Sergey S. Horujy

SYNERGIC ANTHROPOLOGY, ITS CONTEXTS
AND ITS CONNECTION WITH MICHEL FOUCAULT

The text for the presentation of the book:
Sergey S. Horujy. "Practices of the Self and Spiritual Practices.
Michel Foucault and the Eastern Christian Discource"
(Vienna, Institute of Human Sciences, 17.03.2015)

The book we are going to discuss is a part of the project, which I develop for a long time, and which I hope can contribute to the radical renewal of anthropological thought much needed today. Thus I will use my time now dividing it into three parts: 1) The description of the project, 2) Main points in the project, which are of general philosophical and anthropological interest and, may be, value, 3) The book and its place in the project. Thus let us proceed to the Part I.

I.

The general goal of the project can be defined as a new conception of man, which is at the same time an episteme or the integrating conceptual, methodological and epistemological basis of all the set of human sciences and all the ensemble of humanistic knowledge. The last task here might seem unexpected or somewhat artificial, but in fact it is what should be expected of anthropology: it is quite justified to think that all human sciences should be based on some common conception of man, and vice versa, that a sound and full-fledged conception of man should be capable to serve as an underlying basis of all the set of human sciences and a kind of common denominator for all the complex of humanistic knowledge. Of course, I shall present only main steps in the advancement to these goals.

We do not accept the approach of classical anthropology in its basic principles of Subject, Essence and Substance as well as in its methodology of abstract postulates and speculative essentialist constructions. Instead of the postulated essence of man *we use the notion of the* ***constitution of man*** *as the ground principle of the description of anthropological reality*. There are two main differences between these principles:

1) Essence of man is unique and universal, but constitution of man is pluralistic. A priori there can be many different types or paradigms of human constitution, and a posteriori we find that this is the case indeed,

2) Constitution of man is not postulated or speculative, but experiential principle. I cannot give precise definitions now, but briefly speaking, this constitution is a full-dimensional frame or carcass of the ensemble of all man´s manifestations; in the first place, it includes basic structures of man´s personality and identity.

Thus already at this initial stage we see two cardinal distinctions of our approach from classical anthropology: synergic anthropology (SA) is pluralistic and experiential anthropology. But being experiential, it is not empirical since experience in question is supposed to be rigorously processed and reflected upon by means of a special methodology close to the Husserlian phenomenological description. Human constitution is formed up not in many arbitrary anthropological experience, but in a special *constitutive experience*, which contains a carcass of the ensemble of all man´s manifestations. The analysis of this ensemble leads us to the following general thesis about the constitutive experience:

*** Man´s constitution is formed-up in man´s unlocking of himself in extreme
anthropological manifestations***.

In this thesis there appears the central concept of SA, the *unlocking of oneself or anthropological unlocking*. Of course, I study it in detail, but here, roughly speaking, I can tell that the unlocking is any act or any kind of man´s encounter with the Other, be it an acting agent or just surrounding reality. Lots of our manifestations are events of our unlocking: for instance, in all our perceptions we unlock ourselves to sensual reality, etc. There are lots of kinds of the unlocking, but according to the main thesis, the unlocking is constitutive for human person if and only if it takes place in extreme experience.

Extreme experience is the next key notion of SA. It was and still is very popular in French philosophy starting with Bataille and then Blanchot, Deleuze and to some extent Foucault too. In such experience a human being reaches limits of all the field of human experience and of all the horizon of human consciousness. I agree with these French thinkers that this is exactly the experience, in which man´s constitution is formed-up. But I discover using my concept of the unlocking that *there are different kinds of extreme experience, and each of these kinds produces its own paradigm of man´s constitution or, in other terms, generates a certain anthropological formation*. Thus I call the set of all extreme anthropological manifestations the **Anthropological Border**, and I perform the detailed study of this border. I find that it is structured into three big areas or topics corresponding to the three basic kinds of the constitutive anthropological unlocking.

The first one is the *Ontological Unlocking*, in which man makes himself unlocked actualizing his relation to being as distinct of the essent or of present empirical being, in other terms, actualizing what is called the ontological difference. Of course, the main sphere of such unlocking is religious life, and I find that the best and purest realization of it is provided by spiritual practices of world religions, such as Yoga, Zen, Taoism, Sufism and Christian-Orthodox hesychasm. I widely use hesychast practice as the model example of the Ontological Unlocking. In particular, it is in hesychasm and in Orthodox theology that the paradigm of synergy was first discovered and described, which served as a prototype of the Ontological Unlocking.

