1 Philosophical Anthropology

A Third Way between Darwinism and Foucaultism

Joachim Fischer

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate and explicate the technique of Philosophical Anthropology. The thesis is that Philosophical Anthropology is a particular (and arguably extremely important) theory in that it steers a course between naturalism and culturalism, in other words, between Darwin and Foucault. Plessner might have said ‘between Darwin and Dilthey,’ but today, Philosophical Anthropology appears as a paradigm which sits between the theories of Darwin and Foucault. It builds a bridge between biology on the one hand and social and cultural sciences on the other; a bridge which could neither be constructed by Darwin (and his followers) nor by Foucault (and his followers). Yet, this bridge allows us to accept both paradigms as ways of thinking while simultaneously limiting their spheres. This Philosophical Anthropology is reconstructed with reference to Plessner’s The Levels of the Organic and Man [Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch, 1928] and to his sophisticated (and subtle) concept of ‘eccentric positionality.’

Philosophical Anthropology: Discipline or paradigm?

It is important to distinguish between two uses of the term ‘philosophical anthropology’: philosophical anthropology as a discipline (a sub-discipline within philosophy) and Philosophical Anthropology as a paradigm.² In the 1920s there were two philosophical movements in this field, out of which two senses of the term ‘philosophical anthropology’ were born. In 1928 there emerged almost a new discipline called ‘philosophical anthropology’ within philosophy, instanced by, for example, Bernhard Groethuysen’s Philosophische Anthropologie (Groethuysen 1931 [1928]), and later by Michael Landmann’s Philosophical Anthropology [Philosophische Anthropologie. Menschliche Selbstdeutung in Geschichte u. Gegenwart, 1964] (Landmann 1974). This dis-

¹ The reason to write ‘Philosophical Anthropology’ with capital letters will be explained in the next section.

² For better orientation the text differentiates between ‘philosophical anthropology as a discipline’ and ‘Philosophical Anthropology’ (written capital letters) as a paradigm.
Discipline is concerned with the question ‘Who or what is man?’ The discipline ‘philosophical anthropology’ is an organized collection of answers to this question, marked by a tradition of European thought, and later on farther afield (Hartung 2008). It developed as a discipline through contributions from different contemporary paradigms, such as psychoanalysis, philosophical hermeneutics, existential philosophy, the phenomenology of the body, the phenomenology of human *Lebenswelt*, the anthropology of Feuerbach, early Marx, and so on. Later, this discipline developed rules governing what it means to work within philosophical anthropology as a discipline, in an interdisciplinary framework between different human sciences.

By contrast, under the same title of ‘Philosophical Anthropology’ (to distinguish it from the discipline here written with capitals) there emerged at the same time a philosophical-anthropological paradigm: a particular approach to thought, with a distinctive procedure, which attempts to arrive at a theory of man via a theory of biological life in general. This is exemplified in the writings of Scheler (Scheler 1961 [1928]) and Plessner (Plessner 1975 [1928]). This developing paradigm, under the title ‘Philosophical Anthropology,’ was shaped by diverse thinkers and researchers: Scheler, Plessner, later Rothacker, Gehlen, Buytendijk, Portmann, and so on. While the work of these individuals is not the subject of this paper, it is important to note that Plessner was not alone in his intellectual interests in this area. Despite the use of different terminology and focusing on different interests, these thinkers shared an overarching approach, an approach they identified as ‘Philosophical Anthropology,’ and this participation in a shared paradigm was the background to their sometimes strange (and often bitter) rivalry.3

The equivocation of the term ‘philosophical anthropology’ as a discipline on the one hand and as a paradigm on the other, leads the philosopher down two tracks at once. We can compare the discipline ‘philosophical anthropology’ to other disciplines in philosophy (such as epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, aesthetics, etc.) and we can also compare the paradigm ‘Philosophical Anthropology’ with other paradigms (such as neo-Kantianism, naturalism, existentialism, phenomenology, critical theory, philosophical hermeneutics, poststructuralism, theory of social systems, etc.). Thus, the equivocation proves itself to be useful for research. Of course, Plessner and the other thinkers who created the new paradigm belonged also to the new discipline, but their noteworthy achievement lies in the invention of the paradigm called ‘Philosophical Anthropology.’

