

Nature, Cosmos, Absolute and Society in the Main Anthropological Paradigms*

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Abstract—Nature is a supraindividual limit for the individual self-definition of man. Our identities differ because we see the world in dissimilar ways. This article suggests the distinguishing of the three main anthropological paradigms that presuppose our understanding of what the world is and how we identify ourselves. These are the mytho-metaphysical, the physically natural and the sociocentric anthropological paradigms. The author also mark the key anthropological dispositions which are the relations "man — nature", "man — others" (or: "man — people"), "man — time" (or: "man — history"), "man — spirit" ("man — the ideal", in some cases: "man — the Absolute"), "man — body" and, finally, "man — death". By interpreting these dispositions in accordance to the logic of a particular paradigm we clarify (or construct) what it means to be human.

Keywords—absolute; anthropology; cosmos; human; identity; individual; nature; man; society; supraindividual

I. INTRODUCTION

Human has always been a major question for a human. Whatever we speculated of, to whatever distant worlds we directed our searching gaze — every time we come to the inquiry of our place in our own existence, or how our existence predetermine the comprehension of the reality we study. Formula "quid hoc ad aeternitatem" ("what is this for eternity?") was implicitly accompanied by the formula "quid aeternitas ad hominem" ("what is eternity for man?"). The study of the most distant mysteries of the universe worries us only insofar as we ourselves live in this universe. The fictional, never-existing worlds, generated by our fantasy, are of certain interest to us to the extent that they remind us to our, human, world. J. Swift's liliput country does not exist in a parallel world — it is a reflection of the plexus of contradictions, passions and vices, which is well known both to the author and his reader. Exploring the fairy-tale magical kingdoms, traveling beyond the stars, we search for ourselves and ... our real home, longing for which sharpens our attention to the gap between the real and the due.

*Fund: The publication has been prepared with the support of the RUDN University Program 5-100. It elaborates the research presented at the 5th International Conference RELIGION, KNOWLEDGE, SOCIETY "Conceptions of Freedom in a 'Post-Truth' World: Religious and Philosophical Perspectives" at Universitatea Ovidius din Constanta.

"Man is the only creature who refuses to be what he is" [1], writes A. Camus. But what is he? "An animal, biped and featherless", as Plato, according to Diogenes La ģrtius [2], once depicted human? Pascal's "thinking reed"? Are we born out of the happy tears of the sun god Ra in the hour of joy when he reunited with his beloved children Shu and Tefnut, as the ancient Egyptian myth tells us? Or are we created on a potter's wheel by the powerful Khnum, just as any potter-demiurge creates clay vessels which can accommodate such different substances, but have their purpose set in advance? Or is there no goal beyond our own decision, and we are simply a product of the evolution of living forms, born by nature which stays indifferent to our fate? Whether our position in space is majestic or whether it is worth to listen more attentively to the words that have come down to us from the Far Eastern tradition saying that when the world was made from the pre-cosmic giant Pangu, people originated not from its flesh, which gave birth to the mountains, not from his blood, which became rivers, not from his hair, which turned into trees and grass, but from parasites on his body?

However, not only the interpretations of "man" are different, but first of all, the supraindividual Other, that surpasses any of us and having found himself in which man turns his gaze on himself, is different too.

This supraindividual other is the maximum limit of our self-definition. By certain generalizations we distinguish three anthropological paradigms which are the mytho-metaphysical paradigm (where the supraindividual limit is presented in a form of living cosmos or metaphysical Absolute), the physically natural paradigm (with materialistically or positivistically understood nature as the supraindividual limit) and the sociocentric one (where the social as the supraindividual limit determines our self-interpretation and interpretations of the reality). In the frames of these paradigms we find our logos that make our presence in the world meaningful.

Asking what exactly is meant by "ecce homo", we can highlight several key points or, more precisely, dispositions based on which a man determines himself. The specific content of these dispositions and the order of their priority in different paradigms will be defined differently, but in one form or another they act as core lines for any anthropological

problematization. As the main dispositions we should probably primarily mark out the relations "man — nature", "man — others" (or: "man — people"), "man — time" (or: "man — history"), "man — spirit" ("man — the ideal", in some cases: "man — the Absolute"), "man — body" and, finally, "man — death".

