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TÍTULO: El estado y el concepto del hombre desde el punto de vista europeo.

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RESUMEN: El objetivo de este artículo es presentar varias concepciones del hombre y su estado en diferentes civilizaciones y culturas durante la historia de la humanidad. El autor enfoca la atención principal en el pensamiento filosófico europeo, comenzando en la filosofía griega antigua, continuando en el cristianismo, y especialmente en la actitud de Descartes orientada antropocéntricamente, que se vuelve aún más fuerte durante el período de la Ilustración. A pesar de los peligros que trae la civilización técnica contemporánea, el hombre sigue siendo el tema del pensamiento filosófico europeo.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Filosofía europea, pensamiento oriental, antropocentrismo, hombre, humanismo.

TITLE: The status and concept of man from European point of view.

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to present various conceptions of man and his status in different civilizations and cultures during the history of mankind. The author focuses the main attention on European philosophical thinking, beginning in Ancient Greek philosophy, continuing in Christianity, and especially in anthropocentrically oriented Descartes' attitude which becomes even stronger during The Enlightenment period. In spite of the dangers brought by contemporary technical civilization, man still remains the subject of European philosophical thought.

KEY WORDS: European philosophy, oriental thinking, anthropocentrism, man, humanism, nature, world.

INTRODUCTION.

Comparison.

Attention to an individual, respect for any human being, his/her dignity, significance and rights - all these aspects represent one of the most important features of European philosophical thinking. The exceptional and ruling position of man among other beings and in the nature as a whole is called anthropocentrism.

The general public usually links philosophical anthropocentrism with the Renaissance period, i.e. with the transition from the Middle Ages to modern times, which again often tends to be connected to humanism. In this way it is set into juxtaposition to the then ruling medieval theocentrism. Even if there is no serious objection to this view, I dare say that anthropocentrism has been openly, or at least latently, omnipresent in European philosophical thinking since its very beginning.

The valid objection can be raised that any philosophical thinking is always the thinking of a human mind, of the thinking of a subject, and that therefore its source and center is always humans themselves. Nevertheless, a philosophical reflection can view a human from various angles, e.g. in Oriental thinking man is perceived in a totally different way than in European philosophy. The

ultimate aim of this contribution is not a comparison of European philosophy, which springs from the ancient world and which is marked by the Jewish and Christian religions, with other major philosophical and religious concepts (Bakhyt et al, 2018; Zare, 2015; Mahendran et al, 2017; Martins et al, 2018). If we allow for a certain generalization, thus not avoiding simplification, and if we set aside individual partial (and at times also oppositional) schools and movements, it can be stated that in Indian thinking, there is an unspeakable, depersonalized order of eternality, which rises high above humans and their earthly affairs; actual events and individuals are of no significance, and there is an obvious repression of one's individual existence, of one's active life; there is a preference for non-being over being, and every detachment ends in ultimate merging under the eternal cycle.

Chinese thinking, particularly Confucianism, represents a shift towards the human, towards the practicalities of life and towards the right way of living it in accordance with given moral principles. At all times it is strictly ruled by an individual's subordination to the whole, to higher wisdom, to tradition, to a depersonalized authority. It is also applied to the Lao – c', in which the main role is played by "the Tao" – something like a way, but otherwise an ungraspable, unconditional, impersonal principle or law, the essence of the world. The aim is de-personification, non-pursuit, peace, calm, harmony and an individual's harmony with the universe.

Russian tradition subordinating an individual to an authority is more similar to Asiatic than European concept of man. It is based on Great Russian awareness of nation, the deity of Tsar and the Orthodox Church which are the only real and true values. In comparison with them life of a single human being equals nothing.

Islam equals a man's total surrender to God, a submission to his will. It sees all human action through this prism. Similarly, in later Arabic philosophy influenced by Aristotle, the role of a human as an individual (his soul included) is suppressed in favour of a certain collective mind of humankind – this only is entitled to eternity (Aristoteles & Apostle, 1984).

History of European philosophical thought.

The Greek pre-philosophical, mythological period was marked by the favour of and awe towards the Gods, to commandments on how to live in an orderly fashion and in harmony with the Gods and with nature. Myths helped the Greeks to explain the origin and essence of the world (see e.g. poets such as Homer, Hesiod, the seven wise men, 8th – 6th cent. BC).