3 Philosophical anthropology as a paradigm within this group of thinkers and researchers is reconstructed in Fischer 2008. See also Rehberg 2009 and Borsari 2009.
Cartesian dualism as the challenge: Philosophical Anthropology as a response

This paper concerns only the paradigm called ‘Philosophical Anthropology,’ not the discipline. More specifically, it is concerned with the theoretical strategy of Philosophical Anthropology, a strategy competing with other paradigms that engage in some form of analysis of the human world. In order to elucidate this theoretical strategy, it is necessary to understand the competing approaches, out of which Philosophical Anthropology has developed its unique approach. While Cartesian Dualism had already been modified by the beginning of the twentieth century (the period of the genesis of Philosophical Anthropology), it has once more radicalized at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As a result, it split into two competing paradigms: between naturalism on the one hand (especially in the form of Darwinism, the core paradigm of the natural and neuronal sciences, or at least of the life sciences) and culturalism (or so-called Foucaultism in the cultural and social sciences) on the other, which are two opposing extremes in a spectrum. For naturalism, the distinction between nature and culture is a distinction within nature itself; for culturalism, and all social-constructionisms, the distinction between nature and culture is an a priori distinction made by culture itself.

It is very important to understand that these two theories continue the legacy of classical Cartesian dualism, a dualism between the thinking thing and the extended thing (mind and nature), but with new terms and new means: the evolutionary paradigm now takes the side of the natural, physical thing, and culturalism takes the mind as its subject. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, biology on the one hand (Darwin), and historic-cultural constructivism in the shape of historicism and hermeneutic philosophy on the other (Dilthey), gave new expressions to the two wings of Cartesianism: in place of the physics of the inanimate thing there was now the mechanism of the organism (including the brain), and in place of the thinking subject there was now language as an inter-subjective medium of thinking (the so called ‘linguistic turn’). Cartesian dualism allows each of the two competing paradigms to expand their span over the entire Cartesian domain: evolutionary biology claims now to explain not only life but the sociocultural world as a whole,⁴ and, vice versa, culturalism,

---

⁴ An important contribution to evolutionary anthropology was, of course, the initial research into the great apes by Wolfgang Köhler (1917).
by means of the linguistic turn, explains natural science and the evolution-
ary pattern as a mere cultural interpretation-scheme of special historicity.

Anticipating the theoretical strategy of Philosophical Anthropology
one could interpret this phenomenon as an attempt to reach a convincing
position regarding cultural and social science in an era that is rigorously
dominated by evolutionary biology. Philosophical Anthropology is a third
agent, but not a sheer mediator: it is more sophisticated than that. It first
relativizes the Darwinian analysis of life (including human life), and
simultaneously it both liberates and limits the sociocultural perspective.
Philosophical Anthropology makes a generous concession in favour of
naturalism without being a naturalistic approach itself. At its core, there
is a philosophical biology which is constructed in response to evolution-
ary naturalism and at the same time it conditions the social and cultural
sciences. Hence, it can claim to be a good ‘fit,’ inclusive of both theoretical
worlds.

We can now characterise the two wings of Cartesianism as the challenge
of naturalism in the shape of Darwinism, and the response to this challenge
by culturalism in the shape of Dilthey and Foucault. Having done this, we
can then elucidate the theory we call Philosophical Anthropology. We will
conclude with short remarks suggesting what one gains by the use of this
paradigm.