II. DISPOSITION "MAN — NATURE"

The "man — nature" relation characterizes human's place in the outside world. As noted above, for the mytho-metaphysical paradigm, nature seems to be either a living, animated cosmos or a physical ("φύσις") procreation of a higher metaphysical principle (at least, the result of its impact on passive matter). Sensually perceivable materiality of nature is secondary in relation to the incorporeal principles that determine its existence. Accordingly, the task of man in relation to the nature, understood in this way, is to either synchronize his being with the principles that set the rhythm of the cosmos, or overcome dependence on material phenomena and gain the closest possible connection with their intangible source.

In the physically natural paradigm, the "man-nature" relation is crucial and serves as the basis for building all the other dispositions. Man is, above all, a product of nature, a step in the evolution of living forms, he is fundamentally different from all the forms of the living preceding him, but inherits them, moreover, includes some aspects of both vegetative (plant) and animal existence. Nature gives man the opportunity to be what he is, or, denying him with its indifference, dooms him to a lonely and desperate search for his authentic existence. Meanwhile, according to the anthropic principle, proposed, in particular, by B. Carter [3], the appearance of the species called homo sapiens is no accidental and not simply the result of natural selection: the very possibility of human existence in the Universe can be predetermined by its fundamental parameters.

The socio-centrist paradigm reverses this disposition. Here, it is not so much that man is a product of nature, but, in a sense, vice versa. First, our very knowledge of nature is predetermined by social factors and will depend not only on a certain "objective" level of the development of science (K. Popper's approach), but also on a specific scientific rationality (T. Kuhn) shared in a given society. Secondly, the development of technology makes it possible to increasingly interfere both in natural processes and, for example, at the gene level, in the nature of man himself.

III. DISPOSITION "MAN — OTHERS (MAN — PEOPLE)"

One of the most important factors determining the self-identification of a person is his comparison with others, who, due to the fact that a person is a social being, first of all, are other people. In the mytho-metaphysical paradigm through the disposition "man-people", there show itself a "horizontal binding" (according to wide-spread – though possibly wrong – etymological explanation Latin word "religare" means "to bind") of like-minded people united by their common "vertical binding" with the divine. A significant lack of unanimity in this "vertical binding" serves as a basis for

dividing others into "our own others" and "other others". Others, with whom man supposedly interacts in this paradigm, can also include various supernatural beings representing certain cosmic principles or manifestations of the divine.

For the second paradigm, "other people" form the collective subject of the evolution of natural forms. We are who we are due to belonging to this subject. At the same time (which is also very important for the third, sociocentric, paradigm), people also create an intersubjective, conjoint world, the so-called "contiguous world", which, according, in particular, to H. Plesner, does not surround man like nature, and is not contained in him like the inner world, but bears the person on itself, being at the same time carried and constructed by the person [4]. This contiguous world, in the words of H. Plesner, forms a pure "we" or sphere of the spirit. Sociocentric anthropological paradigm sees the fundamental importance in the fact that it is in this intersubjective field that the meanings attached to phenomena and processes are constructed, and discourses that predetermine the distribution of these meanings and the significance of certain interpretations are formed. It also predetermines the institutional forms of the social [5].

However, the personal existence of a man is constantly at risk of being lost or even dissolving in the impersonal existence of social forms, regulatory prescriptions or general judgments and practices. Existential anthropology uses the indefinite personal pronoun *das Man* to describe this impersonal existence. To overcome the habitual subordination to the indefinite personal *das Man* and to release the personal core of one's existence requires, for example, according to K. Jaspers, existential communication, which participants constantly focus on each other's personality and the uniqueness of the connection that exists between them in current moment [6]. The concept of sin is unknown to the physically natural and the sociocentric paradigms, existentialism avoids using also the category of guilt, however, according to J.-P. Sartre, one of the vital characteristics of our existence is responsibility, which allows the French thinker to address existentialism as humanism [7].

It should be added that in the postmodern philosophy, which belongs to the third paradigm, the concept of integrity, including the integrity of the subject, is critically revised. For a split, fragmented subject his own subpersonalities in some cases can also act as others.

