

Customs and Ethnology in the Sphere of Philosophy

Summary

Sciences are built up axiomatically, and to debate on the axioms of a science means to abandon this science and encroach on the territory of philosophy. Philosophy can supervise the validity of thinking and methods, but it also can seek sources, the truth and meaning of customs, it deals with their causes and reasons. This text has not attempted to touch systematically on all possible approaches and relations between philosophy and ethnology and customs; that would be too weighty a task. The author has accepted one of the possible classifications (the Düsseldorf systematics of A. Diemer), and provides an over-all view of the possible approaches of individual philosophical disciplines to customs and ethnology. Somewhat greater attention is paid to a general study of the method, a hermeneutic method within the framework of the philosophy of culture, certain questions of the philosophy of language and the philosophy of religion, mysticism and myth.

In the section on method, the author points to two extremes to be found in contemporary ethnology in Croatia. One extreme consists of collecting material without order, without prior hypotheses and without a tendency to arrive, through induction, at broader cognitions. The second extreme is deductive in nature: a general hypothesis is used as a starting point, or (often borrowed) theories, but the hypothesis (theory) is not verified in practice.

The hermeneutic method, which takes the historical context of individual symbols into consideration, has proven today to be interesting for ethnology and folklore studies, especially when it is increasingly obvious that there are no totally immanent interpretations on a synchronic level and that interpretation of customs must not be stripped of a historical commentary.

Questions of the philosophy of language could not be considered in greater detail, but emphasis is placed on the fact that questions of language and terminology are essential, since reality is determined, for us, by language in part, that is language is more than merely a means for establishing contact with reality; it actually participates in structuring that reality "for us". We must keep this in mind when choosing the central concept of ethnology and when translating technical terms from foreign languages. Thinking (in sciences that have not constructed an international system of signs) goes on within language.

The philosophy of religion, mysticism and myth have recently become a focal point of attention once again. The distinctions are stressed in the article between the goals or disciplines dealing with research into beliefs, mythical postulates and customs, which is related to the old question of the use of modern folklore phenomena as historiographical sources.