ANTHROPOLOGY: THE CONCEPT OF MAN IN ALBERT THE GREAT

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INTRODUCTION

In contrast to today’s philosophical anthropology that regards man primarily from a biological–behaviorist or action-oriented perspective, Albert the Great is a proponent of a holistic concept of man as a union of body and soul. Nevertheless, the perspectives and approaches characteristic of today’s anthropological discourse are not entirely alien to him, nor to his main anthropological sources, that is, the writings on theories of the soul, psychophysiology, and zoology by Aristotle and leading Arab and Jewish philosophers. One example is Albert’s treatise De animalibus, in which man is classified as belonging to the genus of sensitive beings and characterized as *animal nobilissimum*. Albert’s concept of man is not limited to this classification or designation, however, since in his opinion it does not specify what truly defines man as man. What man is, according to Albert, and what defines him as such shall be the topic of this contribution.

I have organized this discussion into four parts. (1) In the first more general part, we shall briefly consider the systematic position of Albert’s anthropological reflections and name the main topics. (2) In the second part, we shall examine those Albertan treatises in which we encounter his first definitions of man as man and which illustrate the course of the further development of his concept of man. (3) In the third, I will briefly outline the concept of man developed in the early treatise *De homine*. (4) In the fourth, we will discuss Albert’s anthropological formula *homo inquantum homo est solus intellectus*, its philosophical origins, and its interpretation in a diachronic excursion through those works of the *Doctor universalis* of greatest relevance to this topic. The sketch concludes with a few closing observations.

1. **The Systematic Place and Main Topics of Albert’s Anthropological Reflections**

The primary subject of Albert’s anthropological reflections, addressed in several of his theological and philosophical works, is the human soul. This
he perceives as a self-sufficient substance on the one hand, and as the formal, efficient, and final cause of the animated body on the other; more specifically, it is the cause of man’s being and life.\textsuperscript{1} The soul is for Albert the essence of man, which does not contradict, however, his belief in the substantial union of man as body and soul. On the contrary, with his holistic concept of man Albert overcomes the prevailing doctrine of the plurality of forms in man and reconciles the dualism of two substances, that is, of soul and body.\textsuperscript{2} In his opinion, the human soul, with its rational, sensitive, and vegetative faculties, constitutes one single substance. At the same time, it unites itself with the body immediately (immediate) just like the union of form–matter, action–power, and mover–moveable.\textsuperscript{3} The unity of the soul and the nature of its conjunction with the body constitute a comprehensive unity that will ultimately overcome the dualism of substances in man’s one nature.

Albert’s holistic concept of man corresponds, with regard to scientific method, to the interdisciplinary approach of his perspective. He will examine the whole man as a union of body and soul: his origin, the natural processes of his life, his fulfillment as a human being under contingent conditions, and his ultimate perfection, from the perspective of both the “divine” and the “human” sciences. Albert regards the “divine” sciences as being wisdom in a double sense: first, as theology in the strict sense, which draws its principles from biblical-Christian revelation; second, as metaphysics, the “divine science” (scientia divina) that owes its principles solely to natural reason.\textsuperscript{4} The “human” sciences that provide the systematic frame for Albert the Great’s anthropological reflections are, above all, natural philosophy and the natural sciences, primarily psychology and physiology, as well as ethics, which deals with man’s virtue-

\textsuperscript{1} Alb., De homine, Ed. Colon. 27/2, 571, Ins. 44–45: “animam est considerare tribus modis, scilicet prout est forma et efficiens et finis viventis corporis.”


\textsuperscript{3} Alb., De homine, 571, Ins. 34–38: “Secundum nostram sententiam anima hominis una est substantia in vegetabili, sensibili et rationali. Et propter hoc dicimus, si de anima secundum se loquamur, quod ipsa immediate unitur corpori sicut forma materiae et sicut motor mobili.” Ibid., 572, Ins. 58–60: “ex corpore et anima rationali fit unus homo ea compositione qua componitur potentia cum actu.”