IV. DISPOSITION "MAN — TIME (MAN — HISTORY)"

Human existence includes such a characteristic as the ability to be aware of the changes taking place in the surrounding world. Duration, which includes these changes and is measured by certain of them, is called time. One of the most fundamental philosophical questions is the question of the nature of time: is it objective or subjective? Mytho-metaphysical paradigm thinks of time ontologically, moreover — metaphysically. In this paradigm, time is qualitatively heterogeneous, different epochs imply different conditions of human existence. The physically natural

paradigm rejects the metaphysical vision of time, but, as a rule (with the exception, first of all, of the tradition dating back to I.Kant and his interpretation of time as an a priori form of sensuality) retains its ontological status. In the sociocentric paradigm, the tendency to view time as a phenomenon of consciousness prevails. Time here is, first of all, not something that is "timing" in the real world, but something that is comprehended by our consciousness, while this very comprehension is conditioned by culture, historical memory, and other phenomena produced in the intersubjective reality and producing meanings that we give to time.

The question of time is closely related to the question of history. At the very dawn of mankind, people did not know the history and, as M. Eliade believes, lived in the "eternal present" [8]. Together with the accumulation of memory of the past and the development of ideas about the future — beyond the bounds of tomorrow only (which is in prehistorical thinking the same as today), the future, giving hope or bringing fear, — the historical thinking gradually forms. The first ideas about history relate to the cyclical model (or metapattern, as defined by P.K.Grechko [9]) and, in the worldview of people who share this model, are the representations of natural and cosmic cycles. Abrahamic religions open to man the perspective of linear time (and history as a theophany), which later, within the framework of the secular thought of the second paradigm, will become the ontological basis for the ideas of evolution and social progress. Selection of recurring patterns in the general upward (or less often: downward) movement leads to a spiral model of history presented in Giambattista Vico, G.W.F.Hegel, Marxist "historical materialism", the theory of sociocultural dynamics by P.A. Sorokin and many other concepts of modernity (many of which are referred to as "cyclic", but in the strict sense of the word are actually spiral). The third paradigm implies the absence of some external extra-historical logic behind the historical events, involving the existence of the purpose of history, its laws, etc., or at least doubts the possibility of human comprehension of this logic. Among the theories of historical development, concepts of nonlinear history rejecting any historical metanarratives start dominating. Among them one could mention the synergistic model of complex systems or the model of history as a non-structural integrity, "rhizome", by G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, that pay increased attention to the role of chance and the significance of current circumstances (and not transcendental principles), in which history is being made at each particular moment in time.

V. DISPOSITION "MAN — SPIRIT (MAN — THE IDEAL, MAN — THE ABSOLUTE)"

The "man — spirit" disposition is the main meaning-forming relation for the first paradigm, especially when the spirit is thought in the disposition "man — Absolute", where the Absolute is separated from nature being metaphysical principle of all that exists physically. Forms of the ideal here are prefiguration, archetypes (in the understanding of M.Eliade [10]) of the earthly — both natural and social. However, in one shape or another, this disposition remains in

subsequent paradigms, even if in a transformed, rethought form. For the physically natural paradigm, the "spiritual" is no longer supernatural, but a product of the evolution of the natural world or its material systems, at a certain stage of which we find the beginning of man who is capable of spiritual activity and creates spiritual culture. Some thinkers, V.I.Vernadsky in particular, assume that with the fulfillment of certain conditions connected with the development of mankind, the "spiritual" or "intelligent" activities of man forms a special phenomenon of a planetary scale — the noosphere.

The ideal, deprived of its own ontology, is seen as unachievable goal, a utopia [11], a fantasy [12], or phantasm, whose existence in our consciousness, both individual and collective one, can influence the real life of a person or a society, transforming it [13].

The third paradigm avoids the category of the spirit, it prefers to conceptualize its own problematization with the help of such concepts as "meaning", "sign", "culture", "discourse", etc., which, nevertheless, in some way inherit the "spirit", and, in the language of classical philosophy, belong to the sphere of the spiritual, although taken essentially non-metaphysically.