The first philosophers, the Milesians (6th century BC) focused on the search for the originating principal, for *arché*, which they saw in some prime matter. The Pythagorians (6th century BC), on the other hand, saw it in numbers. The following two rather opposing schools – the Eleats and the Atomists (5th century BC) – also strove to solve the ontological issue rather than the human one. This era of “nature” or natural science-oriented philosophy was relatively short.

The Sophists (5th century BC) turned their attention to human matters, which culminated in Prothagoras’ formula that “Man is the measure of all things”, in Socrates (5th century BC), to whom the famous words “Know thyself” are ascribed, and in the so-called Maieutics, the “art of obstetrics”, the method of finding the truth. According to this method, truth is latent in the mind of every human being; it only needs to be “helped to the world”. Two others among the most prominent ancient philosophers, Plato (5th – 4th cent. BC) and Aristotle (4th century BC), Socrates’ followers, built on his interpretation of a human (Aristoteles & Apostle, 1984).

Although the European Middle Ages was built, from the point of view of philosophy, on the two already- mentioned giants of the ancient times, it took over their metaphysics, which could be exploited for teaching about God and theology, rather one-sidedly.

Even if the world and man come second, distinct anthropocentrism is latently present even in the Patristics – e.g. in Augustine’s (4th - 5th cent. AD) theory of the soul, of hereditary sin and predestination (Augustine, 1876), it can be traced in the Scholastics, too. Even Thomas Aquinas, a strict theocentric thinker of the 13th century, understood the whole course of events as a fight for the

redemption of man. His efforts to reconcile a natural human mind with the supernatural truths on faith, social learning etc., are well known. A thought winds through the Middle Ages, like an uninterrupted thread, which claims that the world was created for man and man was created in the image of God, from whom salvation is to be expected. Departure from religious dogma and supernatural truths, as a result of the spread of Renaissance science, also means a retreat of theology from its privileged positions and its replacement by an interest in man, in his dignity and natural needs. The stress was shifted from issues of metaphysics and ontology towards noetics – scientific knowledge whose validity or true nature is judged by the learning subject himself, i.e. by man (Aquinas, 1947).

While in ancient times and in the Middle Ages man was perceived as part of the universe, of the world as a whole that he did not contradict, with this new orientation man achieved a position in which he went beyond nature and the surrounding world. These thus turned into objects of his interest and activities. He became the center and arbiter of his own free action. A prominent representative of this view is F. Bacon (16th – 17th centuries), to whom science and knowledge are an utmost human thing (see his theory of idols of the mind) and they serve as a tool for subjugating nature (*scientia est potentia*). Another representative of later humanistic philosophy was a famous person in pedagogy J. A. Comenius (17th century) (Bacon, 2000).

The modern feud between rationalism and sensationalistic empiricism is but a logical consequence of understanding that the veracity of knowledge is not decided by some “higher power” but by man through his innate gift of sense and senses. In R. Descartes (17th century) a subject is already strongly detached from the surrounding world; it is detached from the rest of reality. Descartes’ conception inspired different and original monistic philosophy of B. Spinoza (17th century) and pluralism of G. W. Leibniz (17th – 18th centuries) (de Spinoza, 1922; Leibniz, 1989).

Humanistic aspect is strong also in Ch. Montesquieu (18th century) (De Montesquieu, 1989). The established subject – object paradigm then marks all the philosophy that was to come later. Man, as a thinking creature, assumes a privileged position in relation to other living creatures and to nature as such; his attitude towards them is superior and distantly instrumental (Descartes, 2013). (Here we can notice the very first signals of harmful human activity and his technically oriented civilization, which came much later).

The general preference for man over anything else has more than a merely rational side to it. It is evident in the whole of British empirical and sensationalistic philosophy, as witnessed, among other things, by the titles of the most important works by their protagonists: “An Essay of Human Understanding” by J. Locke (17th century), “A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge” by G. Berkeley (18th century), “A Treatise of Human Nature” and “An Inquiry concerning Human Understanding” by D. Hume (18th century) (Locke & Nidditch, 1979; Berkeley, 1881; Hume, 2003).

