

## CA☆ FORUM ON THEORY IN ANTHROPOLOGY

## Anthropology through Levinas

Knowing the Uniqueness of *Ego* and the Mystery of Otherness

by Nigel Rapport

An anthropological commonplace since Evans-Pritchard has been that ethnographic subjects will have their rationality circumscribed by the discursive opportunities made available by a “culture.” Hence, social science comes to terms with the “internal” nature of judgements (Winch). Ultimately, the relativist nature of both Winch’s and Evans-Pritchard’s conclusion has its source in Wittgenstein’s philosophy. For Wittgenstein, “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” Moreover, “language” in this connection extends to the “textual” nature of behavior per se. There exists a determining habituation of embodiment and dwelling as well as of reasoning, believing, and talking. This article explores the nature of a pretextual or nontextual sphere that exists beyond conventional—“cultural”—languages. Wittgensteinian assumptions are set against those of Max Stirner and Emmanuel Levinas. While in many ways disparate, the writings of Stirner on the *ego* and of Levinas on the “other” both insist that knowledge can be derived—knowledge, indeed, of a fundamental, even absolute, nature—by way of a transcending of a taken-for-granted symbolic, conceptual, textual, and doctrinal language-world. What is key is the attention one pays to corporeality: to the “flesh and mind” of the self (Stirner), to the “body and face” of the other (Levinas). The article is theoretical and epistemological in register. An ethnographic afterword points in the direction of how the argument might be grounded in representations of fieldwork encounters.

Through my small, bonebound island I have learnt all I know, experienced all, and sensed all.

—(Dylan Thomas, letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, November 1933 [1966:48])

It has been a commonplace in anthropology since Evans-Pritchard that one anticipates ethnographic subjects—including anthropologists themselves—as having their rationality circumscribed by, indeed defined by, the discursive opportunities made available to them by a “culture.” The latter entailed a moral system, not a natural system. Hence, belief in witchcraft may be “rational” according to the cosmological worldview within which observation, explanation, reaction, and social interaction must symbolically function (Evans-Pritchard 1937). The “idea of a social science” is to come to terms with the “internal” nature of judgments, as Peter Winch (1970:107) famously phrased it, internal to the subjects’ discursive possibilities. Ultimately, the relativist nature of both Winch’s and Evans-Pritchard’s conclusion—that one cannot reason outside, or against, a system of beliefs,

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because one has no other idiom in which to express one’s thoughts—has its source in Wittgenstein’s “ordinary-language philosophy.” In Wittgenstein’s own words, “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (1922:5.6). Language is instrumental in determining a life-world, or “form of life,” and the latter must be accepted as a given; so that “what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence” (Wittgenstein 1922:7). Moreover, “language” in this connection can be understood as extending to behavior as such, given the “textual” or patterned nature of the latter. To say that one is immersed in a form of life is tantamount to saying that there exists a determining habituation of one’s embodiment and environmental dwelling as well as of one’s reasoning, believing, and talking. One dwells within an environing, and limiting, habitus as well as within a language-game. All is determinately textualized.

This article explores the nature of a possible pretextual or nontextual sphere, however, that exists beyond ordinary or conventional—“cultural”—language, that human beings nevertheless inhabit and, moreover, from which they have the capacity to extract rational knowledge. The “pretextual” invites us beyond the domain of conventional conceptualization and classification, beyond the commonsensical and habitual, to a place from which we begin to know, again, as human beings.

The challenge is to argue for this rationality and describe the procedure of a pretextual knowing. What is the nature of the knowing subject, and what is the nature of the known object, if these were to be reconfigured in an anthropological discipline whose tradition (at least since the days of Herder) has been to deny, or at least bracket off, the domain of “the human” and of universal “human being,” urging that there is no such phenomenon to know, only Germans, French, and so on, ensconced in communitarian traditions of language, practice, and soil? One moves beyond conventional knowledge or “culture” to notions of universal human knowledge or “science” and the “civilization” that might inscribe itself by virtue of such knowledge (Rapport 2011, 2012a).

