

ON PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: CAN IT BE A SCIENCE?

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating Philosophical anthropology which is commonly accepted as a multidisciplinary approach to human sciences. Philosophical anthropology is philosophy of man which considers the phenomenon of man within his contextualized cultural and historical existence. Philosophical anthropology purports to understand man's position in the world by elucidating the basic qualities and conditions which makes man what he is. Methodology of science requires using reductions like reduction of man into social or biological organism however; such a methodology results in some problems. Philosophical anthropologists propose that modern anthropologies cannot give complete description of the phenomenon of man. Reduction as the methodology of science may not be successful. This is why Philosophical anthropology is so important. Philosophical anthropology involves use of phenomenological methods in order to analyze and interpret the basic categories concerning the nature and culture of man instead of application of the methods used by natural sciences. The methods used by Philosophical anthropologists must permit us to perceive the meanings which cannot be articulated by the methods used in natural sciences. The methods of Philosophical anthropology comprise outcomes of the sciences like psychology, sociology, archeology and linguistics. However, Philosophical anthropology is insufficient in methods which provide criteria for true theory. The present study also purports to articulate and discuss whether Philosophical anthropology has any different characteristics providing us with basic knowledge of human nature and of the human condition or "total man". Although Philosophical anthropology is accepted to offer a metaphysical foundation for the various sciences of man, there are difficulties in determining the truth of theories in Philosophical anthropology because of lacking of a scientific methodology.

Keywords: Philosophical anthropology, reduction, human nature, culture, scientific method.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropology is the science of man which deals with human biology and cultures of human groups. It is the study of human species from both cross-cultural and evolutionary points of view. Anthropological investigation involves in comparison of contemporary cultures and investigations of cultural and biological changes. "Anthropology as a science is distinguished from other sciences in part by [1] its subject matter, the facts of culture. In part it is distinguished by [2] a theoretical orientation, the search for regularities in culture change and continuity. But in part it is also distinguished by [3] its techniques of analysis, the

comparative method” (Anderson, 1972, p. 8). Anthropology aims at considering comparisons of contemporary cultures and cultural and biological changes.

One of the subject matter of anthropology is “human culture” which refers to certain historically created facts. The concept of culture presupposes necessity of society and therefore person as a member of society. Anderson claims that it should be noticed that ‘culture’ designates a complex structure which involves knowledge, belief, arts, moral, law, custom, and whatever has been done by man as a member of society (1972, p. 7). It does not imply something fixed but it stands for change and continuity. Anthropologists employ certain methods called the comparative methods in order to discover regularities in cultures such as facts concerning clothing habits, family organizations, etc. From an anthropological point of view, every human society is different from one another. Anthropology aims at demonstrating the connections between human cultures. A major concern of anthropology is to determine the conditions from which cultural differences arise.

As a scientific discipline, anthropology can be divided into four subcategories: biological, cultural and linguistic anthropologies and archaeology. Physical anthropology is the biological branch of the discipline. It tries to reconstruct the physical evolution of our species and to give a description and an account for the physical variations. In other words, physical anthropology takes as its object of study cultural difference between societies which may end result from biological reasons. On the other hand, cultural anthropology examines on specific contemporary cultures and on the patterns which are the cause of human culture in its totality (Bates and Fratkin 2003, p. 30). In brief, the principal purpose of anthropological researches is to discover certain laws which govern the growth of human culture. Modern anthropology, from an evolutionary point of view, takes as the fact that there are definite laws which are applicable everywhere and any development in human culture follow.

