

## ***Nature or History? Philosophical Anthropology in the History of Concepts***

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### **ABSTRACT**

In a renowned essay, Odo Marquard's set a cornerstone in defining anthropology from a history of concepts point of view. In the light of more recent researches, some of his conclusions are here reconsidered and criticised. The concept of anthropology, as developed by Herder, Kant, Wilhelm von Humboldt, romantic philosophers and physicians, and finally by Hegel and some of his followers, offers no evidence for Marquard's alleged opposition between anthropology and philosophy of history. On the one side, in Kant's or Hegel's work anthropology is not as peripheral as Marquard argued; on the other side, romantic anthropologists developed a deep interest towards historical perspectives. Rather, anthropology was quite often considered as a non-metaphysical alternative to psychology. These results also suggest a revision as to the role of anthropology on a broader historical scale.

### ***1. Philosophical Anthropology in the history of concepts***

With his essay *Zur Geschichte des philosophischen Begriffs «Anthropologie» seit dem Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1965), Odo Marquard set a cornerstone in defining philosophical anthropology from the point of view of the historian of concepts<sup>1</sup>. The considerable value of Marquard's work, together with the relative lack of general studies in this area, soon imposed the essay as a «classical», helpful in focusing the intrinsically difficult, somewhat puzzling meaning of «anthropology» within modern thought. Despite occasional criticism, Marquard's general frame is still widely accepted nowadays<sup>2</sup>. Marquard's most general claims can be briefly summarised as follows: firstly, philosophical anthropology is a typically modern enterprise (I). Anthropology is a theory of man, yet not

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<sup>1</sup> Marquard 1965 (reprinted in Marquard 1973). See also Marquard's entry «Anthropologie» in the influential *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Marquard 1976). Concerning Marquard's own contributions to Philosophical Anthropology, see Fischer 2008, 441 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The longevity and wide diffusion of Marquard's theses have been recently pointed out by Gisi (2007, 1).

any theory of man necessarily implies anthropology: rather, dismissing metaphysics and mathematical sciences, anthropology becomes «possible» by means of a «turn towards the World-of-Life» (II) and becomes «fundamental» by means of a «turn towards nature» (III). Accordingly, anthropology gains «a specific and fundamental validity» whenever it assumes the role of the «great alternative» to philosophy of history; otherwise, it remains «peripheral» (IV)<sup>3</sup>.

Consequently, anthropology and philosophy of history mutually exclude each other, so that the alternate success of the privileged paradigm – either nature or history – in a certain historical age implies the regress of the other. In support of his theses, Marquard observes that Kant's bias towards philosophy of history imposes a peripheral role to anthropology, which he considers as a mere «embellishment» in his work. Marquard then goes on highlighting the dramatic development of «romantic» anthropology in the early XIX Century, until the renewed decline of anthropology and the triumph of historicism with Hegel's work. Marquard provides a still useful bibliography of romantic anthropology, listing dozens of books and journals mentioning «anthropology» (or derivatives) in their titles. He underlines that many of those titles come from physicians, who obviously incline to a naturalistic approach<sup>4</sup>.

In this work I intend to reconsider some aspects of Marquard's essay. To this purpose, I shall take into account some of Marquard's examples. In the light of more recent researches, those same cases can be better considered as relevant counterexamples to Marquard's views. My conclusion is that Marquard's above mentioned theses (III) and (IV) are untenable. Anthropology becomes relevant, in my opinion, whenever it goes hand in hand with philosophy of history (§ 2), thus representing – at least in many significant cases – the «great alternative» to *psychology* (§ 3). This new glance at the considered period also suggests a revision on a more general level (§ 4).

## 2. *Anthropology and philosophy of history*

Rather than concentrating on one single author, I shall consider some general features of the period approximately corresponding to Hegel's

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<sup>3</sup> Marquard 1965, 211, 214.

