CHAPTER ONE

ANTHROPOLOGY AS A REPRESENTATION OF HUMANITY

6 Interdisciplinary Anthropology

The aim of this study is to describe human sociality within the framework of an interdisciplinary anthropology. ‘Interdisciplinary’ means that the object of the study will be examined from multiple perspectives. The presentation of the individual perspectives of description will, however, not only include an analysis of the respective methodological approaches and results, but above all will look at the ‘object’ of these descriptions: human existence as it shows itself at the site of sociality, i.e., in human interaction.

In order to be able to evaluate the factual adequacy of the descriptions which come from different disciplines, this study proposes to define a hermeneutic-phenomenological criterion for the way anthropological descriptions refer to their object. On the basis of a hermeneutics and phenomenology of human humanity, the possibilities and limits of comprehension in the individual descriptive perspectives can be better evaluated. It will therefore be the task of this chapter to investigate the possible meanings of ‘humanity’ and to determine why an anthropological description of sociality cannot work without a reflection on human humanity. Here, it will be important to show in which ways that humanity can be taken into account as a phenomenon, rather than just in its representations and descriptions. Before we tackle this methodological problem, however, we will first deal with a question of content: what constitutes the humanity of human beings? Is it their essential nature, the concrete conditions of their existence on earth (the human condition), or is it the manner of their phenomenal self-perception (corporality)? To shed light on this matter, we will systematically examine various positions of 20th century philosophical anthropology to investigate how human humanity can not only be normatively justified, but also anthropologically described. By asking what constitutes human humanity, I want to demonstrate that human sociality cannot be examined in an interdisciplinary way without methodologically reflecting on the way anthropology refers
to its object. Otherwise, the anthropological descriptions may be in danger of missing their mark; because, as has been explained above, their object is not simply the empirical fact of the human being, but its phenomenal concreteness [Gegenständlichkeit].

In the following, this chapter will explicitly reflect on the characteristics of the object of the various disciplinary efforts to represent human sociality in its phenomenal concreteness. To speak of the ‘concreteness’ of the human being and not only of ‘the human being’ as an object is to assume that human existence is more than that which can be objectified with methodological tools; that human existence in itself is also characterized by forms of concreteness that allow for the representation of the object from various perspectives in the first place.

In order to flesh out this hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to concreteness in the context of anthropology, a short examination of the corporeal-bodily dimensions of being human is in order. Because of their bodily existence, human beings are forced to always refer to others from an irreducibly separate position (interhuman difference). It is also their visibility and corporality that enable them to express themselves and represent themselves in the presence of others. In their expressive behavior, human beings enter into a relationship with others, but at the same time remain withdrawn from them. They play with the manifold modes and forms of their visibility for others and yet also remain invisible in them, insofar as they are not completely absorbed into any intersubjective relationship. At all times, their social presence also contains forms of their absence through which they hide from the gaze of others and elude the appropriation of their presence. This interplay of presence and absence is constitutive of the phenomenal concreteness of human beings in the social lifeworld. Therefore, it also represents a yardstick and a frame of reference for the scientific description of human beings.

When human beings are examined in their ‘concreteness,’ it means that their humanity is not viewed as a given precondition of the representation and interpretation of human beings, as a human ‘essence’ or human ‘nature.’ Instead, human humanity is to be located in or

---

1 On the hermeneutics of concreteness also see §11 of this study.
2 See Dalfert and Hunziker 2007, X.
3 See the works of Helmuth Plessner on corporeal phenomenology and their social significance that are presented in §10, as well as in Blumenberg 2006, 777–895.