

SYMBOLICAL FORMS AND THEIR ROLE
IN AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS. ERNST
CASSIRER'S CONCEPTION OF THE HUMAN WORLD

The rich and intellectually revealing work of Ernst Cassirer belongs to a relatively new (in a methodological sense) branch of so-called philosophy of culture. Although the ancients have on many occasions presented something which might be thought of as a preliminary study of culture it seems impossible to ascribe to them the name of the founders of this type of philosophical discourse. As a self-conscious activity on the part of philosophers, theoreticians or artists, philosophy of culture was born in the eighteenth and then developed in the nineteenth century in France, England and Germany. This type of philosophical reflection was successfully developed (elaborated) by such great figures of European philosophy as Vico, Herder, Hegel, Taine, Dilthey, Taylor – to mention but a few – who time and again recalled their core ontological or epistemological beliefs. It goes without saying that there are many conceptions, disparate and often conflicting views concerning the way (manner) we understand the very term **philosophy of culture**. This is not – suffice it to say – to be treated as a kind of mere, mechanical combination, a “putting together” of two theoretical entities that is, **culture and philosophy**. If by the first term we generally understand, as Cicero and St. Thomas prompted us to do so a uniquely human way of taking care (**colo**) of something: gardens, villages, roads, new kinds of weapons, eventually leading the agents of such actions to “higher”, more spiritual and intellectual activities then the second word in this terminological combination inevitably suggests that **paideia** or culture (in its broadest aspects) will be either approached or inspired by philosophical methods and interpretations. (No wonder that there have arisen so many orientations in the sphere of philosophy of culture, which is in a way caused by many currents and schools, in the domain of philosophy.)

Thus, it is only through this type of approach we gain the acute awareness that what once was (especially in earlier historical formations) **taking care** of substantial entities – giving them a proper functional form – was soon to

become “taking care” of rather immaterial ones: values, norms, rules. It is generally agreed despite varying proposals and solutions that culture is sharply opposed to nature, pertaining to the human sphere of activity and what is more important – it constitutes solely the human sphere of being. This motif has been present in reflection on culture since Antiquity which, in turn had exerted exceptionally strong influence on the medieval and Renaissance thinkers. In the epoch of English, French and German Enlightenment this influence made itself felt in the form of a somewhat overrated distinction (vide Voltaire, Rousseau and Gibbon) between civilization (a set of material instruments, facilities characteristic of highly organized social): economic and political life as something which marks off human society from that of animal groups) and culture (a set of spiritual – that is, an axiological and normative sphere of advances on every plane of human endeavour. In modern times various philosophies of culture have energetically sought their own, unique ways to establish and exploit this ever evasive phenomenon of solely human activities of “higher nature”. Moreover, those theoretical efforts have tried (and are still trying as can be distinctly discerned in French postmodernism and the new sociology of Giddens and Baudillard) to overcome – often one-sided, if not biased points of view gearing their proposals and ideas to one or the other philosophical background.

Although the fundamental assumption – to wit – that culture is nothing but a human invention, a human sphere of activity remained unshaken, the philosophical tendency has brought about – in an inevitable way – so many variations in the domain of the philosophical branch (discourse) in question. One is fully satisfied in positing that almost every important and vital philosophical current produced its own version of the philosophy of culture. Among such important and fecund trends active on the European scene, we should mention the phenomenological approach which placed a vehement stress on the free and spontaneous activity of human consciousness. Its manifold and varified acts – thinking, imagining, perception were by their very nature intentional (This old medieval concept interpreted all conscious acts – intentions – in forms of a specific kind of transcendent movement of consciousness towards all that is outside it; hence the current term used by all phenomenologists is transcendence.) For this new and promising philosophical science – as Husserl often said – it meant nothing else but that it was a human ego which governs the transcendent world. In other words, what we know as our reality – the world of values, evaluations, norms, works of art or scientific achievements was the final effect of the human constitution. Hence culture – as the ultimate product of conscious beings – depended on our intentional acts and bore in its innermost nature, the concrete stamp of that which belongs to our