<sup>4</sup> Marquard 1965, 214-216. Marquard also discusses further examples and contemporary situation.

lifetime (1770-1831)<sup>5</sup>. No doubt that a close connection between anthropology and philosophy of history can be ascertained in many cases at that time. Some early traces of this process can be detected within the debate concerning the «destination of man» (*Bestimmung des Menschen*). This dispute arose within Protestant theology<sup>6</sup> and originally dealt with individual destination after death; yet, it eventually involved – especially, as we shall see, with Kant – more general questions concerning the history and the destination of humankind, in a very close connection with anthropology<sup>7</sup>.

Let us first consider the case of J.G. Herder: in an early unpublished writing of 1763, Herder proposes (long time before Kant) a «Copernican revolution» of his own, consisting in the identification of philosophy with anthropology<sup>8</sup>. Herder realises his ambitious program many years later, in the four books of the *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-1791). With this immensely influential work, Herder aims at the foundation of a *Geschichtsphilosophie*, relying upon anthropological knowledge. Shape, posture, sensibility, language, reason: everything speaks in favour of the human strive for the Divine. On this basis, Herder shows that human soul is not doomed to destruction. Man is the final result of creation and can reasonably expect a spiritual life after bodily death. However, this result concerning human destination is not achieved through introspection or meditation. Rather, Herder nourishes his anthropology with vast materials borrowed from Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* and, more generally, from most sciences of man of his time<sup>9</sup>.

In his review of the first book of Herder's *Ideas*, Kant criticises the lack of metaphysical analysis and the abundance of merely analogical inferences. In Kant's view, Herder's arguments for immortality are thus untenable<sup>10</sup>. In his own writings devoted to anthropology and philosophy of history, Kant explicitly assumes that man achieves his «destination» only as a species, in history, not as an individual<sup>11</sup>. Since the study of the «character» of living beings allows us to infer their «destination», Kant's

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<sup>5</sup> For a broader context, more details and further bibliography see Martinelli 2004.

<sup>6</sup> See Spalding 1748.

<sup>7</sup> On Mendelssohn and Kant see Hinske 1994; on Kant and the «destination of man», Brandt 2000, 2007, 2007a; concerning Fichte, Fonnesu 1993. The pervasiveness of this debate for the anthropology of the eighteenth century in its entirety was noted by Linden 1976, 127.

<sup>8</sup> Herder 1763. Marquard clearly underestimated the role of Herder (and of W. Humboldt, see *infra*).

<sup>9</sup> Herder 1784-91. On Herder's anthropology see Pross 1987, 2002; Zammito 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Kant 1785, 45.

<sup>11</sup> Kant 1784, 18.

anthropology strongly cooperates with his theory of history<sup>12</sup>. This link clearly emerges from the final, sometimes neglected section of Kant's *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, devoted to the «Character of the species». Slightly but radically modifying the scholastic definition, Kant dynamically defines man an *animal rationabile*, who still has not achieved – as a species – its rational (i.e. moral) destination in history<sup>13</sup>.

In the same years, in his unpublished *Plan einer vergleichenden Anthropologie*, Wilhelm von Humboldt develops a comparative outlook on anthropology, once again centred on the key concept of «character». Since the defining features of man are nature, history and morals, the anthropologist must display a threefold disposition: he is a naturalist, a historian and a philosopher at the same time<sup>14</sup>. All the differences among human «genera» (*Menschengattungen*: genders, but also historical ages, nationalities, and so on) contribute to define the ideal whole of humankind: for this reason, linguistic and national differences must be preserved and defended by means of consequent political constitution. Here, again, anthropology is the natural ally to philosophy of history. On the one side, comparative anthropology gathers its materials from historians, biographers and writers; on the other side, anthropology provides the philosophical background of historical and political theory, granting the desired balance between universalism and historical particularity<sup>15</sup>.

