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Anthropology in a Globalized World. History, Culture and Philosophy

Antropologia w zglobalizowanym świecie.
Historia, Kultura i Filozofia

Streszczenie

Dzisiejsza antropologia próbuje powiązać historyczność i kulturę pojęć, poglądów i metod, którymi się zajmuje jako nauka z historycznością i kulturą przedmiotów badań. Antropologia bada odkrycia nauk humanistycznych i tworzy autokrytykę na podstawie filozofii historycznej i kulturowej, tym samym torując drogę dla badań nad powstającymi pytaniami i kwestiami. W sercu tych wysiłków leży nieposkromiony niepokój umysłu. Badania w dziedzinie antropologii nie ograniczają się do określonych kontekstów kulturowych czy pojedynczych epok. Refleksje dotyczące integralnej historyczności i kulturalności badań umożliwiają dyscyplinie odejście od eurocentryczności nauk humanistycznych i skoncentrowanie się na nieroziwiązanych problemach teraźniejszości i przyszłości. Tak określony cel implikuje sceptyczyzm wobec wszystkich, obejmujących cały przekrój zagadnień i powszechnych interpretacji antropologicznych, przykładowo tych spotykanych w naukach biologicznych. Antropologia nie jest dyscypliną funkcjonującą w izolacji od innych dziedzin nauki. Dotyczy zagadnień z wielu różnych nauk i dyscyplin, w tym filozofii. Mówiąc o antropologii nauk humanistycznych i społecznych należy rozważyć pięć następujących paradygmatów: 1) antropologię ewolucji i hominizacji; 2) antropologię filozoficzną opracowaną w Niemczech; 3) antropologię historyczną i historię mentalności, zapoczątkowane przez historyków we Francji i czerpiące inspiracje ze Szkoly Annales; 4) amerykańską tradycję antropologii kulturowej, 5) wreszcie antropologię historyczno-kulturową. Powyższe paradygmaty stanowią również podstawę antropologii edukacyjnej.

Słowa kluczowe: Hominizacja, antropologia filozoficzna, antropologia kulturowa, antropologia historyczna, antropologia kulturowo-historyczna, antropologia edukacyjna

Abstract

Today's anthropology attempts to relate the historicity and culturality of its concepts, viewpoints, and methods to the historicity and culturality of what is under investigation.

Anthropology examines the findings of the human sciences and develops a critique of itself based on historical and cultural philosophy, thereby paving the way for the investigation of new questions and issues. At the heart of these efforts lies a restlessness of mind that cannot be stilled. Research in anthropology is not limited to certain cultural contexts or single epochs. Reflections on the integral historicity and culturality of the research enable the discipline to leave behind the Euro-centricity of the human sciences and to focus on the unresolved problems of the present and the future. This aim implies skepticism toward all-encompassing and universal anthropological interpretations, such as those occasionally found in biological science, for example. Anthropology is not a single discipline. It touches on many different sciences and disciplines, including philosophy. Speaking about anthropology in the humanities and social sciences, we have to consider the following five paradigms: 1) anthropology of evolution and hominization; 2) philosophical anthropology developed in Germany; 3) historical anthropology and the history of mentalities, initiated by historians in France and taking its cue from the Annales-School; 4) the American tradition of cultural anthropology, and 5) finally historical cultural anthropology. These paradigms also provide the basis for educational anthropology.

Keywords: Hominization, philosophical anthropology, cultural anthropology, historical anthropology, historical cultural anthropology, educational anthropology

New challenges

One new challenge that anthropologists have long failed to address is how to define the *relationship between general insights and specific insights* relating to human beings as individuals and human beings in general. While in archaeology, biological anthropology, and linguistic anthropology it is permissible to make universal statements about human beings and humankind, in historical and cultural anthropological approaches the emphasis is more on being able to use hermeneutic methods to make complex statements on particular historico-cultural phenomena. These approaches are oriented toward the investigation and assurance of cultural diversity. However, even when we are concerned with cultural diversity, the question still arises as to what is common to all human beings.

In these times of globalization it is becoming increasingly important for anthropology to investigate the relationship between similarities and differences among human beings, cultures, and historical epochs. The question as to the role of comparison in both diachronic and synchronic research in anthropology has taken on a significance that we urgently need to clarify. In my view, the aim of anthropological research is not to reduce but to increase the complexity of our knowledge about human beings and its education. This requires interpretation, reflection, and self-criticism, and an ongoing, philosophically inspired critique of anthropology that must include an examination of the fundamental limits of human self-interpretation. In analogy to a definition of God in theology, there is thus talk of the *homo absconditus*. This term expresses the notion that anthropological insights and findings can only grasp the human condition in part, that is, from a variety of different perspectives and thus incompletely.