The second kind is the so called *Ontic Unlocking*. Its experience does not actualize the ontological difference and is completely restricted to present being, but nevertheless it is also extreme. Typical examples of such unlocking are provided by patterns of the Unconscious such as neuroses, manias, phobias and so on, which Dr. Freud studied not far from here. The constitution formed-up in this unlocking determines the formation of the Ontic Man radically different from the Ontological Man. The Freudian Man constituted in patterns of the Unconscious is a subformation of the Ontic Man, and there are other types of ontical constitution besides this subformation.

Finally, the last kind is the *Virtual Unlocking*, which is realized in virtual anthropological practices, like the habitation in cyberspaces. The number of such practices, their diversity and importance grow quickly so that in modernity the formation of the Virtual Man gradually becomes dominant.

What is important, besides these three there are no more kinds of the constitutive anthropological unlocking. ***There are three and only three basic anthropological formations, those of the Ontological, Ontic and Virtual Man. As for man or human being as such, it is represented as the ensemble of these three formations, each of which is defined by a certain paradigm of man´s constitution***.

With this representation, SA obtains full conceptual framework as subjectless and essenceless pluralistic anthropology of the unlocking. I can add here briefly that the fundamental role of the unlocking was discovered and well-known ages ago in spiritual practices. There is an interesting illustration of this. The ancient symbol of man´s unlocking is man´s open palm. And it so happened that in two principal spiritual practices, Yoga and hesychasm, their greatest teachers had the name "Palm", the Yogi Patanjali in India and the bishop Palamas in Byzantium (*anjali* in Sanskrit and *palama* in Greek both mean "palm").

After constructing the conceptual framework valid for the whole field of anthropological experience, our project proceeds to the next stage. Now SA must become an episteme or meta-discourse for all the set of humanistic discourses or else the ***science of human sciences***. To achieve this, all these discourses should be transformed by means of our framework. Such overall conceptual and epistemological transformation can be characterized as their *anthropologization*, the procedure, by means of which their anthropological contents will be made explicit and will determine directly their organization. The key part of this procedure is what I call the *anthropological diagnostics*: phenomena described by a chosen discourse must be related or attached to our three basic anthropological formations. Then the anthropologizing transformation of this discourse should be done, using the established connection with the framework of SA. For both these steps we have found adequate methods and tools, but of course the actual capital transformation of any disciplinary discourse is a big work, the main part of which is very concrete and cannot be described a priori on the universal level. Thus at this stage we have a series of relatively separate tasks concerning concrete humanistic discourses.

To this moment, the problem of the anthropologization was studied and to some extent solved in principal disciplinary fields. First of all, the anthropological dimension of historical process was reconstructed: like Foucault, we also trace the "history of the subject", noticing that at any historical moment some anthropological formation is dominant and reconstructing the sequence of changing dominant formations. Then the anthropologization was basically performed for the set of dicourses describing social reality. To this end we use the notion of the *anthropological trend,* which connects anthropological and social levels of reality. Anthropological trend is an anthropological phenomenon or practice or group of practices, which becomes more and more popular, influential and widespread and so obtains social importance. This notion is an efficient tool opening the way to anthropologized treatment of large domains of sociology and social philosophy. Now the work of the anthropologization goes quite actively involving more and more new disciplines. Recent developments here include anthropologizing studies in economic theory and theory of law. It was found, in particular, that pluralistic vision of

human being in SA can be used for the replacement of the old classical conception of the subject in the theory of law.

Summing up, we can already say that our plan of turning anthropology into a new episteme is sufficiently realistic.

II.

Now I want to say a few words about the context of our project, about its place in the current academic situation. I will mention only three points, which seem to me the most topical.

1) The first point concerns our program of the anthropologization. One can say that it is quite in line with leading tendencies of human sciences. Current processes in the world demonstrate ever growing role of anthropological factors and anthropological level of reality. Thus it is typical in the last decades that specialists in human sciences and social sciences find it necessary to disclose anthropological contents of the phenomena of their studies openly and directly and put it to the forefront. And it is exactly what we call the anthropologization. It happens repeatedly that the work on the anthropologization of new fields is initiated not by ourselves, but by professional specialists in these fields who feel that such work is needed and then approach us expecting that SA can do it. For instance, the application of SA to the problem of the replacement of the classical legal subject was started by a law professor in Belorussia while I did not know about it. Then we came into contact and now in April we organize a workshop on this problem in Minsk, with the participation of legal specialists from Moscow, St:-Petersburg etc. And this is a typical case.

2) As you could see, SA is multifaceted like insect´s eye. Thus my next point cocerns SA as not an episteme, but a method of the analysis of anthropological experience. I said already that SA is experiential, but not empirical anthropology, and it has its own method how to deal with anthropological experience. Very roughly, the method is as follows: first we find some special domain or block of this experience satisfying two conditions, it must be epistemologically transparent and anthropologically representative. We perform analytical description of this block using our notions and principles. Then, having this description, we gradually extend it to larger fields of the experience and in the end we obtain what we need, namely, a new analytical or phenomenological description of the whole field of anthropological experience, which amounts to new experiential anthropology. This scheme corresponds basically to Husserlian phenomenology. That is how Husserl described the arising of the Cartesian cognitive theory, and the starting experiential ground of this theory, the famous cognitive act producing the *Cogito ergo sum* thesis, was called by Husserl the "***smallest rescued bit***".