The general trend towards synergy between anthropology and philosophy of history remains preserved during the age of the so-called «romantic» anthropology. Let us consider the manifesto of the *Zeitschrift für die Anthropologie*, bearing the promising title *Die Aufgabe der Anthropologie*, written by the journal director, the physician C.F. Nasse<sup>16</sup>. The «fundamental problems» of anthropology, he thinks, are the following: «how has man developed; what is man; what will man become?»<sup>17</sup>. Nasse avoids reductionism and naturalism in favour of a

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<sup>12</sup> Kant 1798, 329. On the concept of character see Munzel 1999. Marquard (1956, 214) wholly overlooks this link and speaks of anthropology as «occupying» the branch of «*Geschichtsphilosophie*» (instead of this, in Marquard 1976, 366, Kant's anthropology «occupies» the branch of practical philosophy). Accordingly, he is forced to consider Kant's anthropology as *physiological* (Marquard 1956, 229), against Kant's own will and understanding.

<sup>13</sup> Kant 1798, 321.

<sup>14</sup> Humboldt 1796, 360. See Trabandt 1990.

<sup>15</sup> Humboldt 1796, 336, 342.

<sup>16</sup> Nasse 1823. Marquard (1965, 230) quotes this title. He doesn't seem to have considered its contents.

<sup>17</sup> Nasse 1823, 10.

dynamic concept of anthropology, explicitly aiming at a «history of humankind». In the third volume of his *Die Anthropologie als Wissenschaft*, devoted to «Pragmatic anthropology» (1823), J. Hillebrand explains that pragmatic anthropology considers the perfecting («*Vervollkommnung*») of man and essentially deals with human culture. Pragmatic anthropology is then not identical with history or philosophy; however, it has a great affinity to philosophy of history, since it exposes the «internal linkage» of history and philosophy<sup>18</sup>.

Many other issues of romantic anthropology consist of a reflection upon the history of humankind in a rather spiritual and sometimes religious sense. Recalling Herder's scheme, H. Steffens begins his *Anthropologie* (1822) with a natural history of the Earth and its inhabitants, written in the language of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*<sup>19</sup>. However (like Nasse), Steffens considers man as the result of infinite past geological eras, in his actual present and as the starting point of an endless future spiritual development<sup>20</sup>. According to Steffens, creation is the manifestation of God's will, and not «the outcome of blind natural necessity»: therefore, «nature has its own history, its own living development». God's creatures are all free, and this freedom is the key of history: it is «the historical in nature»<sup>21</sup>. A religious and even «mystical» intention permeates Steffens' anthropology. In this view, Steffens was not at all isolated. In J.C. Heinroth's *Lehrbuch der Anthropologie* (1822), the history of humankind is presented as a sort of anthropological confirmation of the Bible<sup>22</sup>. Heinroth, a physician and the author of a famous treatise on psychiatry, clearly shows spiritualistic tendencies<sup>23</sup>. According to Heinroth, man certainly belongs to both nature and spirit, yet he considers «bodily life» as «an instrument, an organ, a servant», wholly subdued to a superior and dominating «spiritual life»<sup>24</sup>. Accordingly, Heinroth's explanation of the history of humankind turns out to be a scientific transposition of the Biblical account.

In short, the romantic idea of the unity of spirit with nature, which is the key of anthropology's success at that time, does not necessarily imply

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<sup>18</sup> Hillebrand 1823, 10 f.

<sup>19</sup> For this reason, Marquard (1965, 228 f.) quotes Steffens as an example of naturalism in romantic anthropology.

<sup>20</sup> Steffens 1823, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Steffens 1823, 264-265.

<sup>22</sup> Heinroth 1822, 278. Marquard (1965, 216) acknowledges a «theological» drift only in the last phase (e.g. Ennemoser) of romantic anthropology, as well as «in the late idealism in general».

<sup>23</sup> Landmann 1962, 408; Poggi 2000, 551.

