

The 'Primitive'/'Civilized' Opposition and The Modern Notion of Objectivity: A Linkage*

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This paper as originally written was intended as a contribution to a seminar investigating the 'primitive'/'civilized' opposition in the history of modern Western thought and culture. It attempts to trace an intimate linkage between the 'primitive'/'civilized' opposition and the development of that ideal notion of objectivity that has been so determinative in the formation of modern thought, throwing fresh light on each in the process. Specifically, far from serving the transcendence of self-centeredness in thought, the modern notion of objectivity — conceived in critical opposition to all pre-critical (pre-civilized) sensibilities as naively subjective — where it has served as more than a mask for the hybris of modern 'scientific' thinking, has itself tended to undermine the possibility of that transcendence. By insisting that one realize *a priori* a formally universal pattern of explicit conception, the modern critical ideal of objectivity effectively removes one from any sustained serious engagement with the other as truly 'other' — whether as *transcendent object* of comprehension, transcending the presumption of thought to a definitive explicit grasp of its essence, or as *transcendental condition* of comprehension, affording irreplaceable and crucial further perspectives onto the object in question and thus onto one's own otherness. For it, empathy plays no cognitive role

*The following essay, with minor revisions, was originally read to the members of the 1978 N.E.H. Summer Seminar, "The Religious and Empirical 'Other': 'Primitive' and 'Civilized' in the History of Religions." It reflects the fact that, when read (the afternoon of July 17), the Seminar was already well underway. It has a deliberate conversational quality at times, particularly the first part, by which I originally addressed my hearer — and now address you, my reader — in print. I consider this quality essential to the argument and so I have refrained from editing it out in the published version. Indeed, the usual impersonal voice of the scholarly essay is no innocent device when it comes to dealing with any actual 'other' in regard for his or her otherness, as distinct from an objectified representation of the person.

whatsoever. Ironically, the modern critical insistence upon objectivity (thus conceived) defeats its own purpose.

The achievement of genuine objectivity, on the contrary, is attained only in and through the indefinite interplay of genuinely independent, relevant perspectives. I argue that the practice of modern science at its best, in contrast to the usual accounts of science, is more adequately characterized by the pursuit of objectivity in this latter sense. Thus conceived, one moves toward objective truth not by critically suspecting one's own personal intimations of hidden truth wholesale, nor by blindly trusting in them in defiance of critical reflection. Rather, one moves toward it by responsibly and vulnerably following up these largely inarticulated intimations as one's own best present avenue or clue on the way to the discovery of truth recognizable in common, in a context where as many other relevant perspectives and considerations that can be discovered are empathetically brought to bear with equal right and taken into account as such. Only some such accreditation of the personal and interpersonal coefficients of all knowledge can afford us a basis for navigating between modernity's Scylla of paralyzing uncertainty and Charybdis of defiant presumption.

Each of us is odd and peculiar both to ourselves and to each other. But it is not our oddness and difference that separate us from ourselves and from each other. Rather it is the insistence upon being the same that has caused such division and separation, such collapse of communication between self and others, such destruction of personhood and the human community. Since we are all centered in strangeness, it may be that by way of strangeness, by way of our differences, that we may come into touch with that bond that gathers mankind and world into the wholeness of expression.¹

I

My intention in what follows is to bring some reflections which I have developed elsewhere, regarding problematic aspects of the modern intellectual ethos, to bear upon our analysis and critique of the opposition 'primitive'/'civilized'² in our cultural inheritance. I will be exploring how an understanding of the tensions between what might be called pre-critical sensibilities and the critical mode of thinking that defines us as modern intellectuals illuminates several dimensions of the problem and brings it closer to home than we may have realized. For the opposition 'primitive'/'civilized' has not merely shaped tragically our relations with 'other' peoples; in a very real sense the pattern of thinking it represents continues fatefully to shape the way we relate to our own 'otherness,' both as members of a specific social-cultural-racial grouping and as individual persons – particularly those of us who find ourselves white Anglo-Saxon protestants. Indeed, it serves to exclude from conscious appropriation our own 'primitiveness' in almost every sense of the word. As the author of my epigraph has it, "we are strangers to our strangeness."

I shall be arguing in opposition to our now 'instinctive' predilection that no further feat of self-criticism of the typically modern kind, however radical, will be able to extricate us from this estrangement; for our predicament is in large measure due to the modern critical temper itself. There is a spirit inherent in the intellectual ethos many of us have come to

take for granted that cannot abide the unsettling strangeness of the 'other,' from whatever quarter it may appear, except as defined or characterized in some way — i.e., objectified. The typical mode of criticism to which such definitions of the 'other' are subjected is that they fail to be objective enough, that they have not escaped being a projection of the objectifying mind. But what is thus lost sight of is the subtle disallowance of the other as 'other' that has taken place. No matter how objective the characterization, so far as it presumes to have captured for reflective representation the essence of the other, it cannot but have rendered it 'not other' — i.e., domiciled, domesticated, no longer unsettling, made impotent to call one's presumptions and blindness into question. I shall be arguing that this usual, if unconscious, annulment of the other's unsettling presence for the sake of objective cognition is not only not necessary; to the contrary, a resolute ongoing openness to the 'other' as such is indispensable for objectivity. In brief, I offer here a few notes to help identify and make conscious this disallowance of the other inherent in the way we tend to think, so that we might better be able to counteract it as occasion permits.

II

Our discussion concerning the '(uncivilized) other' thus far seems to me to have suffered acutely from abstraction, particularly when it has come to identifying who it is supposed to be. Like the Kantian *Ding an sich*, for the most part any real 'other' for us has remained an unknown 'X.' At best we have dealt with no more than someone else's objectification of 'the other': the category of the 'unknown,' the catchall of 'the as-yet-unclassified'; 'the non-person,' 'the not-self,' 'Jew,' 'woman,' 'the insane,' etc. At times I have received the impression that the unavowed objective of the Seminar has been to overcome the category of the 'other' altogether, it being nothing but 'civilized' man's projection of his negative self image. Without denying that there may be some truth to the latter charge, I wish to suggest what strikes me as a wiser course of action — namely, a recognition and respect for the otherness of a person.