This methodology of the smallest rescued bit is followed not only by SA, it is typical of modern nonclassical anthropological approaches, which sometimes use it intuitively or implicitly. In all cases, the right choice of the rescued bit, of the starting ground is of crucial importance. Frequently this choice was made in favor of the experience of primitive consciousness and archaic societies, like Amazonian or Polynesian tribes. The main such example is of course structural anthropology by Claude Levy-Strauss. However, SA makes a different choice. Analyzing hesychasm and other spiritual practices, I see that they are devoted specially to producing certain constitutive experience, which follows strict rules and has completely transparent organization; it is even reflected upon and interpreted within these practices. So I draw the conclusion that *they can be considered as genuine schools of pure anthropological experience, and hence they can be accepted as a "rescued bit" and used as the*

starting ground for a self-consistent experiential anthropology. As for archaic anthropological experience, we all know that it was used as such starting ground repeatedly and successfully. Evidently, this experience is less complex and more transparent than that of historic man, and it serves perfectly for disclosing basic structures and paradigms of consciousness, like famous sets of binary oppositions. But nevertheless I must remind you and stress one thing: certain levels, certain functions and structures of consciousness are not present in the archaic thinking because they are not yet formed-up. It would be too long to describe these functions and structures now, but in a word, the main missing element is the separation between two kinds of constitutive anthropological experience, namely, the experience of the Unconscious (or induced by the Unconscious, to be more precise) and the experience of the transcendence (in Heidegger´s terms, the experience *der Lichtung des Seins*). In terms of SA, in archaic consciousness the ontological and the ontical kinds of the unlocking and hence the Ontological and Ontic anthropological formations are merged and mixed-up. Thus from our point of view, archaic consciousness is anthropologically representative not to the sufficient extent.

In the book we discuss today SA enters into dialogue with Michel Foucault. Now we see that it can (and may be should) enter also into another dialogue, with Claude Levy-Strauss. Another conclusion from what we said is that **spiritual practices represent a pool of pure anthropological experience and hence a fitting (and quite unexploited so far) starting ground for elaborating nonclassical anthropological conceptions**.

3) Finally we cannot avoid asking the question about the relation of our approach to fundamental philosophical problems or *philosophia prima*. Again my answer will be just sketchy. The current philosophical situation is characterized by a certain trend, which can be called the *deterritorialization of philosophy* using the well-known Deleuzian notion. It means that the fundamental ontological problems and traditional questions of *philosophia prima* or *philosophia perennis* are now put aside or even rejected directly as false problems and questions. But if we look more in depth, we find that in fact fundamental problems are not as much rejected or denied as they are now thematized in a different way and mainly by various implicit means. As Badiou puts it, it is mostly roundabout strategies that are practiced and philosophical work is performed on territories of other, nonphilosophical disciplines and discourses. Philosophy and fundamental philosophy, ontology, survive on neighboring territories.

The main reason for that is evidently the breakdown of classical metaphysics and all the foundations of European philosophical tradition. Besides the trend of deterritorialization, this breakdown generated also another trend close to it, the trend of *deontologization*, which means the rejection of ontology or, to be more precise, the rejection of the discourse of the transcendent in favor of the discourse of the purely immanent. Such deontologization was strongly advocated and stimulated by Nietzsche and reached its peak in recent postmodernist philosophy, with philosophy of Gilles Deleuze as probably the most striking example. These two trends, deterritorialization and deontologization, are closely connected and can be considered as parts or aspects of one dominating trend of modern philosophizing. Undoubtedly, this trend represents a direct and sufficiently justified response to the fatal crisis of classical tradition.

However, in contemporary philosophy there is also a very different response to the crisis. This is Heidegger´s response, which is summarized in his famous formula "*Another Beginning*". Heidegger accepts completely the conclusion about the end of metaphysics, what is more, he is himself one of the main architects of this conclusion. But he holds that in any case the strategy of the deontologization, the denying of what he calls *ontologische Differenz*, is not just wrong, but

rather impossible since man as such possesses inner connection with being as such, being as distinct of present empirical being. Thus the end of metaphysics is not the end of ontology, it does not mean that we must state the absence of the ontological dimension of reality and develop purely immanent discourse. According to Heidegger, it only means the increase of what he calls the forgottenness of being and the hiddenness of being. Such increase is the deterioration of the connection of man and being, but whatever progress this deterioration has, the connection can never be lost completely. Hence the only right way out of the crisis is to restore man´s openness to being. As Heidegger sees it, this openness was perfect in ancient Greece. The Greek state of the openness to being was the origin and the beginning of European thought so that what we need now is nothing but another beginning, which is not, of course, a simple repetition of the original one. In our context it is natural to call the search for another beginning the ***strategy of reontologization***. Evidently, it is an alternative strategy with respect to the trend of deterritorialization/deontologization, and in late Heidegger´s work its foundations are laid out.

