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The Liberal Treatment of Difference

An Untimely Meditation on Culture and Civilization

by Nigel Rapport

John Stuart Mill's liberal vision included a notion of "civil advancement" whereby the free expression of a diversity of opinion would result not only in an initial collision of difference but also in an eventual consolidation as truth. The work of this article is to explore the ways and extents in which such liberalism can translate into a cosmopolitan anthropology. Is toleration of difference the appropriate anthropological ethic, or can one hypothesize a liberal "magnanimous" overcoming of difference? In a wide-ranging discussion, the voice of Mill is juxtaposed against those of C. P. Snow, Ernest Gellner, Stevie Smith, and Karl Popper. Much commentary would suggest that liberalism is passé. A political context dominated by renascent particularisms, militant religions, and resurgent ethnicities spells the collapse, it is told, of any Enlightenment project of liberal-humanist universalism. "Cultures are not options." Notwithstanding, the argument is made here that as "opinion" grades into "knowledge," so "culture" grades into "civilization" and local community (*polis*) into global society (*cosmos*). Difference may become a step along the way to a recognition of universal human truth.

Social tolerance always; intellectual tolerance never.
(attributed to Ernest Gellner)

A Liberal Century, 1867–1964, and the Untimely

The dates 1867–1964 are relatively arbitrary but not accidental. In 1867 John Stuart Mill took up the honorary position of Lord Rector at the ancient Scottish university of St. Andrews, and in 1964 C. P. Snow ended his three-year tenancy of the same position. My intention in this article is an anthropological contextualization and appreciation of the liberalism that is represented by these two figures and an examination of how their "liberal century" might be extended into ours.

The Lord Rector is chosen every three years by the students of the University of St. Andrews as their representative on the university's governing body, the University Court, and on taking up the post, the incumbent delivers an inaugural address. (The office of Lord Rector was created by the British Parliament when it passed the Universities [Scotland] Act, 1858, at which time British university education was domi-

nated by Scottish institutions; only Cambridge and Oxford predated the Scottish quartet of St. Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh.) The triennial election and installation at St. Andrews has come to contain elements of comedy and public performance, and a number of well-known humorists have recently occupied the role (John Cleese, Alan Coren, Clement Freud). But this was not always the case, and besides Mill and Snow, the title has also been bestowed on Andrew Carnegie, Rudyard Kipling, and Fridtjof Nansen. A skill in communication and in putting across a student perspective in a persuasive and yet personable fashion might explain the advantage of being able to combine a comic touch with a public gravitas: the Lord Rector, one might say, has to speak student opinion to university establishment.

My first step will be the untimely juxtaposition of the inaugural address delivered by C. P. Snow against that of John Stuart Mill almost a century earlier. But I also intend the "untimely" in a deeper, Nietzschean sense. From 1873 to 1876, Friedrich Nietzsche published four wide-ranging "meditations" that he denominated "untimely" for being unfashionable in content as well as transcendent of fashionableness. I would write against what I see as a contemporary "culturalist" fashion: the multiculturalist axiology and ethos in vogue in the United Kingdom and elsewhere that sees culture understood not "as an idiom or vehicle of intersubjective life, but its foundation or final cause" (Jackson 2002:125). The fashion is reificatory and essentializing. I would critique three tenets of such a culturalist discourse: that cultural belonging is foundational of human identity, that cultural difference is found-

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dational of other differences, and that all knowledge is culturally founded. My resource is the liberalism that was formulated as a political and moral philosophy by the likes of Mill and Snow, and it is with their publications and their public addresses that I begin.

“On Magnanimity”

Charles Percy Snow (1905–1980) is perhaps best known for his sequence of novels of British social, political, and intellectual life, *Strangers and Brothers*. Narrated by the character Lewis Eliot, the novels offer a semiautobiographical account of life in provincial England, at Cambridge University, and in London through substantial parts of the twentieth century and taking in its major public events. The treasury of ethnographic detail within the novel sequence—akin to the nineteenth-century English accounting of Anthony Trollope (about whom Snow was a passionate advocate)—has already been mined by social anthropology (Gluckman 1962; Paine 1977).

Like Trollope, Snow also led a significant public life beyond his novel writing. He began as a physicist before becoming a civil servant in the British government, working in the Ministry of Labour and then of Technology. In 1959 he delivered a celebrated Rede Lecture at Cambridge—later published as *Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (1959)—which lamented the gulf between science and the humanities in Western intellectual and public life.

“On Magnanimity” was the title Snow chose for his inaugural address as rector at St. Andrews on April 13, 1961. Magnanimity and courage, Snow (1962:6) observed, were the virtues that he most admired in both public and private life. Courage had already had its many advocates, and so, while not meaning to set himself up as a “moral passport officer,” he would like to take the opportunity to expound publicly on a virtuous vision. For he could not help thinking that were we to take stock of ourselves and others as individuals and as societies “honestly,” or “in our freedom” (as Existentialism has it), and then were we to act “generously” on the basis of our discoveries, the world would benefit. Magnanimity entails the human capacity and the practice of people seeing themselves “as they really are.” Also, one is generous and gives others their due. Also, one is hopeful and endeavors to see the best in oneself and in others, and then one works to promote that best. Honesty, generosity, hopefulness, fulfillment.

Snow’s words have an innocence to them and would have had then, in the early 1960s, even before poststructuralism urged us to see sophistry and subject positionality mediating inexorably discursive construction. But Snow was not naïf, however much his tone and verbal register in the public lecture were direct. He elaborates. As practical virtue, magnanimity entails a complex process of self-awareness, relationality, and betterment. It has complex roots. Magnanimity arises out of a sense of human oneness, that while we are all

individual, we are also all the same, and we can and should extend a brotherhood or love or compassion or charity to this species whole. But magnanimity also arises out of a sense of the real, a sense of human weakness and fallibility, and of the moral liabilities, the social inequities and iniquities of human interaction. One need not despise the apparently hypocritical, then, if one were to recognize in statements that fell short of actual gestures of magnanimity a desire often to become better. Last, magnanimity arises out of vanity, a wish and a belief that individually and collectively we may behave better than we might. If magnanimity has murky roots, Snow suggests, then so might all human excellence. And yet it is a virtue to which he would look most hopefully as a practical means to “sweeten and to glorify human life” (Snow 1962:7). As an everyday lived awareness, Snow (1962) concludes, “I want a man who knows something about himself. And is appalled. And has to forgive himself to get along” (17).

Looking about him in England, however, Snow is saddened. The practice of magnanimity is not widespread and appears even to be on the wane. There is no doubting English tolerance—more so than in the United States, more so than any society ever, in all likelihood—but England is not a magnanimous society. Malice lurks close beneath the polite surface and frequently breaks cover. It is likely, Snow adjudges, that this bespeaks a world power in decline; it is English fear and frustration that breed hardness and hate, and such hatred is easy while virtue is hard. Nevertheless, hate and negation ultimately nauseate the soul, Snow insists, demeaning our human dignity and potentiality. Not all human life need be conducted in the narrow terms of envy and consideration merely of the survival of one’s own. Our human capacities, individual and collaborative, in particular our scientific and technological means (thanks, in part, to the physical and mathematical magnanimity of the likes of Einstein and Rutherford), make the future ours to determine; we can do good or ill with the world, but we cannot cut ourselves off from it. It should be within our practical capacity, for instance, to banish world hunger before a number of generations. Recall how recently this was the widespread social condition in Scotland and in Ireland: practice the magnanimity to recognize ourselves now in the two-thirds of the world’s population who are poor enough to starve to death.

Snow sums up: a tolerant, polite veneer is not sufficient. We can work at human improvement. But magnanimity as a public virtue has the same private origin as do all social characteristics and cultural traits. To practice political and social virtue, we need first to recognize the truth of ourselves as individuals and to endeavor to make the best of ourselves as individuals. Being magnanimous, the individual, as a human *Anyone*, in his or her existential freedom, is honestly willing to put himself or herself, and to put human fellows, in a position where they might all make the best of themselves.

“Inaugural Address at St. Andrews”

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was a civil servant and member of Parliament as well as being Britain’s most significant nineteenth-century philosopher and author of the foundational tract of liberalism as a political philosophy, “On Liberty” (1963). He delivered his inaugural address as Lord Rector at St. Andrews on February 1, 1867. The delivery reputedly lasted 3 hours, the lecture representing a not insignificant encapsulation of Millian themes and insights, with a particular focus on the virtues inherent in university education.

Of the three main “ingredients” of human culture—knowledge, morality, and aesthetics—Mill begins, it is the first to which a university most devotes itself. But the latter are not ignored. For the aim of a university education is to place the student in a position to develop a taste for truth: to discriminate and to ascertain. This includes the student choosing his or her own moral path. A university aspires to being a public space of “free speculation” where instruction is given in a spirit not of dogmatism but of enquiry so that the student learns to deploy intelligence to “seek for truth at all hazards” (Mill 1963:353).

The best model of knowledge and also the best model for knowing are provided by science. The natural sciences teach us of the properties of the things in the world that we have not made but that we have to live with and that operate according to regular processes; the human sciences aspire to the laws of human nature of whose study nothing is more deserving of human attention. Science is not merely an instruction in facts, however, but also, and equally significantly, a training in the disciplinary procedures by which truth is everywhere ascertained: observation (plus experiment) and reasoning. Physics and mathematics remain, respectively, the best exemplars of these two routes to truth, but whatever the individual’s path in life, the ascertaining and discriminating of truth can be expected to be—should be expected to be—his or her most incessant intellectual occupation. The knowledge and the knowing that a university teaches, values, and promotes, Mill (1963) asserts, eventuates in “elevating the character of the species itself; exalting and dignifying our nature” (350).

In the above paragraphs is contained the nucleus of Mill’s humanist vision. The human individual—*Anyone*—has both the capacity and the right to develop a worldview that fits him or her personally, that does justice to his or her own efforts of discovery, and that suits his or her own nature. In this being true to self, moreover, truth itself may be revered and furthered. This is so for two chief reasons. First, truth is difficult, and human beings are fallible. In the diversity and creativity of the individual search, the most various possibilities of truth are construed, experimented with, and subjected to reason—by self and other alike. Second, human beings are creatures of habit: truth becomes dogma and ceases to be appreciated and “lived” unless it is fully, frequently, and fearlessly—and individually—discussed. It is thus that the nature

of human individuality, truth, and the advance of the human species can be said to amount to an objective and valuational complex.

That *Anyone’s* search for truth elevates the species and initiates a beneficial understanding of nature and human nature also had, for Mill, more proximate consequences. “Government and civil society are the most complicated of all subjects accessible to the human mind,” Mill (1963:319) opined, but the self-conscious, meditative temper to which an appreciation of natural and human science leads means that the modern mind is better equipped—more complex, more manifold—even than those of the ancients, of classical Greece and Rome, to tackle these complications and depths. Faced with sophistry in public life, for instance, we learn, as Hobbes’s dictum has it, that “while words are the counters of wise men, they are the money only of fools” (Mill 1963:322). That is, we do not mistake words for the facts they stand for; words themselves are not facts. Likewise, faced with superstition and nescience, we appreciate, as Henry Maine revealed, that ancient laws and obsolete institutions and ideas may still have a covert influence on modern life, and we can beware how such a “mitigated barbarism” may lead us to accept erroneous things as natural or necessary. Faced with all illiberalism, we recall that “bad men need nothing more to compass their ends than that good men should look on and do nothing” (Mill 1963:349).

Mill’s hope is that the university-educated individual will practice the public virtue not to allow bad to be done in his or her name. The government of a liberal society is *Anyone’s* responsibility, and the truths with which civil society is imbued are a public manifestation of what the individual has found out for himself or herself. Civil society represents a kind of intermediate space or stage between the individual life and that of the species, and the same truths ideally pervade across the spectrum. It is “in our freedom” that sophistry, superstition, and illiberalism do not prevail.

Truth and Self

The existentialist phrasing “in our freedom” does not actually appear in Mill’s text, but I am struck by the resonances between Mill’s lecture and C. P. Snow’s. Human beings can hope and expect to gain access to the real. The progress of science provides the best example of the kinds of truths to which human beings can aspire. Moreover, knowing the nature of things as they are is a public virtue, one to which civil institutions such as universities should devote themselves and one in which students should immerse themselves: we can and should improve the human condition, and it is in this improvement that our dignity, our dignifying of human life, resides.

This civility and humanism operate at both a societal level and an individual level. Indeed, it is individually *sourced*. By being true to oneself, true *with* oneself, one can hope magnanimously to open up a liberal space for others; by being

true to methods of truth and the discernment of truth, one can hope to avoid sophistry and superstition in one's own life and also avoid an illiberal treatment of others. From the authentic selfhood of the individual is to be derived an authentic liberality or openness toward others and the world. In our freedom as individual human beings—rational and moral—we can accede to truths befitting the dignity of the species.