This article intends to revisit the Wittgensteinian assumptions concerning the limitations of language-games and forms of life by setting them against assumptions, in particular, of Max Stirner and of Emmanuel Levinas. While in many ways disparate, the writings of Stirner on the *ego* and the writings of Levinas on the other, or *alter*, both insist that knowledge can be derived—knowledge, indeed, of a fundamental, even absolute, nature—by way of a transcending of a taken-for-granted symbolic, conceptual, textual, and doctrinal language-world. In Levinas’s words,

What moves outside the order of things can be brought into the general picture without having recourse to any supernatural or miraculous dimension and, demanding an approach irreducible to the established precedents, can authorise proper projects and models to which every mind, that is to say reason, can none the less gain access. (1989:278)

What is key is in the attention one pays to corporeality: to the “flesh and mind” of the self (Stirner), to the “body and face” of the other (Levinas). There is a kind of human organ of perception; it is in the possession of “Anyone,” any individual human being: attending to this organ and its perceptions can give onto an awareness of universal humanity. Indeed, we already know this to be the case. What is the premise of anthropological fieldwork but an encounter with a corporeal being-in-the-world that transcends the taken-for-granted or enculturated (see Benson and O’Neill 2007)?

The nub of the issue is a human being whose capacity, whose identity, and whose knowledge exceed the bounds of any particular collective, “cultural” system of symbolization, classification, and representation: human being in itself. The issue is (and has been) at once ontological and moral (“The goal of the human sciences is not to constitute man but to dissolve him” [Lévi-Strauss 1966:247]). A humanistic approach not only recognizes in the language-speaker and the culture-member the social being so designated and “produced” but also recognizes that there is more to conscious and self-conscious individuality than cultural construals of personhood. Albeit much of life might concern a habitual round—routine exchanges conducted by way of conventional forms and “common sense”—such habitualism remains a temptation rather than a necessary condition. Hab-

its, after all, must be worked at, practiced, if they are to be maintained, and any can be broken. The language-speaker and culture-member remains a reflexive, “ironizing” agent (Rapport 2002), and this agency includes the capacity—indeed, necessity—to gain a knowledge of the real world through bodily mechanisms and by virtue of an individual, “bone-bound” being.

### Beyond Immersion in a Common Form of Life

I have come to feel that the metaphor of immersion to describe our human practice is misleading. The anthropologist is commonly said to immerse himself or herself in the field setting and there find the research subjects, immersed alike in a culture or an environment or a social structure or a language, in a set of relations or a field of environing forces or a habitus or a discourse or an episteme or a structural class. But this is a metaphorical construct, and also a metaphysical one with overtones of encompassment and totalism, of the determining conditions of being, and I would contest its appropriateness and accuracy. The only thing I know I am immersed in is my experience. I occupy a life-world comprising consciousness and embodiment. There are my waking thoughts and sensations and my dreams; there are my memories and my imaginings; there is my intentionality and my reactivity. My life-world is a kind of bubble: my body plus the cocoon of habits and relations that I develop around it, extending my intentionality into the surrounding space, so that my body and its environment come ideally to be a reflection of mind—so that environment comes to represent an extension of the self, a manifestation of the existential power of the individual living organism (Rapport 2003:215–239). In short, the human being is immersed in his or her life-world. And that is all.

So what lies beyond immersion? For while knowing my immersion in my own experience, I also recognize limits to my life-world and a radical otherness beyond. I know that my maintaining my life-world in a kind of homeostasis—where my worldviews and my life-projects fulfill themselves in the successful deliverance of my expectations and desires—entails a continuous work against the resistance of a world beyond. I do not wish to open myself up to charges of atomism, then, powerfully critiqued by Alfred Whitehead (1964:91) as “the misconception that has haunted philosophical literature throughout the centuries.” There is “no such mode of existence” as “independent existence,” Whitehead elaborated, and “nature [is no] mere aggregate of independent entities, each capable of isolation,” whose coming together is “accidental”; to the contrary, “every entity is to be understood in terms of the way it is interwoven with the rest of the universe” (1926:141). And yet, contra Whitehead, there does seem to me a sense in which humanity can be described as a plurality: an aggregation of conscious, embodied entities whose characteristics—certainly in terms of their *qualia*, their immediate lived subjective senses of being-in-the-world—are capable

of isolated definition and indeed must be so defined for reasons that are as ethical as they are ontological. Furthermore, insofar as one posits free will and contingency and serendipity, the coming together of these embodied entities in space does possess an accidental character. (By what law of necessity do I choose to type these words into my computer at this moment—looking up as I do so now, midsentence, at a robin eating seeds from a bird feeder that I have erected outside my study window—and do you happen to read them?) While not isolated or independent, the life-worlds of different human beings about one another with consequences that are unpredictable, not determinate.