Darwinian naturalism

Darwin’s theory of evolution has not only become a key theory within
biology itself, but also a biologically-founded theory within anthropology.
As Ernst Mayr claims, “No modern thinker, can, in the end, avoid thinking,
when it comes to the essentials of his worldview, as a ‘Darwinist’ thinks”
(Mayr 1988). We can think of the Darwinian paradigm as a rocket with two
phases: first, the theory of life or living organisms, and secondly, embedded
within this theory, a theory of the human being.

Darwin’s theory of life, expressed in The Origins of Species by Means of
Natural Selection (Darwin 2000 [1859]), understands all species of living
organisms (both those still in existence and those now extinct) as resulting
from an evolution inherent in the very nature of living things. According to
this theory, the variety now observable in living organisms did not result
from a creation by a transcendent power, but from a process of development
ruled by certain inherent mechanisms: genetic variation arising through
the process of reproduction, natural selection of variations which are suc-
cessful in their environment, and finally, the stabilisation of successful species of organisms. It is important to note that these variations include not only organs and other physiological achievements, but also kinds of behavior of individual organisms (in higher species), predispositions for certain behaviors, ‘moods,’ and other non-physiological characteristics. The theory postulates that all organisms (extant and extinct) are connected to one set of ancestors.

The second phase of the evolutionary ‘rocket’ Darwin himself introduced in *The Descent of Man* (Darwin 1990 [1875]) published some twenty years after *The Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. Impressed by abundant empirical evidence, Darwin was led to compare human beings to other creatures within the realm of living things, and came to the thesis that there was a common descent of plants, animals, and human beings, and that the natural origin of human beings is the same as that of other higher primates. This systematic inclusion of man in the living world amounts, scientifically, to the inclusion of anthropology within biology. Darwin himself contrasts his thesis with a traditional idealistic self-interpretation of man: for Darwin, the human mind derives from lower forms of cognition, the human language from the voices of mammals, the moral sentiments from social instincts. Evolutionary theory allows us to systematically understand all those characteristics over which man seems to have a monopoly simply being mechanisms of life (evolved traits), and to reduce all anthropological terms to biological terms. Darwin’s key claim is: “Nevertheless the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind” (Darwin 1990 [1875]). This theory of the merely gradual differentiation in the evolution of life, covers the ‘impulses’ of life. The struggle for survival of the individual organism, and the survival of the species by reproduction, the mechanisms of variation, selection, and stabilization all function at the human level and explain all human phenomena, including what we think of as sociocultural; all patterns of conduct, all symbolic interactions, all inner moods and mindsets, can be explained as epiphenomena of the mechanisms of survival and reproduction common to all living things. Evolutionary theory as a naturalistic paradigm postulates ‘bio-power’ in the human being – but in a sense other than that used by poststructuralists and Foucault. It is not that sociocultural constructions and disciplining discourses that have come to wield power over human life in historically diverse ways and govern life by these cultural constructions, but rather that life itself is the determining power: bio-power is the power of life itself extending into all human constructions and discourses. In this evolutionary theory, all aspects of the sociocultural can be ‘biologized’ or
explained with reference to nature: within the Darwinian paradigm, one can observe and explain how life itself ramifies through all the branches and stems of the mental, emotional, social, and cultural world (Dawkins 2009; Eibl 2007). Similarly, with biological psychology, sociobiology, biological cultural science, and evolutionary epistemology, this bio-evolutionary programme of an ‘evolutionary anthropology’ penetrates into the sociocultural sphere: “Der Darwin-Code. Die Evolution erklärt unser Leben” – the title of a Darwinist study published during the year of Darwin 2009 (Junker and Paul 2009).