The importance of man and a far too optimistic interpretation of his role in the world were stressed by the Enlightenment; despite the variety of angles and views, e.g. J. J. Rousseau and F. M. Voltaire (18th century) (Rousseau, 2018; Voltaire, 1759). I. Kant (18th century) looks upon man as an active creator of knowledge (transcendental subjectivity), and as both the source and purpose of the moral code (categorical imperative). The active subject – the Ego – subordinates and changes the world, i.e. the non-Ego, according to the Ego’s own wishes; this is the leitmotif of the philosophy of J. G. Fichte (18th century) (Fichte, 1906). So-called German classical philosophy culminates in Hegel’s (18th– 19th centuries) objectively idealistic theory of man and the world, namely in his concept of the “Absolute Spirit”. L. Feuerbach (18th century) in his criticism of Christianity points out that the idea of God as a moral being is but a personified, alienated essence of a human being and that the reality of religion is just a reflection of human reality. He insists that anthropology replaces theology and

the religion of love between You and Me without the go-between God replaces religion (Kant, 1949; Hegel, 2018; Patel et al, 2018).

Marxism cannot be denied as having an originally humanistic motivation, which unfortunately rejects the universal, timeless, generally valid value of humanity, claiming it was hollow abstraction (Marx & Engels, 2009).

What is important is the Marxist notion of practice, which is seen as a specifically human, sensory objectively creative action, through which man changes the world he lives in; in a revolutionary way, he projects himself into this world. A prominent personality who supports the line of philosophers rejecting God and making man responsible for all his deeds is F. Nietzsche (19th century). He is the author of a new morality of strong individuals, from which an “Übermensch” is about to arise. Other strong supporters of the same philosophy were the Existentialists, above all J. P. Sartre (20th century) (Sartre, 2001). He claims man is bound to freedom, he perpetually negates and creates himself, and projects himself outside his own present existence. The unique, unrepeatable human existence, “Dasein”, is the central motif of Heidegger’s (20th century) philosophy. Dasein is the being, the “place” which is highly suitable for the explanation of being in the broadest sense of the word (Nietzsche, 2008; Heidegger et al, 1962).

Anthropocentrism is a distinct feature of pragmatism, too, especially evident with W. James (19th – 20th centuries), to whom meaning and its consequences for an acting subject is the measure of all things (James et al, 1976). Neothomism, another significant type of philosophy of the 20th century, operates with the real man on a much larger scale than used to be true of medieval Christian philosophy. It takes seriously all human needs and strives to give satisfactory answers to the most burning questions of the day (Maritain & Anson, 1944).

It would be erroneous to claim that man is neglected by the scientist stream in philosophy represented by various forms of thinking aimed at questions of knowledge and science, using the umbrella term Neopositivism. The main role in it today is played by analytical philosophy. It examines the language, not some artificial “perfect” language of science, but natural language, real human speech (Russell, 2013; Wittgenstein, 2009; Quine & Quine, 1990; Davidson, 2001; Ajalloeian et al, 2015). Even if the issue of man could be found in many other philosophical branches of both the 19th and 20th centuries, we will conclude with an “umbrella” discipline of philosophical anthropology (e.g. M. Scheler or A. Gehlen, 20th century), whose main theme is man in his complexity and whose approach is truly holistic (Scheler, 1961; Gehlen & Rehberg, 1988).

CONCLUSIONS.

In order to summarize the main theses and facts about the development of the concept of man during the history of mankind, it should be said that in oriental thinking man, especially an individual human being, means very little. Opposite to it, in ancient Greece (later Rome), after a relatively short period of natural science-oriented philosophy, the main attention turns to man and human affairs. Even in medieval Christian thought important aspects of anthropocentrism are apparent: the world was created for man, who – despite his sins – has to be saved finally.

Renaissance, and new age philosophy beginning with Descartes means a clear detachment of man standing against the rest of reality, which becomes only an object of his knowledge and practical activity. This attitude becomes even stronger in Enlightenment, which is extremely optimistic about human abilities to make endless progress.

Only in the second half of 20th century the development of technical civilization becomes the subject of criticism. But the humanistic orientation of European philosophical thinking is still present in it.

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