

DEZSŐ GURKA (ed.):

Changes in the Image of Man from the Enlightenment to the Age of Romanticism – Philosophical and Scientific Receptions of (Physical) Anthropology in the 18 – 19th Centuries

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Concerning the fundamental questions of modern physical anthropology, the first frame of reference for anybody today would be the Darwinian theory of evolution. This theory was *the* great assault against the traditional, religious worldviews, which basic tenets were to specify the state of man in relation to gods and to those unworldly spheres where the gods used to live. However, it is not so prevalent, that the theory of evolution, and later the results of modern paleoanthropology and human genetics were in some way answers to those questions, which were already posed for at least a hundred years before Darwin. When Carl Linné classified man (*Homo*) under the order *Anthropomorpha* (later *Primates*) together with apes (*Simia*) in his *Systema Naturae* in 1735, this act signified the emergence of a new era, a new field of science – the “sciences of man”. The purpose of the studies in this volume – *Changes in the image of man from the Enlightenment to the age of Romanticism – Philosophical and scientific receptions of (physical) anthropology in the 18-19th centuries* – is to examine the new concepts of man, mankind, humanity, and the human races predominantly in the German and Austro-Hungarian contexts.

In the treatise *Inventing ‘humanity’*, the author (László Kontler) argues, that the theoretical and moral questions regarding the changes in the ‘image of man’ are to be conceptualized within three cultural-historical tendencies: “the temporalization of human difference”, the “historicization of nature”, and the “naturalization of man”. As for the first tendency: it was an intellectual strategy of the westerners to legitimize dominion over newly “discovered” lands and its inhabitants, and understand the huge cultural and economical differences between Europeans and natives. “The ‘historicization of nature’, and the ‘naturalization of man’ were the other two processes which preconditioned the emergence of anthropology.” In their study, Uwe Hossfeld and Jörg Pittelkow summarises these strands of anthropological scrutiny: the discourse of the human-animal difference, the anatomical and medical observations of physicians, and the collection of ethnographic data during scientific expeditions.

These tendencies provided the background for the basic questions of nascent anthropology. Is there a difference between human and animal? If there is, what is it

exactly? What is the defining factor in the morphological differences between the races of man? Is there a hierarchy between these groups? Are different races rather different species with separate origin (*polygenesis*) or there is only one human species with a common ancestor (*monogenesis*) and with insignificant physical differences? Whoever wanted to take a position in these controversies had to relate to these questions too. For example, in his study, Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik exposes the difference between the Kantian, Herderian and Fosterian concept of experience. While Herder and Kant shared a historical and “proto-evolutionary” view on the origin of man, Foster, the renowned natural scientist, was more bound to the phenomenal and taxonomical description of the world. This explains the fact, that he even ventured on the hypothesis that black people were members of another, separately developed human population. The study, written by Endre Hárs demonstrates how differently an “evolutional” step – the upright stature of man – can be interpreted. Pietro Moscati the Italian doctor saw in this stature the ground of many physical handicaps, in contrast with the four-legged mammal’s well-adapted bodies. Herder, in turn, interpreted it as a metaphorically relevant, admirable ‘jump’ towards the superior being, called *Homo sapiens*.

The volume contains some other studies which try to refine important concepts of relevant authors, for example Carl Linné’s conceptualization of the four varieties of human species. Staffan Müller-Wille convincingly explains that while we commonly take the Linnéian categories as the precedents of modern “races”, the Linnéian concept of “variety” (*varietas*) was much more fluid and accidental construction. There are useful studies on prominent figures such as Karl Friedrich Blumenbach (Thomas Junker), Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (Vera Békés), Carl Gustav Carus (Dezső Gurka), Hegel (Klaus Vieweg). At last but not least, in the fourth chapter of the book, the authors – Ildikó Sz. Kristóf; Piroska Balogh; Tibor Bodnár-Király; Lilla Krász; György Kurucz – examine the cultural transfer of the Western European/German ideas to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, through such institutions as the very important Jesuit College of Nagyszombat (*Trnava*).

In the era of global capitalism, digitalization and emergent populism, the Kantian question “What is man?” is more relevant than ever. The contribution of books like this, to the understanding of the earlier formation of the ‘images of man’ is equally important, as well as to the scientific community as to the wider intelligentsia.

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