**Culturalism and constructionism: Responses to Darwinism within Cartesianism**

Darwinists can claim that we have been living in a ‘biological epoch’ since last third of the nineteenth century (Illies 2006). How can we challenge this claim? We can differentiate between two categories of response: *Darwin or God* (Klose and Oehler 2008) and *Darwin or Foucault*. In popular debate, there is much interest in the attempt to re-establish theology, and the theological theory of the creation of living beings (including man) by God, but the theory of creationism is not influential within science. Within science, the alternative to the Darwinian approach is constructionism, which is highly developed and dominates the scene with a broad spectrum of variation. It is important to introduce the defining features of constructionism here, as it will serve us to contrast it with Philosophical Anthropology as a paradigm. Two contemporary constructionisms that have attempted to respond to the first Darwinian challenge (theory of life) were neo-Kantianism (the renewal of idealism) on the one hand, and historicism, or hermeneutic philosophy (especially as seen in Dilthey) on the other (De Mul 2004). On what common principle do these responses rely? The key principle of such approaches, the starting point of the paradigm, is always the inherent ‘order’ of thought and speech, which, be it an intellectual or symbolic or linguistic order, is itself unaffected by nature. This principle is common across all the various forms of constructionism, regardless of whether it involves the order of language, symbols, writing, symbolic forms (Cassirer), historical a priori (Dilthey), or the respective epistemologies of word-view and self-view (Foucault).

Seen from this point of view evolutionary biology appears to be a mere discourse, a linguistic construction on ‘life,’ according to the rules of a certain discourse-formation and part of the discursive ‘bio-power’ (the term now used in Foucault’s sense). The decisive move within the theoretical
chess game of socioconstructivism or historicism or poststructuralism is to claim that the distinction between nature and culture is only possible within culture, within the respective symbolic order of social culture (Reckwitz 2006). ‘Life,’ particularly human life, enters the game only according to socially-constructed systems and worldviews, marked by subjugations of the body and bio-power-control of populations, techniques of controlling life, contingent rules (instantiated in discourses, images, language, symbolization, and bio-politics) and the contingent decisions of inter-subjective or trans-subjective cultural order. All of these concepts define what can be accepted as ‘life’ and as ‘human.’ All naturalisms, including evolutionary theory, can be deconstructed as merely a strategic discourse or narrative, and can therefore be suspended, repealed, or cancelled.

Philosophical Anthropology: A third way

Against this historical background, we are now ready to introduce Philosophical Anthropology. To understand Philosophical Anthropology, it is important to remember that all of the thinkers within this paradigm retain a non-Darwinian idealistic self-interpretation of man, i.e. that man is special in self-knowledge and self-determination, and liable to cultural social construction. This position is foundational for Philosophical Anthropologists and not open for discussion. As such, the reductionist Darwinian theory constitutes a real challenge to thinkers in this field. The strategy of Philosophical Anthropology as a philosophical paradigm is to follow neither evolutionary theory on the one hand, nor to evade (as culturalistic constructivism does) the basic question of nature and life on the other. In other words, it tries not to follow naturalism, nor to dodge the question of nature in the same way Dilthey and Foucault did. What Philosophical Anthropologists accept from the evolutionary approach is explanation from within nature, i.e. that there is an explanation of life inherent within nature – without recourse to theological models or teleological models of the purpose of nature. In short, they accept the basic role of biology (Jonas 1966). Philosophical anthropology places itself in a concession to Darwinism and nonetheless does not coincide with Darwinism.