Partly because we spend so much of our time in books, that distinguishing trait of 'civilized' man, we forget that our language, particularly our spoken language, does not as such leave us hermetically sealed within the shadow play of a particular system of objectifications. We forget that our language, rooted within our somatic presence in the world 'here' vis-a-vis 'there,' permits us to address other things and other persons *directly*, apart from our representations of them, and be addressed in turn. It permits this through its provision of pronouns (possessive, demonstrative, personal), with their inherence in gesture and their somatically reflexive force, and proper names, themselves bestowed through somatic rite. Direct address would be impossible were we confined to a formal language system lacking this overt somatic rootage, which enables us to indicate immediately who is speaking to whom, with respect to what circumstances and, if the listener is alert, how what is said is to be taken. We forget that it is at or in relation to these junctures of

intersomatic, immediate address — paradigmatically at these junctures — that anything we think or say or write or read (!) actually comes to confront reality as something *other* than itself. Why so? Precisely because it becomes subject at the point to the interplay of human difference, where our own direct acquaintance with things is given to us vis-a-vis that of others. Only there is it forced to account for itself in face of the queries, challenges, and sometimes concurrent judgments of *other* persons, and as well those of ourselves when we come to consider things from an *other* vantage point, if only that of a later moment. At these junctures, so far as we have not closed ourselves off, we are laid open to and are confronted with, an otherness lying beyond our representations. Here we are given opportunity to correct them.

The obvious at times needs pointing out: we have some others, right before us. Each of us is other to the rest, particularly in our respective capacities to think and speak and pick up on things independently and in different ways from the others. This we do in virtue of where we happen to be coming from, what sort of experiential background we reply upon (racial, economic, ethnic), where we happen at the moment to be standing, what sort of a stand we happen to be taking, etc. Thus considered, each is distinctly other for the rest in two fundamental respects: as transcendent 'object' and as transcendental condition of deeper insight into the matters at hand.

First, as a peculiar transcendent 'object,' a cognitive target, each is a person with whom the rest of us have severally become acquainted *and* who, for whatever reasons, we may be trying to comprehend and figure out, to 'place' more or less objectively in our thinking about the Seminar. Yet each person, precisely as someone with whom we are personally acquainted, transcends whatever objectified, more or less explicit grasp we may have upon him as represented for our reflection. We know the elusive otherness of his presence to be *other* than, sometimes a great deal *more* than, what our powers of reflective representation can succeed in making explicit. We recognize this, it is important to see, in virtue of our tacit acquaintance with him in person, which is always something distinct from our idea of him — being that in virtue of which we check out and either verify or correct our ideas about him. This, in large part, is what Michael Polanyi means in stressing that explicit knowledge is rooted and grounded in a non-explicit, tacit knowing; that it is, when rightly regarded, an implementation of tacit knowing.³ (Though I have spoken here of the 'other' as person, what I say also would hold true for any nonhuman thing with which we might be tactily acquainted.)

Second, so far as we are able mutually to accredit each other competent to sort out from our own respective perspectives and validly concur on matters we are jointly discussing, each for the other is a *transcendental condition*, necessary but of course insufficient, of the success of his own achievement of insight and comprehension within the context of our discussion. In so far as any one of us is unable at length to obtain independent recognition from the others present of what he believes is an insight into a given matter, either he will question the ability of those in question to grasp what he is getting at in the circumstances (i.e., question

the other's competence in some measure) or he will come to suspect his own presumed insight or the adequacy of his grasp on it, likely in view of considerations the others will have brought to light which he has failed to take into account. Because others are transcendental conditions of any independent perspective a person can gain onto his own efforts and onto the cognitive target of those efforts, the competent concurrence of others that the person's insight is genuine or conclusion is well-founded is a ratification of the confidence he places in it himself, a ratification of the competence with which he credits himself – i.e., that his apparent insight is genuine or that his argument is sound. Indeed, anyone's sense of his own competence in recognizing reality has itself been built up and continues to be sustained by this kind of ratification from competent others, *others* who do not merely agree, but who mutually recognize what he does *from where they independently stand* – who do not merely see (manifestly) what he sees but see and accredit (manifestly) that he sees what they independently see as well. (Even apart from developed competence, other persons' perspectives are nonetheless latently transcendental, awaiting a faithful exploration and expression that can bring them competently and effectively to bear on the matters in question.) Every cognitive claim appeals for its validity and truth to this kind of recognition from *others* as such. Polanyi speaks of this as the universal *intent* of all our affirmations, distinguishing it from the presumption to established universality.⁴

Note as well that the presence of other persons, at least as a possibility, is a transcendental condition of a person's tacit recognition of the transcendence of an object beyond his explicit grasp. They are witnesses against his presumption to an absolute grasp of the object. The transcendent status of any object of cognition is thus directly linked with the transcendental status of other persons! Inversely, to fail to recognize the transcendental status of other persons with regard to any given subject matter, whether by intention or not, is in effect to lose sight of the transcendent status of the object of one's concern.

In summary, the otherness of the other person pertains not merely to his transcendence: that about him which we always know tacitly to be *other* than what we are able to conceive explicitly. It pertains also to his potential or actual transcendental status, his possession of a perspective *other* than we ourselves possess onto the matters with which we are concerned. (Notice, though, that the implementation of a person's transcendental status will depend upon his willingness and developed ability to bring his perspective faithfully to bear upon the dawning of a mutual recognition of truth in common beyond the finite reach of any one perspective.) In virtue of his very otherness he is *our* access to that perspective, an access dependent on the often difficult and tenuous possibility of our entering into empathetic rapport with him, learning what uniquely he is in a position to bring to light, and perhaps thereby discovering in ourselves presumptions needing challenge and growing beyond them.⁵ Here lies the importance of our really listening to and hearing out what the others present here have to contribute. Thus I too should hear out – indeed, I solicit – what any one of you may have to bring to light concerning the matters I here present, so far as your

cognitive concerns overlap mine and mine yours, if the sense and truth I seek to disclose be common, as I believe it is.

Another consequence immediately follows. What about those other human others, those with ways of coming at the world decidedly different from our own, namely, those persons 'civilized' men have classified 'primitive'? Being other human others like ourselves, they too as *such* transcend whatever categories to which we assign them, and are, in principle, transcendental conditions of the adequacy of our grasp not merely of what *they* are about but of what we are about as well, and of the human condition we share with them in common. How well we listen to them and, in listening, respect their otherness, I suggest, is a measure of our humanity.

However, the critical intellectual tradition to which we are heir has led us to regard the otherness of the other as an obstacle to the achievement of objectivity. Allow me to review how it has done this.

III

A preoccupation of mine from my earliest undergraduate years that has given continuity to the development of my thinking has been making sense of one of the paradoxes of modern civilization. On the one hand, I observed the pervasive uprootedness, the disorientation and self-doubt that has attended the rise and cultural influence of modern science. On the other hand, there is the sense of wonder, love of adventure and promise of personal fulfillment in revealing hidden truth that as an undergraduate major in physics I learned motivates scientific inquiry at its best. Gradually I came to discover that the root of the paradox has very little to do with the discoveries of modern science — though to be sure they have been disturbing enough — and very little to do with the mode of inquiry actually practiced by better scientists as an ideal to be emulated.