It is remarkable the frisson I feel, the sense of discomfort even, writing the above phrases and anticipating their (anti-humanistic) reception. How difficult it becomes to write "truth," "the nature of the human," "individuality," "individual and human improvement" in an anthropological essay. I also find that difficulty sad and alienating because these are objectives that I believe are there to be addressed—the truth about the individual and the human whole—and to which I would lay disciplinary claim. Apprehending these things is fundamental to the way in which anthropology may serve the public value of charting ways to cosmopolitan justice: to a liberal treatment of *Anyone* globally. The relation between anthropology, truth and just global society is what I devote the remainder of this article to illuminating.

Magnanimity and Toleration, Opinion and Truth

I begin by returning to a distinction that Snow found significant between "magnanimity" and "tolerance." Magnanimity began with being honest in one's perceptions of self and other and then in promoting the best in oneself and the other. Knowledge would seem key here, both self-knowledge and that of proximate and general others. One looks askance at the status quo—ironically, critically, truthfully—in order to see what is actually there and how it might be bettered. Tolerance, however, might be said to begin, and to end also, in a certain distance. One does not presume to know the other because one accords difference an a priori moral status in its own right, a difference one need not and should not seek to overcome. My understanding of Snow's emphasis on magnanimity is that it is based in an aspiration toward a true knowledge of other as of self rather than simply a toleration of an imagined difference. There was a global knowledge of individuality to which humanity might aspire, and a civil society could be envisaged in which such knowledge was a common treasury. Being open to truth and endeavoring always to be discriminatory in ascertaining true knowledge and to subject claims to the court of scientific criticism were the processes by which the life of individual human beings and the species whole were dignified and elevated alike.

In 1838 and 1840, Mill published a pair of essays that amounted to praise poems, the first to philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham and the second to poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge. They were an odd pairing, the first as liberal, secular, and "enlightened" as the second was conservative, religious, and "romantic" (Leavis 1950). But this,

for Mill, was the point: each was the opposite but also the completing counterpart to the other. Bentham versus Coleridge replayed John Locke versus the *ancien régime* that replayed Aristotle versus Plato. Mill might have felt that Bentham (Locke and Aristotle) possessed the truth and that Bentham's insistently doubting spirit and his detailed sifting and anatomizing method were vital for a world where so many false things were believed. But Mill also recognized that insofar as rationalism came to be translated into a political program, as in the French Revolution, a missing romantic element removed the possibility of a complete settled polity. Coleridgean conservatism—insisting on a restraining discipline, a feeling of history and loyalty and the sacrosanct, with a value placed on cohesion, sympathy, and common interest—included what *les philosophes* overlooked as requisites of civil society in their postrevolutionary designs; one might keep ancient forms even as old contents were replaced with modern insights. Moreover, given the ever-imperfect state of contemporary knowledge, antagonism in political opinion was as important as were mutually checking powers in the liberal constitution. Mill concludes:

Truth, in the great practical concerns of life, is so much a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites, that very few have minds sufficiently capacious and impartial to make the adjustment with an approach to correctness, and it has to be made by the rough process of a struggle between combatants fighting under hostile banners. (Mill 1963:172)

The above passage appears actually in the essay "On Liberty" of 1859, and it was here that Mill famously developed his mature insights concerning the individuality of opinion properly admitted into a liberal society. "On Liberty" amounted to a treatise on the relationship between opinion on one side and orthodoxy, norm, and law on another, also between opinion on the one hand and knowledge, fact, and truth on the other. Opinion was contrastive by nature, Mill asserted, and opposing opinions were necessary for a vital, free, and progressing society. However, opinion also graded into true knowledge: diversity and contrast were part of a process that culminated in the truth. By turning now to "On Liberty" more fully, I would elaborate on how Mill answers the fundamental question of how one might move beyond toleration in a practicing of magnanimity. As "opinion" grades into "knowledge," I would contend, so "culture" grades into "civilization" and local community, or *polis*, into global society, or *cosmos*. *Difference becomes a step along the way to the recognition of universal human truth.*

"On Liberty" defends individuality against what Mill (1963: 194) describes as "the despotism of custom." Human nature is individual in nature, Mill begins. Human nature is not like a machine that is or can be built after a model but more like "a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing" (Mill 1963:184). It is the case that different

human beings require different conditions for their development, both physical and moral:

Such are the differences among human beings in their sources of pleasure, their susceptibilities of pain, and the operation on them of different physical and moral agencies, that unless there is a corresponding diversity in their modes of life, they neither obtain their fair share of happiness, nor grow up to the mental, moral, and aesthetic stature of which their nature is capable. (Mill 1963:192)

It is best when the individual practices “his own mode of laying out his existence, not because it is the best in itself, but because it is his own mode” (Mill 1963:192); it is by cultivating all that is individual in themselves that human beings become “a noble and beautiful object of contemplation” (Mill 1963:187).

Individuality was for Mill (1963:181) not only a “leading essential for well being” but also a “necessary part and condition” of “all that is designated by the terms civilization, instruction, education.” Freedom of worldview or opinion and freedom (within certain limits) to act on that opinion were fundamental aspects of that individuality in practice. To use and interpret experience in his or her own way was the “proper condition of a human being” who was in mature command of his or her faculties. Tradition and custom may evidence what *others’* experience had taught them, but this experience may be narrow or old or unsuitable for the individual’s own nature or circumstance. To be best and most fully human was for the individual to arrive at his or her own life plan or life project: truth had to be personally discerned, chosen, and lived so that all the faculties were employed and not merely the imitative. The individual used “observation to see, reasoning and judgement to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and . . . firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision” (Mill 1963:183).

The benefit of this to the species, to the progress of human civilization, was the creation, experimentation, or discovery of wise, good, and noble things: “a greater fullness of life” in the individual brought about “more in the mass which is composed of them” (Mill 1963:187). Sadly, however, it was also the case that the despotism of custom often crushed individuality and so hindered human advancement: “Custom is there, in all things, the final appeal; justice and right mean conformity to custom” (Mill 1963:195). It was Mill’s judgment that England represented less of a threat to liberty in this respect than “the East,” but even here individuals were wont to lose themselves through pressures on and opportunities for a collective uniformity. Instead of cultivating their individuality and bringing themselves nearer to “the best things they can be” (Mill 1963:188), mediocrity, weak energies, and weak feelings prevailed.

Let me look in somewhat more detail at this issue: how and why individual differences in opinion should be admitted

into the public realm and how society developed in truthfulness as a result. Mill sums up his case as follows:

The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error. (Mill 1963:142)

Individuals are not infallible, as we have heard, and “ages,” as sums of individuals, are no less so. It is therefore wrong to compel an opinion to ignominy or silence, because it may be wholly or partially true. The nature of truth is that it is complex, and to intend to know the whole of a subject, it is necessary to hear what can be said of it by people of all experiences and how it might be approached by people of all characters. For these reasons of fallibility and complexity, every truth-claim must be pushed to an extreme: reasoning must be valid for the extreme case if it is to be good for any case. Also, truth-claims must be continually proven, with every opportunity taken to refute them, to avoid the dead hand of habit. Truth, in short, is an attitude as well as a possession: to be properly appreciated it must continually represent a real and heartfelt conviction reached by reason and personal experience and not a mere formal profession or prejudice (“prejudgement”). Truth is a difficult and continuous work. Nor are fallibility, complexity, and habituality the only difficulties to be overcome. *One sidedness* continues to be a commonplace in human practice, Mill observes—the recourse to partial judgments—as well as *sectarianism*, whereby truth is rejected or not recognized because it is propagated by persons regarded as opponents. Thus may the partial truths of collective tradition harden into contrarian exaggeration, bigotry, and prejudice.

It is nevertheless the case, Mill is happy to conclude, that on the calmer and more disinterested bystander even if not on the more impassioned partisan, a collision of diverse opinions works a salutary effect. False surmises and practices gradually yield to fact and argument. Humankind does progress, becoming more capable of discerning the truth in all its difficulty and complexity; difference of opinion consolidates into unity, and history assumes a certain shape:

As mankind improve, the number of doctrines which are no longer disputed or doubted will be constantly on the increase: and the well-being of mankind may almost be measured by the number and gravity of the truths which have reached the point of being uncontested. (Mill 1963: 168)

A narrowing of the bounds of diversity of opinion is inevitable and indispensable, Mill attests, even though a civil society must continue to employ “contrivances” (such as Socratic dialectics) that ensure that truth remains a live issue (for the

maturing and the matured alike) and never simply customary or doctrinal.

The Conditions of Debate

Key to Mill's notion of civil advance is the understanding that the free expression of a diversity of opinions will result not only in an initial collision but also in an eventual consolidation as truth. Certain conditions must be met, however, for this to occur. For those "backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage," Mill admits (1963:136), free and equal discussion is unlikely to convince or persuade. "The greater part of the world," he considers, "has, properly speaking, no history, because the despotism of Custom is complete" (Mill 1963:195); over "the whole East," the capacity to guide oneself through deliberation to one's own improvement has not yet evolved. (Mill's words are resonant of what will be Max Weber's thesis concerning the ubiquity of "traditional" authority and its necessary evolution to "rational.")

But it has become hard to apply such terms and conditions, so to speak. Mill's language is open to easy caricature as teleological, also ethnocentric and "orientalist": it is no longer feasible, politically or even intellectually, to dichotomize and evaluate as he would. In a globalized circumstance, with "the East" coming west, the "backward" is more likely nominated to be the member of the "developing world," the "post-colonial" or "subaltern." An expectation of custom evolving into civility is more often replaced by an assertion of a cultural right to adhere to a traditionalist orientation, made in the name of a collective deemed to be an organic unit of homogeneous membership and inheritance. There exists a kind of cultural fundamentalism, both within the academy and without, embodying a neoromantic "autochthonization" (Malkki 1995:52) in contrast to notions of "enlightened" progress. "Cultures are not options," Bhikhu Parekh (1998:212) presumptively legislates, and the "survival" of cultural tradition (Taylor 1992:54) is to be deemed a collective goal and a right that takes legitimate precedence over individual desires. According to this culturalist discourse, cultural belonging is to humanity as species belonging is to animality (Stoczkowski 2009:11). Here is knowledge canonized as culturally limited (Evans-Pritchard 1937), here is cultural difference as deserving of the most fundamental respect (American Anthropological Association 1947), and here is cultural belonging as fundamentally mediating identity (Runnymede Trust 2000). In short, Mill's terms and conditions of liberal progress are replaced by ones of fundamental communitarian difference. Cultural communities assume the right to deploy matrices of symbolic classifications that define the individual human being's essence: as member or outsider, "infidel" or "apostate," "Quebécois" and "First Nation," as "modest woman" on "Muslim land." The "culture defence" (Demian 2008) anticipates the reproduction of sovereign communities, enculturated memberships, and discrete traditions, perspectives and

practices in multicultural spaces. Culturalism, in Unni Wikan's (1999) synopsis, is "loose on the streets."

It would not be true to say that the idea of consolidating opinion into truth—and transcending customary cultures—has become a wholly foreign project since Mill. C. P. Snow's vision of magnanimity—including the existential freedom to move forward with an honest and generous appraisal of people and things—finds its place in a twentieth-century liberal tradition that can boast E. M. Forster's embrace of civil liberties, Karl Popper's "open society," Isaiah Berlin's "negative freedom," John Rawls's theory of justice, Brian Barry's critique of multiculturalism, and extending to Richard Rorty's "postmodern bourgeois liberalism." Jürgen Habermas's "discourse ethics" discerns a specific relationship between civil exchange and truth, claiming a communicative rationality whose consequences are moral.

Similarly, it is not true that since Mill there have not been versions of liberal propositions within anthropology. Ernest Gellner forthrightly insisted on the dichotomization between culture and science, between custom and truth:

A collectivity united in a belief is a culture. That is what the term means. More particularly, a collectivity united in a false belief is a culture. Truths, especially demonstrable truths, are available to all and sundry, and do not define any continuity of faith. But errors, especially dramatic errors, are culture specific. They do tend to be the badges of community and loyalty. Assent to an absurdity is an intellectual *rite de passage*, a gateway to the community defined by that commitment to that conviction. (Gellner 1995:6)

Wikan (1999:57–58), again, decries a culturalism that has "run astray," such that to say "this is my culture" is to lay claim not to a personal becoming but to a particular and exclusive collective nature, fixed and uniform, demanding of respect, even reverence. Wikan's conclusion is that culture is neither a fitting frame for the organization of social relations nor a fitting foundation of an anthropological science. It now behooves anthropology to speak *against* a notion of culture as a foundational difference and speak *for* sameness: the sameness of the human and the sameness of the individual human being (Wikan 1999:63). Honor the integrity and agency of *Anyone*.

