concepts, one cannot speak about the meaning of life as a whole — in Dilthey's philosophy life is the last, irreducible reality that consequently cannot refer to anything different from itself. Understanding of life as a whole consists in understanding its sense (*Sinn*), which consists of structural connections between the meanings of its constituent parts. Thus, in human sciences, the process of understanding is characterized by a two-directional movement: it attempts to integrate the meaningful individual aspects into a unity of thought as well as to reconstruct the entirety of thought considering the meaning of all its parts. The total link between all those meaningful constituent domains is the life connection that is approachable through understanding of individual expressions of experience.

However, a severe limitation to the attempt at objectivity in human sciences is the fact that the meanings of life objectivations cannot be fixed as the objects in scientific observation like the research objects of that time's natural science were. While trying to find a way for overcoming that difficulty, Dilthey is of the opinion that although the social and historical world is created through people's acts, in its complicity it is contrasted to individuals as a connection that preceded them and that continually and deeply influences them.

## Andrus Tool

### Wilhelm Dilthey's philosophy of life and hermeneutics

The aim of the article is to provide an overview of Wilhelm Dilthey's (1833—1911) way of thought and, against this background, to analyse the viewpoints presented in his report *The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Manifestations of Life*. Wilhelm Dilthey's journey as a philosopher began in the mid-19th century — a period in the history of German philosophy that has been described as a crisis in the identity and legitimation of philosophy. The predominant tendency in German philosophers' strivings to overcome this crisis was orientation to particular positive sciences — philosophy reformed itself into the theory of science. Among the multitude of special sciences, Dilthey's philosophical interest concentrated on humanitarian and social sciences. Under the influence of his own works, they became known in German culture by the summary name *Geisteswissenschaften* — human sciences. Expressing the main attitude in German philosophy, Dilthey is convinced that an inevitable constituent of any theory of science should be a theory of cognition, and the theory of science is cannot be reduced to merely the logic and methodology of science as might be seen in English or French positivism.

In his attempts to create a theory of cognition of scientific knowledge, German philosophy found support in national tradition, particularly in Immanuel Kant's philosophical heritage. "Back to Kant" became the slogan of diverse

philosophical quests. Dilthey was also influenced by this trend, and this influence is even reflected in the ambitious name by which he signified his epistemological endeavours. Namely, he set himself the aim to create a "critique of historical reason" or to achieve in the philosophy of human sciences something analogous to what Kant, in his estimation, had achieved in establishing the epistemological foundations of natural sciences. At that, he acknowledges Kant's understanding of objectivity of scientific knowledge, according to which the latter consists in strictly universal and inevitable validity of knowledge. Dilthey's attitude to Kant, however, was by no means uncritical. Dilthey's reservations to Kant's teachings represented a philosophical tradition competing with Kantianism, the so-called philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*). The programme of his "critique of historical reason" could thus be called an interpretation of Kant from the viewpoint of philosophy of life.

Although Dilthey's epistemology starts from the premises of traditional modern philosophy of consciousness, it modifies the underlying concept of consciousness. In Dilthey's system of concepts, this term encompasses the whole complex of historically developed cognitive and motivational conditions that form a basis for each individual act of experience. This complex of conditions also inevitably forms the basis for scientific experience; consequently, in the interests of substantiation of scientific knowledge, it is necessary to analyze this basis in the life connection of human consciousness on which the possibility of scientific knowledge is based. This complex of conditions is like an *a priori* component of cognition, which shapes the possibilities of scientific knowledge. The given apriority is only relative, valid for a concrete act of consciousness. Contrarily to Kant, Dilthey denies the feasibility of components of knowledge entirely independent of experience. His interpretation of Kant from the position of philosophy of life is the empirization and historization of "consciousness in general" or the transcendental subject as postulated by Kant.

In his opus magnum, *Introduction to Human Sciences*, Dilthey defines science as a system of substantiated sentences consisting of defined concepts. According to his epistemological principles, scientific substantiation can only consist in substantiation of experiential facts. As experience, in Dilthey's conviction, is divided into two kinds that differ in their epistemological status — external experience and internal experience — sciences also differ in their epistemological status, depending on which kind of experience mediates the facts upon which the substantiation of sentences of the respective science is based. Natural sciences inevitably have to substantiate their statements relying on external experience as natural phenomena are mediated to us only through this kind of experience. The object realm of human sciences is, according to Dilthey, given to research primarily by internal experience and understanding.

Dilthey's later work, which includes the report *The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Manifestations of Life* is characterized by a certain shift in the centre of interest. Primarily this consists in the transition of the focus of attention from the treatment of internal experience to analysis of understanding as the basis of human sciences. Now he considers the task of philosophy to give an epistemological substantiation to the expectation that the methodology of human sciences enables us to achieve objective understanding of the social and historical world. Dilthey attempts to show that the subjective aspect in understanding and interpretation of human manifestations of life need not mean subjective arbitrariness. He distinguishes, on the one hand, between the interpretations that form statements in accordance with the functional

connection that involves both the manifestation of life interpreted and the interpreter himself and, on the other hand, such interpretations that detach themselves from such a functional connection. An interpretation can be called objective if it links to such an intersubjectively accessible connection in as many aspects as possible. The more connections that remained unnoticed earlier in the interpreted object and the presumptions of the interpreting subject the interpretation discloses, the more objective it is. Simultaneously, the fact that the interpreting subject has been moulded by a historical functional connection leads to the conclusion that absolute objectivity is unattainable. The latter should mean that the interpreted manifestation of life and one's own presumptions should be related to the whole of universal life connection. The latter, however, is cannot be grasped by a human because human experience is always limited in time and space, and the whole itself always remains open for future changes. **Henri Poincaré**

### **Last thoughts. I**

Several articles and lectures collected under this heading were meant to form the fourth volume of the author's works on philosophy of science. The collection was published in Paris in 1913, after Poincaré's death. In the first chapter, he discusses the possible changes in natural laws in time and asks if we should be able to notice these changes. Thereafter he deals with several questions related to space and time: their mutual relations, the relations between space and sensations, motion and nature. He asks why space has three dimensions. He also discusses the logic of infinity, links between mathematics and logic, problems of quantum theory and thermodynamics and relations between science and ethics. The appendices at the end of the book deal with foundations of geometry, principles of infinitesimal calculus and other questions.

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