VI. DISPOSITION "MAN — BODY"

Our body is a point and at the same time a means of our presence in the world. The body is paradoxical: a person simultaneously identifies himself with his body, and saying, for example, "my body", he distances himself from it as a subject from an object. Mythological thinking sees the body as an image of cosmos, in which we should establish harmony, reflecting that which reigns in the universe, and at the same time — the abode of the soul, which the soul can leave (just like a person can leave his home), to return later, or just disappear, or go into an extra-cosmic transcendental state. Christian teachings regard the body, the "flesh," as a source of sinful temptations, because, according to their logic (in a similar way to the logic of many soteriological doctrines that do not know, however, the concept of sin — from neo-Platonism to Jainism), focusing on the body pollutes the soul and impedes its redemption.

Within the second anthropological paradigm, the human body is a direct presence of the natural supraindividual limit in man. Even what distinguishes us from other living beings — thinking, morality, work, culture — is available to us because of our natural bodily organization — for example, specifically organized matter of the brain. The desires of the body, the needs of the body, and the capabilities of the body in Z. Freud, K. Marx and many other theorists are variables attached to biological constants. The most powerful qualities of a human being are derived from its natural weakness or, as in A. Gehlen, the "insufficiency", the natural initial maladjustment to the environment.

Sociocentric paradigm focuses primarily on the artificial nature of human physicality. The natural material of our beings, although it has definite boundaries, is still very plastic. Our cultural existence, the discourses in which we are immersed, the meanings highlighted and fixed by these

discourses contributes to the formation of a very specific type of body. Gymnastics, hygiene, culinary traditions, dietological practices, fasting cannot be found in the animal world, and all this makes our nature initially not natural, but a social product, formed in accordance with certain meanings. In addition, the social not only works with the original biological material of our body, but also complements it through countless prostheses, augmentations or extensions: from clothes and stone tools to automobiles, contact lenses, artificial organs, computers. At the same time, a number of theorists, for example, M. Foucault, consider social processes and institutions as directed not at a certain transcendental subject or the subject of the political, the economic, etc., but, above all, at the human body. So the power relations, established by the society starting from the Modern time, are presented in the context of anatomical politics and biopolitics as power over the "producing body as a machine" and "reproducing species body" [14]. The body is also thought of as endowed with its own means of expressing meanings; the contemporary studies focus on exploration of the field of body language, in which not only individual desires, but also social codes can be read. The development of computer technology is increasingly contributing to the practical implementation of the idea of the "body without organs" by G. Deleuze [15], the meanings and value of the physical body are gradually replaced by the logic of the virtual body, and this implies a revision of the fundamental space-time relations that determine human existence.

VII. DISPOSITION "MAN — DEATH"

The corporeality of human existence leads us to another, and for many teachings — the most important point of anthropological problematization. "Death! Where is thy sting?" — cried the prophets and theologians, announcing the triumph of man over death. "When we exist, death is not; and when death exists, we are not," noted Epicurus, explaining why death has nothing to do with our lives. And at the same time, does not the very presence of death cause us to seek victory over it? Is not human existence, as M. Heidegger supposes, "Being-towards-death"?

The mytho-metaphysical paradigm, as a rule, did not deny the mortality of the physical body of man (with the exception of cases when one of the heroes received immortality and was accepted into the world of gods, which, according to several mythologies, for example, ancient German, could also die once). But since the body was primarily thought of as the vessel of the spiritual component of man, the question of the death or immortality of the soul certainly had more significance. The latter was provided by the connection of a person with a higher metaphysical source — whether through heroic deeds, or by following celestial archetypal patterns, or through pious or righteous life. The sinful existence aggravates human despair by taking him further apart from the divine [16].

The physically natural anthropological paradigm establishes the limit of human existence in accordance with the limit of life processes occurring in his body. Still we hope that the deeds of a person in the memory of other

people can survive his death, but these perspectives are not at all about the individual immortality of the subject. The inevitability of death brings the whole burden of being to our lifetime existence. "Memento mori" gives rise to a very special sound of "carpe diem". But the anthropology of existentialism reminds us that the knowledge of the inevitability of death is accompanied by ignorance of its hour. Therefore, genuine existence cannot be a matter of tomorrow, every today, every current hour, every instant moment a person must strive to the utmost true existence. The concealment of existence, escape from oneself, comfortable self-deception are equated with the death of an existential subject, which is why A. Camus speaks not only about physical, but also about philosophical suicide [17].