<sup>24</sup> Heinroth 1822, 43.

a naturalistic view. Rather, even when physicians are involved, romantic anthropology is quite more complex than a merely psychophysical doctrine of the human being. The origin and the development of the spiritual side of man is frequently regarded as the result of a transcendent intention. The task of anthropology is to explain this process, and the historical epiphany of the spiritual, starting from man's natural side. Nature is the beginning, history is the end and the goal of anthropology.

All this said, the presence of naturalistic approaches to anthropology at that time is obviously far from being excluded. Following certain tendencies represented in Germany by Ernst Platner<sup>25</sup>, or contemporary French models<sup>26</sup>, many philosophers and physicians conceive anthropology as a naturalistic theory concerning the relationship between body and mind<sup>27</sup>. Yet, this idea of anthropology is neither exclusive, nor, in my opinion, particularly relevant. On the contrary, most influential authors develop a radically different idea of the matter, closely related to their philosophical theories of history. On the one side, Marquard underestimates (or ignored) the close cooperation between anthropology and philosophy of history e.g. in Herder, Kant, Wilhelm von Humboldt; on the other side, he misses the deep spiritual, religious and historical commitment of many anthropologists (both philosophers and physicians) during the romantic age<sup>28</sup>. In any case, anthropology cannot be adequately defined and understood in terms of its opposition and mutual exclusion with philosophy of history.

### 3. *Anthropology and psychology*

Rather, in many cases, anthropology competes with *psychology* for a leading role. The reason why Marquard neglected the role of psychology in defining the concept of anthropology is not clear to me. After all, it was rather an obvious step to take, since the two disciplines have much to do with each other. For this reason, the study of the dialectic relationship between psychology and anthropology allows us to understand the development of anthropology more satisfactorily. Quite frequently, they

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<sup>25</sup> Platner 1772; see Kosenina 1989; Naschert-Stienings 2007.

<sup>26</sup> See Moravia 1978, 1982.

<sup>27</sup> For the second half of the eighteenth century, see Linden 1976, 36 ff. This also holds for many of the items in Marquard's list for the first half of the nineteenth century (1965, 230-232; 1976, 367).

<sup>28</sup> I shall discuss Hegel in the next paragraph. Disregarding the role of psychology, as Marquard did, would hamper a proper understanding of his view of anthropology.

have been identified with each other, yet sometimes psychology and anthropology have been the banner of different, even of opposed philosophical intentions. In my view, this latter occurrence defines the exact moment in which anthropology attains its specificity, and finally, its *raison d'être*.

In the *Critique of pure reason*, Kant explicitly distances himself from empirical psychology, the discipline introduced by Wolff in 1732 and further developed by Baumgarten<sup>29</sup>. After its necessary divorce from metaphysics, Kant suggests, psychology should find its proper place within the field (still to be fully developed) of anthropology<sup>30</sup>. Since the winter semester 1772-1773, when he begun his lessons in anthropology at the University of Königsberg, Kant had adopted this new denomination in order to avoid confusion with scholastic psychology, which was conceived as a part of metaphysics<sup>31</sup>. A letter to Markus Herz of 1773 shows that Kant, at the same time, took particular care in specifying that his lexical choice in favour of anthropology did not imply any adoption of a deterministic views on man, similar to Platner's<sup>32</sup>. Actually, Kant borrows many ideas from scholastic psychology in the first part of his *Anthropologie*<sup>33</sup>. However, this does not exhaust his concept of anthropology. Kant considers the *Didactic* as an anthropological «Doctrine of the Elements», providing an empirical description of all available materials (thoughts, feelings, volitions), whereas the subsequent *Characteristic* plays the role of the anthropological «Methodology», illustrating the destination of man according to his manifold «character»<sup>34</sup>. Kant repeatedly underlines the difference between empirical psychology, as a metaphysical and «scholastic» discipline, and anthropology<sup>35</sup>.