I have in the past suggested that anthropology might conceive of itself as the study of “the effects that human beings as individual, energetic things-in-the-world have upon one another” (Rapport 2003:75). My image is based on the insight that a respect for the individual case goes to the very heart of social science as a project. Each human being represents an individual center of energy, driven by its own metabolism, within its own embodiment, along its own historical course of activity-in-the-world. How each will react to other things in the world, human and nonhuman, has an indeterminate quality. More specifically, it is difficult, if not impossible, to predict how one human being will affect another human being with whom he or she comes into contact. This is so for three reasons: first, because each engages with others from the position of outsider: each is dependent on bodily sense-making apparatuses that are discrete and distinctive to itself, which imbue it with its own perspective on the world and no other; second, because each is set on its own life-course, each is engaged in furthering a life-world whose direction and logic has been distinct from the moment “it” began; and third, because the sense-making procedures of each are characterized by a creativity—a “randomness” even (Rapport 2001)—that makes their generation of perspectives unpredictable even to themselves.

As discrete centers of energy, individuals begin, from before birth, to become distinctly themselves: to accrete personal habits and histories, identities. This takes place through activity-in-the-world, through physical movement, and through intellectual assessment of what the senses relay to be the results of that movement. Particular sensory apparatuses operating with particular points of view give rise to personal, environing “sensoriums” in which individual consciousnesses dwell, each possessing a “phenomenological subjectivity,” as James Fernandez (1992:127) has phrased it. Experience is “anchored” in the body, in its physical movements and its “endless internal motilities,” and consciousness operates in what Fernandez would describe as a “pre-linguistic quality space” (1971:57, 1977:478).

Not only is the energy behind this activity-in-the-world individually based—embodied—it is also individually directed. From the moment the individual energy source begins moving in its environment and becoming itself (its selves), a unique history of embodiment, of worldly engagement, un-

folds and grows that compasses its own logics, its own habits, its own ways of doing and being, and its own purposes. Gregory Bateson referred in this connection to the individual “organism-in-its-environment” (1973:426). How, Bateson asked himself, does this energetic organism come to know? Its self-direction entails thought processes that are “fundamentally stochastic” (Bateson 1980:200). A stochastic process, Bateson elaborated (1980:54–57), is where information is “plucked” from an initial random array. An individual’s consciousness provides him or her with an apparently endless supply of imagined ideational possibilities; from these random “nothings” or “no-things,” the individual human brain makes “somethings” by selecting possible versions (of world) that might be accurate, useful, pleasurable, and so on, and testing these out. The criteria of selection are intrinsically “aesthetic” ones, Bateson insisted: deriving from the eye (and sensorial complex) of the perceiver, it is a matter of finding connecting patterns that gratify. The discovery of a gratifying pattern leads to new “information,” causing “something” to survive longer than other random options. What is to be insisted on, Bateson concluded, is that this process of knowing is both perspectival (personal) and self-directed: a matter not of environmental or exterior determination but of individual explorations in the sphere of the random “mutations” of imagined possibilities. The well-being of the organism (as with the human species as a whole) is a measure of the extent to which the information that the individual finds gratificatory is also in reasonable (and rational) accord with the real world surrounding it.

The individual organism-plus-environment is not alone in the world, then. It is discrete but not alone. It embarks on a distinct voyage of activity-in-the-world (activity-in-its-world) and sense-making, but it is surrounded by a plurality of other things-in-the-world, inorganic and organic, some engaged in voyages comparable to its own. In considering anthropological knowing in a pretextual or nontextual way—a way that sees beyond metaphors of cultural totalism and discursive determinism—it is the need theoretically to give an account of plurality that I wish to focus on in greater detail. “What defines the human condition,” in Michael Jackson’s words (2008:230), is the fact that “everyone is both identical and different. . . . While every human being belongs to the same species, everyone is irreducibly himself or herself. . . . Our humanity is both shared and singular.” How does one know this sharedness next to this singularity, this sameness next to this difference? In its consciousness the individual is gratuitously itself and discrete, and yet beyond its life-world exists an otherness that offers resistance, part of which can be designated as “human” for the particular way in which it “resists,” the particular way in which it abuts the individual. At least, this would be my claim: that the individual human being is able to recognize a commensurateness in fellow human beings at the same time as these fellows are immersed in other life-worlds and hence possess a radical distinctiveness. This recognition of sameness and difference goes beyond

cultural conceptualization and classification. But to where exactly? An “organ of perception”? And is it not a paradoxical recognition? One recognizes the limits of one’s self and one’s life-world and the radical difference beyond. One knows that one is ignorant, moreover, of the intrinsic nature of that plurality that is other.

This paradoxical relation—of knowing that one does not know, and cannot—calls for further elucidation.

### The Mystery of Plurality

In the work of two otherwise very distinct thinkers, knowledge and otherness—the paradox of knowing that there are limits to what can be known of fellow humans—is developed into an entire philosophical system that spans the ontological and the moral. They are Max Stirner and Emmanuel Levinas. I shall refer to them, briefly, in turn.