The despair, that sometimes comes through in the perception of death in the context of the second paradigm, originates not only in a loss of believe in the postmortem existence of man (which came with the "death of God"), but also in changes in social practices associated with the experience of dying. The "family" parting with life in the circle of relatives and friends, which was inherent in traditional and early bourgeois societies, is replaced by the experience of meeting death in the formal, impersonal environment of clinics and professional doctors in the systematic flow of the dying, among whom man is condemned to meet death alone.

Similarly, another social process, namely the accelerating development of technology, within the framework of the third paradigm leads to the need for a reformulation of the question of death. Death can be postponed indefinitely, by, say, placing the dying person in a cryochamber until, as we hope, the mankind of the future will find means to prolong human life to infinity. People speculate about the opportunity (that had only recently seemed to be completely fantastic) of transfer of human consciousness into an artificial or virtual body, which creates a new concern: will the transferred subject be the same as before the transfer, or are these two different subjects, and if the new subject maintains continuity with the original at the memory level, then doesn't the same inevitable death, that we try to avoid, await the original subject?

At the same time, in the dominion of the third paradigm, the very concept of the subject as such is rethought, and many theorists, starting with M. Foucault and R. Barthes, speak of the "death of the subject". The concept of a holistic, absolute subject is replaced by the idea of a subject that is decentralized and even accidental. Is there an essential continuity between who we were in the past and who we are now? If not, then what we, following the old tradition, call our self, has died countless times. And whether the death, that the death of the physical body brings, will be something fundamentally different from the deaths that many of our past Selves have already died? R. Barthes, for example, argues that the subject reporting his actions is no longer the subject who acted... But what is the subject, what is the individual subject? I am always the speech of the other, says Jacques Lacan. We are not immersed in reality, but in a multitude of coexisting texts, in hypertext, and it is not that we study reality, but interpret this hypertext. However even

the self-interpreting Self, as J. Derrida believes, is nothing itself but a hypertext product. Can we speak of a subject that exists outside of his discursive practices? The identity of the subject is hidden under numerous masks, believes M. Foucault, but, ultimately, is there an original Self, how to fix it, won't something that hides under the masks be only a new set of masks? And if a particular bearer of social meanings acquired from a cultural code, dies, what was so integral and unique in him that would really disappear?

VIII. CONCLUSION

At the basis of any of our meaningful actions, of our words and thoughts, there are always a certain logos, some knowledge we have about ourselves and the world in which we dwell. The question of the trueness of this knowledge is a separate problem that requires special treatment. It can be assumed that, historically, this knowledge is sharpened, clarified, polished, and tends to become increasingly authentic. However, we can also assume that the subject of each particular logo understands and speaks the world according to a well-defined discourse within which his ideas of truth are formulated, while a person who understands himself in the context of a different discourse might not agree with them. There is a third possible option according to which the world history is the history of the gradual oblivion of the truth of what we are, which was once revealed to man.

There is also no single answer regarding the ontological status of our logos: is it the fruit of human cognitive activity or does it exist objectively while the process of our cognition only open up access to it for us? Contemporary scientific thinking, as a rule, requires that we proceed from the idea of sociogenicity and historicity of knowledge, while religious consciousness and metaphysical discourse imply an objective existence of truth available to a person to some degree. Therefore, judging whether λόγος is ontological without άνθρωπος, we will come to different answers.

But let's raise another question: is anthropos ontological without logos? If we do not limit our understanding of man only to his belonging to a particular biological species, then we assert the essential relation of anthropos with logos. The logo, according to which man realizes himself, isn't just the logos of man — it is, first of all, the logos of the world. In this "world" man occupies a certain place, is endowed with certain opportunities and is limited to certain limits, starting from which he puts some tasks, in other words: builds one or another project of himself. The animal does not know the "world", it knows only a part of its habitat, with which it can relate itself in the context of the present situation, also relying on instinct and memory. Man becomes himself by discovering (or inventing?) the "world", that is, proceeding from the logos of the world given through the presence of man. So man faces the necessity of knowing his own presence. The aim of such cognition is inherently anthropological knowledge, and, therefore, anthropology in a broad sense is the key by which anthropos manifests logos and thus, in fact, can solely exist as anthropos.

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