In previous writings of my own I have wanted, too, to address the totalizing, even totalitarian, tendencies of communities as containers of identity and matrices of meaning (Amit and Rapport 2002), and I have urged that anthropology beware conflating the cultural symbolization and classification of the world with its truth. There is a gulf between cultural constructions of personhood, most importantly, and the objective lineaments of individual embodiment and identity (Rapport 1997, 2010a). Even should *individualism* be deemed a particular historico-cultural symbolization of group membership, it need not be confused with *individuality*—the consciousness, intentionality, agency, distinct embodiment, and subjectivity of the human actor—which can be considered as

a universal fact of the human condition (Rapport 2003). It is human nature to exist beyond culturo-historical specifics and givens, both temperamentally, as in manifestations of individual scepticism and irony, and cognitively, in manifestations of individual criticism, rationality and imagination (Rapport 2010b). This is *Anyone's* existential freedom.

The sticking point is the political. Science delivers objective propositions that are in principle translatable, without loss of efficacy, into any cultural milieu, Gellner (1993:58) observed. By “science” I would understand a rationalist engagement with the world that includes the deliverances of human science (such as anthropology). “Gender is a construct” is a fact. The individuality of consciousness is a fact. The nonevidential “leap of faith” implicated in confessional identities is a fact. “Human history is characterized by a traffic in meanings between cultural areas without stable or fixed borders” is a fact. In principle, as Gellner (1993:58) suggests, one can imagine knowledge of such scientific fact spreading universally, incrementally replacing the particularistic and contingent and mythopoetic and laying the foundations of a new social order: new knowledge and new society existing beyond cultural and communitarian difference. But this is not the nature of *Realpolitik* and *ressentiment*. To expect Western Enlightenment notions, whether of rationality or liberality, to be met and embraced as abstract ideas, as ideas alone, as ideas at all, is to fail to understand the politics of culture and the continuing commitment to its “false” and “absurd” convictions (Gellner 1995). Identity politics mean that deliverances of the Enlightenment operate as global phenomena, where and when they do, through the market and through the industrial-military complex more than through an idealistic (or existentially “free”) appreciation, an open or progressive acceptance of change to traditional matrices of social structuration and belief.

On one view, it will be ever thus. Cultural belonging is an intrinsically contrastive, agonistic, political phenomenon, as James Boon (1982:231) describes it: one intends not a progressive going beyond so much as a “playing the vis-à-vis.” However fuzzy and contingent, heterogeneous, incoherent, formalistic, and superficial may be the actual contents of cultural tradition, “cultures” can yet be recognized as essentially “beside themselves” (Boon 1982:230); constituted contrastively, both as wholes and as parts, they incline toward otherness in a dialectical fashion. The cultural ever “emerges as a contrastive replaceable for its complement”: cultural traditions can be expected to exaggerate and invent otherness, indeed, so as to continue to be themselves (Boon 1982:213). Culture embodies an implicit negativity.

If this is the nature of cultural politics and a global world is also a world of growing political “compression” (Paine 1992)—of cultural boundaries piling up against one another in incremental fashion—then is it still viable to hope for opinion to grade into knowledge and for “culture” to give way to “civilization”? Is toleration of difference, as against its magnanimous overcoming, the furthest moral hope? It is not

hard to find commentary that would suggest that liberalism is *passé*; hopes that humanity might unite in a universal civilization grounded in notions of human and individual sameness are eclipsed by a politics of histories and communities where members assert themselves as peoples and not as essential rights-bearing persons. A political context dominated by renascent particularisms, militant religions, and resurgent ethnicities, it is said, spells the collapse of any Enlightenment project on a world-historical scale (Gray 1992).

The Gradation of Layered Worlds

The Holiday was one of three novels written by the English poet Stevie Smith. Set in 1949, it centrally concerns Celia, living in a London suburb with an aunt and working as a civil servant at a government ministry. Celia describes the setting of her life as “postwar”: an abiding sense of time that is neither war nor peace: a place where people work long hours, do nothing compared with the victory others have secured, and feel guilty and exasperated. Celia is “caught in the bewilderment of a postwar consequence, the trivial, the boring, the necessary, the inescapable; what is one’s duty” (Smith 2007:184).

Celia ponders family life, personal loves, suffering and death, but her (and Smith’s) meditations also concern global politics, in particular the relation between England and its erstwhile empire. “A great Power in the full flush of the greatest victory that men have won”—for every blow Germany inflicted on Jewry and its other victims, England gave them death “to three times three”—now finds itself exhausted (Smith 2007:89, 129). The postwar gives a sense of being trapped in a web of sophistry. England (the West) feels weak and corrupt, no longer single-minded and simple, noble, or admirable.

Celia is torn. On the one hand, she knows herself to be a middle-class English girl, proud and complacent about a dear country: “I have no integrity, no honesty, no generous idea of a better way of life than that which gives cream to England” (Smith 2007:92). This Celia feels bitter about the pressure on England to quit India, Palestine, Malaya, the Antarctic, and South Africa just because the rest of the world wants a change, pointing a none-too-clean forefinger at a path to sainthood it expects England (alone) to follow.

A cousin of Celia’s, in uniform in Palestine, was once beaten by “Jewish Zionist terrorists”: they wanted this British officer, with long centuries of government behind him and enjoying the top prestige, to understand the perspective of the lowest and the landless. But Celia’s cousin had refused them the magnanimous gesture, wrapping himself up instead in his anger, pomposity, and sense of indignation.

But Celia knows, too, that her cousin’s response is not sufficient. A vision of a new world is called for, which the English *will* morally deliver: they will leave Palestine and leave India, out of choice and for the sake of conscience. And Celia’s hope is that the Indians and the Zionists, in *their* anger and

their pride, will then “see” the English—understand the other perspective—in ways her cousin the army officer would not.

Celia’s hope for English rectitude on the world stage is drawn from a key component of Englishness: its law. Here is something that she considers to be “above the world”: “not to be bought, it is strong, flexible and impartial” (Smith 2007: 126). This institutional hope is consolidated by a more personal knowledge: the example of her Indian friend in London, Raji. What is wonderful to Celia about Raji is his generosity and his freedom. His upbringing was oppressive; he was interned in an English prison camp in India and also beaten by the Indian police as an agitator. Notwithstanding, he deploys his intelligence and his warmheartedness to see people for what they are: seeing beyond the English creation of a vassal state; beyond the Hindu widow burning, child rape, and caste; beyond the cruelty and avarice of Muslim brokers. Raji exists as “an honest person upon a centre fixed” (Smith 2007:13).

Smith’s language is no more politically correct toward otherness, always, than is Mill’s (“backward, barbarian states of society”) or Gellner’s (“absurd to pretend all meaning-systems are equal”). My interest is in interrogating whether it might be said to be *liberal* with cultural difference. (*The Holiday* appears as an imprint in the Virago series “Modern Classics”: the reader is invited to find in the text a classic “human” voice with which to engage.)

I am struck by several resonances with C. P. Snow’s key terms: “honest,” “generous,” and, in particular, “free.” Raji is heroic in his freedom, in looking out on the world from an authentic center in the self with a capacity to be honest regarding what he sees, and generous in his practices. Resonant also with Mill is the value of an impartial law that is above the sway of opinion, of the merely local and customary, and that is flexible enough to treat the individual case universally. This is worth “speaking up for” (Smith 2007:141) and “standing up for” (Mill 1963:217). Celia lives at a particular time and place and possesses particular perspectives on the world. And yet she, as a character, and Stevie Smith, as her creator, would claim an existence beyond the limits of such particularities. One *does* get beyond “English” and “Indian,” “post-war” and “Palestine,” and “Zionist terrorist” to a knowledge of what is “above the world” of narrow identity and difference.

A further allusion concerns the layering of human life. Celia’s middle-class English opinions—and those of the Indian Hindus and Muslims she hears about from Raji and those of the Zionists she learns of from her cousin—these are kinds of subjectivity or partiality that exist *beneath* her recognition of the need for a new world to be reached through a more objective honesty and magnanimity, also beneath her appreciation of a rule of law that might be lodged above the mundane world. From opinion to knowledge, from particular to general, and from *polis* to *cosmos* can be conceived of here, I would say, as kinds of movement between *layers* of the human condition existing simultaneously as well as over time. It was this kind of vision that Karl Popper (1978) promoted

in his depiction of an open liberal society. He posited “three worlds” of contemporaneous human habitation: “World 1” being that of the physical object, “World 2” that of subjective experience, and “World 3” of objective knowledge. Albeit that these interpenetrated contemporaneously, they also represented evolutionary stages in a human cosmos.

To elaborate in brief, the scientific tradition is distinguished from the prescientific tradition and the nonscientific, Popper (1963:50) asserts, in being internally layered. Like these latter, science is a tradition that is passed on; and also like the latter, scientific theory is interested, possessing a partiality that can but influence the observations and the practices conducted in its name (because observations are always theory impregnated). However, unlike prescience and nonscience, scientific tradition is founded on critique. Theory and practice are passed on not as dogma but with the challenge continually present to debate them and improve on them. Science ascends to objectivity, then—even while beginning in subjectivity—by way of open discussion, free criticism, and unlimited competition (Popper 1997:69). Science accedes to better knowledge than nonscience because of its practice of rational criticism (dogmatism and orthodoxy ever represent the death of knowledge and its development). The layering within science is an echo of the layering between science and nonscience.

One nevertheless admits, Popper continues, that there exists no general criterion of scientific truth that can save us from error. We can continue to err in our judgements and miss the truth because we are fallible human beings; science is not infallible or finally authoritative because it is a human methodology. But this is not to say that the choice between competing theories is arbitrary; we do learn and we can get nearer to the truth. The quest for certainty may be a mistaken one but not the quest for truthfulness. Again, the secret lies in critique: if we endeavor continually to criticize our theories, we can learn that we have been mistaken—and so get nearer to the truth. We may call this a theory of fallibilistic absolutism (Popper 1980:374–378): one may not know with certainty what is true, but one knows what is not true. Human beings can recognize the absoluteness of their errors.

One also recognizes the hopelessness of seeking precision in words or concepts. It is impossible to speak in a way that renders it impossible for one to be misunderstood. Nevertheless, it is feasible to expect to deploy symbols in a *sufficiently precise* way for the problem context in which they are intended. It is similarly possible to see beyond symbolic languages to the real things and the real problems that they would describe and that they would treat. We can escape both verbalistic involution and a nihilistic self-referentialism (Popper 1999:20–30). The secret, again, is openness and criticism. Admit every source of knowledge—imagination, tradition, reason, observation—in every possible symbolic format but grant none final authority as a guarantee or criterion of truth exempt from practical critique.

And so Popper comes to his positing of a potential tripartite layering of worlds of human habitation. In World 1, human

beings exist amid physical things, as natural organisms. In World 2, human existence is characterized by subjective, imaginary, phenomenal, somatic, mythopoetic experience and by customary behavior. In World 3, human existence benefits from critical externalizations of mind, from the production of objective knowledge lodged in a variety of symbolizations: languages, social institutions, works of art, pieces of technology, scientific treatises, novels. The physical, the experiential, the critical; there is recursive interaction between these three layers of human existence. But key to my purpose here is Popper's (1997:150) notion that objective scientific knowledge be understood as ideal-typically an "exosomatic artefact" that occupies World 3, as a culmination of movement from Worlds 1 and 2. Knowledge is of a real world, subjectively construed (opined), which is finally *objectified through the practices of open debate, practical experimentation, and reasoned critique*. Knowledge exists beyond the individual body, also beyond the body of community tradition and belief; it is stored in libraries and in technologies, which are distinct from knowing subjects. The evolution from things to opinions to knowledge is a gradation possibly above the world of the individual life project and lifetime, also of the communitarian.

As Popper's liberal vision of knowledge production becomes impersonal and utilitarian, there is a temptation to lose trust: abstraction can tend toward authoritarianism, and openness can appear as an impatience with or disrespect for proximate constraints (cf. Rapport 2005). But I recall how Mill also lodged his concern with freedom of individual opinion finally in the whole human species moving forward in truth, while Popper (1997:80) insists that it is in increasing individual freedom and relieving personal suffering that the worth of human science and endeavor is ultimately lodged. Popper, like Mill, refuses to eschew the link between particular and general: it is through human advancement that individual security is vouchsafed. It is not personalism that one decries but relativism: all humanity has the capacity and the right to operate in, and to benefit from, all three worlds. This is our dignity. One does not hold fundamentalistically to a particular tradition however much one enjoys the experience of community belonging; rather, one anticipates acceding to knowledge beyond opinion, critiquing any essentialist claims to intraspecies difference. With "effort" and "good will," Popper concludes (1997:34), far-reaching understanding of the world and of one another, even if not perfect, is achievable.