The problem derives rather from the sort of thing the Marxists call a "false consciousness," namely, an ideologically distorted picture of the method scientists follow to arrive at their so compelling conclusions about the world. This false consciousness regards the method of science — 'critical scientific reason' — to be *the* sole mode of access to truth, set by *definition* in opposition to anyone's confidence that an *uncritical*, more or less natural, ingenuous indwelling of the world as incarnate selves affords us access to the way things really are. It regards with a sceptical eye and instinctively seeks to discredit any way of coming at and being acquainted with things that has not been subjected to 'scientific' or experimental control, particularly one shaped by an uncritically assumed, specific cultural inheritance, hence "fraught with superstition, ignorance and error." It is the latter, claimed Galileo, that has deceived us. . . . And without a second thought, most people since have nodded heads in docile agreement. If you would get at the truth of any matters that concern you, so the modern intellectual conscience has come to insist, you must divest yourself of subjectivity, even despise it, sunder the pre-critical marriage of self and world that is your incarnate perspective and ascend to that critical objective frame of mind in which conclusions for all may in principle be

drawn.

At this point I am reminded of the words of Old Peter, the totem carver, in Margaret Craven's novel, *I Heard the Owl Call My Name*. The novel, should you be unfamiliar with it, tells a story that takes place along the rugged coastline of upper British Columbia among the Kwakiutl Indians. Old Peter says:

"It is always so when the young come back from the school. My people are proud of them, and resent them. They come from a far country, they speak English all the time, and forget the words of Kwakwaka. They are ashamed to dip their food in the oil of the oolachon which we call gleena. They say to their parents, 'Don't do it that way. The White Man does it this way.' They do not remember the myths and the meaning of the totems. They want to choose their own wives and husbands."

He faltered as if what he was going to say was too painful to utter.

"Here in the village my people are at home as the fish in the sea, as the eagle in the sky. When the young leave, the world takes them and damages them. They do not listen when the elders speak. They go and soon the village will go also."⁶

The White Man's school, in Old Peter's view, damaged the children of the village in leading them to be ashamed of who they were, leading them "to degrade and discount"⁷ the peculiar cultural difference they embodied in their person and viewpoint. Somehow it had come to be for them a liability – not just in regard to the image they had come to accept of what it means to be an enlightened, knowledgeable human being. No doubt a part of this was due to WASP prejudice inherent in the milieu of the mission school they attended. Yet if we rest matters here we overlook noticing how such prejudice is fundamentally a prejudice against individual and cultural difference as such. Even the specific difference of 'civilized' caucasians is disallowed serious recognition as that of one people among others. It is not the interplay of differences, the coming together of different points of view, that brings enlightenment, so these children were taught to think, but exactly the opposite: only a transcendence of the respective 'biases' of each to 'an objective, rational civilized frame of reference,' formally identical for all, will enable one to make respectable, rational sense.

Herein is displayed some of the more problematic implications of the modern notion of objective reason. On the surface, the modern ideal of objectivity consists in a formal universalization of thinking into a unified self-consistent system in which a person is *supposed* to have transcended the incarnate particularity of his grasp on things and have been enabled in principle to arrive at conclusions regarding the world that will be invariant for all – at least so far as one proceeds *via* strict reasoning in accordance with rational principles and from a basis of evidence impersonally established. This modern critical, 'civilized' ideal legislates in advance an impersonal sameness in inference for all who would realize validity and truth. Correlatively it deprecates differences in thinking, differences in ways of coming at the world, typing them without a second thought as precritical, eccentric, not yet objective – indeed, as 'primitive.' It withholds the accreditation of competence – and therefore a serious hearing – from all who do not attempt to abide by the objective ideal.

Moreover, as an ideal it poses an *a priori* requirement, not an *a posteriori* goal at which to aim; hence, it pertains more to the form in which reasoning is to be conducted than to content or substance. In effect, such

reasoning is to be conducted as *if* it were not someone's in particular but strictly anonymous. Being a formal requirement it risks being taken merely as a requirement governing the explicit expression of reasoning, as a mark of rational sophistication. In any case, the practical outcome is an effort by all who seek to be 'objective' to eliminate from the explicit expression of reasoning every indication of whatever personal or perspectival character may be latent in its substance. And given the non-cognitive stigma with which modern critical reflection immediately brands reasoning that overtly manifests personal 'bias,' the latent perspectival character of most modern thinking that presumes to be 'objective' rarely comes into question with any effectiveness, because it is never allowed to reach overt expression as such. As 'objective thinking' it cannot permit itself to be subject to the interplay of multiple perspectives as one competing among others. By definition, there can be no 'other' for a truly objective frame of thinking in the modern critical sense. 'Otherness' is pre-critical, pre-modern, pre-'civilized.'

It should be obvious at this point what I am suggesting: namely, that invocations of 'objectivity' in reasoning and castigations of 'subjectivity,' whether explicit or merely implicit, should be recognized to be the rhetorical devices they are. Indeed, just because a line of reasoning has divested from it all outward marks of having been articulated by a certain person from a particular point of view and having been addressed to a specific audience under particular circumstances – i.e., all outward marks of being a concrete transaction between persons – it is no less a rhetorical transaction than overt propaganda, and in certain circumstances may well be less justified. No *actual* mode of reasoning is above rhetorical (or moral) assessment, just as no articulate appeal is beneath logical analysis. As an increasing number of rhetorical theorists allege,⁸ for too long have logic and rhetoric been thought to be disparate fields of endeavor. The presumptive exemption from rhetorical criticism of certain modes of reasoning – such as that often claimed for mathematics, the natural sciences, and every other field of inquiry that attempts to be 'scientific' in the modern sense – is in fact secured precisely by suppressing from explicit expression every facet of concreteness, every evidence of their incarnation in transactions between actual persons. If they could be thus divorced from the realm of concrete events, then, of course, logical criticism alone would apply. That they ever succeed in being so divorced, however, is an illusion. Even the most abstruse modes of mathematical reasoning should be recognized as rhetorical transactions within the world between persons, whatever else they are. Only in this way can we begin to comprehend them 'in the round,' and catch sight of the ironies to which they too are subject.

Curiously, the modern critical notion of objectivity when examined in use, has rarely, if ever, functioned in a neutral, non-polemical context of description. Since its inception at the dawn of the modern age it has functioned primarily in connection with a rhetorical strategy legitimating the avoidance of acknowledging a preferred view as one's own, as *one* competing *among others* on equal grounds, by presenting it as established on a privileged, impersonal basis, invulnerable to the challenge and

interplay of merely anthropocentric perspectives because it is above them. It is the notion of 'objectivity' thus operative, I suggest, that constitutes the epistemological underpinning of the modern version of the opposition 'primitive'/'civilized.'