His contemporary audience took this distinction between psychology and anthropology for granted. In his destructive review, published in 1798 in the *Athenaeum*, F.D. Schleiermacher suggests that Kant's theory was, in any case, diametrically opposed to the obsolete and execrated

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<sup>29</sup> The drafts of Kant's lessons are available in Kant 1997; see Brandt-Stark 1997.

<sup>30</sup> Kant 1787, 548.

<sup>31</sup> See Brandt 1999, Brandt-Stark 1997.

<sup>32</sup> Kant 1773. In the same spirit, Kant will soon adopt and permanently maintain a «pragmatic» rather than «physiologic» view of anthropology: see Kant 1798, 119.

<sup>33</sup> See Hinske 1996, 2002, who possibly overestimates Kant's general dependence on scholastic psychology.

<sup>34</sup> See Kant 1798, 412; 1997, 1530; 1923, 661. On the anthropological *Characteristic* see Manganaro 1983, Brandt 1999, Sturm 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Kant 1798, 161; see also Kant 1923, 800, 801.

scholastic psychology, whose recent disappearance he warmly welcomes<sup>36</sup>. Goethe and Schiller agree that Kant's work can be read from the point of view of a «pathological» side of man<sup>37</sup>. Much more than a «faculty psychology», Kant's *Didactic* is actually a pathology of human faculties, whose negativity is balanced by the subsequent thoughts on character and destination of the human species. Notwithstanding his refusal of Kant's pragmatic approach to anthropology, also J.F. Fries sharply distinguishes between «philosophical anthropology» and the empirical psychology of the «*Eklektiker*»<sup>38</sup>. Despite some occasionally synonymous or synergic usage<sup>39</sup>, an alternative and mutually exclusive function of anthropology and psychology can be ascertained in many significant cases. Unsurprisingly, the most notable champion of scientific psychology in the first half of the XIX Century, J.F. Herbart, is among the harshest critics of anthropology, a discipline which he considers an inappropriate mix of psychology and «somatology»<sup>40</sup>. In fact, as we have seen, a psychophysical approach to anthropology was well represented at the time.

In Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*, Anthropology is the first part of the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit, followed by Phenomenology of Spirit and Psychology<sup>41</sup>. According to Hegel, Anthropology is the doctrine of «soul», dialectically elevating itself from its proximity to nature to higher levels of «conscience» (Phenomenology) and, finally «spirit» (Psychology). In many respects, Hegel inverts the usual internal structure of anthropology. Whereas Kant started from individuals and ended with the history of humankind, Hegel's anthropology begins with a plurality of «characters» and moves towards the unicity of an internally concentrated subjectivity, leading the way towards «conscience» and Phenomenology. In its anthropological path, the soul repeatedly faces a dialectical negative instance, whose features are borrowed from the vast repertoire of romantic anthropology, which Hegel knows surprisingly well<sup>42</sup>. It is only through psychical pathology and – *à la lettre* – pre-

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<sup>36</sup> Schleiermacher 1799.

<sup>37</sup> Both letters are reprinted in Malter 1980, 336 f.

<sup>38</sup> Fries 1831, 31.

<sup>39</sup> See Linden 1976, 63 ff.; 120.

<sup>40</sup> Herbart 1823, 190.

<sup>41</sup> Hegel 1830. The section is explicitly entitled «Anthropology» in the second and third edition (1827, 1830).

<sup>42</sup> See Petry 1978, 441 ff. (notes). Marquard (1965, 217) thinks that Hegel's attempt to subordinate anthropology to philosophy of history implies the «degradation of anthropology». Hegel's inclusion of anthropology in the *Encyclopaedia* would then mean a critique of the romantics, who merely caught the «*An-sich*» of man. However,



conscious phenomena like suggestion or hypnotism (and so on), that the soul frees itself in the direction of phenomenological *Bewusstsein*.