Envoi: Issues of Overcoming Difference

Anthropology, in Kant's (1996 [1798]) formulation, was to be at once an empirical, pragmatic, and ethical enquiry ultimately responsible for delivering a cosmopolitan improvement in knowledge and justice. My efforts in this article might be said scarcely to have departed from an idealist domain of novel, philosophical treatise, and social-cum-moral commentary; the intent, however, remains practical. How can one formulate an anthropological approach to difference that

reaches beyond the identification of customary opinion and communitarian exclusivity and their political posturing to secure true knowledge and its free individual enjoyment on a global scale? And my focus remains empirical: the daily context in which human individual capacities for freely authoring identities—including those existentialist proclivities for reevaluation, transcendence, irony, voluntarism, and becoming—are threatened by culturalist discourses championing essentialist classifications and communitarian closure. A cosmopolitan perspective on this causes me to cherish progress in the human accumulation of objective knowledge and progress in the freedoms universally guaranteed *Anyone* for fulfilling individual worldviews and life projects.

I end by addressing speculatively three further questions to which these considerations lead me. First, *regarding what kind of datum might opinion best be expected to consolidate into knowledge?* It is perhaps the case that "opinion" should itself be regarded as internally differentiated or layered, that some kinds of opinion are more easily converted into fact than others, and that one works one's way across the spectrum from easy to difficult. "The earth is flat," "The earth is 4004 years old," "The Holocaust did not occur," "There is a global Zionist conspiracy," "AIDS is a divine punishment," "Life begins at conception," "Women are intrinsically more modest than men," "Sadomasochism should be countenanced between consenting adults," "Stanley Spencer is the greatest British twentieth-century painter," "*The Holiday* is a classic of modern literature," "Coca-Cola tastes better than Pepsi." It might be argued that the above statements traverse a spectrum from the more easily refuted (as false knowledge) to the less easily, culminating in kinds of opinion that might ever remain matters of taste. While much may reside in gray areas—to which communitarian loyalties may continue to attach themselves—it is nevertheless significant to recognize rational procedures as existing above the cultural sway.

Second, *in what kind of social situation might opinion best be expected to consolidate into knowledge?* The politicization of culture renders opinion a matter of honor and pride, while stereotypes have long proved themselves resistant to being overturned by fact (Rapport 1995). There is resistance to knowledge that is introduced by opponents and strangers and a seeming preference (as Gellner observed) for native error; there is resistance to unilateral or charitable acts of knowledge provision and a preference for the "honor" of error one has oneself determined or inherited. One might conclude that to be open to change calls for a level of social affluence and confidence. But then again, there is deemed to be nausea and an anxiety associated with "postmodern excess" that renders us unconfident as a global condition (Bauman 1998:72–75). Our general situation is one where cultural fundamentalism promises an escape from individual responsibility via an embracing of personal insufficiency vis-à-vis the collective. The issue is to find nontotalitarian responses to the "risks" of personal freedom.

Third, *for what kind of temperament might opinion best be*

expected to consolidate into knowledge? Openness and confidence as social ethos must also find a counterpart in individual attitude and temperament. There must be a willingness to learn and improve for opinion to grade into knowledge. One feels confident, perhaps, that one may change and still remain oneself. In describing knowledge as “exosomatic” and social, Popper seemed to suggest that individuals change their opinions less than societies do; to see opinion grade into knowledge calls for a historical perspective. And yet, the dignity I would accord to *Anyone*, the liberal hope to be cherished for the life of any human individual, presumes a capacity for truth and a desire to fit oneself with the best knowledge available that is universal. To exchange opinion for knowledge is necessary for us to make the best of ourselves and our fellows in the present.

Comments

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The scope of the research questions posed by scholars, anthropologists included, has probably never been as open or innovative as the ideal of “pure” and unfettered academic inquiry might suggest. The chances that our inquiries would be shaped, more or less, by the passing seductions of academic fashions or the pressures of dominant disciplinary and institutional orthodoxies have always been high. But at a time in which many institutions of higher education and research are experiencing increasing corporatization, the pressure to cede the span of research questions to “strategic” initiatives, branding exercises, government-set priorities, and so on is all the more inexorable. Hence, one cannot but admire Rapport’s willingness to court questions and adopt stances that have become controversial in anthropology (and related disciplines and policy positions). That many of these questions are rooted in a venerable Enlightenment tradition makes Rapport’s sense that using certain kinds of phrases (“truth,” “the nature of the human,” “individuality,” “individual and human improvement”) in an anthropological essay has become very difficult, ironic rather than irrelevant. In an effort to establish credentials for innovation, anthropologists have a tendency to eat their elders. Hence, simply positing that certain intellectuals and ideas of the past might still be inspiring for the present can become controversial. In doing so, we may burnish our claims for novelty, but we also risk undercutting the richness of the disciplinary traditions on which we can draw.

But if we regard anthropology first and foremost as a mode of inquiry, or, as Rapport would have it, a “human science,”

then surely its progress must be judged in terms of the effectiveness of the research questions that anthropologists pose. Is the search for a moral position on the relationship between anthropology, truth, and just global society the best way to open up new avenues for empirical anthropological inquiry?

In 1995, in an earlier debate published by *Current Anthropology*, Roy D’Andrade (1995) responded to a series of attacks in anthropology on objectivity, science, the notion of truth, generalizations, ethnography, and anthropology by arguing that the effort of these internal critiques was to propose the transformation of anthropology from “a discipline based upon an *objective* model of the world to a discipline based upon a *moral* model of the world” (399, emphasis in the original). “Objectivity” D’Andrade (1995) defined as referring to the “degree to which an account gives information about the object being described” (399–400). To the extent that the account describes a thing rather than oneself, it stands a reasonable chance of being replicable or refutable. In contrast, a moral model seeks to ascribe judgments about good and bad or assign blame and praise. D’Andrade (1995) made it clear that he was not arguing that anthropologists should have no moral models; rather, he was arguing that they should keep their moral passions or politics separate from how they “do their science” (402). Moral models may be useful for arguing about what use is made of our findings, but they are “counterproductive for discovering how the world works” (D’Andrade 1995).

I would add that they are also counterproductive because they are not very effective at opening up fields of inquiry. We can judge the analytical effectiveness of theoretical paradigms in terms of their capacity for generating the kinds of questions that open up new avenues for inquiry. To the extent that by their very nature, moral models seek to provide answers or positions on how the world *should* work, they are not very good for generating questions about how it *does* work. Rapport argues that his intent remains practical and empirical. But it also blends objective and moral models. Rapport thus seeks progress in the accumulation of knowledge but also “progress in the freedoms universally guaranteed *Anyone* for fulfilling individual worldviews and life projects.” But this, it would appear, seeks to morally resolve the question of individuality rather than to pose it in ways we might fruitfully investigate. As such, it may be an important and emotive subject for moral debate, but it seems more likely to close off rather than open up avenues for empirical investigation.

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In this stimulating text I find three important and interrelated issues that are interesting in view of the long-existing disputes

in anthropology. In a sense, it is a continuation and revitalization of the “old” topics broadly related to the issue of particularism versus universalism.

1. *Rationalism.* Among other things, Nigel Rapport says that rational cognition is probably a major driving force behind neohumanism, in which *Anyone* can fulfill his or her individuality in a cosmopolitan world and in a liberal fashion. The controversy between rationalism and relativism kept busy many in anthropology and philosophy some decades ago (Peter Winch, Steven Lukes, Martin Hollis, Ian Jarvie, Joseph Agassi, John Beattie, Mary Hesse, Dan Sperber, etc.). In a spirit of zero tolerance in the intellectual domain, Rapport urges us to turn opinion into knowledge not by setting “objective standards” but by applying liberal principles facilitating constant advancement of learning, which enables the liberation of individuals from “habit and custom” and the attainment of “magnanimity,” which is something more than the toleration of otherness. I cannot agree more. It should be added that although such an attitude can be derived from John S. Mill and later from C. P. Snow, Karl Popper, and Ernest Gellner, it has had many other advocates, such as Allan Hanson, Ian Hacking, Robin Horton, Jon Elster, or Phillippe Mongin, who by reaching to intellectual traditions other than liberal developed a more benign as well as less Western/science-centric understanding of “rationality,” meaning pursuing “truth” in the domain of cognition and making rational choices in everyday life. I dared to call it “rationality relativized,” that is, the consistency of actions with regard to shared and available convictions (Buchowski 1997:40). Assiduous in our cosmopolitan striving for the best knowledge but never assuming its objectivity, we make the best choices from existing options that are unavoidably moral and utterly humanistic. Richard Rorty (1991:198–199) associates this attitude with “modern-Western-liberals.” Rapport need not convince those convinced about the rational and moral choices humans have to make in the name of goodness and “truth.” Moreover, it could be done without recourse to an idealistic and mysterious human nature and, at the same time, without the ignorance of mundane pragmatics, that is, culture and power relations.

2. *Culture.* Elaborated by British gentlemen, individualism and liberalism also assist a move from a group-bound culture to a universal civilization in which individuals can fulfill their aspirations and desires. This is also a point prompting a critique of multiculturalism as a philosophy and social policy. Rapport mentions Uni Wikan’s writings supporting this stance; however, he neglects to acknowledge many other anthropologists who, in this respect and for various reasons, questioned the concept long before (e.g., Tim Ingold, Ulf Hannerz, James Clifford) or even wrote “against culture” (Abu-Lughod 1991:137–138). Most of these authors perceive “culture” as an abused, reified, and essentialized notion and tend to see it in Foucauldian terms of discursive practices, not necessarily bounded to any “sociocultural unit.” Phe-

nomena conceptualized in such “classical” anthropological “culturalist” terms as hybridization, transnationalism, and globalization also provoke an intellectual response in the form of Rapport’s cosmopolitanism, which becomes a part as well as an epitome of these developments. The uniqueness of the latter rests in the fact that it grounds itself in philosophic liberal ideals such as human nature and individual freedom and not in mundane affairs, social relations, and hierarchies.

3. *Power.* Rapport’s stand is permeated by humanist ideals that anthropologists have shared anyhow. Already evolutionists promoted the psychic unity and rationality of all humans. Moreover, even as experts in particular “cultures” and promoters of relativism, they have struggled for the equality of humans and for universal virtues. Relativism does not imply cognitive tolerance, but in the form presented above it assumes a constant rational striving for better forms of knowledge and the rejection of irrational beliefs. The recognition of different ways of life (cultures) and the promotion of the plurality of lifestyles (multiculturalism) does not exclude what Terrence Turner (1993) calls “critical multiculturalism.” The idea of “social tolerance always” is Turner’s perspective explicitly tied with individuals’ right to choose a lifestyle and a group as well as to change it at will. The value added in this “traditional” anthropological way of study is that it does not close its eyes to power relations contained in social life. Rapport’s project seems to be detached from issues of power relations between individuals and groups (also those implicating hierarchies of knowledge) and is limited to the domain of philosophical rationale of some aspects of anthropological practice.

Nigel Rapport has reminded us about the basics of anthropological craft that we often forget in the hectic academic life and business. I appreciate it very much. I just wanted to emphasize that similar ideas can be found other than in “liberal cosmopolitan” intellectual traditions of the discipline, that the black-and-white picture of universalism contrasted with particularism cannot be easily drawn, and that drawing it may actually simplify the picture.

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The cosmopolitan, liberal anthropology that Rapport proposes has its heroes and villains. Some forms of difference—those seemingly produced by knee-jerk assertions of cultural identity—are presented as productive of a sterile particularism. But a questing, questioning marketplace of ideas is regarded as more generative, capable of progress and even unity of opinion. So here we see a sociocultural anthropologist ac-

tually searching for freedom from the parochialisms of cultural entanglement and advocating for the emergence of an “emancipated subject” (Keane 2007:5)—indeed, a subject that can be called *Anyone*.

Rapport’s voicing of his argument is intriguing and provocative. In his text, Mill and Snow speak to the assembled students at St. Andrews but also to each other, to Rapport, to us, as if their arguments were ultimately as timeless as the liberated subjectivity explored in the paper. Mind you, I do note that while the message of these secular sermons is meant to lead us toward open discussion, their medium—in this context—is more that of the authoritative monologue, delivered in decidedly venerable surroundings, even if it also meant to speak truth (or at least opinion) to university authorities.

Whether timeless or untimely, Rapport’s essay reminds us eloquently and bravely of some important lessons. From him, I hear that anthropology must think more subtly about a critique of the uses of culture and in the process take on a public, expansive perspective that it has often lacked or rejected in Western intellectual and political circles. In this sense, the ability of both Mill and Snow to bridge professional worlds is as eloquent as their words. And I agree that our arguments can surely gain power through a search for and assertion of human commonalities that extend beyond physical realms so that we do not constantly fall back on delivering pious reminders (usually from the margins) to other disciplines of the value of the particular and the idiosyncratic. Inherent in these tasks is a question also posed by Kant (and largely absent in Durkheim’s emphasis on the coercive moral power of the collective [e.g., Laidlaw 2002:312]) relating to what the human as “free” actor might be able to achieve and how we can improve our self-knowledge both as individuals and as a species (Hart 2010:441).