Max Stirner is best known for a text written in 1844, *The Ego and His Own: The Case of the Individual against Authority*. The book is a most original polemic, seen as complementing (and prefiguring) in many ways the existentialist programs of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Stirner launches himself into his text from the start, and so shall I. “My flesh is not their flesh,” he writes (2005:138–139), “my mind is not their mind. If you bring them under the generalities ‘flesh, mind,’ those are your thoughts which have nothing to do with my flesh, my mind, and can least of all issue a ‘call’ to mine.” He elaborates: “truth,” “freedom,” “justice,” “humanity,” “God”—these concepts and all others desire that the individual grows enthusiastic and serves them. The concepts, one might say, are egoists. But no: the individual should resist and be the egoist him or herself. “Let me then likewise concern myself for myself, . . . who am my all, who am the only one. . . . I am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself, as creator, create everything” (Stirner 2005:5). Everyone remains “exclusive” in their individuality, incomparably unique, and what purports to have general meaning—the “divine,” the “human,” the “true,” the “good,” the “just,” the “free,” whatever—should by rights—both ontologically and morally—be seen as without meaning for the individual as unique *ego*.

I am most interested here not in Stirner’s arguments for individuality but in his claims that conceptualization and its symbolic, textual forms are “foreign” to the subject-as-*ego*. The individual develops itself not as a man but as an *ego*, Stirner explains. As unique, with nothing in common with the other and no means of comparison, the *ego* is the measure of all things: no concept or name can express or exhaust it. The *ego* should always recognize itself as such: recognize no “calling” as a vessel of God or king or even as a tool of the idea of humanity. An individual has no need of a calling—of having exterior ideas stamped into him—to complete himself. A man just has to apply his own force to the world, to act and be himself. Essence is not a task or a concept to be realized: it just is; it acts; it manifests itself, intrepid, invin-

cible. Outside forces can be friendly or unfriendly to an individual’s natural force, but they can neither create nor dissolve this force. There exists an indomitable egoism that can neither be trained nor extirpated.

Nevertheless, no one is born alone, and society is a human being’s original state. The project is for the individual to keep his “ownness” from societal control: not to lose oneself in the depths of objects, in what has been declared fundamental by prior human judgement: sacred specters! The difficulty is that “the confusion of concepts marches ever forwards” (Stirner 2005:96). Even liberalism exhibits a zealotry with regard to its own ruling concepts—“human,” “science,” “mind,” “reason”—such that the democratic state comes to be reified according to a common norm of good citizenship. Even liberal “freedom” is a collectivity over against the individual, who is liable to become dishonored before its sanctity. Even “human rights” are further foreign law: *ego*’s “rightness” is not something that another can make out—however good his or her intentions. For *ego* is always more than any particular historical conceptualization: “Those are all ideas, but you are corporeal” (Stirner 2005:126). *Ego* is real and of itself “a world’s history” (Stirner 2005:365). Concepts, ideas, and principles are creatures that *ego* can create. But one does not allow them to appear fixed and to hold dominion, nor to run away from us as if their own flesh, nor to become revered as if our idols. Concepts become “higher powers” and sovereign only to the extent that *ego* disrespects itself and abases itself before them.

The genius of *ego*, its creativity, is rightly to transcend all normativity. One might enter into contract with concept and norm but never to the extent that one misrecognizes one’s ownness. One puts language to use, as one’s own property—and does not allow the usage of another to threaten or become despotic. For Stirner, the conceptual cannot know *ego*, and even one’s own past linguistic creation should not stand in the way of what one’s genius deems true and necessary in the present.

Emmanuel Levinas needs little introduction, for the contemporary influence he exerts. Yet while also writing contemporaneously with Wittgenstein and having been a student of Husserl and Heidegger, he significantly rejects the notion of a totalizing perspective on meaning in human life. Culture, history, concept, and landscape as containers of knowledge and mediators of knowledge are mythic, not true. There is a “not-knowing” that is essential, fundamental. Archetypically, this appears to us in death. Death is an event that happens to us without our having any possibility of a priori knowledge. It is absolutely other and with an otherness that we can never transcend: death remains unknowable. This otherness of death is alienating, dislodging us from the center of existence, sundering our solitude. Death shows us that “existence is pluralist” (Levinas 1989:43) and that there is no commonality. There is no possibility of communion with death, or sympathy or harmony or empathy. Rather, death’s hold over our existence is mysterious.

