PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION
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CHAPTER 1
PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY, OR THE PHILOSOPHY OF MAN

1. PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION ON THE HUMAN PERSON

Many areas of knowledge concern the human person or identify their objective as being able to elaborate an anthropology, that is, in etymological terms, a discourse or a treatise about man. But in each of these areas a “sectorial” approach is used, in that one or another aspect of human existence is examined, and hence the noun “anthropology” is accompanied by an adjective circumscribing the scope of the investigation.

Thus, although the terminology used is not always the same, we have cultural anthropology, which studies the usages and customs of human societies as they are structured over time as expressions of specific relationships with others and with the environment, and psychological anthropology, which studies human behavior from the point of view of mental dynamics in order to understand how psychological identity is constituted and how personality disorders and disturbances arise. To cite another example, social anthropology analyzes the dynamics of relations between individuals in order to highlight the elements common to the various forms of society. Finally there is ethnological anthropology, which studies human groups, describing and comparing their shared traits in association with the geographical, historical, and climactic conditions in which they live.¹

As may be seen, each of these scientific disciplines concerns itself with just a single aspect, important though it may be, of the human person; but each cannot, in itself, comprehend man in all his rich-

¹. There is also physiological, or physical, anthropology, which deals with the somatic traits of individuals, and paleoanthropology, which studies fossilized human remains. In an even more specialized perspective, there is also criminal anthropology.
ness and complexity. What they are, in fact, are scientific-experimental analyses (i.e., based on observation, on empirical verification), which cannot account for the person in himself; that is, seen globally and not from a particular point of view.

*Philosophical anthropology*, on the other hand, reflects upon man in order to understand him in his entirety, grasping the fundamental principles of his existence in the world and his behavior. Hence, it could be said that, whereas science investigates *how* the human individual manifests himself toward his environment and his fellow man, philosophy asks itself about the *why* of human beings, about the ultimate principles of their existence and activity. The difference between the scientific and the philosophical approaches to the human person can also be expressed by saying that philosophy seeks to answer the question, *Who is the human person?* while the aforementioned scientific disciplines are more concerned with, *How does he act? How does he evolve?* and, *How does he interact with others?* This does not mean that the two sectors cannot communicate with one another; quite the opposite: Philosophy must take the results of science into account, for they will often stimulate further study or the reformulation of certain theses, and scientists, in their methodological autonomy, must seek not to lose sight of this area of knowledge, which constitutes the *source of meaning*.

The expression “*philosophical anthropology*” is a relatively recent one in philosophy, though it has remote roots in I. Kant, the term became consolidated in the twentieth century thanks particularly to the works of M. Scheler, H. Plessner, and A. Gehlen. And although these authors give the discipline a precise connotation (that of reflecting upon man above all on the basis of biological data and of comparison with animals), this book aims to present a philosophical anthropology beyond that thematic limitation, reflecting on the human person in the more general sense indicated above.

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3. The expression *philosophical anthropology* is used to designate philosophical currents very different from one another. An interesting overview is found in E. Conti, “*Antropología filosófica in Italia,*” “*La Scuola Cattolica,*” 31–74 (2004).