Modern anthropologies study on overwhelmingly complex structures and phenomena like human being, human society and human systems. These phenomena are all multiply realizable and all are hard to be defined. Complexity in the systems of human being challenges anthropologists in giving an accurate and complete description of the phenomena. Oppositely, Bohannan and Glazer (1988) dissent with this view and propose that cultural phenomena are not more abstract than any physical phenomena which can be conceptualized. That is to say, cultural phenomena can be explained like concrete phenomena. The concept of culture is as abstract as the concepts body, matter, energy and so on. “Scientific inquiry, however complex in practice, rests on two interrelated mental activities: first, reducing the subject of inquiry to manageable units, that is, to define and describe units of useful data, and second, once a sufficiency of information is in place, generalizing further about related categories of data or even about expectations of what will be found in the future” (Bates and Fratkin, 2003, p 3). In other words, unknown cultural phenomena can be explained by using concepts or laws of specific science already known. Scientific laws will use to explain or describe certain qualities or properties which we do not know. Seen from another point of view, as in all scientific activities, anthropologists also have to use the method of reduction; that is to say, they are inclined to reduce their subject matter to manageable proportions and they are tended to reducing complex phenomena (or entities) into simpler one. In any anthropological investigation, materialistic approaches which involve ecological and biological explanation require using the method of reduction. Then, what is *reduction* or the method of *reduction*?

Reductionism is the idea that a theory or a phenomenon (or an entity) can be reducible to another theory or phenomenon (or entity). Two kinds of reduction can be stated as reduction of theories (theoretical reduction) and reductions of phenomena (or entities); however the

notion of Reduction is mostly used to prove the idea ‘all sciences are reducible to one unified science’. That is, theoretical reduction is primarily accepted as a way to unify the sciences.

Concerning theoretical reduction, it will be convenient to mention three models such as (i) Reduction as Translation, (ii) Reduction as Derivation, and (iii) Reduction as Explanation. These models can be summarized as follows:

- (i) “Theory T reduces to theory B when all of the truths of T (including the laws) have been *translated* into the language of B.
- (ii) Theory T reduces to theory B when all of the laws of T have been *derived* from those of B.
- (iii) Theory T reduces to theory B when all of the observations explained by T are also *explained* by B.” (Ney, 2008).

Churchland treats reduction as primarily an epistemological question, because reduction is essentially regarded as a relation between theories. Reduction could be used to refer to something metaphysical or could be used to refer to something epistemological, in other words it is a kind of explanation. That is, an explanation implies a reduction of something which is relatively new to something already known. A phenomenon can be reduced to another in virtue of the reduction of the relevant theories. It is a point about scientific method that is epistemology, it is not really metaphysics. Churchland claims that reduction is fundamentally an explanation and it must be concerned with reduction as an epistemological problem (1986, p. 283).

In his theory of reduction, Nagel talk about the reducing science as the primary science and the reduced science as the secondary science. In reductions, principles or laws in the secondary science must be logically reducible to that of the primary science. For instance, if we take biology as the primary science and anthropology as the secondary science, then anthropology is logically reducible to biology if and only if biology can reductively explain anthropology. Then we can say that the facts of anthropology wholly depend upon the facts of biology. If someone says that the phenomena of human culture can be reduced to biological phenomena, then he also says that theories of anthropology can be derived from theories in biology. In other words, when anthropology is defined as a multidisciplinary approach to all the sciences of human nature- sociology, psychology, biology, and so on, the use of reduction is possible. If the laws of anthropology are reducible to the laws of biology, then laws of anthropology can be derived from the laws of biology. However, theoretical reduction, as a methodology of science, cannot be successful. Reduction requires bridge laws between the reducing principles and the reduced principles. Because of lacking a bridge law between judgments about man and laws of empirical science, anthropology cannot be reduced to laws of biology or another physical science. In other words, reduction of anthropology into laws of biology may not be successful.

Whether reduction of phenomenon can be successful is a valuable question since such a reduction does not provide us with a genuine solution for problems in anthropology. Reduction implies that the reduced phenomena (or entities) are identified with the reducing phenomena (or entities). For example, if notion of man is reduced to biological or social organism, it is identified with biological or social organism. Or, social behaviors can be reduced to inherited and instinctive predispositions. Only thing which reduction provides is verbal extensions into sociology or anthropology by using laws of biology or of other sciences according to Bohannon and Glazer (1988, p. 107).