Now after describing two alternative strategies for modern philosophizing let us come back to synergic anthropology. The question is: where is it located in the philosophical landscape determined by these opposite vectors of the development, the vectors of deontologization and reontologization, which could be called for brevity sake the Deleuze vector and the Heidegger vector? And the answer is that ***synergic anthropology implements both strategies***. It is all-embracing because its basic paradigm of the anthropological unlocking is so general. The constitutive experience of the Ontological Man is that of the actualization of man´s relation to being as distinct of empirical being. This is the experience of man´s openness to being, which means that describing this anthropological formation we develop the discourse of reontologization. Contrariwise, the constitutive experience of the Ontic Man is completely restricted to empirical being. It does not actualize – in fact, it denies – the ontological difference, and hence it follows that describing this anthropological formation we develop the discourse of deontologization. Thus synergic anthropology includes both the Deleuze vector and the Heidegger vector. It is pluralistic anthropology and we see now that it is pluralistic in its philosophical and ontological positions as well.

It is worth adding here that pluralistic positions can easily lead to eclectic theories, but in our case it is not so. Synergic anthropology avoids the risk of eclecticism because all its topics share the same conceptual base or *Grundverfassung* rooted in the fundamental paradigm of the unlocking. Perhaps it can be likened structurally and epistemologically to theories of multiple worlds well-known in philosophy of nature. They were popular mostly in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment époques, but nowadays they reappear in the form of the *conception of the Multiverse* in modern cosmology, which replaces the old notion of the Universe. Thus I could say that ***synergic anthropology represents anthropological reality as a kind of the anthropological Multiverse***.

III.

Now let us turn to the book. Its subject is already announced in its title: it is comparative analysis of synergic anthropology and theory of the practices of the Self by Michel Foucault. My description of synergic anthropology makes it clear that for the whole project this subject is but a stone in the mosaic. However, it is an important stone since the relationship with Foucault – with his theory of the practices of the Self, to be more precise – involves some key points of our

project. In all these points the relationship is nearly of the same kind: there are two anthropological approaches or projects, which proceed *grosso modo* along the same lines. They both reject all classical essentialist anthropology and try to construct new anthropology as an experiential discourse based on human practices. To this end, they both single out soma basic classes of practices or, in other terms, soma basic blocks of anthropological experience. They thoroughly analyze them and then extending this analysis they try to come to full-fledged anthropology capable to describe and to understand the whole field of anthropological reality, both in its history and its present state. Hence we see that they both can be considered as following the strategy of the "smallest rescued bit". On the other hand, practically in all points and at all stages including the key choice of the rescued bit, the two projects have also strong divergences. They have very different background, different contexts, motivations and so on. And it all means that Foucault´s theory can be for us a very valuable dialogical partner or if you will a sparring partner (you know, in the boxing). And this is exactly the kind of relationship, which is realized in the book.

The type of Foucault´s thought was also dialogical enough. We can see that theory of the practices of the Self treats Pierre Hadot and Peter Brown with their studies of ascetical practices and spiritual exercises as close authors and dialogical partners. For my theory of spiritual practices they are dialogical partners too so that one can talk about a certain united context, in which ***there emerges a certain line in modern nonclassical anthropology based on the study of religious practices and religious experience***. Rene Girard is another important author who is close to this line. And I think it would be a good thing to analyze this line as a whole as a promising line in modern anthropological studies.

To finish I shall make one small unnecessary remark. I spent much time and much work studying ascetic practices and ascetic way of life in Eastern Christianity and also in other spiritual traditions. It would be easy to find good academic reasons for it, but in fact the main reason was not as much academic as personal: there was here the case of a real *Wahlverwandschaft*, or elective affinity. And Michel Foucault was a similar case. He was a person of strong ascetic inclinations cultivating severe self-restriction and rigorous self-discipline. Sure, it was asceticism of his own and unique kind, he used, for instance, such formulas as "homosexual ascesis", which would sound absolutely crazy out of his personal context. But still it was genuine asceticism, and hence the ascetic theme and rich ascetic discourse in his works are also fruits of a real *Wahlverwandschaft*. Evidently, all this implies that there is the same not only academic kind of connection between us too. Thus my final conclusion is that above all our contradictions and divergences my book is a document of our *Wahlverwandschaft*.

2015