

## THE POSITIONALIST NOTION OF HUMAN NATURE IN PLESSNER'S AND GEHLEN'S PHILOSOPHY

The School of Philosophical Anthropology of the first half of the twentieth century put forth the question on the condition of human nature and “man’s place in cosmos”. This was not a new question; and philosophical inspirations and a continuation of some deliberations were inevitable. The philosophy of culture knows of many such problems. Deliberations undertaken by Arnold Gehlen, Helmuth Plessner or Max Scheler offer an interesting interpretation not only of the problem itself, but also allow grasping the problems of twentieth century philosophy. Philosophical anthropology, even though it is based on empirical studies and wants to attach great significance to these studies, stands between other important streams of philosophy at the time, and is subjected to numerous influences (such as the philosophy of life or phenomenology).

Plessner is most probably the most open philosopher, locating himself between extreme options. It may be said that his thought is formulated between Scheler’s idealism. Scheler, whose discovery of spirit, as the essence of humanity, makes it possible to separate the human being from his biological base and accept that culture is a domain of pure human activity, therefore, activity, where the human spirit (its essence) develops, through heroism, spirituality and cultivation of higher values. At the opposite end of this thinking, it is possible to put Gehlen, with his naturalism and the statement inherited after Herder, that “man is a being marked with fault”. As a result of such a point of view, Gehlen may construct his vision as a being that is fully biological, which through the mind and language is capable of making up for evolutionary shortcomings, through a sublimation of his deficiencies and creation of culture. Culture understood as compensation, but also a different space, a sphere, in which man encloses his biological urges in numerous institutions and forms of culture, in such a way that he is far removed from his biological origin. Nevertheless, if we take a closer look at different formations of culture, if we analyze their origin, we can reach the primary biological character of human nature.

Plessner stands in the middle of these opinions. He will want to refer to empiricism, just like Gehlen, as Scheler's idealism will undoubtedly be too radical for him, but the consequences of Gehlen's philosophy will be equally radical. Fighting with Cartesian dualism, he will also solve, or appease the oppositions of naturalism and idealism. It should be borne in mind that Plessner's philosophy is also inspired by the Darwinian approach to species, and draws inspiration from Dilthey and Bergson (Plessner informs about this in his dissertation entitled: *A Question of Condition humana*). This abundant source of inspiration puts Plessner in the middle of many philosophical conflicts.

Following the naturalist lead, Plessner describes the human condition from the perspective of evolution and the biological abilities, traits and conditions of the human body. However, this naturalist approach itself includes something that I would call a metaphorical description of these conditions. Starting with the upright position, the fact that man is a being with such a peculiar body posture, Plessner draws not only man's further abilities as a species, but states that the upright position – as being vertical – is an ennobling one. There is certain symbolic in this position. Everything directed upwards seems to be nobler, more important, has the possibility of not only free action (freed arms) but also of looking around the world. This is not only a broader perspective of perception, but also the possibility of contemplation, doing something beyond the biological level. Therefore, biological preconditioning is at the same time preconditioning that is non-biological, symbolic or metaphoric. Plessner also pays much attention to the hands and eye, as special elements of the body. These interests are expressed by his words: "nature is not only a frame, the stage cage and the back wall of the sidelines, but also the scenic force."<sup>1</sup>

"Indirect directness" is a significant description of man's being in the world. The eye and hand are man's tools allowing him to cover the distance separating him from the world. The eye brings closer by the possibility of looking at what is distant. The hand brings closer by the possibility of pulling, touching, seizing what lies beyond our body. Along with the development of civilization, man has developed these two organs "arming" them with field glasses, periscopes, microscopes, extensions arms, feeders. In this way, what is distant for animals is brought near for man. However, this approximation has its specific character, it is *indirectly direct*. Such a possibility also describes man's being in the world. Through the body, the world is given to us and we shape our knowledge about the world. Reality surrounding us appears to be something that is ours, but at the same time, beyond us. As Heidegger has put it, man feels at home in the world; but Plessner in his conception shows that this "feeling at home" does not have a uniform character. We are "at home",