Anthropological research and discovery is location-related and subject to historical and cultural change. Its starting point is a willingness to wonder or marvel that the world is as it is and not otherwise. Marveling is the beginning of fascination with the mystery of the world and curiosity about the possibilities of anthropological knowledge and the education of the human being (Wulf 2016).

Today's anthropology attempts to relate the historicity and culturality of its concepts, viewpoints, and methods to the historicity and culturality of what is under investigation. Anthropology examines the findings of the human sciences and develops a *critique of itself* based on historical and cultural philosophy, thereby paving the way for the investigation of new questions and issues. At the heart of these efforts lies a restlessness of mind that cannot be stilled. Research in anthropology is not limited to certain cultural contexts or single epochs. Reflections on the integral historicity and culturality of the research enable the discipline to leave behind the Euro-centricity of the human sciences and to focus on the unresolved problems of the present and the future. This aim implies skepticism toward all-encompassing and universal anthropological interpretations, such as those occasionally found in biological science, for example. Anthropology is not a single discipline. It touches on many different sciences and disciplines, including philosophy.

Anthropology cannot be regarded as a closed field of research. It is the result of the interplay between different sciences. Depending on the issue to be examined, the range of disciplines involved can be very different. The object and subject of anthropology can encompass the entire field of human culture in different historical areas and cultures. Anthropology presupposes a plurality of cultures and assumes that cultures are not closed systems; rather, they are dynamic, able to permeate each other, and they have an indeterminate future (*ibid.*).

Anthropology can be understood as an academic attitude toward examining issues relating to different times and cultures. Anthropological research, therefore, can be found in many different disciplines, such as history, literature, linguistics, sociology, psychology, and science of education. However, the research frequently tends to transcend the boundaries of individual disciplines, thereby becoming transdisciplinary. This results in completely new scientific disciplines and issues that require new forms of scientific interaction and cooperation. Many different research methods are used in these processes. Historical-hermeneutical processes of text, image and music interpretation, qualitative social research methodologies, and philosophical reasoning are widely used, the latter being an approach that is difficult to categorize in terms of specific methodology. Some research makes use of artistic and literary materials, thereby transcending the traditional boundaries between science, literature, and art. A growing consciousness of the role of cultural traditions in the development of different research areas, subjects, and viewpoints has made the increasing trend toward crossing international cultural boundaries a central issue of anthropological research.

In the light of globalization, this transnational approach to anthropology is becoming increasingly important. It provides the framework that nurtures a spirit of inquiry and a commitment to expanding our knowledge, which in turn lead to the development and testing of new research paradigms.

Paradigms of Anthropology

The demise of a binding anthropological norm has made it necessary to take a fresh look at the most important anthropological paradigms and try to locate their common ground as well as their differences. This has also given rise to a need to define the tasks and procedures of anthropology and to illustrate their importance for research in the humanities as well as the social and cultural sciences (*ibid.*). Four different paradigms of anthropology and the integrative paradigm of *historical cultural anthropology* are of central importance in the conceptualization of anthropology and its central importance for education today.

1

If the subject of anthropology is research on human beings, it seems only logical to include human evolution in the scope of the anthropological examination of the “conundrum of humanity.” However, *human evolution and the process of hominization* can only be understood if they are viewed as an integral part of the history of life itself. The irreversibility of human evolution and of the history of life is also an aspect of anthropology; today, this process is understood as a result of the self-organization of material. In the same way that anthropology highlights the historical character of its research, evolutionary theory emphasizes the radical time-scale of nature and human evolution. Time and history are therefore central dimensions of evolution. Hominization is a lengthy process of development that starts with early hominids and includes primordial humans and early humans *en route* to becoming modern human beings. This process is a multidimensional morphogenesis of interdependent ecological, genetic, cerebral, social, and cultural factor (*ibid.*)

2

Integrating the study of evolution into anthropology raises issues concerning the relationships between all living things and beings and the long duration of human evolution. It also involves a quest to discover general laws of evolution. The central focus of *philosophical anthropology*, on the other hand, is the special character of human beings as derived from a comparison of humans and animals. This character enables humans to be conscious of the objects around them and to have a concept of the world. Like Helmuth Plessner I conceive the uniqueness of humans in their ex-centricity. This term refers to our human capacity to step outside our own bodies by using our imagination. This makes it possible for us to see our bodies not only as something we are, but also as something we possess. For example, in terms of the way we feel and perceive our hands, we sense them as belonging to our bodies and also as organs that we can use as we wish. Arnold Gehlen developed a theory of humans as “deficient beings” (*Mängelwesen*), building on the idea that the constitutive element of human existence is its insufficiency at the time of birth, which had been formulated by Johann

Gottfried Herder two hundred years before. Humans are obliged to use individual and collective actions to overcome their inadequacies and insufficiencies, and this is the origin of culture, language, and institutions (Wulf 2016).