Philosophical anthropologists claim that modern anthropologies give incomplete description of the phenomenon of man. For, anthropological approaches are concerned with only human nature and as stated before, they try to explain human nature by using laws of biology. In other words, methodology of science requires using reductions like reduction of man into social or biological organism; however, such a methodology results in some problems.

The question “what is man” is not such a problem that has a scientific answer because *what man could become* has no limits. These theoretical potentialities of man are also another reason for rejecting reductionism. That is to say, social facts or phenomena are multiply realizable (or contingent) and if something is multiply realizable, than it may correspond to more than one different properties. Provided that predicate referring the social facts has a disjunctive form, it is not suitable for appearing in a scientific law. For reduction, coextension is required because it refers to identity. Two predicates are coextensive just in case they are satisfied by the same particulars. They are nomically coextensive, if they are coextensive as a matter of scientific law. Only laws of nature make possible reduction. Thus, multiple realizations are the ground in rejecting reductionism. Furthermore, the industrialization and the rise of technology are responsible for some problems concerning the contemporary philosophies of man. It can be claimed that contemporary philosophies of man has been inevitably influenced and a new understanding of humanism has developed by the industrialization and the rise of technology. For these reasons, the phenomenon of man needs to be clarified in different perspectives. This is *why Philosophical anthropology is so important*.

It is commonly accepted that Philosophical anthropology deals with the question related to metaphysics and phenomenology of man. Max Scheler defines Philosophical Anthropology as a fundamental science investigating the essence and essential constitution of man (1958, p. 65). It provides us with a multidisciplinary approach to human sciences. The goal of Philosophical anthropology is to investigate the phenomenon of man within his contextualized cultural and historical existence (Schrag, 1970, p. 83). Philosophical anthropology is an enquiry of phenomenon of man rather than the nature of man, but this does not exclude questions concerning human nature. That is to say, Philosophical anthropology is philosophy of man which considers the phenomenon of man within his contextualized cultural and historical existence and also human nature.

According to Scheler, the phenomenon of man must be defined appropriately. For him, concerning man, there is no unified idea although different scientific, theological, and philosophical views concerning human beings exist. (1961, p. 128) The methods of natural sciences involve certain inherent limitations. Science employs abstractions and simplifications to make an investigation on man. Nevertheless, such an investigation cannot demonstrate all the potentialities of man. The meaning of man cannot be reducible to laws of nature or more specifically laws of biology. Traditional metaphysics and modern anthropology are insufficient to explicate such a question because it would reduce the question about man to the question about a biological and rational individual.

Philosophical anthropology implies use of phenomenological methods in order to analyze and interpret the basic categories concerning the nature and culture of man instead of application of the methods used by natural sciences. The methods used by Philosophical anthropologists must permit us to perceive the meanings which cannot be articulated by the methods used in natural sciences. Its methods involve outcomes of the sciences like psychology, sociology, archeology and linguistics. “Philosophical anthropologists set out from the conviction that the theory of knowledge had reached a desperate crisis. Traditional theory of knowledge is seen by them as occupied only with one of the functions of consciousness; and consciousness, in

turn, is understood to present only a part of the forces shaping human reason” (Pappe, 1961, p. 49). It is traditionally believed that science helps man to control the nature; however, modern science does not describe facts of nature but our knowledge of nature. For this reason, man inevitably finds himself as the subject matter of his scientific activity. That is, as a part of nature, man tries to understand his self-image. Why the self-image of man is so important is essentially significant because it permitted us to understand the whole range of genuine potentialities in man according to Pappe (1961, p. 53). Although physical science is successful in describing our knowledge of nature, it fails to describe the phenomenon of man.