Firmly convinced of the truth of the heliocentric theory newly proposed by Copernicus and seeking every means at his disposal to disarm the objections of its Aristotelian opponents, Galileo happened upon an ingenious rhetorical weapon, destined to become the fixed point around which the modern critical attitude toward all pre-critical sensibilities would revolve, opposing the impersonal, *objective* standpoint of scientific reason to all others as *subjective*.⁹ I have in mind his bold resurrection of the distinction, first proposed by the ancient Greek atomists, between the primary qualities and the secondary qualities of an object. Primary qualities, you will recall, are supposed to pertain to the object itself and do not vary from person to person or with the conditions of perception. Secondary qualities, on the other hand, are relative to the perceiver and the conditions of perception. They are, as it were, *projected* by us back into the object by a natural mistake. (The fact that primary qualities turn out to be relative to the perceiver's idealization of the object in terms of a specific set of abstract parameters enabling metrical analysis seems to have escaped Galileo's notice.) The method of the new science, so runs the ensuing argument, interferes with this natural human propensity anthropocentrically to project what is only in oneself back into the objects of experience and, instead, rigorously insists that our reflective conclusions about the objects of experience reflect solely those primary qualities which are true of objects *in themselves*, apart from this projection.

Notice what is going on here: what is true of 'objects in themselves' – i.e., objects in their transcendent otherness – is now to be determined not through the interplay of different perspectives in interpersonal conversation, but through an abstraction from a certain mode of lived experience of formally universalizable data, taken not as the derived abstractions they plainly are but as primordial. We have here an inversion of the relation between tacit and explicit knowing: now the tacit knowing which is our acquaintance in person with a thing is to be regarded as rooted and grounded in such explicit data! No longer is it acceptable as a basis for verifying or correcting 'objectively' explicit accounts. Over against the immemorial confidence in the fundamental reliability, despite its fallibility, of a person's tacit reading of the world unless there is a good, specific reason to doubt it, one is now advised *to doubt*, to doubt even one's strongest natural inclination to believe, unless there can be established an explicit justification of its reliability. Thanks to the powers of mathematical analysis and the experimental isolation of hard data, we are said to be able to *penetrate through and beyond* the surface of our naive experience – a confused chaos of both secondary and primary qualities – and arrive at an objective determination of things as they really are, giving us a point of view no longer subject to the relativity of individual and cultural perspectives. The 'scientific world view' – a *picture* of the world, and *explicit representation* of the world, in which it is impossible to find oneself or any other person except as an 'object' among 'objects,' shorn of

all transcendence and, more so, of any transcendental status – comes to supplant in our thinking the world we tacitly indwell together and where, among other things, we call into account each other's representation of things. But whose is this world view? And who has any secure place to stand whereon it might be called to account?¹⁰

Accordingly, to come to reason in a 'scientific' way – i.e., to acquire a modern mind – is to be habituated, on the one hand, to distrust one's first and natural inclination to indwell the tacitly given believably (and anyone else's inclination, for that matter) and, on the other, to entrust oneself to the attitude of critical suspicion as the cardinal intellectual virtue. Here, in the attitude of critical suspicion, with its latent insistence on explicitness for the right of objective scrutiny – the explicitness of any candidate for truth and validity, any candidate for serious assent, all else being assigned to irrational oblivion – we find the inaudible escalator of ascent to 'the objective mode,' where the modern mind secures for itself a god-like autonomy *vis-a-vis* its objects. And what is the nature of the autonomy thus won? What but a freedom from accountability in the determination of truth and meaning; a 'freedom' from the transcendental threat of being called to account from perspectives other than one's own 'universalized' perspective and from the unsettling transcendence of a world unassimilable to one's exploitive intent. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno diagnose this 'autonomy' as rooted in fear:

Man imagines himself free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown [i.e., 'other']. That determines the course of demythologization, of enlightenment, which compounds the animate with the inanimate just as myth compounds the inanimate with the animate. Enlightenment is mythic fear turned radical. The pure immanence of positivism its ultimate product is no more than a so to speak universal taboo. Nothing at all may remain outside, because the very idea of outsideness [i.e., 'otherness'] is the source of fear.¹¹

Consider again the impact of 'Galileo's strategy' on his opponent. On the one hand, the latter's reservation about the new Copernican view is turned back upon itself, forcing him to call into question the very basis of his understanding anything at all up to the present, namely, a confidence that his lived incarnate perspective, one among many others, is nevertheless a genuine opening onto reality – as if he were a fool for presuming to speak out of it at all, leastwise confidently.¹² Listen as if the following argument were addressed to you: "Your view of things – e.g., that the sun rises in the East and sets in the West – is really a naive *projection* of your own point of view onto things. You fail to subtract your presumptive, if only natural, self-centeredness, rendering it impossible to isolate what is true of things unto themselves. To the contrary, the method of the new science, by holding in check all subjectivity, allows our knowledge to be built up on strictly impersonal grounds. To have your case be seriously considered, you will have to mount it on grounds equivalently impersonal." The force of the argument is comparable to having a rug pulled out from under you. On the other hand, the opponent is granted an opportunity to break free from his self-incurred bondage to a parochial, archaic, human-centered perspective and enter upon the sovereign maturity of universal man under the supra-individual guidance of critical scientific reason, holding forth the prospect of mastery over himself and all other things. Once he feels the narrowness

of the perspective in which he has hitherto been confined and sensing the possibility of once and for all breaking free of parochialism as such, how can he resist?

IV

In consequence, those of us who have been fully initiated into modernity, on reflection at least, have difficulty believing in our own beliefs and entrusting ourselves gracefully to any inward summons to venture affirmatively beyond the safety of critically established truths and 'civilized' ways of being. Precluded by our modern minds from accrediting anything inaccessible to 'objective scrutiny' and finding the personally evocative authority of that which summons us to be inaccessible in precisely this respect, the modern half of our mind reacts instinctively in distrust: unless it can somehow be shown to be explicitly legitimated, that which summons us must be judged 'merely subjective,' 'irrational,' an obfuscating projection of inwardness onto 'the hard reality of objective fact.' When we venture at all in such circumstances we act out of what, until we prove otherwise, we cannot avoid suspecting is irrational presumption, a fiction, engendered in us by some inner motive or reaction formation of which our conscious reasons are but rationalizations. When they do find expression, our 'convictions' possess an ostentation and our decisions an insularity that betray a latent despair. We oscillate between the polar extremes of paralyzing uncertainty and presumptive self-assertion, inwardly torn asunder, unable to find what Merleau-Ponty calls "the precise point of human resolution."¹³ In time we become less and less capable of giving ourselves unstintingly and without defensiveness to what deep down we feel is most worthy of our devotion and most able to evoke in us the passion of integral acknowledgment. "If only it were real!" Our hankering for the unsophisticated simplicity of what we imagine to be 'the primitive mentality' waxes strong.