The key issue in any theory of Philosophical Anthropology therefore is its internal relation to a philosophical biology (Grene 1965). Every Philosophical Anthropology, as a paradigm, invents a philosophical biology by means of which it then unfolds a theory of social culture. In challenging Darwinism, the relationship to a particular philosophical biology is decisive. It is there-
fore characteristic of Philosophical Anthropology that in its conceptual framework, it never starts as an anthropology, but rather, before considering man, deals with the wider theory of life. It is typical of this approach to reach consideration of the human only in the wider context of all living things. In contrast to the impulse of evolutionary theory, the guiding impulse here, when considering the living world in general, is to avoid surrendering to the irreducible experience of man as a reason – and discourse-mediated being, capable of self-detachment, language, ecstasy, laughing, crying, and so on. In the view of the Philosophical Anthropologists, there is nothing wrong with evolutionary theory as a theory of life, except that it is inadequate as a theory of human beings, as it is unable to explain their special experiences. The credo of Philosophical Anthropology is: as a philosopher, you are responsible for the biology which interprets man. So philosophers have to be responsible for inventing a proper philosophical biology compatible with the theory of life in general, but also appropriate to the interpretation of man. That is the task in which Philosophical Anthropology engages in this biological epoch in which we find ourselves. In biologically-informed talk about the organic world, the phenomena of life should be described in such a way that – after consideration of the organic in general, the human organism is at last considered – the experience encountered at the beginning (the self-detachment, self-determination, or dignity of man) should not be proven to be an illusion or a mere epiphenomenon. To put it in another way, the strategy of Philosophical Anthropology, faced with the challenge of Darwinism, is to arrive at a unified theory wherein a non-reductive concept of man-in-nature, achieved within an inclusive theory of life, is capable of dealing with the contrasts between plants, animals, and man. In a sense, all the Philosophical Anthropologists are working like detectives or investigators, sifting through the findings of empirical biology for discoveries which might allow them to stress the Sonderstellung of human organisms. Therefore, they are deeply interested in the discoveries of Driesch (1921), Von Uexküll (1996), Buysen (1928), Bolk (1926), Portmann (1990), and many other biological researchers whose biological discoveries might offer an open door to the anthropologists' philosophical biology. Let us explicate the paradigm more precisely. Provided that the Darwinian theory of man is either a type of vertical reduction akin to a conceptual reductive operation which translates all theological or philosophical assertions concerning man

5 And they all were deeply impressed by Henri Bergson and his philosophical dealing with evolutionary theory – the ‘L’évolution creatice’ (1944 [1907]) was a model for their own attempts at similar enterprises.
to assertions about natural science or biological states, or it is a type of vertical reduction in parallel to an ontological reduction in which the human being in the end is nothing other than a natural body, then Philosophical Anthropology turns the table by turning the reduction upside down.

In short, it operates as a theory of vertical emergence within a theory of living things which itself includes a theory of the stages of living things (without recourse to theology or teleology). By this theory of vertical emergence in nature, the Sonderstellung of man can be carefully characterized (Thies 2004). Therefore, one can see at first sight that the anthropology of Feuerbach, for instance, does not belong to this paradigm, because it shares the operation of reductionism. So Feuerbach, characterized by his materialism, need not be counted as a progenitor of Philosophical Anthropology.

**Philosophical Anthropology and Plessner’s ‘eccentric positionality’**

Now is the time to explain Plessner's term 'eccentric positionality' (Plessner 1975 [1928]). The discussion so far will hopefully aid us in accurately defining and sharpening our Philosophical Anthropology by using Plessner's rather sophisticated concept. The concept itself reveals how Philosophical Anthropology works as a paradigm. In fact, other advocates of the philosophical-anthropological approach, e.g. Scheler or Gehlen, Portmann or Jonas, more or less tacitly accepted Plessner's term. Plessner takes for granted self-detachment, self-determination, and all the properties classically (and idealistically) ascribed to human beings, but he does not begin with them – i.e. they are not his point of departure. The goal here is to reach the peak of the culturalist endeavour (the whole realm of cultural and social sciences), the so-called hermeneutic sphere, but not by beginning with its own assumptions. As the operation of Philosophical Anthropology requires, Plessner reaches the classically idealistic terms in a roundabout way, via an excursus in the theory of life. He starts with the idea of the thing. The thing appears as a phenomenon to the subject, but the drive of Plessner’s theory is not to try to reconstruct the experience the subject has in relation to the phenomenon, but rather to focus on the phenomenon of the thing itself. His approach prefers philosophical attention to the thing (the object, that which is experienced) over attention to the subject (that which experiences). Thus,