In his boldest move, Levinas asserts that *ego's* relationship with *alter*, with the living other, is equally "a relationship with a Mystery" (1989:43). Just as there is an abyss between the present and death, so there is an abyss between individual consciousness and others with whom the individual is faced. Social life is not reciprocity, then, and intersubjective space is not a concurrence. Rather, *ego's* face-to-face relation with the other has an exteriority that is irreducible. Other people are absolutely other: intimations of infinity. They are beyond knowledge or thought about the being of things: beyond totalization, comprehension, or expression. "The relationship with otherness is neither spatial nor conceptual" (Levinas 1989:48).

The mystery of the other that cannot be known, imagined, or possessed and that proves the plurality of existence places the *ego* under an obligation, according to Levinas, turns *ego* into a kind of hostage to ignorance. One thought one knew, one thought the world stretched out from one's point of vision, as good and bad, positive and negative, pleasurable and distasteful, but now all one's conceptualization and classification have proved relative in the face of the other's absolute difference. This radical realization must now, therefore, be the basis of a new metaphysics in which ethics precedes ontology, in which the face of the other and an allowance for the other's mysterious being undercuts and undergirds all claims to know and all practice.

Rather than Levinas's ethical philosophy per se, it is his stance on knowledge that I would here say a little more about, albeit the two cannot be extricated, Levinas insisted (which is why Heidegger cannot be forgiven for his quietude in regard to Nazism). Modern technology is feared for reducing men to cogs, Levinas begins. But technology is less dangerous than the sentimentalism of place and its supposed environmental totalism that reduces men to rootedness and splits them into natives and strangers. Technology has the capacity to wrench us out of a Heideggerian world and its spiritualism and superstitions: the sublimated idols of place, family, tribe, and nation. "From this point on, an opportunity appears to us: to perceive men outside the situation in which they are placed, and let the human face shine in all its nudity" (Levinas 1990:233). "Beyond situation" lies the "demystified and disenchanting world" of absolute, homogeneous, geometric space. Technology assists us in rooting our piety not in landscapes and memories but in an abstract universalism and so to "discover man" and his place in the "economy of the Real": freed from imagination and passion, from "the prestige of myths, the discord they introduce into ideas and the cruelty they perpetuate in social customs" (Levinas 1990:273).

"Mythic knowledge" is a kind that names and classifies, seizing hold of its object and possessing it in denial of the independence of its being. Mythic possession is a kind of violence that denies otherness: violence is a kind of unjust sovereignty, an imposition of solitude. The point of philosophy must be not to philosophize in a mythic way. As a love

of truth, philosophy must "aspire" to the other, to life, and not to the politics of identity. Our reason should enable us to avoid "doctrine" in our thought, to mistrust opinion, and so to aspire to universal truth. Reason—archetypically the mathematician who bows before the evidence—is the supreme freedom of maintaining an inner link with truth. Freedom is interiorizing rational relations with the world. "Herald a man freed from myths" and a civilization "built on justice [that] unfolds in science" (Levinas 1990:276, 275).

Such knowledge begins on the path that leads from a human being to his or her neighbor. The *ego* as a solitary being is a naïve, wild growth and movement. It invades the world, grabbing nourishment for itself. It is a usurper. But then the event of meeting otherness opens up the possibility of fundamental, objective experience: the experience of external being. This experience lays new foundations to the condition of self-consciousness that are equally and at once ontological and moral. "When I really stare, with a straightforwardness devoid of trickery or evasion, into [the other's] unguarded, absolutely unprotected eyes," the freedom of *ego's* own consciousness, its happy spontaneity, is inhibited (Levinas 1990:293). For the other cannot be adapted to the scale of *ego's* existence without violence, war, or bureaucracy. This is a kind of knowledge that is not self-knowledge—knowledge from one's own doctrines and qualities—but "heteronomy through and through." Moreover, it is a knowledge of physical proximity: a sensibility. Levinas (1989:92, 164) speaks of the encounter with the other as a kind of "passion" and "surplus" and "anarchy": one's sensibility is affected in spite of itself. Proximity is anarchic inasmuch as it entails "a relationship with a singularity without the mediation of any principle, any ideality" (Levinas 1989:90). One encounters an otherness independent of any a priori and incommensurable with such.

Notwithstanding, the experience of the other's proximity can be appreciated as "the first intelligible": an objectivity "before cultures and their allusions" and independent of history (Levinas 1990:294–295). Resisting mythic possession, the face opens up a new dimension in the perception of being, an absolute one. "The face is an irreducible mode in which being can present itself in its identity": enclosed in its form but also open, establishing itself in its depth, otherness presents itself somehow in a personal way and establishes the universal (Levinas 1990:8). The solipsistic, mythic self, captivated by itself, thus ends here in a confronting of other selves. Civilization is conversation with the other as interlocutor: conversation is commerce, renouncing the claim to sovereignty of culture.