Preoccupied with what lends itself to 'objective scrutiny' to the exclusion of all else, our *mind* soon loses touch with the concrete inter-human context of its endeavors to which it would otherwise be responsible and where lay the tacit intimations which were its original inspiration. Indeed, as it approximates the 'objective thinking' of a Kantian 'transcendental ego,' it sometimes loses touch with whose mind it is. Cut off from what is at very best a mostly inarticulate rapport with ideality, our *outward life* becomes increasingly prosaic, more and more the helpless manipulant of forces beyond conscious control. Deprived of finding in 'the objective world' anything worthy of devotion, any promise of personal fulfillment, our *affections* gravitate toward hysteria, defying the 'objective' present and the disenchanting power of critical reflection which constitutes it for the sake of some transcendent reality inaccessible to, and therefore safe from critical suspicion: an idealized past, a utopian future, a timeless otherworld of mystical flight or some private fantasy. In face of irreconcilable fragmentings of the psyche like these, the temptation to 'drop out' entirely into the gutsy vitality of sensuous immediacy divorced from both critical reflection and passionate striving becomes, at times, overwhelming. Like Humpty Dumpty, we have had a great fall, and none of the 'solutions' our

modern minds can muster, each more in its critical suspicion of human subjectivity, is able to put us together again. Mostly they exacerbate our fragmentedness.

Those who advocate in the face of this predicament a blind trust in instinct, feeling or even tradition as an avenue of escape are false prophets. For *until our own and each other's personal intimations of truth-as-such* – i.e., truth in common, yes, *objective truth can be cognitively accredited per se*, any such trust in 'instinct' over against the spirit of 'critical objectivity' will be infused with an inwardly divisive spirit of defiance, a refusal to accept the results of critical reflection, and therefore will necessarily be viewed by our modern minds as a reversion to the barbarian within. Under circumstances such as these – refusing on principle to determine when it may not be trustworthy – it very often is. (No reflection of 'primitive peoples' is here intended.)

V

The account given above of how 'science' handles the problem of anthropocentric thinking has so taken hold of the imaginations of modern intellectuals that very few – until recently – have ever thought to question whether it fits the actual practice of science at its best, even that of Galileo. I do not have opportunity here to establish that it does not. I refer you to the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michael Polanyi.¹⁴ To my thinking, these men along with certain others have shown, not to belittle the achievements of modern science but to place them in their proper perspective, that the modern scientific understanding of nature, is, if not more so, no less a 'product' of human subjectivity in its positive capacity for apprehending and pursuing intimations of hidden truth, *rightly disciplined* – as opposed to its negative capacity for critical scepticism – than pre-modern understandings of nature. And further, that neither the nature nor the discoveries of modern natural science make coherent sense when abstracted, as they usually are in the literature, from their concrete locus in the *common, tacitly lived world*, the *interpersonal community of other competent researchers* and the *personal histories* in which they continue to have their being, along with whatever other intimations of meaning and truth human beings currently apprehend. This concrete ambience, which we know so well but about which we have such difficulty telling and from which our modern minds continue to absent themselves in theoretical abstraction, remains quite literally the *ground* of what truth anyone attains about the nature of reality. Which is to say: our modern sophisticated theories about the nature of reality are *derivative*, while the concrete ambience wherein they originate, by virtue of certain persons sensing therein the tacit intimations which will be the discovery of their truth, is and remains *primordial*. I take it that Polanyi and Merleau-Ponty seek to have us recognize that insofar as we confuse this relationship and allow our scientific theorizing to induce in us a scepticism that subverts our confident indwelling of that ambience, we will be killing the goose that lays the golden eggs.

In so far as the actual practice of natural science is not reflected in the orthodox account of critical scientific reason, we must recognize that it is

possible for a person to carry on research in a wholly appropriate manner more or less unself-consciously while, on reflection at least, supposing that it is something quite different.¹⁵ Indeed, it is possible to find examples of this kind of double-mindedness in every traditional discipline, not excepting anthropology and religious studies. In such cases one can find persons whose work hovers ambivalently between the pursuit of objectivity and universality through a formal, more or less vertical, *a priori* transcendence of the relativity of personal perspectives (i.e., in the modern critical manner) and a pursuit of the same in a more or less horizontal or oblique manner through the painstaking dialectic of exposure to, and taking account of, the indefinite plurality of different perspectives that can relevantly be brought to bear on the matter in question. Whereas the former presumes an *a priori* guarantee of the possibility of universality in virtue of a structure of reasoning the same in all and unique in none, the latter claims no such guarantee but credits universality on the promise of continued confirmation by persons of sound and independent judgement in conversation (or at least virtual conversation) with one another. Merleau-Ponty has illuminatingly traced this ambivalence at length in the writings of Edmund Husserl, founder of the tradition of philosophical phenomenology.¹⁶ The same ambivalence can be detected in controversies in religious studies, for example, between attempts to interpret the meaning of religious phenomena as universal, *sui generis*, more or less context-independent structures of experience and counterclaims to the effect that their meaning is inevitably misinterpreted when considered apart from the lived context of their appearance.¹⁷ From my current, relatively superficial reading of the controversies surrounding the structuralist approach in anthropology, I am led to suspect the same ambivalence is at work.¹⁸

One of the principal reasons why scholars and scientists remain attached to the orthodox account is the absence of any well known and well worked out alternative understanding of how universality and objectivity may be achieved. I have already alluded at several junctures in my argument to how just such an alternative understanding might be developed.

VI

Hannah Arendt has argued¹⁹ that without our realizing what has happened the dominance of the ideal of critical scientific reason in the modern world has come fatefully to distort our conception of, and erode our ability to make, common sense. Common sense once meant – as it still does for unsophisticated, non-intellectual, ordinary people most of the time – our capacity to recognize a thing in common between us, our capacity to come to a common recognition in the world wherein we dwell together, despite – no, even in virtue of – the apparent conflict between our respective points of view. Instead, it has come for us moderns to mean our capacity to realize *the same form* in the pattern of our reasoning, a sameness in our reckoning with consequences, whereby we are supposed to reach the same conclusion in independence from one another. But this is to cease to have anything in common. The paradigm of common sense

in the modern world is our ability to add 2 and 2 together and all come out with 4.

If so, this suggests to me that, similar to the modern notion of common sense, the modern notion of objectivity may be derivative from a more radical or primordial notion that remains latent in the practice of good science, 'the official account' notwithstanding. Indeed, it suggests that our over zealous pursuit of 'scientific objectivity' outside the hard sciences may well have ironically eroded the ground on which objectivity in these fields is actually achieved – I mean our capacity to recognize and arrive at truth in common and through the interplay of different perspectives.