But I am still left with many questions. Is Rapport’s indictment ultimately aimed at renascent particularisms and ethnicities, at the anthropology that has become embroiled in charting their asserted differences, or at both? More broadly, should his proposal not contain some diagnosis of why, in his terms, such sterile articulations of difference are currently flourishing, or are we to ignore the social and political catalysts for the efflorescence of obstinate expressions of parochial rather than cosmopolitan culture? For his exemplars, Rapport turns to both fiction and natural science (as did both Mill and Snow), but I wonder how well a Popperian model of the search for truth can serve us as we attempt to transcend communitarian closures. How does the effortful rigor of scientific method provide a plausible paradigm for the open exchange of ideas that is to be achieved at universal, global levels? How will the evidence permitting *Anyones* to create and test knowledge be distributed, and how are we to decide when truth, however provisional, has been attained? These are questions less about (the inevitability of) politics in human affairs and more about the role of institutions in the framing and authorizing of voices. We should after all

remember that Mill—himself the prodigious embodiment of extraordinary educational efforts on behalf of his father—championed liberty alongside legislation that would grant enhanced voting power to the well educated, including no doubt the university students he was addressing at St. Andrews. Most of us would agree that universities should not, alas, be taken as ideal embodiments of the universal. I also worry about the assumptions inherent in Gellner’s dictum: “Social tolerance always; intellectual tolerance never.” This position, powerful as it is in its defense of rationality, also assumes the presence of interlocutors who are engaged as equals in a global field of epistemological competition that can somehow take place emancipated from the shackles of culture (Coleman 2008:44). Finally, and perhaps displaying my own intellectual insularities, I would like to know more about how Rapport’s proposals can make me write a different kind of ethnography—a discourse that looks both to the particular and to an anthropological vision of the universal. But I make these remarks while confident that Rapport’s “meditation” on free discourse is meant to produce just that: a dialogue where observations on the power and parochialisms of “culture” should mark the beginning, not the end, of the questions that we ask.

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I am grateful for being given the opportunity to comment on a piece by Nigel Rapport, whose graceful and finely argued texts are always a pleasure to read. Rapport’s philosophically minded voice is an unusual one in anthropology and has enlarged the compass of our discipline’s theoretical possibilities.

In this piece Rapport offers us an uncompromising call for a liberal, magnanimous anthropology. He follows C. P. Snow’s approach on magnanimity, where the term is used to describe the human capacities for mutually enhancing our self- and others’ existential freedom in our search for truth. Such capacity is a “practical virtue” that adds up to the well-being of our “species whole.” It is a public good that we do to each other, and it is sourced in the individual.

The individual foundation of the politics of magnanimity finds in John Stuart Mill an illustrious antecedent. Mill’s liberalism, Rapport observes, describes a template for a Society of Anyone where the vision for a shared search for truth could elevate the species and perfect the organization of society. Now this requires of course adherence to a number of truth conditions and truth steps: we must first agree on our political epistemology. To this effect Rapport finds guidance and advice in Karl Popper’s program for an open science.

Mill's and Popper's programs are both inspired by a classical ploy of the liberal-contractarian tradition: the state of nature account (SoNa). An original or inaugural or "ethological" society (Mill's never accomplished project; see Collini 1991:149) is defined that allows for the identification of a number of functional terms for social life. Thus it is that Hobbes identified the contractarian requisites of sovereignty, that Hume derived the "artificial virtue" of justice, or that John Rawls, through the use of his famous "veil of ignorance," identified a core set of "primary goods" underlying any system of equal basic liberties.

SoNa has also been offered to help delineate the formal traits of notions such as truth or knowledge. Bernard Williams's (2002:44) elegant investigation into the problem of truthfulness, for example, describes a SoNa to help him identify the "basic virtues of truth": accuracy and sincerity. Likewise, Edward Craig (1990) has employed a SoNa to identify the functional role that "knowledge" plays in liberal society, such that *asking questions about knowledge* suddenly suggests itself as a plausible project. Williams's and Craig's analyses both point at the difficulties that putting "truth" and "knowledge" to work in a political epistemology are likely to yield.

SoNas are of course minimalist models of functional social life. They help represent *as functional* aspects of social and individual life not previously seen in those terms. But as Williams (2002) notes, "We can give an account of truthfulness and its value, I believe, in the particular philosophical mode of a fictional genealogy, but . . . such an account is essentially incomplete. . . . Culture and history *fill in* the abstract, fictional account" (39).

I have dwelled on the role that SoNas perform in the tradition of liberal philosophy because it is precisely this type of account that is not made explicit in Rapport's piece. Instead Rapport offers us what we might dub a clever inversion of the contractarian program: rather than departing from a (minimalist) position of ignorance, he departs instead from the vanishing point of magnanimous enlightenment. Not what we know today, but the culmination of truth (about human nature and human justice) that we must legitimately aspire for: "a global knowledge of individuality to which humanity might aspire."

I admit I feel a little uneasy with this move, although I concede it is a handy way of disposing of the perennial Is-Ought problem in normative political theory. For although a magnanimous philosophy is no doubt a very commendable way of inflating the moral powers of the individual, I cannot see how it can, of its own accord, help us delineate a theory of political ethics. In the absence of a SoNa, no matter how minimalist or skeletal, the magnanimous individual remains, at heart, just that: an outline of a "sufficiently capacious" (Mill) but ultimately vacuous individual. It is vacuous because it has no world wherein to engage in the production of truth and knowledge. Such an individual can have no knowledge

of truth, because he or she would not know *whom to know it for*.

I have resorted to the notion of SoNa because it is the standard formula of sociological supervenience in liberal philosophy. I have other reservations about Rapport's piece, about his caricature of culturalist theory, or his rather conventional (Popperian) sociology of science, but I have opted instead to try to take his argument seriously in his own terms. Let me conclude, however, on a point about the place of SoNa in philosophical argument that, I think, brings to the fore the radical importance of ethnographic description. SoNas aim to understand how cooperation functions and what this functioning brings forth. But they always, *always* take as their point of departure a group of human beings who cooperate *but are not kin*. Kinship is expressly disallowed in the theories of politics and knowledge that develop thereof. Now how magnanimous is that?

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Rapport's offering is timely for those of us who confidently operate within the comfortable parameters of what he terms "cultural fundamentalism." Rapport has made a habit of unsettling anthropology's comforts by proposing that we at least consider our own dearly held assumptions. This, to my mind, is always timely; we ought always be loathe to rest on our laurels—and we generally are loathe to do so except, says Rapport, when it comes to culture.

As Rapport himself points out, this is not likely to go down well, given the "fashion" of culturalist discourses he sees dominating our discipline. In this sense, Rapport takes untimely issue with three claims he sees as characteristic of cultural fundamentalism: (1) "that cultural belonging is foundational of human identity," (2) "that cultural difference is foundational of other differences," and (3) "that all knowledge is culturally founded." Pretty hard stuff to swallow, perhaps, those of us who teach first-year anthropology might think, whether it is because we have not looked at our wise words (to bright-eyed students looking for something solid to hang onto in a slippery disciplinary terrain) as a kind of discourse or because we bristle with the very idea that such suggestions could be made. It was not so very long ago that other sorts of determinist explanations, such as Harris's cultural materialism, were summarily rejected by a discipline increasingly suspicious of the same accusation Rapport levels at cultural determinism—that it is routinely and perhaps even unreflexively drawn on "not as an idiom or vehicle for intersubjective life, but [rather] its foundation [and] or final cause" (Jackson

2002:125). One can track Rapport's alternatives—indeed, he is not so much interested in establishing that cultural determinism is our primary recourse as he is in looking at its consequences and to the opportunities that liberalism might offer us. Here, the case is as clear as Rapport could put it. So I will not deal here with the line of argument but rather its foundation—the accusation that anthropology slavishly refers to culture as its be all and end all with some pretty hefty consequences that go to the heart of how we could relate to one another. One question here concerns the faith anthropology has in such a course of “cultural determinism”; has anthropology arrogated itself to a position where such a platform should be accepted? This is the sense in which Rapport's insights are timely and untimely.

Perhaps we should turn to other areas to examine the claim before Rapport's claims are put down to yet another part of his case for the individual—that would be easy enough to do given that we are familiar with his arguments and their counters. But if we value the practice of examining our own disciplinary bases, we should consider Rapport's claims seriously.

Consider the basis of Rapport's claims, for instance, in mathematical context. In 1931, Gödel developed his incompleteness theorem, which, in essence, claimed that some mathematical systems, including arithmetic, could not be proved true by recourse to their own bases; arithmetic cannot be proved true using arithmetic. This is because arithmetic is based on axioms and assumptions that cannot be, essentially, proved using arithmetic as an explanans (see Gödel 1931). Gödel thusly dealt an almighty blow to the dearly held dream of making a mathematical foundation on which human reality could be explained. The reaction was one of pessimism, even gloom, even now. Gregory Chatlin, a mathematician currently in the employ of IBM (at Watson Research Centre) recently spoke with *New Scientist* magazine about his initial pessimism regarding incompleteness (see Brooks 2011:37). He at first felt that it presented walls and limits and shook the foundations of a paradigm that he would rather have comfortably operated within. Now, he holds that incompleteness theorem offers new opportunity to come to know, as new ways must be found, new paths followed. Is this not what Rapport wants us to consider? Is he not urging us, no matter what one thinks of his track record insofar as the individual is concerned, to think about incompleteness and the benefits of discomfort? About the notion that, in English, we are able to say “this sentence is false” without abandoning language? To be able to pursue mathematical explanations without the comfort of already knowing? To conduct anthropological work without the cultural comfort and its consequences? Rapport offers us a sophisticated liberalist argument for so doing, and, one may read that as one sees fit, this should at least be read with an eye to what Rapport sees as the consequences for persons and for the world and for the discipline if we remain wedded to cultural determinism. But the guts of this piece go to comfort.

If it is false arithmetic, it might just be false anthropology, too.

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In this contribution, Nigel Rapport reflects on an “anthropological approach to difference that reaches beyond the identification of customary opinion and communitarian exclusivity . . . to secure true knowledge and its free individual enjoyment on a global scale.” Rapport's argument is embedded within a liberal concept of “enlightened progress,” that is, the production of truth as lived and individually discussed and the rejection of cultural reification and essentialism. From among the many ideas of this thought-provoking work, I shall discuss three aspects: (a) the grading of “culture” into “civilization,” (b) the “being true to oneself” as condition for the magnanimous overcoming of difference, and (c) the notion of universal civilization in the context of objective human knowledge.

Rapport argues that culture restricts any (free) knowledge production, cultural fundamentalism being but an extreme form of this fact. In doing so, the often articulated opposition between cultural essentialism out there in society and the processual understanding of culture in academia is not an issue. The author replaces it by a transition of culture into civilization, more precisely in combining the liberal choice of individual life worlds and the universal progress of objective knowledge. But we may wonder, what do people actually really do within everyday life? Is the reference to cultural belonging, in whichever form, an absolute one? According to Baumann (1999), the same social actors who argue for the essentialist notion of culture apply in their everyday activities the processual understanding of culture, combining various elements of the cultural flows occurring today. Baumann considers this difference between words (essentialist culture) and activities (processual culture) not as opposition but as complementary, and he speaks of the “double discursive competence” of social actors. This leads me to the opposition between “universal civilization” and the “politics of histories and communities.” Can we, on the basis of a specific European intellectual tradition (Enlightenment) and after centuries of defining societies from the tradition of the colonial gaze, argue against politics of self-determination, which emphasize own trajectories within the cosmopolitan project of entangled modernities (Randeria 1999) we are living in?

A central aspect of Rapport's argument is the notion of “being true to oneself,” the Cartesian *cogito*, a technique of introspection that could allow one to overcome the simple toleration of difference. The Indian Raji of Smith's novel obviously represents such an ideal type with his liberalism, free-

dom, and magnanimity in the awareness of others. I would, however, understand Raji's personality less from the viewpoint of an "authentic center in the self." Rather, I would like to emphasize his "being in the world," that is, Raji whose self is a result of the social relations he has so far experienced, although most were oppressive. Is not the experience of social relationality constitutive for the experience of an other-awareness beyond the toleration of difference? Instead of relying on the Cartesian *cogito* in the context of present modernity, I would suggest to shift toward the centrality of a relational reflexivity, one that is embedded in networks and alliances regarding flows of information and knowledge and characterized by the access to or the exclusion from them (see Lash 2003).

Finally, I feel uncomfortable with the notion of a universal civilization in connection with the right of all social actors "to fit oneself with the best knowledge available that is universal." I wonder, after terrible threats to our cosmopolitan condition (e.g., think of Chernobyl and recently of Fukushima and of the effects of climate change, etc.), how and from whom these qualities of human knowledge may be defined and globally circulated, considering that present *Realpolitiken* are channeling and defining knowledge production and dissemination. I also question in this context the opposition between universalism and the "traditionalist orientation": we may argue on the one hand that all citizens of the world have a right to freely dispose of any tradition so far developed. Exclusion from this freedom, however, is mostly due to monopolies of institutions such as states, transnational corporations, or market interests. On the other hand, this freedom also incorporates the right of individuals and societies to insist on their particular trajectories and therefore to acknowledge their interconnected visions of and within the global world. Universalism then becomes relational and multicentered. Of course, Rapport displaces this multicentrism into the particularities of subjective worldviews and allegiances, but I feel uncomfortable about the (monocentered?) universalities of objective opportunities and truth, as this concept is embedded within a European tradition.