Thus, it was only in the hands of Hegel's followers that anthropology lost its strategical importance<sup>43</sup>. Most significantly, to a great extent this loss of importance is the loss of a specific difference from psychology. This process can be easily revealed within the so-called right-wing Hegelianism. C.L. Michelet was probably the most consequent thinker who explicitly identifies anthropology and psychology<sup>44</sup>. Zealously attempting to reform Hegel's Philosophy of the Subjective Spirit, Michelet struggles to restore the original function of Phenomenology, as expounded by Hegel in the Jena version. Consequently, Phenomenology becomes a general introduction to philosophy, pre-existent and external to the system. Thus, what remains of the Subjective Spirit, i.e. anthropology and psychology, necessarily merges into a unified *Philosophie des subjectiven Geistes*. Unfortunately, this move neutralised any philosophical potential of anthropology (and of psychology, too) in the less formal version of most Hegelians like J.E. Erdmann, who simply identifies psychology with Philosophy of Subjective Spirit<sup>45</sup>. Much more interesting, of course, are the vicissitudes of the concept of anthropology among the left-wing Hegelians, from Feuerbach to the young Marx and beyond. Yet, our present task is confined to an analysis of the development of this matter until approximately Hegel's death<sup>46</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion

To sum up, anthropology becomes (in Marquard's terms) «peripheral» whenever it diverges from philosophy of history, thus embracing an oversimplified psychophysical perspective, as in Herbart's criticism. On the contrary, anthropology becomes philosophically relevant whenever it refuses such naïve naturalism, rather reflecting upon the various physical

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with similar arguments one could also infer that phenomenology is irrelevant since it merely concerns the «*Für-sich*», and so on: nothing (but pure philosophy) could then avoid «degradation». As in the case of Kant, Marquard's negative attitude partly depends on the painful state of the art concerning these two chapters in the history of philosophy at the time. For instance, Marquard takes no notice of the deep Aristotelian roots of Hegel's anthropology (see Ferrarin 2001, 234 ff.).

<sup>43</sup> On the contrary, Marquard (1965, 217) simply identifies Hegel's with Michelet's positions.

<sup>44</sup> Michelet 1840, V.

<sup>45</sup> Erdmann 1847, 1; see also 1837.

<sup>46</sup> For further developments, see Martinelli 2004, 115 ff.

and moral «characters» of man, on the purpose (or «vocation», *Bestimmung*) of individuals, genders, ages of man, peoples (including wild ones), races, historical ages and finally, of all humankind. A dynamic and flexible vision of human nature, which is no longer considered immutable, is the basis of this idea of anthropology. Anthropology makes philosophy of history possible, and philosophy of history makes anthropology relevant. In this process, anthropology is mostly conceived as an alternative to psychology, whose approach typically disregards long-term historical view.

Although these claims refer to the considered period, they could suggest a revision of many aspects in the received idea of anthropology on a more general level. Anthropology has a precise function within modern philosophical discourse, focusing attention on the human «world-of-life», as Marquard asserted, yet without embracing naturalism at the cost of neglecting history. Rather, anthropology attains relevance through its opposition to radical naturalism in the study of man, and quite often (although not necessarily), this goal is achieved through a parallel, synergic philosophy of history. At the same time, anthropology is also typically sensitive to scientific results. Quite often, it tries to integrate them and thus to present itself in a sort of mediatory position (sharply criticised, as such, by many philosophers).

The case of Hermann Lotze, philosopher and physician who begun his career defending a «physiology of the soul» against the theory of *Lebenskraft* and became later famous for his *Mikrokosmos* (a philosophy of history work, and an «essay in anthropology», as the subtitle goes), is not isolated<sup>47</sup>. In Wilhelm von Humboldt's elegant synthesis, the «dangerous cliff» to be avoided in any judgment concerning man is «to consider man always – and yet never enough – a natural being»<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> See Lotze 1856-64.

<sup>48</sup> Humboldt 1796, 353.

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