From its first clear formulation in the writings of Descartes, the modern epistemological tradition has almost invariably taken the fundamental paradigm of knowledge to be the mind's reflective agreement *with itself* in abstraction from all else – in abstraction as well from its concrete situation in the world in relation of others; no appeal is made to anything beyond reflection's immediate grasp. Therein, the transcendental perspective of the *other* which is to say the tacit context of human plurality within which one reasons, is entirely lost to view. Correlatively, the effective transcendence of the object of knowledge, that of the thing-in-itself, Kant's 'solution' notwithstanding, is lost as well. Merleau-Ponty summarizes:

If it is perfect, the contact of my thought with itself [in reflection] seals me within myself, and prevents me from ever feeling that anything eludes my grasp; there is no opening, no "aspiration" towards another for this self of mine, which constructs the totality of being and its own presence in the world, which is defined in terms of self-possession, and which never finds anything outside itself but what it has put there.²⁰

(Note the bearing on the engendering of this paradigm of a reader's relation to the printed word, particularly of a discursive, non-dialogical sort, as his prime intellectual medium.)

To the contrary, in line with my initial remarks concerning the other as transcendent and as transcendental, I suggest that we recognize a more primordial paradigm of knowledge: *the phenomenon of mutual recognition* between persons of independent perspective, in terms of their very otherness, each from the other. (To be more precise: the paradigm should be the phenomenon of an open-ended sequence of confirming recognitions by whosoever acquires competence in independently assessing matters of the sort in question. Any claim to knowledge as such should be said to anticipate that indefinite sequence of confirming recognitions.) The phenomenon of mutual recognition, it seems to me, is both logically and ontologically radical, a root or primitive notion, not to be taken as reducible to any other – to say, the sameness of conclusions of persons who arrive at their conclusions in isolation from one another. Instead, private cognition, no matter how rigorously universal in form, should be seen as itself derivative from, and appealing for its validity to, the more radical phenomenon of mutual recognition. On these terms a knowledge of something has an irreducibly public dimension, a standing before others, whose recognition is often hard won: at one and the same time the possession of knowledge is an experience of *being known* or at least recognizable in one's knowledge and of *making known* or participating in a disclosure of truth in common within the *inter-human*

sphere. There is no sense at all to be made of the notion of knowledge apart from someone who knows or apart from the indefinitely extended public of competent persons to whom he is ultimately responsible.

From these considerations it now becomes clear that objectivity pertains in its root meaning not to conclusions formally invariant for all possible knowers, as we, conditioned by the modern epistemological inheritance, have been prone to think. Rather does objectivity pertain to the recognizability of what is known from an indefinite multiplicity of genuinely independent perspectives, the acknowledged capacity of the known to command a meeting of independent minds. Accordingly, objectivity is attained not by stepping beyond all personal, anthropocentric perspective to some formally universal frame of reference. Rather is it a never-to-be-taken-for-granted result, contingently achieved, from patiently following up one's own personal intimation of hidden truth as a *point of access to truth in common*, following it up in a context where as many other relevant perspectives that can be discovered are empathetically brought to bear with equal right and taken into account as such. So also with respect to the achievement of universality in its root meaning, as Merleau-Ponty makes clear:

If universality is attained, it will not be through a universal language which will go back prior to the diversity of languages to provide us with the foundation of all possible languages. It will be through an oblique passage from a given language that I speak and that initiates me into the phenomenon of expression, to another given language that I learn to speak and that effects the act of expressions according to a completely different style — the two languages (and ultimately all given languages) being contingently comparable only at the outcome of this passage and only as signifying wholes, without our being able to recognize in them the common elements of one single categorical structure.²¹

In different words,

We still arrive at the universal not by abandoning our particularity but by turning it into a way of reaching others, by virtue of that mysterious affinity which makes situations mutually understandable.²²

What makes possible the 'miracle' of mutual recognition, the achievement of objectivity — never guaranteed and never absolutely assured — is precisely and irreplaceably each person's own incarnate, tacit perspective onto truth in common, so far as it is responsibly and vulnerably taken up *vis-a-vis* that of others. Paradoxically, it is this vulnerable, risk filled taking up of our own unique perspective that puts us in touch with others in their otherness, or at least in touch with the means of building some rapport with them.

From the moment I recognize that my experience, precisely insofar as it is my own, makes me accessible to what is not myself, that I am sensitive to the world and to others, all the beings which objective thought placed at a distance draw singularly nearer to me.²³

And further:

If . . . I have understood that truth and value can be for us nothing but the result of the verifications or evaluations which we make in contact with the world, before other people and in given situations of knowledge and action, that even these notions lose all meaning outside of human perspectives, then the world recovers its texture, the particular acts of verification and evaluation through which I grasp a dispersed experience resume their decisive importance, and knowledge and action, true and false, good and evil have something unquestionable about them precisely because I

do not claim to find in them absolute evidence.²⁴

To put it quite simply, what makes possible the 'miracle' of mutual recognition is each person's capacity *vis-a-vis* that of others to bring to light a different angle, an unique facet of reality – though it always may turn out to be a narrower angle or a different facet than was first supposed.

(This possibility is something Galileo apparently failed to realize in supposing the new astronomical discoveries to refute our natural perceptual experience. They did not refute it but only showed it to be a much narrower angle onto the astronomical matters in question than was believed. That it nevertheless continued to afford a genuine angle onto reality is attested by its prompting Galileo to invent the telescope to take a closer look!)

It is in virtue of our uniquely distinct incarnations that we approach truth, not by leaving them behind. I speak, of course, not merely of each of us for himself but equally of each for the other. My approach to truth depends as well on your willingness to explore and bring to common light what is evident from where you stand, and vice versa.

VII

Once we have an effective counter argument like this to the modern critical descrediting of trust in incarnate, personal perspective, it becomes easier to grasp what a post-critical intellectual ethos might involve. That occurs where and when parties to a given inquiry or discussion, forsaking none of their modern critical acumen, nevertheless jointly endorse each entrusting himself confidently to his own fundamental, incarnately rooted convictions, i.e., to his own tacit intimations of truth, despite – indeed, fully aware of – the vulnerability of those convictions, so far as they can be made explicit, to criticism; entrusting himself to them *not as truth itself but as his own best present avenue or clue or stage on the way to the discovery of truth in common* between them.²⁵ In a post-critical ethos the uniquely distinct perspective of each person is valued as irreplaceable in regard to its capacity to serve as a standpoint for bringing to common light otherwise unglimped aspects of reality. *A fortiori*, the same is true of each culture's distinctive mode of apprehending and co-responding to the shape of the world.