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Anthropology—at least social and cultural anthropology—finds its place in the academic marketplace as the study of difference. Consequently, the bulk of anthropological writing emphasizes different notions of personhood, gender, relatedness, and so on even to the point where it sometimes seems as if anthropologists are intent on denying any universality at all. When pressed, many, perhaps most, anthropologists allow that it is a question of levels and that at some deep

level there has to be a common human nature, even if we only ever encounter "encultured" humans. Despite such admissions, there are not many cultural anthropologists who see their task as specifying what that common humanity is and still fewer who do so from a humanistic (rather than natural-scientific) starting point. This makes Nigel Rapport's project all the more original and worthy of attention.

As always, Nigel Rapport's paper is densely argued on the basis of wide reading. I am impressed by his unambiguous defense of liberal values and his attempt to put his finger on the weak points in anthropological assumptions. I am impressed too by his fearless insistence on "untimely" (as he calls it) reading, bringing into anthropological discussion figures who rarely figure there (J. S. Mill, C. P. Snow, Karl Popper) and unusual material—in this case from a novel. He himself remarks that he may be viewed as "scarcely to have departed from an idealist domain of novel, philosophical treatise, and social-cum-moral commentary."

I am less convinced, however, by his argument that anthropology necessarily tends toward the position he espouses. It is true that the culturalist ways of thinking he attacks are very common outside the academy, but contrary to the charge that anthropology has merely connived in this, anthropologists have also been at the forefront in showing how these are used strategically: whatever may be claimed in the political arena and in the struggle for rights and resources, such culturalist views do not make up people's whole sense of themselves at the practical everyday level (e.g., Baumann 1996).

The epigraph Rapport attributes to my father, Ernest Gellner, sounds authentic. My father certainly favored liberal tolerance as a political and ethical position but equally believed that sloppy, self-indulgent, or intolerant thinking should be contested at every opportunity. However, as the contribution *from anthropology* he would have insisted on the necessity of understanding, studying, and thinking about the social roots of the cosmopolitan liberalism that Rapport proposes. Is it to be found only among elites (Hannerz 1992), for example, or equally among "working-class cosmopolitans" (Werbner 1999)? Does it require a separation of powers in the organization of the state, or can it flourish in other circumstances as well?

Conversely, anthropology should also study—and I would argue has studied—the conditions under which culturalist thinking emerges, takes root, and spreads (e.g., Gellner 2009; Handler 1988; Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011; Shneiderman and Turin 2006). As an anthropologist, what Rapport should be arguing for is more and more subtle *ethnographic* study of the different ways that people experience a common humanity—for example, in situations where cultural difference is highly valorized in the political domain (e.g., Quebec, India, Belgium, etc.). It would be good if his engagement with the actually existing ethnographic record was as enthusiastic as his engagement with liberal philosophers.

Given that he takes Mill as his starting point, it is hardly surprising that Rapport shares Mill's optimistic view that truth

and consensus will eventually emerge out of competing opinions and ways of life. What that truth consists of—in terms of propositions now generally agreed that were in the past contentious—he does not specify. Equality for women, perhaps?

In conclusion, therefore, it would be helpful if Rapport were to distinguish more clearly when he is arguing as a philosopher/literary critic and when he is pushing a specifically anthropological program. As far as the former is concerned, he needs to explain how, in his view, progress toward a shared truth has emerged from the clash of opinions and what that shared truth consists of. He also needs to provide further precision on the difference between natural-scientific and anthropological modes of knowledge production as well as on the different kinds of knowledge so produced. I would not previously have placed him in the positivist camp, but in what he has written here he opens himself to the charge that he sees no fundamental difference between the sciences of nature and the human sciences.

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Throughout his career, Nigel Rapport has produced a great range of work that stimulates us with its “untimely” edge, its rigor, its creativity, and its ability to provide much food for thought. I have for a long time admired and followed Rapport’s faith in a “cosmopolitan anthropology,” and its development in the paper above excites me and also challenges me. I find I can only go so far as to believe in such faith’s good intentions and intermittent applicability rather than its universality and inevitability. I become troubled by the problem of how to embed such a faith in all aspects of my own work even if it fits happily in much of it. Like Rapport, I feel uncomfortable writing the words “truth,” “the nature of the human,” “civilization,” and other vocabulary that he draws on throughout this paper unless I can add qualifications that specify the details of a particular voice or set of voices (“her truth,” “Yakha understanding of human nature”). Perhaps offering a reflexive comment that engages with questions of anthropological pedagogy and ethnographic practice will encourage Rapport to consider how to feel less “sad” or “alienated” through his noble efforts for our discipline.

I teach a very large introductory anthropology subject that aims, above all else, to excite new students by the possibility of understanding *both* that there are “others” with “different” worldviews that will challenge their own common senses about unilateral “truths” *and, at the same time* will allow them to recognize that fundamentally we are all formed of the same human clay. Diversity does not give way to sameness in such pedagogical framing; it moves next to it in its capacity to

open new minds: the one challenge assists the other realization. Interestingly, the development of a Boasian notion of “cultural relativity” and a “celebration of diversity” was an early (and highly effective) attempt to develop an equal “treatment of *Anyone* globally,” and yet now, here, “culture” is presented as equal to “custom” and an antonym to “science” and “truth”—as somehow a less than robust tool and an impediment to liberal ideals. Culture, as an ever-reconstructed signifier, is a helpful if imperfect tool that helps a teacher to open a door to a world of ideas and foster a novice’s curiosity about very different ways of knowing and living. Difference itself can be revelatory particularly for students who are perhaps too in tune with their own privileged and liberal self-powers. Variety (of expression, experience, philosophy) is the spice of anthropological life. Where, then, does a “liberal treatment of difference” fit in the curriculum, and how, when, and where can we best teach it?

I wonder too about how to apply such a philosophy on the ground with my own research. I think of key informants in my various “fields” and all the potentialities as well as limitations that they experience. Alison can act out her “becoming” an islander in the Hebrides (contesting the spoken boundaries of belonging that would exclude her), while Carol in California is “transformed” through her daily body practice in significant ways. Sarada in Nepal breaks consciously from high caste rules to pollute her body at an untouchable’s home in order to make a liberal political statement, but her “untouchable” host cannot move in the other direction. Not now. And my job as anthropologist is as much to try to understand her imprisonment, her feeling stuck, as it is to hope for her freedom.

I also want to think about “magnanimity” as a “practical virtue” (following C. P. Snow) in this work. I *can* find a perfect example of its transformative power in my study of two men on death row in California—men whose words, actions, and reflections demonstrate that they “know something about themselves and are appalled” and have to make themselves (creatively) in the world before they leave it. Yes, these men *in that context* are magnanimous *in those senses*. I would apply Snow’s formulation and Rapport’s interpretation quite happily here. But what of those who, in the face of death (e.g., as suicide bombers, perhaps) are not at all appalled with what they see of themselves (even if many others are)—who believe themselves to be “authentic selves” acting “magnanimously” within their own worlds, faiths, and families? Magnanimity is not equally understood, because its components (“being appalled,” “desiring to become better”) have been molded by the many culturally informed ideas that nurture it.

I strive to share Rapport’s faith in the future. But I also wonder, are my own liberal attractions to “virtuous pursuits” and “best” practice, in my own life and in the activities of many (but not all) of those whom I’ve worked with as “subjects,” partly emerging out of a culturally shaped capacity to see or imagine a much brighter world?

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What I did not foresee was the strong countercurrent towards liberalism which emerged in the '60s and reawakened my interest.

(Gellner, quoted in Davis 1991:65)

Offering a comment, read “an opinion,” on any complex meditation is bound to be tricky. This is especially so when the author has deconstructed the very notion of opinion itself. The bar has indeed been raised once it has been pointed out just how dangerous lazy opinions can be. Fortunately, despite many possible shortcomings, this is generally not what academics are prone to being. Slow, safe, conservative with a small *c*, sure, at least sometimes, but not particularly lethargic with ideas. Yet as we are reminded in the little manifesto booklet *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Graeber 2004), academia in its basic premises, its ethos and rationale, is an institution that has not changed much for centuries. Its purposes and functions within society are still much the same as they have been since medieval times. Nevertheless, even though historical anthropology has significant cachet—and as scholars we are constantly contextualizing our material theoretically and temporally—there is still a dearth of reflexivity when it comes to understanding not the origins of our ideas as such but certainly the symbols and ceremonies of our lifestyle or worldviews.

Edmund Leach (1984) and Alfred Gell (1999) have famously examined ivory-tower rituals and legacies. My feeling is that Nigel Rapport is doing something quite similar here, similarly grand in its intent. Obviously his piece is important because of the subject matter—the propagation of humanist principles, ideals, and historical developments—however comprehensively contested they have occasionally been (e.g., Fanon 1961). But for my purposes here, I am not especially interested in bringing out or highlighting the subtleties of such debates. Instead, I suppose my main point is that this piece is particularly evocative because of its double, maybe even its treble, reflexivity. This exists in a thread of connections about moral philosophies of difference that take us back to the formalization of ways to think about the world differently at the height of modernity in the scholastic realm—a realm that was then going through one of its few profound altercations over the past 800 years—a realization and occasional acceptance of the desire to actually strive to change the world. Rapport is well placed to chronicle this humanist history, both geographically and intellectually. Indeed, his own form of existential anthropology and liberal cosmopolitanism (or is that cosmopolitan liberalism?) seems to have grown out of these types of humanist musings put forth by many proponents of the post-Scottish enlightenment.

One is not being magnanimous in singing the praise for this article’s profound development of an argument. The text is itself full of fascinating wordplay and double entendre. As a thought piece about the anthropology of humanity and truth, it is sophisticated precisely because it does not proclaim to be about the Other or even to be about some generic form of Western thought. Ultimately it starts and ends “at home”—within our very own type of ancient social institution—with all its privileges, flaws, freedoms, and potential prickliness. And so to criticize Rapport for “naively” referring to human nature, or facts, would be to completely miss the point. As he himself admits in relation to speaking of humanism, we are bound to be uncomfortable here with such terms, concepts chosen to tap into as well as to trap our misgivings not only as “Westerners” but as “Western intellectuals.”

If I understand correctly, part of Rapport’s argument is to suggest that however banal Thatcher’s infamous message from the late 1980s was at the time, there is a certain sense in which it has latterly begun to manifest itself more evidently. There increasingly appears to be less and less of such a thing as Society. For this reason, the acceptance of the maxim for a bounty of social tolerance is also in decline. By extension, the world is becoming more capable of rationally justifying a lack of tolerance, said to be of the intellectual sort but which is really a disguised way of propagating social intolerance. Xenophobia, hatred, fear, and distrust thus become the norm with greater ease and with greater support from the intelligentsia no less.

Rapport’s vision of the magnanimous overcoming of difference is an affront to this travesty whereby a notion as absurd as the nonexistence of society could even become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Social anthropologists, even those with right-wing leanings (and we know they did and still do exist), were obviously not prepared to accept this idea of there being no society, big or small, homogenous or multicultural. And for this among other reasons, we are duty bound to heed the call of laying claim to this as well as other such discourses, untimely as they may be.

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Nigel Rapport confronts the reader with an important question, and he has the guts to take an “unfashionable” position. His article disappoints though by failing to provide a substantive anchoring of this position in the scholarship of the discipline. The tension between universalism and relativism is one of the key themes in the history of anthropology. Discussing two important liberal writers, John Stuart Mill and C. P. Snow, both attached to the University of St. Andrews and spanning a century between them, Rapport feels inspired

to take a universalist stance: “because these are objectives that I believe are there to be addressed—the truth about the individual and the human whole—and to which I would lay disciplinary claim.” He explores how universal human truth can be established so that “‘opinion’ grades into ‘knowledge,’ . . . ‘culture’ grades into ‘civilization’ and local community (*polis*) into global society (*cosmos*).” His article is a reflection on how liberalism can be translated into “a cosmopolitan anthropology.”

These are noble goals; the authors that inspire Rapport are noble thinkers reflecting on issues such as individual liberty and magnanimity. Rapport wishes to defend the possibility of a single truth for humankind as a whole and writes against what he calls “culturalism,” which is the opposite extreme on the gamut between universalism and relativism. According to Rapport, culturalism is the fashion today, and therefore he sees his own essay as “untimely.” I do not think that this characterization of contemporary anthropology is accurate. Culturalism is certainly loose on the streets, and therefore it may be a good idea, as Wikan (1999) suggests, for anthropologists to write against it, but in my assessment anthropologists themselves have generally been careful not to essentialize holistic concepts such as culture and society for several decades (Bubandt and Otto 2010). Rapport’s own depiction of the culturalist discourse includes Evans-Pritchard (1937) and a statement on human rights by the American Anthropological Association (1947). These are hardly contemporary sources, thus confirming that this is a recurrent theme replayed in a contemporary idiom.