In Stirner's *ego* and in Levinas's *alter* I find alike a respect for—even awe before—the finite human body. The flesh and mind of the self are the measure of all, attests Stirner, taking the corporeal perspective of the *ego-in-its-life-world*; the body and face of the other are absolute mystery, attests Levinas, taking the corporeal perspective of one life-world vis-à-vis another. For Stirner and for Levinas, the mystery of the

consciousness behind the face, as with the uniqueness of creativity within *ego*, situates body beyond conceptualization and transcendent of doctrine, beyond culture and transcendent of history.

Equally, ignorance plays a central role. For Levinas, respect for otherness is based on ignorance more than on knowledge: the relevance of ignorance is that it undermines not only myth and the conceptual and cultural but also the possibility of having other than an intimation of the absolute plurality of existence. For Stirner, respect for self is based on a recognition of how foreign the rest of the world is, how ignorant of *ego*: the ignorance is absolute and determines the irrelevancy, both ontological and moral, of otherness to self. The image of anthropology as a study of the effects that human beings as individual, energetic things-in-the-world have on one another finds echoes in them both: it is the energy of *ego vis-à-vis alter* and the energy of *alter vis-à-vis ego*.

### Organ of Perception

We have heard Levinas claim that otherness is experienced as an event, not a conceptualization or an interpretation, not a contextualization or a cultural knowing, because the experience transcends these, with intimations of the absolute. We are able to approach this absolute, nevertheless, and appreciate the event of otherness because we perceive difference when we are face to face with it: difference is the way in which the individual human being experiences the abutting of another against itself and experiences “the miracle of moving out of oneself” (Levinas 1990:9). But still, how is this known to be a *human* abutting? It must be that *ego* perceives that the way in which the other abuts himself or herself is commensurate with the way he or she abuts it. Levinas therefore emphasizes the nakedness involved: one stares nakedly, without evasion or deceit, into a face naked of the protection of “mythic” identity, role, relationality, even mood and expression. Here is a perception of naked humanity. But how, exactly?

Let me return to the image of energetic things-in-the-world by way of another image. There is a famous passage in James Boswell’s *Life* of Samuel Johnson in which Boswell describes the two of them, in 1763, discussing the idealist philosophy of Bishop Berkeley while walking in a churchyard. It is not the case, Johnson claims, that “to be is to be perceived” (*esse est percipi*), as Berkeley would have it: a real world exists independent of our constructions of it. And to show the vehemence of his disagreement Johnson kicks out vigorously at a large stone lying nearby until, Boswell recalls, his foot “rebounded from it” and Johnson exclaims: “I refute it thus” (Boswell 1935:471). Johnson’s so-called commonsensical proof for the independent existence of matter is not widely regarded as logically competent to refute immaterialism; nevertheless, the image is useful here. For Johnson is claiming to know the reality of the world through physical engagement rather than an a priori discursivity: a practical,

as opposed to a “pure,” rationality. What he discovers is a materiality against which he rebounds. Johnson cannot kick through the stone, and Boswell observes this, too. The stone possesses a mass and inertia that can force themselves on Johnson’s and Boswell’s consciousness. It cannot force a specific perception or interpretation—there is no saying what Johnson’s and Boswell’s “inside views” on the stone are—but it is difficult for them not to accept the stone’s otherness and objectivity. This is something both of them perceive.

Now let me ask this: In what ways are Johnson’s and Boswell’s relations to each other distinct from their individual relations to the stone? How are Johnson and Boswell different to each other from stones? If Johnson kicked Boswell instead of the stone, he might find himself kicked back. In addition, Boswell could arrange with Johnson future times and places at which he agreed to be kicked again. Furthermore, Johnson and Boswell could engage in discussion on their kicking relations and develop norms in relation to them. They could equally discuss histories of the incidences of kicking and the proprieties of kicking. None of this would assure Johnson or Boswell knowledge of what it felt like to the other to kick or be kicked or of their motivations or purposes for doing so beyond what was openly claimed and symbolically framed. Moreover, the fact that both are seemingly “immersed” in a discursive world of “stones” and “kicks” and “times and places” and “discussions” and the “proprieties” of stones and kicks does no more than provide a context of surfaces on which their interaction might conveniently skate (Rapport 1993); these are symbolic and conceptual tools—precisely a *form* of life, formal tools and settings to use in the construction of personal experience.