A crucial point here is the recognition, implicit in Polanyi's thesis that we know more than we can say,²⁶ that incarnately engendered, personal conviction reaches, cognitively speaking, beyond what at any given moment it can make explicit of itself toward significant matters of truth in common. Attending to what is made explicit as a determinate object of critical reflection, though needful in appropriate contexts, eclipses entirely the tacit apprehension of which it is the implementation, namely, the horizon of meaning it, or any cultural form, opens upon as one attends *from* it, empathetically reassuming its original intention from within the lived context of its engendering. Again Merleau-Ponty puts it well, this time speaking of how the history of philosophy *should be* approached, though he could be speaking equally well about a cultural system:

Rather than "explaining" a philosophy [as a determinate 'object' for critical thought], the historical approach serves to show how its significance exceeds its circumstances, and how as an historical fact it transmutes its original situation into a means of

understanding it and other situations. The philosophical universal lies in that instant and point when a philosopher's limitations are invested in a different history which is not parallel to the history of psychological or social facts, but which sometimes crosses and sometimes withdraws from it – or rather which does not pertain to the same dimension.²⁷

Elsewhere he addresses the same issue as it arises in anthropology:

On a deeper level, anthropology's concern is neither to prove that the primitive is wrong nor to side with him against us, but to set itself up on a ground where we shall both be intelligible [each to the other] without any reduction or rash transposition.²⁸

The point, clearly, is that cultural expressions, from whatever quarter, should be interpreted so that they might be seen and heard *from* their otherness, in the full power of their expression.²⁹ In fundamental agreement, Clifford Geertz writes:

The essential vocation of interpretive anthropology is not to answer our deepest questions, but to make available to us answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said.³⁰

Justifying this endorsement of the other following the bent of his own thought and conviction, however peculiar, is the principle implicit in Augustine's maxim, *nisi credideritis non intelligitis*. Polanyi explicates it as follows: "The process of examining any topic is both an exploration of the topic, and an exegesis of our fundamental beliefs³¹ in the light of which we approach it; a dialectical combination of exploration and exegesis" – apart from which we have neither power of insight nor courage of exploration.³² A post-critical ethos grants to each the right to this mode of inquiry; it even expects it of each, for each has need of the other's pursuit of it.

Correlatively, a post-critical mode of reflection is one that repudiates the presumptiveness inherent in our natural powers of reflection to overtake what is tacitly given by losing sight of the concrete context which engenders it (our reflection), forgetting the perspectival nature of its grasp on things and confusing the objectifications which are its product with the phenomena they purport to represent – i.e., the presumption to dismiss as insignificant the otherness of the other in respect to its status as transcendent or as transcendental. While attending with care to the determination of its object, a post-critical mode of reflection endeavors simultaneously and tacitly to keep track of its situation in the ambient, interhuman world *vis-a-vis* that about which it is thinking and, as faithfully as possible, aligned with whatever it was that summoned it to reflect in the first place. It realizes, along with Socrates, that reflection itself (as distinct from our power of bringing something to original expression) is ultimately not a power of *coming to knowledge* as is usually presumed – above all, in the modern critical ethos – but, when held responsible within the context of human plurality, a power of *coming to ignorance*. In plain words, a post-critical mode of reflection realizes itself to be a power of coming to oneself, minus presumption, in the actuality of one's finite acquaintance in person, alongside that of others, with the truth in its transcendence beyond one's explicit grasp.³³ The anthropologist J. van Baal suggests that 'primitive people' have realized this all along.³⁴ May we become as wise.

ENDNOTES

¹Orus C. Barker, "We Are Strangers to Our Strangeness," no. 2 of a series of three lectures entitled, "The Source of Identity in Language," given at Shaw University, Raleigh, N.C., 1974; unpublished mimeograph copy, pp. 15f.

²By way of explanation, I have in the following placed single quotation marks around 'words' and 'phrases' whose usage here employed is out of the ordinary, whose customary meaning or force I wish to highlight as being problematical or which are brought under discussion as concepts or word uses *per se*. Which of these functions is indicated should be clear from the context. I have reserved the use of double quotation marks for quotations, whether actual or hypothetical.

³Michael Polanyi, *The Study of Man* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 11-39; Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1966), p. 4-25; and Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch, *Meaning* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 28-45.

⁴See Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, p. 78: "For the scientist, having relied throughout his inquiry on the presence of something hidden out there, will justly rely on the external presence also for claiming the validity of the result that satisfies the quest. As he accepted throughout the discipline which the external pole of his endeavor imposed upon him, he expects that others if similarly equipped — will also recognize the presence that guided him. By his own command, which bound him to the quest of reality, he will claim that his results are universally valid. . . . I speak not of established universality, but of a universal *intent*, for the scientist cannot know whether his claims will be accepted. . . . To claim validity for a statement merely declares that it ought to be accepted by all [on these grounds]." See also Polanyi and Prosch, *Meaning*, pp. 194ff, and Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), *passim* (see index). Compare also the parallel discussion in the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty referred to below, when he speaks of an indirect of "lateral universality."

⁵Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes how this access to each other's perspectives can take place because we are not wholly self-possessed, rival totalities, but are always potentially open to each other: "He is able to get across to me inasmuch as I am . . . speech [just as he is], that is, capable of allowing myself to be led by the flow of talk toward a new state of knowledge. . . . In a speech we realize the impossible agreement between two rival totalities not because speech forces us back upon ourselves to rediscover some unique spirit in which we are participants but because speech concerns us, catches us indirectly, seduces us, trails us along, transforms us into the other and him into us, abolishes the limit between mine and not mine, and ends the alternative between what has sense for me and what is non-sense for me, between me as subject and the other as object." *The Prose of the World*, ed. Claude Lefort and tr. by John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 143, 145.

⁶Margaret Craven, *I Heard The Owl Call My Name* (New York: Dell, 1973), pp. 61f.

⁷Jerry Diller, *Ancient Roots and Modern Meanings* (New York: Bloch, 1978), p. xviii. Copies of "A Personal Preface" to this book were distributed to members of the Seminar by Professor Diller in connection with his presentation.

⁸See, for example, Wayne C. Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), and the work of Ch. Perelman, including his *The Idea of Justice and the Problem of Argument*, tr. John Petrie (New York: Humanities Press, 1963), and with L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, tr. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1969).

⁹I do not mean to suggest that Galileo was alone responsible for the place that this rhetorical strategy came to assume in the modern critical ethos. Yet he clearly had an important, precedent setting role to play in its development, whether or not he was fully aware of its nature.

¹⁰The 'revolution' now being carried out in the discipline of anthropology turns precisely on this question. It is the 'primitive' peoples, heretofore having been the docile 'object' of the 'civilized' science of anthropology, that are now asking of 'civilized men,' "Who are you to tell us how the world is to be understood, or that our traditional understanding is less than adequate, incompetent to challenge yours. Your celebrated 'objectivity' seen from where we stand is little more than a mask disguising quite other ambitions, which you seem unwilling or unable to avow." See *Reinventing Anthropology*, ed. Dell Hymes (New York: Random, 1972).

¹¹Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, tr. John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1972), p. 16.