My main point of critique is that Rapport’s article appears to lightly sidestep the overwhelming anthropological evidence for the key role that habits, customs, cultural patterns, and institutions play in human life. His essay is discursive in nature and based on reading philosophers and novelists. Ethnographic studies are hardly referred to. With the founders of liberalism Rapport appears to share a deep-seated belief that individualism without constraints will lead to the best outcome for humankind as a whole. In the economic sphere, the pitfalls of a “free market” have recently been confirmed by the global economic crisis, which forced governments worldwide to intervene and regulate. Following Mill and Popper, Rapport appears to profess a free-market model of universal truth. If everyone is allowed to express their opinion freely, opinion will grade into knowledge. The problem is that this does not happen by itself, as Mill, Popper, and also Rapport have to admit. “Certain conditions must be met for this to occur.” But this is the crux of the problem. These conditions are frequently not met, and in order to make open criticism possible—I fully agree on this as one of the cornerstones of scientific knowledge—certain forms of institutionalization have to be put in place that warrant freedom of speech and independent research (e.g., peer-reviewed academic journals).

Although I readily agree on the need to create a space for free inquiry and discussion in the pursuit of truth—which is

potentially universal—it is exactly the how of this that needs research and reflection as part of a cosmopolitan anthropology. Here Rapport’s article fails to offer substance and direction, also in its brief “envoi” on overcoming difference. In my view anthropology should continue to study how cultural differences—a central aspect of social life—frequently but not necessarily lead to social and intellectual closure and reification. Analyzing these processes of boundary drawing and naturalization may give us clues on how to overcome “the despotism of custom” (Mill). The problem with Rapport’s “solution” is its one-sidedness: it focuses on the human individual on the one hand and humankind as whole on the other. There is a whole world of phenomena in between, or rather numerous cultural “worlds” being continuously created and changed by human beings living in groups and relating to each other and their environment. Understanding how this continuous process of “worlding” (Tsing 2010) relates to claims for universal truth is certainly a central concern and project of anthropology.

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Rapport’s timely piece is beautifully written and enriched with surprising allusions—I imagine that few anthropologists will have come across Snow’s lecture to the University of St. Andrews. Rapport is, of course, quite right. If anthropology can be said to have a sole aim, it is the search after truth. Of all the methods developed within the social sciences aimed at learning about the diversity of human societies, it is still the most effective and the most accurate. Other benefits may stem—we hope that they will—from the pursuit of anthropology. However, it is only because it is better than the others that we continue to practice it. It is only because it can develop truer accounts than other disciplines that we are in a position to argue that listening to anthropologists is worthwhile. To say, shyly, that it provides a “different” perspective is to lose the battle before it is even begun. Anthropology is different because it can provide a truer account of social life than any other method. This can be the only justification for our claim for a privileged seat in the public sphere.

Rapport’s equally unusual juxtaposition of Popper and Mill is equally insightful. Popper has never quite received his due from anthropologists.¹ Perhaps this was because of Popper’s attack on socialism, which still can irritate and anger those on the left even today. Nevertheless, Popper regarded himself

1. With the notable exception perhaps of Professor Michael Banton, whose distinguished career in the academic and international public sphere—Banton became chair of the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination—was underpinned by a strong sense of Popperian philosophy.

as a humanist. It also may be noted that Popper used the word “essentialist”—indeed he appears to have coined the term—to attack positivism in exactly the same way as everyday academic anthropological discourse does in our day (Popper 1960). Indeed, just as is so frequently reiterated today, Popper’s starting point in his attack on positivism is that there is no straightforward access to the external world and no conclusive answer. From this, however, he goes on to argue that such an insight does not necessitate our ceasing in our search for why and how some explanations may be better than others. It is this second step that appears to have become atrophied within contemporary anthropological practice, perhaps under the mistaken impression that to distinguish between explanations necessitates a return to positivism.

We should applaud, then, Rapport’s fresh insistence that a liberal public sphere and a search after truth are both possible and necessary bedfellows. This, in areas of the world where university and academic freedom are under threat, such as in the United Kingdom, must remain a lodestone to be sought and defended. Such a defense may be passive in the sense that a gifted teacher can do a great deal still today to resist from within his or her university. But it may too be practical: personal action may be linked to the sort of intellectual clarity that anthropology may bring. In other words, an anthropological search after truth can combine with a sense of liberalism to facilitate a practical life that does not have to be rooted in the university. Snow’s public career is an excellent example of this, and Rapport is quite right to call attention to the anthropological nature, the rich ethnography, of Snow’s great series of novels. Looked at from this point of view, anthropology as an intellectual discipline overlaps with but is certainly not confined to academia. Rapport’s article helps us to articulate why this may be so.

What is less clear is the significance Rapport’s conclusions have for our internal argument, as it were, as to the wider place of social or cultural anthropology within anthropology as a whole. If all human cultures are united (or even if they all have the common cultural capacity to learn), then there would appear to be no reason why the biological unity of humans should not again be a central tenet of anthropological enquiry. Replacing “diversity” with “unity” is thus potentially a helpful approach to anthropology’s public engagement, but equally it could help to reunify anthropology itself. Marett, one of the last of the Victorian anthropologists in Britain, is now almost entirely unread. Yet his *Anthropology* (Marett 1912) resonates still with its trenchant universalism: “Let any and every portion of human history be studied in the light of the whole history of mankind. . . . Anthropology . . . aims at truth for truth’s sake. Knowing by parts is science, knowing the whole as a whole is philosophy. Each supports the other” (12). Perhaps removing the stress on difference would help us to heal our own internal differences as well as benefit our place in the public sphere.

Reply

I am very grateful for the quality of the questions posed. I may not do their complexity justice, and perhaps I do little more than paraphrase. But let me isolate 11 trenchant queries, further dividing these into three themes, and imagine that I respond to each commentator as a conversational protagonist.

1. Relations between Rationality, Morality, and Culture

Alberto Corsín Jiménez asks: *To give an account of truthfulness and its value, do we not need a cultural and historical context? Otherwise it is fictional—purporting an original State of Nature. Is not Anyone an ultimately vacuous figure without a preexisting world wherein to engage in the production of truth, a world that provides context for “knowledge,” a world centrally focused on kinsfolk?*

Let me answer, Alberto, by imagining in the figure of *Anyone* my daughter, Emilie, now aged 12. Albeit that Emilie’s identity has always been expressed by way of cultural symbolologies, it became clear to her parents early on that Emilie knew in her own way: what she knew, how she knew it, and why. From the outset, Emilie, I say, was her own person; in your terms, Emilie embodies an original State of Nature. I mean this physiologically as well as psychologically: according to the best knowledge available to me, I recognize Emilie’s identity as being unique (she has not been here on earth before and she will not be again). This makes her time here both special and, I would claim, precious. Emilie’s life is a thing in itself, with a value of its own, independent of the contingencies of culture and history; this “context” is irrelevant both to Emilie’s identity and to her preciousness.

So far as possible I would wish for a historical world not to intrude: for Emilie’s/*Anyone*’s life to be tied to no tradition, no collectivity, no sense of duty other than what s/he attests or invents. *Anyone* inevitably knows for him- or herself—it is intrinsic to embodiment—and I wish for *Anyone* to have the right to live that knowledge fully: to fulfil the human capacity for producing personal knowledge and truth. *Anyone*’s “vacuousness”—or “gratuitousness” (Rapport 2008)—relative to what preexists is only another way of expressing *Anyone*’s absolute integrity.

Vered Amit retorts: *Is, however, the search for a moral position on the relationship between anthropology, truth, and global society the most effective way to undertake empirical anthropological inquiry? Is not a moral modeling of the world counterproductive for discovering how it works? To morally address individuality is to close off avenues to its objective investigation.*

I find it difficult to disentangle the moral from the objective, Vered. Anthropology and other human sciences tell us more and more about the nature of individual human embodiment. I appreciate, for instance, Gerald Edelman’s (1992) work on

the biological individuality of the brain and its unique development in each body. How we come to be embodied is individual; how we occupy an environment is a matter of individual bodily homeostasis. Each of us might be conceived of as inhabiting a unique environmental dwelling constituted by a lifetime of individual engagements with the world around us, so that self and self's dwelling place are constructed in tandem (Rapport 2003:215–239). At the same time, individuality owes its unique nature to its humanity: this is its objective context. The “cosmopolitan” project of anthropology I take to be the task of knowing the dialectical relation: individuality out of humanity (Rapport 2012).

Individuality is an objective component in empirical reality. The earth's position in the solar system is another. Further anthropological investigation into “how the world works” then accommodates these truths while closing off no avenues of research. One asks: how are these truths lived, in the context of particular individual lives and particular social relations, particular historical traditions and cultural cosmologies? If I find ignorance, I feel that I also have an anthropological duty in this regard. If a public discourse of geocentrism with regard to the earth, for instance—or individualism or collective consciousness or communitarianism with regard to individuality—negatively affects the quality of life—that precious and finite singularity—of human beings, then there are moral consequences to my investigation that I must not detach. Of course, my anthropological investigation might itself deliver new objective truths—concerning, say, the properties of plants or characteristics of human creativity. But the investigation into objectivity is neither confused with a moral duty nor wholly separate from it: given the truth of human nature and of individual embodiment, what is their due? how might human-individual capabilities and liabilities be best serviced by social organization and acknowledged in cultural symbolologies?

Tamara Kohn asks: *Is not “culture” a helpful if imperfect tool, a signifier continually to be reconstrued? Does it not help the anthropological pedagogue open the doors to otherness and to the need for global equal treatment? Are not practices everywhere culturally informed—limited and capacitated—including imagining a better world?*

My fearfulness stems, Tamara, from the conviction that “culture” is the wrong unit for this, assigning difference to the wrong level and misconstruing the kinds of difference: symbolic or rhetorical as against ontological. I find “culture” being used to defend claims to what is untrue and unjust, legitimating ignorant treatment of individuals and defending intransigence. “Culture” translates into an essentialization of memberships of symbolic classes and a reification of collectives. “Culture” transforms identities and relations into supposedly uniform consensuses and matters of collective adjudication, traditions often tied to supernatural revelation that must be respected and upheld for their own sakes. For instance, Bhikhu Parekh's (1994:13) antiliberal claims are not only erroneous but pernicious: “Since human beings are culturally embedded, respect for them entails respect for their

cultures and ways of life. . . . Cultures are spiritual creations of their relevant communities.” I am fearful of lending the wrong kind of credence and legitimacy to a kind of construction of human life that is fictional, not ontological, so that culture becomes a kind of ghetto or prison: “You are this kind of human being, born in this community, this tradition, this religion.”

There is only one kind of human being. At the same time, difference is an individual property, a manifestation of the paradoxical relation that sees human unity expressed as individually embodied particularity. I would like my anthropology to teach otherness as an individual possession. This means making the world safe from culture understood as foundational and symbolic classifications understood as objective. Cultural traditions are to be appreciated aesthetically—as opinion, not knowledge—and treated as matters of taste, freely adopted or denied. To help make the world safe for *Anyone*—a world of equal treatment and of diverse practices—is to promote knowledge of who is to be equally treated and who practices, who knows, and who has rights. Even when individuals are members of groups, it is they who remain the bearers of identities: to teach respect for difference is to teach respect for identity individually chosen and embodied. Anthropology teaches that “culture” pertains to the domain or level of opinion: a lifestyle option. Culture's aesthetic expressions—personal or shared—may resonate deeply with individuals' senses of who they are. But as claims to knowledge, they are treated ironically. For not all practices are culturally informed; increasingly they can be objectively informed. Part of the work of anthropology—a vital part—is now to work out an accommodation of “culture” within “civilization” so that different cultural tastes can be practiced and so that none infringes on *Anyone's* capacity and right to (re-)formulate his or her own tastes.

Ton Otto objects: *Have not anthropologists in recent decades avoided conceptualizing culture and society as essential wholes? On the other hand, is it not naive to prescribe a free-market model of universal truth—of individuals' opinions grading into knowledge—without an appreciation of the key role that social processes of habitualization and naturalization continually play? Human beings create cultural worlds together in the contexts of customs, institutions, and hegemonies.*

I do not think that “free market” is the correct metaphor, Ton, to describe Mill's conception of individuals being at liberty to formulate, express, and inhabit their own opinions. (The metaphor leads to a confusion of political or moral liberalism with an economic “neoliberalization.”) Mill's image is more anarchic. There is no call to “enter a market” to buy or sell opinions. Rather, “This is *Anyone's* view: that is *Anyone* else's: each has a right to live by his or hers alone.”

Nor do I think it is a “hegemonic” imposition to place something at a higher epistemological level than opinion, namely, knowledge. Archbishop Ussher's opinion that the world was created on the night preceding Sunday, October 23, 4004 BC, has been replaced by archaeological knowledge.