---

6 For useful interpretations of this important term, see, for instance, Eßbach 1994, Krüger 1998, Fischer 2000 or Lindemann 2005.
he starts with the distinction between inanimate and living things, and characterizes living things as defined by a ‘boundary’ (*Grenze*). Organisms, or living things, are marked by boundaries; they are boundary-realizing things. An organism has boundary-contact with its environment; it builds up its own complexity in metabolism with the environment by means of its boundary. This approach of defining organisms by their boundaries has many implications. Plessner can explain the properties of organisms by this condition (according to empirical biology: and this constitutes the main part of *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*), but can also pave the way for an application of this analysis to the sociocultural sphere of man. The boundary of the organism is not only a result of the fact that living things have to organize their own survival (i.e. solve the question of stabilisation), but the idea of the boundary of an organism also includes the notion of ‘expressivity’ – another important difference between living and inanimate objects. By their boundaries, living things become manifest at their surfaces, and by their surfaces as boundaries these living things are *phenomena* in the deep sense of the word. It is extremely important to note at this point that Plessner’s philosophical biology, constructed within a Philosophical Anthropology, already encapsulates the basic idea of ‘expressivity’ by defining living things by their boundaries. And ‘expressivity,’ since Dilthey, is vitally important as the key term of self-awareness in the social and cultural sciences. Thus, Plessner creates a connection to the cultural and social sciences from within a philosophical biology via the establishment of a fundamental category which includes the idea of ‘human expression’ (Plessner 1964).

To develop and extend this approach into the sphere of human beings, Plessner needs not only a theory of different types of living things, but also a concept that will enable him to differentiate between different levels or stages of boundary-regulation. This need is satisfied with the concept of ‘positionality.’ It replaces the key notion of *idealism* (Fichte’s *Setzung*, or the self-positioning ‘I’) with a *naturalistic* idea – passive positionality (*Gesetztheit*) or being positioned. This positionality marks a deep concession of Philosophical Anthropology towards Darwinism, because it highlights the relative passivity of organisms – being pushed by the anonymous force of nature into the boundaries they have to keep. The living body is given by nature. Positionality implies that there is no Creator who makes and positions living beings; there is no self-positioning ‘I’ who positioned nature (as the Non-I): nor is there a society or culture which creates or defines life. Positionality entails only that the anonymous force of nature pushes individual organisms into their boundaries and borders, disposing them
to stay within a specific spatial environment. Plessner now continues his Philosophical Anthropology by distinguishing stages of positionality, driven by the goal to classify plants, different kinds of animals, and human beings. He distinguishes between open and closed forms of positionality, and next between a-centric and centric positionality. Mammals and within them primates, belong to the latter group. One could say that the emergence of ‘centric positionality’ denotes the breakthrough of intentionality in the evolution of life. Plessner explains this intentionality towards the environment (Umweltintentionalität) from the practical correlation between organism and environment. In doing so, he gives this key concept of phenomenology and pragmatism a crucial place in his reconstruction of the levels of the organic.

And one has to bear in mind that Plessner’s intention with ‘centric positionality’ is to include what he calls ‘frontal positionality.’ This is very important for his next step, because with the term ‘frontal positionality’ he can draw attention to the observable fact that some kinds of brain-animals are already in communication with the brains of other animals: by the frontal appearance of their positionality, i.e. by their expressive boundary surfaces, visual patterns, touching and shouting, which allow interactional co-ordination and imitation between positionalities. There is already a relationship between the individual organism and the society, even at the level of ‘frontal positionality’ – perceiving each other through the senses.