¹²The Aristotelian view, though not simply identifiable with a person's lived, incarnate perspective, is grounded in the way things appear to his natural, anthropocentric experience.

¹³Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, tr. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1974), p. 95.

¹⁴For Polanyi's account of science, see especially *Personal Knowledge; Tacit Dimension*; Michael Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1947); and his essays collected in Michael Polanyi, *Knowing and Being*, ed. Marjorie Grene (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969). For Merleau-Ponty's views of natural science, because he nowhere develops an extended direct treatment of the subject, I recommend Theodore Kisiel, "Merleau-Ponty on Philosophy and Science," and Joseph J. Kockelmans, "Merleau-Ponty on Space Perception and Space," both in Joseph J. Kockelmans and Theodore Kisiel, *Phenomenology and the Natural Sciences: Essays and Translations* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 251-311.

¹⁵A case in point: Jacques Monod's *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*, tr. Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Knopf, 1971), ironically but unconsciously juxtaposes a moving exposition of recent discoveries in biochemistry with which Monod himself was quite evidently, passionately involved, with an account of the cold and detached 'objective' method by which these discoveries were allegedly achieved. At one point (p. 4), he indicates that an adequate test for 'objectivity' would be whether a computer could apply it!

¹⁶See "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man," tr. John Wild, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 43-95; "The Philosopher and Sociology" and "The Philosopher and His Shadow," in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, tr. Richard McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 98-111, 159-81.

¹⁷Pick almost any of the better known texts representing themselves as phenomenologies of religion (e.g., the major works of Eliade, Kirstensen, Bleeker, etc.) and one will find no trouble in locating instances where a religious phenomenon (e.g., a particular myth or type of myth) is presented, analyzed and discussed wholly apart from any endeavor to acquaint its readers with the actual, concrete place it has within the life of the people (or person) who find it religiously meaningful; i.e., with its phenomenological givenness in the context of someone-in-particular's actual experience. Against this more or less ahistorical, speculative approach, however comparatively based, historians properly speaking rightly rage. On the other hand, the 'phenomenologists' rightly criticize the tendency of historians to get lost in insignificant detail at the price of religious meaning. Neither seems to have conceived the possibility of an oblique passage to the universal through the historical particular in the manner I am suggesting.

For a summary of the controversy up to the mid-50's, see Raffaele Petazzoni, "History and Phenomenology in the Science of Religion," in his collection, *Essays on the History of Religion* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954; "Studies in the History of Religions," vol. I), pp. 215-19.

¹⁸Clifford Geertz asks, "Is the 'very simple transformation' which produced a general theory [the universal grammar of the intellect which Levi-Strauss postulates in *La Pensee Sauvage*] out of a personal disappointment [namely, Levi-Strauss' ethnographic inability to enter the world of the Tupi-Kawahib, as recounted in *Triste Tropiques*] real or a slight of hand? Is it a genuine demolition of the walls which seem to separate mind from mind by showing that the walls are surface structures only, or is it an elaborately disguised evasion necessitated by a failure to breach them when they were directly encountered?" Clifford Geertz, "The Cerebral Savage: On the Work of Claude Levi-Strauss," in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 359. On the more general issue of this sort of ambivalence in anthropology, see Geertz's essay, "The Impact of Culture on the Concept of Man," pp. 35-54.

¹⁹Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 280ff.

²⁰Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, tr. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities, 1962), p. 373.

²¹Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 87.

²²Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, p. 92.

²³Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, p. 94.

²⁴Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, p. 95.

²⁵There is much in common between what I say here and the epistemological perspectivism of, say Nietzsche — see Jean Granier, "Perspectivism and Interpretation," *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David B. Allison (New York: Delta, 1977), pp. 190-200 — and the "subjective method" of Roger Poole — see his *Towards Deep Subjectivity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), especially ch. 5: "The Perspectival World and Subjective Method." However, neither Nietzsche nor Poole has to my thinking, adequately developed an acknowledgement of the transcendence or 'otherness' of truth, which is accessible only through the continuing transcendental interplay of genuinely independent, competently explored perspectives.

Truth as such is never immanent to any one perspective — nor to any Hegelian presumptive resolution of them all into some totalizing perspective. Nor is subjectivity as such transcendental. Only insofar as my personal perspective is uptaken with universal intent, in the interest of bringing to light truth lying beyond my immanent grasp, does it transcend 'subjectivity' and come to function in a transcendental capacity. My empathetic exploration of any other such perspective never renders wholly immanent to my enlarged perspective the otherness of that perspective: something of that otherness is irreducible, precisely what is transcendental about it. Hence, my assimilation of it must never presume completeness. So far as it does, so far as I close myself off from challenge and correction from that quarter, I have let go of the truth for its reflection. On the contrary, it is by way of other persons, in virtue of their unassimilable difference from us, and of ourselves as others among others, that we approach truth and bring our concerns to bear upon the world common to us all.

²⁶Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, p. 4 *et passim*.

²⁷Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 130

²⁸Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 122

²⁹Here lies what seems to me to be both the problem of historicism and the makings of its solution: a failure to comprehend cultural expressions from within their very otherness as *other* — not as the truth according to a particular subject or historical-cultural situation, but from within that perspective as what one is able to grasp of truth in common, which grasp as such tacitly transcends any simple identification with the explicit expression in question. Strictly speaking, the problem of historicism follows directly from supposing that, in principle, truth can always be made fully explicit and that the explicit expression of any claim to truth

may be equated without qualification with what its author takes to be the truth. But this discounts entirely any sense the author may have for the transcendent otherness beyond what he can make explicit of the truth he claims to know (i.e., be acquainted with).

³⁰Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 30. Whether the anthropologist has the right to make such answers more public than their authors would prefer – and as a consequence to leave them more vulnerable to exploitation from without than before – remains a genuine moral question, quite untouched by my remarks.

³¹"Beliefs" here are to be taken not as determinate statements to which one assents as the truth, but, so to speak, as cyphers which sum up and focus a complete range of indeterminate intimations of hidden truth yet to be fully explored, i.e., comprehensive hunches that, from where the believer happens to be coming from, the truth will more than likely be found in 'this direction,' and found to be 'this sort of thing.'

³²Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 267.

³³Compare Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy*, tr. John Wild and James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1963), p. 39: "The irony of Socrates is not to say less in order to win an advantage in showing great mental power, or in suggesting some esoteric knowledge. 'Whenever I convince anyone of his ignorance,' the *Apology* says with melancholy, 'my listeners imagine that I know everything that he does not know.' Socrates does not know any *more* than they know. He knows only that there is no absolute knowledge, and that it is by this absence that we are open to the truth."

³⁴van Baal, *Symbols for Communication: An Introduction to the Anthropological Study of Religion* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971; "Studies of Developing Countries," no. 11), p. 280.