Other knowledge—astronomical, medical, psychological—now supervenes on the opinion that gods live in clouds above Mount Olympus, that Jews caused bubonic plague, that a female station in life demands modesty, humility, and shamefastness. I am well aware of the consequences that “processes of habitualization and naturalization” can play on human social life. It is precisely the potential despotism of such customization that I am keen to avert.

To avoid essentialist and holist versions of society and culture is to insist that there is one world, inhabited by different individuals. Customary “worlds” of symbolic classifications may extrude themselves between humanity and individuality, but such “worldings” (communities, castes, religions, etc.) are aesthetic matters, to be regulated so that individual subjectivities might find free expression. This is an idealistic project but not one without “substance and direction.”

In Ton’s objection I find echoes of David Gellner’s, when he asserts: *An anthropological study is ethnographically to understand the social conditions under which ways of thinking—“cosmopolitan,” say, as well as “culturalist”—emerge, take root, and spread. And does not the ethnographic record also document the strategic nature of deployments of ways of thinking at the practical everyday level? Subtle ethnography reveals people experiencing a common humanity even in situations that valorize cultural difference.* And echoes, too, of Michał Buchowski’s query: *Can we not aspire to a “relativized rationality,” defined not in relation to “human nature,” “truth,” and “goodness” but to the options that the mundane pragmatics of culture and power, social relations and hierarchy, make available? We strive for better forms of knowledge and the rejection of irrational beliefs, but we do so amid the complexities of particular lives.*

Yes, but I want to recognize that while we undertake our search for knowledge from within the complexities of lives ensconced in social relations, hierarchies, and cultural habitualities, Michał, and while our ideas emerge, take root, and spread in particular social conditions, David, that we also possess the capacity to reach truths that transcend the paradigms, the terms, and the practices that led to their acquisition. Some truths can be revolutionary in this way: the wheel; the printing press; the mapping of the genome; the brain scanning that, for instance, leads us to know the relation between gazing on a loved one and gazing on favored works of art. I would distinguish between, say, the pleasure that I get from gazing on Stanley Spencer’s paintings and the “pleasure response” that science now recognizes as a specieswide capacity of our individual human embodiment. I think Popperian worlds are one way to formulate this distinction. On one level there is the *substance* of particular lives: I cite Popper, Michał cites Robin Horton, and David cites Gerd Baumann. On another level I wish to put our human-individual *capacities* to cite as well as rights to cite. And a hierarchical relation should be seen to obtain between these: because I have the human-individual capacity to cite, thereby I do my substantive citing; because I have the human-individual capacity to cite, thereby I should have the right do my substantive citing.

Nor am I so convinced that ethnography vouchsafes an appreciation of either anthropologists or their informants experiencing human universality (David) or rejecting irrational beliefs (Michał). Consider the current fashionableness of “Amerindian perspectivism” and incommensurate sociocultural worlds. Appreciation of Amazonian cosmologies encourage a redefinition of the “classical categories” of “nature,” “culture,” and “supernature,” we are informed, for here are humans, the dead, jaguars, tapirs, and so on, possessing one culture while existing in multiple natures: one epistemology, multiple ontologies (Viveiros de Castro 1998). Bruno Latour (2004) elaborates: the “awesome multiplicity” found in Amazonian cosmologies repudiates all claims to “mononaturalism”—to there being one nature, one world, and one humanity whose truths reason and science disclose. Any “composition” of one world can only be a negotiation by a “pluriverse” of “entities” at present “owned” and inhabited by a “freight of gods, attachments, and unruly cosmos” (Latour 2004:454–457); one must admit the common constructed or “cultured” nature of a diversity of worlds before negotiations toward substantive commonalities can even begin. Failing this, the “fundamentalism” of scientific “naturalizers” (appealing to “Nature Out There”) and the fundamentalism of radical Islam (appealing to the revelation of the Koran and Sharia) wage war without end (Latour 2004:459–460).

This is not helpful. The fact that all human knowledge is “constructed” in the sense of being made out using particular methods and by virtue of particular traditions of discovery does not mean that all such knowledge possesses the same factuality. The status of scientific facts is not the same as religious facts, for instance. The latter might fall into a category of “constructivism”—“dependent on series of [human] mediations,” “[apt to] fail and thus requiring careful maintenance and constant repair” (Latour 2004:458–459)—but the world to which science provides insight has no need of our cultural “life-support systems” and their histories. We can know this world, we can adapt ourselves to it, we can even know how to adapt it to our desires, partially, but there is no way in which its realities might “fail” in the way that cultural paradigms of knowing might fail. Our “construction” of knowledge thus gives onto different kinds of facts: some are *aesthetic* in character, matters of personal taste, and some are *empirical* in character, matters of rational discernment.

“Culture” is the name I would give to sets of aesthetic judgements; “nature” a domain of universal truths. To distinguish the two is fundamental for a progression in human knowledge.

2. The Pragmatic Approach to Difference, and Ethnography

I think Simone Dennis is being magnanimous when she suggests: *If it were admitted that a culturalist discourse was based on axioms, assumptions, and systemizations that were circular—*

that could only prove their own validity in a tautological fashion—then would there not be benefits to the initial sense of discomfort we, as anthropologists, might feel? Disciplinarity is paradigmatic, not a self-sufficient form of knowledge, and “culture” must remain an incomplete way to explain human reality.

You are giving my argument the benefit of the doubt, Simone, because you see the *bases* of disciplines as also being the *biases* of disciplines, and hence the need for any such periodically to be reassessed. It is for reasons of our practical effectiveness beyond the academy that anthropology’s “culture” should be interrogated.

I find Simone to be in tune with Patrick Lavolette when he argues: *Academic institutionalism, its symbols and ceremonies, ethos and rationale, has functioned over the centuries to assist the reproduction and structuration of society. But let us at least imagine that the claim of academia in a humanist modernity to desire to change the world for the better were disinterested. Does this not afford a pragmatic means to challenge social intolerance and xenophobia?*

I see you as casting a critical (anarchic) eye, Patrick, over all academic claims to righteousness. We must be sceptical and scrupulous with regard both to our claims to independence of thought and to any mundane mouthings concerning policies of tolerance. Indeed, if *no* claims may be taken at face value, for the biases and hypocrisies and strategies their rhetorics will clothe, then pragmatism is the only kind of truth: does this piece of sophistry have better consequences for the world than that?

Here, too, in the world of best practice, I would place Thomas Fillitz when he attests: *Those who argue for essential cultures actually practice a broader discursive competency, combining in their everyday lives various elements from global cultural flows. And is not this self-determination of identities and trajectories the form of political freedom that we should be espousing in a postcolonial world: a multicentered universalism based on local social relations and reflexivities?*

If I were to give your strategic essentialists the benefit of the doubt, Thomas, it would be to esteem an “ironical” consciousness in community membership. Community can possess a Janus-facedness, in Anthony Cohen’s (1978) description. When a community deploys a rhetoric of unity in dealings with the outside world, this operates both as a mechanism of solidarity and as a veneer to internal differentiation: we are Arsenal Football Club/China/Islam; we are the best; none is like us. But a liberal society calls for a kind of regulation whereby two things are guaranteed. First, the essentialist rhetoric does not have unwanted consequences for outsiders. Second, the rhetoric does not have unwanted effects on members’ capacities to go on formulating their own life projects: at the same time as *Anyone* practices Islam according to his or her satisfaction, he or she practices gay clubbing or even Judaism. To promote Thomas’s self-determination of identities and trajectories in a multicentered universalism is to ensure that *Anyone* is recognized as being a paradigmatic exemplar of universal humanity. It is *Anyone*’s freedom to

determine his or her worldviews, life projects, and relations, including community memberships. Irony is called for also to recognize that the freedom to hold all manner of opinion cannot translate into the unfreedom of others having to take that opinion seriously or otherwise have it effect their lives. *Anyone* has no necessary case to answer in the court of *Anyone* else’s caprice.

It is in the way of pragmatism, finally, that I understand Simon Coleman’s comments concerning anthropology’s workability. He asks: *Is a model of universal truth as natural science and literary fiction might promote best suited to a world where social and political conditions lead to an insistence on parochial difference? Do we not need ethnographic method (instead of scientific method) to transcend communitarian closures and open up an exchange of ideas—including how to judge “truthfulness” free from institutional authorization?*

“Open up” is the key term, Simon, I think. I see “open” versus “closed” cutting across distinctions between “ethnographic method” and others. Openness is an overriding value, one previously exalted in anthropology (by the likes of Max Gluckman and Robin Horton) as much as in science or literature. I would hope for an anthropological method that aims to know those open social arrangements that remove obstacles to *Anyone*’s free, unique, and continuous becoming. Openness in anthropology translates into an appreciation of human life’s open-endedness: our individual capacity to become (Rapport 2001).

If *Anyone*’s life is a unique embodiment, then futurity is what I would work to ensure as a birthright: the potential of a life of uniquely embodied capacities that is open to *Anyone* at every moment of his or her existence. E. M. Forster confided to his locked diary: “how annoyed I am with Society for wasting my time by making homosexuality criminal” (cited in Parker 2011:4). I would work out those social arrangements whereby globally the unique preciousness of an individual life is never brought to unnecessary closure, never stunted or maimed by the prescriptions of cultural traditions, others’ aesthetic classifications, others’ histories, others’ communitarian parochialism.

3. “Anthropology”: Inscribing Human Singularity

David Shankland observes: *Why should not the biological unity of humans again be a central tenet of anthropological enquiry? Replacing an emphasis on difference with commonality might unify anthropology as a human science (social, cultural, physical, archaeological) as well as establish a signal and liberal stance in intellectual exchange: “Anthropology” works to establish the truths of social life, including how some human explanations are better than others.*

I welcome your hopefulness, David. The case *against* hoping for an anthropology that progresses toward truth, meanwhile, is succinctly put by John Gray’s *Enlightenment’s Wake* (1995). The Enlightenment project, Gray declaims, to displace

customary moralities and traditional forms of supernaturalism by a universal critical and rational civility is dead. The cosmopolitan hope to see differences of cultural tradition becoming voluntary aspects of a private sphere of lifestyle choices is delusionary. Most of the world's population still experiences culture as rivalrous, exclusionary ways of life in which membership is unchosen; identity derives from others' sanction and manifests itself in conflict and historical memorializations of enmity: culture as fate (Gray 1995:124).

I find in such (anti)triumphalist declamations vital distinctions being threatened. There are different kinds or grades of truth. "Civilization" might be that accumulation of truths whose factuality is independent of discourse: the accumulation of "natural facts" or "knowledge." There are different kinds of things in the world and different kinds of difference. "Individuality" might be the difference that inheres in human embodiment, an essential difference that expresses itself through cultural symbolisms but that is absolutely distinct from these. Individuality possesses an objectivity that subsists irrespective of its recognition or valuation; supernaturalism, communitarianism, traditionalism do not. To have equal respect for all human beings is *not* according equal respect to cultures (as "ways of life" and "spiritual creations" of "communities") but guaranteeing that *Anyone* lives under the aegis of the best knowledge available.

In the spirit of Robert Marett, I perhaps conclude, David: "natural facts for their own sake," while "aesthetics facts" (or opinions) do not exist "for their own sake" because they possess no ownness that is not individually conferred and should not be deemed to.

My intent remains practical: an anthropology that delivers objective truths and liberal freedoms. Binding together this cosmopolitan program is the subjectivity of human experience.

Stephen Spender² praises Kierkegaard for his insight into the "oneself" of everyone that "moves outwards towards other people and towards society from isolated being." The "reality and force" of this subjectivity have tended to be misjudged, inadequately accommodated, if not denied outright in "outward living," Spender elaborates, pressed into the role of "social unit" in a fictional "public." Might not modern civilization offer more to everyone's unique subjectivity than "oppression" and misappropriation?

This praise by poet of philosopher would seem to me an entirely anthropological sympathy. Indeed, it accords with anthropology's specific methodology as a science: its ethnographic aspiration to enter into the life world of any human being. The anthropological informant is *Anyone*. No one is denied a voice, whether on analytic grounds or moral. It is *Anyone's* due, I would contend, to have his or her individual integrity respected, not reduced to that of a category or class.

2. Spender, S. Ca. 1955. The man inside. This article was cut out from a newspaper or magazine and did not include any identifying information regarding the source of publication. The article reviewed *Kierkegaard*, edited by W. H. Auden (Cassell, 1955).

Before any supposed *intersubjective* relation (of love, consensus, cooperation, exploitation, oppression, resistance) can be claimed, *Anyone's* subjective consciousness must be hazarded.

The substance of individual lives may incorporate collective labels and idioms, but these attributes of "outward living" have no a priori warrant on the *qualia* of those lives. Doing justice to subjective existence—both in objective analysis and in global morality—I would see as anthropology's civilizational promise.

—Nigel Rapport

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