Philosophical anthropology purports to understand man’s position in the world by elucidating the basic qualities and conditions which makes man what he is. It is an investigation of the phenomena of man instead of the nature of man, as it aims at explicating and understanding the existence of man within concrete historicity and cultural variability. Schrag contends that unlike classical understanding of anthropology which investigates on the nature of man, Philosophical anthropology is concerned with the phenomenon of man without ignoring legitimacy of questions concerning human nature (1970, p. 83). That is, Philosophical anthropology purports to comprehend man as a historical being. Pappe claims that Philosophical anthropology aims to establish a complete picture of the potentialities open to man (1961, p.59). The method of phenomenology or similar methods should use in science to complete the methods of natural science. Anthropologies which use the methods of different sciences such as biology, sociology, etc. are misleading because they all oversimplify their subject matter, i.e., the phenomenon of man.

The question “what the features or conditions constitute man” is much more fundamental and also complex question than that anthropologies is concerned. For Scheler, basic typologies like *homo religious*, *homo sapiens*, *homo faber*, *homo dionysiacus*, and *homo creator* have been created, because man always wants to understand himself. All anthropologies try to reduce the phenomenon of man into a simpler individual. For this reason, Scheler rejects these perspectives. For example, anthropology originating from the idea ‘man is homo sapiens’ assumes that the *reason* distinguishes man from other animals. It reduces man into *reason*. Also, anthropology which is based upon the claim “man is homo faber” assumes that man is not primarily a rational being, but he is the products of either physico-chemical process. That is, man is reduced into a biological organism. By using these typologies, scientists and also philosophers tried to explain and also understand the phenomenon of man and human nature. “Man does not ‘exist’ as an object, nor even as relatively constant object, but only as constant potential for growth to the state of true humanity which can be freely accomplished at any moment, a process of truly becoming man...” (Scheler, 1958, p. 25). Since man is not a simply biological or a rational individual, such a reductionism cannot be acceptable, so it is false. For this reason, Scheler rejects five modern anthropologies.

Philosophical anthropologists charge modern anthropologies for incomplete description of man. Anthropologies make too much simplification in the phenomenon of man. Scientific methods cannot capture all of the potentialities of man. However, Philosophical anthropologists do not explain how they explain the whole phenomenon of man. “Is there no limit to the roles that a man may justifiably play and if there are any such limits, how is Philosophical anthropology going to tell us what they are?” (Weiler, 1980, p. 207). That is to say, according to Pappe, Philosophical anthropology can describe the phenomenon of man as a whole and also it completes the methods of science. However, he does not mention any method of Philosophical anthropology and he does not explain how Philosophical anthropology can give a complete description of man.

Nevertheless, although Philosophical anthropology is a multidisciplinary approach of human sciences, it has insufficient methods which provide criteria for true theory. It must be articulated and also discussed whether the Philosophical anthropology has any different characteristics providing us with basic knowledge of human nature and of the human condition or “total man”. Although Philosophical anthropology is accepted to offer a metaphysical foundation for the various sciences of man, there are difficulties in determining the truth of theories in Philosophical anthropology because of lacking of a scientific methodology.

How Philosophical anthropology deals with problems concerning roles, morality, and historicity of man is very problematic. “There is no method available which contains either the hope or the promise of a true theory in Philosophical anthropology which would be both scientifically and morally valid for all of us. In a very important sense this is indeed the last word on the subject and that, for all its negativity, is no mean achievement.” (Weiler, 1980, p. 207). Philosophical anthropology does not give any criteria for testing and deciding between two rival theories. There is no methodological principle which is essential for confirmation of theories, i.e., empirical testing. Although Philosophical anthropology is defined as a systematic study of man, its methods depend upon reflective and phenomenological methods rather than any scientific method. Anthropological investigations are observational and so empirical whereas Philosophical anthropology investigates on its subject matter by means of critical reflection, i.e., employing reason. For this reason, Philosophical anthropology cannot be identified with any empirical science. It is an interpretation on the subject matter of empirical sciences.

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