Beneath the symbolic, conceptual, and social surface, what, then, do Johnson and Boswell find? Johnson rebounds off Boswell similarly to kicking the stone: Boswell has materiality. But Boswell can also arrange to move himself to other scheduled locations for Johnson to kick and rebound off him again. And Johnson and Boswell can engage in the commerce of seeking to convey their thoughts and feelings on the encounters and report on what other acquaintances also purport to be thinking and feeling about their encounters. But is there more? Each might know his own pain or pleasure. Each is, in Stirner’s terms, assured of his own “ownness.” But what of the other? This is, in Levinas’s terms, a “mystery”: what appears before them, one might say, is a stone-likeness attached to an intentionality or a stone-likeness attached to an autonomy: Johnson can kick Boswell-as-a-stone but finds Boswell also possessed of the energy to kick back or flee or complain or deliberate or decide to return to be kicked routinely. This mystery sunders the solitude of Johnson’s intentionality. Johnson looks at Boswell, and Boswell can look back. Indeed, Boswell can continually orient himself toward Johnson, physically and verbally, until Johnson kicks him with sufficient force as to disable him or kill him.

Is there a nontextual knowledge here? There is a specificity to the otherness that Johnson and Boswell find in each other

that is distinct from the otherness of a stone—namely, each other’s autonomy—and distinct, also, from the otherness of a pet animal—namely, each other’s capacity to make abstract verbal arrangements—and distinct, again, from the otherness of artificial intelligence—namely, each other’s incapacity to be refashioned once sufficiently disabled. Let us call this recognition of a distinctive otherness “humanity.” Johnson and Boswell can recognize in each other an otherness that possesses human capacities. The claim of this article is that such recognition of an autonomous, capable human actor is itself a universal human capacity: we have the perceptual capability of recognizing universally a humanity that is distinct from thinghood and from animality and from technology. We do not know the *qualia* of the human other, but we can recognize its humanity in its capacity to act as our interlocutor in particular, significant ways.

The uniqueness and the mystery of human corporeality are together the object that anthropology configures when it pursues a knowledge that is pretextual or supratextual. This pursuit is possible, one can claim, by virtue of a kind of universal human organ of perception that operates in this nontextual sphere and exercises a capacity to rationalize recognition of fellow human interlocutors. An organ of human perception enables *ego* to know *alter* as a commensurate presence that is external to itself and that exists beyond cultural conceptions of identity and their symbolic representations and classifications.

### From Existential Ignorance to Scientific Knowledge?

I am aware of an apparent contradiction. Stirner and Levinas have written of an ignorance in relations between *ego* and the other that is absolute: it leads Stirner to respect *ego* as the measure of all and Levinas, equally, to respect the other. And yet I have concluded by positing a kind of universal human capacity for knowledge that might be urged on anthropology as a pretextual and supracultural methodology. Moreover, I have given this knowledge linguistic, conceptual, and cultural characteristics, seemingly, and have spoken about humanity’s “capacities” and “intentionality” and the way these might distinguish them from “stones,” “animals,” and “computers” in interlocutory relations.

The contradiction has, I believe, a processual solution. Ignorance, one might say, is an existential and moral imperative: “It is my duty to recognize my ignorance of the other”; “It is my duty to recognize the other’s ignorance of myself.” This duty, however, can be pursued further: it manifests itself in the “naked” look into the eyes of another, but it need not end there. With the sundering of one’s solitude one may begin the process of living beyond solipsism and also of making sense and knowing beyond solipsism: “What is the nature of the specific resistances that I experience in my life-world?” The claim of this article is that such a knowing is underwritten by universal human capacities and can deliver universal human truths. One can configure the human be-

yond the cultural, the historical and social contingencies of time and place, and the human as distinct from the animal and the machine.

But then, this is also for us to find ourselves as anthropologists where we began and, if not to know it for the first time, then to know it afresh after a disciplinary detour through relativism. I mean that ethnographic practice has essentially attempted the putting aside of preconceptions—deployed the naked look—and the meeting of informants as fellow individual bodies into whose skin and into whose life-world one imagines stepping. There is no barrier here—cultural, conceptual, ideological—besides embodiment. This represents an absolute barrier in terms of the substance of another individual human life, but a surmountable barrier in terms of the capacities of the universal human body and its nature (Rapport 2010). Hence, the consummation of ethnographic practice and its nontextual knowing becomes an attempt to establish a language of anthropological insight (conceptualization, classification, causation) that is scientific rather than mythic—whose notions of ontology and analysis are removed from those of folk models—and that aims to know what might be the capacities of universal humanity even as it respects the mystery of how particular individuals substantiate that humanity (as *qualia*). Stirner’s and Levinas’s texts would appear to be of this kind, and mine, too: an inscription of the nontextual. Just as Levinas celebrated the technological developments that helped remove consciousness from a mythic, folk world and increase opportunity to perceive the naked human face, so a technical language might house the development of anthropology’s appreciation of human capacities for perception—such as the corporeal human knowledge that in the body of the human other reside an autonomy, a symbolic facility, and a corporeal fragility and finitude commensurate with its own.