We can now turn our attention to human beings. Plessner suggests the concept ‘eccentric positionality’ for the characterization of our life form. One could say that Plessner, or Philosophical Anthropology in general, captures in this term the 1-2% difference in genetic make-up between the great apes and human beings. ‘Eccentric positionality’ implies that in these living things there is a kind of disengagement or detachment from life, but within life, and, because this happens within natural life, it has to be lived in life, to be connected to life. Eccentricity takes place within positionality. Eccentric positionality means detachment from the body within the body, or in other words, detachment from life within life. Thus, one can adopt Plessner’s approach within both rival paradigms of Cartesian dualism: within Foucaultism/culturalism it operates at the level of discourse; within Darwinism/naturalism it operates at the level of the biological in human life.

---

7 Perhaps ‘positionality’ as the key term of a philosophical biology is more appropriate than ‘auto-poiesis,’ which means something like self-creation or self-organisation of life because positionality contains the notion of the moment that life happens to the organism, when it is set or positioned in its boundary.

8 One has to take into account Plessner’s deep affinity with the new understandings of ontology propounded by Hartmann (1975).
But detachment from life within life means for this type of living being that it has to invent something in place of nature (it has to invent cultural society) and then to embody this invention within nature, because eccentric positionality always remains ‘positionality’ – forced upon the living being by the anonymous force of nature.

Philosophical Anthropology as a paradigm: What do we get out of it?

What have we gained from the use of this kind of paradigm? Using the paradigm, we can generate original anthropological categories, Sonderstellungs-terms, reserved for human beings alone. Eccentric positionality entails both that all anthropological categories are transformed, broken-bridged vital categories, still working within the anthropological dimension, and also that these anthropological categories are opened for variation and determinations by historic categories, concepts of ‘styles’ of human life. So, through Philosophical Anthropology, we have established a connection to the bio-power both in the Darwinian sense, as well as to the bio-power in a Foucaultist sense. To generate such anthropological categories, Plessner introduces the so-called laws of ‘natural artificiality,’ ‘mediated immediacy’ and the ‘utopian standpoint,’ all of which are guidelines for the discovery of anthropological categories. Consider, for example, laughter and crying. For Plessner, this pair is the paradigm of the paradigm, the key example of what he intends to do with Philosophical Anthropology (Plessner 1970 [1941]): only eccentric positionalities can and must laugh and cry – in moments of crisis of sensible orientation, laughing and crying are vital reactions of the positionality to the crises of eccentricity. Every organism has to physically react to crisis, but only an eccentric-positioned being, which exists within a constructed world of sense and reason, can be thrown off kilter by the unexpected, unavoidable reality of the natural world. Laughing or crying, as reactions to crisis, are not cultural constructions by human beings, but things happening to their bodies: it is a regenerative return to the positionality, to their passivity, to the experience that they are living bodies. In short, they are regenerative powers of human life. At the same time, this vitality, this evolutionary bio-power in laughing and crying can and must be disciplined by the Foucaultist bio-power which disciplines, controls, and regulates the occasions of expressions of laughing and crying through the various forces of culture within society.
Darwinism and Foucaultism seen from the perspective of eccentric positionality

Philosophical Anthropology is a way of thinking which, as we have seen, operates somewhere between Darwin and Dilthey, and which re-emerges as a fascinating approach that stands between Darwin and Foucault, between the alternatives of naturalism and culturalism. Plessner’s key concept of eccentric positionality could be an appropriate way to grasp, within a proper philosophical biology, the sociocultural dimension of man. If it works, this approach could offer a technique to control and limit the claims of Darwinism as well as those of Foucaultism. If it works, the technique of Philosophical Anthropology can be seen not only as a paradigm within the discipline of philosophical anthropology (among other paradigms), but as a subtle paradigm within epistemology, in ethics, in bioethics, in cultural sciences (De Mul 1991), in philosophy of technology (De Mul 2010), in psychology (Coolen 2008), in sociology (Claessens 1980; Tomasello 2008), and human geography (Ernste 2004), in philosophy of nature (Grene 1974), and ecophilosophy (Peterson 2010), even (as Max Scheler has applied it) in modern metaphysics.

Bibliography