3

Since the study of anthropology was taken up in the French *Annales School* and in French research on the history of mentalities, historical writing has taken a new direction, called *historical anthropology*. This complements the new issues and the new methodological procedures used in the depiction and analysis of the history of events and the examination of structural and social history. Concentrating on anthropological issues brings into focus both historical structures of social reality and subjective moments of agency in social subjects; this focus is used for research on the basic conditions of human behavior. The studies carried out by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch in France are examples of the successful examination of anthropological issues in the field of history, in which historical knowledge arises from the disputed borders between events and narrative, reality and fiction, structural history and narrative historical writings. These works, which have since become classics of their genre, appeared at the same time as the works on philosophical anthropology but link to the works of historians.

4

Additional important anthropological perspectives are provided by the field of *cultural anthropology, or ethnology*. This discipline does not view human beings as being “behind” (i.e., responsible for) the diversity of their historical and cultural characteristics but studies them within the context of these characteristics. It, therefore, is not sufficient to identify body, language, or imagination as universal cultural entities; they must be examined in the context of different cultures. It is this diversity of culture that enables us to draw conclusions about humans. Comparing culturally different forms of expression results in new ideas and calls some areas of accepted thinking into question. Ethnological research into the heterogeneity of cultures yields important results for cultural anthropology. These findings have had a lasting effect on the understanding of what is different in our own cultures. New developments have resulted in an expanded concept of culture in which both the disparities and the shared characteristics of different cultures play an important role. The globalization of politics, economics, and culture is resulting in the overlapping, blending, and assimilation of features that are global, national, regional, and local. This creates a need for new ways of examining different cultures (ibid.).

The issue of understanding the limits of our comprehension of different cultures becomes central. The ethnographic methods developed in social and cultural anthropology based on fieldwork and participant observation lead to forms of knowledge other than those gleaned from historical source interpretation and philosophical

reasoning. They not only make us aware of what is different in other cultures but also what is different in our own culture. The application of the anthropological perspective to the cultures of the world broadens and deepens the scope of anthropological research.

In Germany, anthropological issues are examined in cultural studies, educational studies, women's and gender studies, and in the history of mentality, as well as in everyday history and microhistory. The scope of these studies encompasses case studies of actual life stories, local and regional history, the history of mentality, and historical cultural anthropology. Different mentalities permeate each other, forming new combinations. They devise actions appropriate to specific situations and provide orientation and decision-making aids for social behavior. They are specific to culture, class, and social group. Mentalities evolve in specific social conditions and structure social behavior in social subjects without giving it a determined, fixed form. They allow individuals to be different and to behave differently. They are subject to change and historical development. Understanding their fundamental historical and cultural nature enables us to grasp the universal openness of history.

5

In view of this situation in anthropology in Britain, North America, Germany, and France, I suggest that we try to connect lines of thought from these four mainstream paradigms and, where possible, to develop them into a *historical cultural anthropology* that adequately accounts for the historicity and culturality of the researchers and their objects of study and combine general insights and specific insights relating to human beings as individuals and human beings in general. Philosophical reflection can help to render the results of this research fruitful for our understanding and definition of human beings in the 21st century.

The approach to anthropology that I present here employs both *diachronic* and *synchronous* methods to investigate human societies and cultures. In addition to anthropological issues and the hermeneutic and text-critical methods from historical research that are applied diachronically, field research with its numerous qualitative and quantitative methods still plays an important role as a method of synchronous anthropological research. The interpretative and reflexive methods offer the possibility of lending expression to the individual and subjective perspectives.

I have attempted to realize this new concept of anthropology and to demonstrate its importance for education in three large, interrelated anthropological research phases, each of which lasted more than ten years. The main fields of this research have been: *The body and the senses, mimesis and imagination, rituals and gestures* in education and society (Wulf 2016).

Reference

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