Key to this scientific project is the understanding of language with which anthropology equips itself: what linguistic “membership” is seen to entail and what the use of language offers. The anthropological tendency has been to approach language as a kind of prejudice—partisan and predispositional—whose world-making (and world-limiting) effects include the incorporating and interpellating of speaker-members as in a text:

Human beings . . . are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. . . . The fact of the matter is that the “real world” is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group. . . . The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. . . . We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (Sapir 1956:69)

The conception is of a closed ideological structure, even a prison-house, whose lexicon, grammar, and taxonomy of con-

ceptual classes define, frame, and canalize—in a word, textualize—the life that is thought, felt, lived, and expressed within it. Such an understanding becomes pervasive in sociocultural anthropology by way of the influential presence of structuralist theorists (Saussure, Durkheim and Mauss, Lévi-Strauss) and the influential appropriation of Heideggerian ideas in later French poststructuralist theory: “Language speaks, not man. Man speaks only insofar as he artfully complies with language” (Heidegger 1971:73); “Language is the house of Being in which man exists by dwelling” (Heidegger 1993:237). This becomes, in its trenchant Foucauldian form,

The researches of psychoanalysis, of linguistics, of anthropology have “decentered” the subject in relation to the laws of its desire, the forms of its language, the rules of its actions, or the play of its mythical and imaginative discourses. (Foucault 1972:22)

But one might espouse alternative conceptions to language being a coercive instrument of cultural determination and dominion. Georg Simmel (1971), then, drew a sharp distinction between the forms of a language and the contents imputed to those forms: to consume a language as a speaker-hearer was to animate it with one’s own personality. For Roy Harris (1981), language was in continuous creation, and also improvisation, by speakers immersed in their own varied experiences; it was a myth to conceptualize a “linguistic community” as assuming a stable sovereignty, an integration, and a regimented, mechanical uniformity. Rather than collective properties, consider a living language as the momentary interactions of individual purpose—practical and ephemeral, rational, innovative, and inconsistent. Or again, George Steiner (1975) urged a recognition of language as exhibiting a dual phenomenology: a conventional and public surface, as against personal and private depths. Beneath a common surface of speech forms and notations, of grammar and phonology, flow the speaker-hearers’ articulate consciousnesses and their individual idiolects. Hence,

the language of a community, however uniform its social contour, is an inexhaustibly multiple aggregate of speech-atoms, of finally irreducible personal meanings. (Steiner 1975:46)

It is personal meanings that support the continuing collective exchange: they are its roots, and they derive from the singular specificity of individual speaker-hearers’ somatic and psychological identities. Any conception of normal or standard idioms—of linguistic homogeneity—is a fiction, part of a political rhetoric: “grammatical rules” can amount to only approximate and unstable summaries of the regularities of actual speech (Steiner 1975:173, 204).

An essential insight in these alternative versions of language—and an emancipatory one—concerns the nature of linguistic competency. Routine social exchange by way of a

set of commonly held symbols does not determine the life lived—felt, interpreted, intended—within it, nor does it guarantee the knowledge derived. Symbols do not carry their meanings on their backs (as Wittgenstein also came to recognize), and to partake in a verbal, a conceptual, even a behavioral exchange is to share precisely in a form of life but not necessarily (or likely) in its contents. Meaning is a personal and private project. As Sapir (1956:153) also admitted, it is in the nature of the “friendly ambiguities” of linguistic forms that an individuation of interpretation takes place in the moment of those forms being superficially shared. Competent speaker-hearers exchange common forms in conventional ways in public spaces, but what they come to know, and why, derives from the gratuitousness—the radical isness and I-ness—of interior, bonebound identities (Rapport 2008a). And ethnography bears this out. The meanings construed and the worldviews inhabited within a language community, even a small, apparently coherent community, far from assuming a determinate and homogeneous profile, may comprise an aggregation of diversity and idiosyncrasy (Briggs 1992; Cohen 1987; Devereux 1978; Rapport 1993; Schwartz 1978; Szwed 1966; Wallace 1964).

The slippage or ambiguity that characterizes the relation between form and meaning in symbolic languages offers anthropology a methodology as well as a research question. Certainly, research questions present themselves—How does an individual human being come to know? What in the way of an organ of perception capacitates the knowing human body independently from the particular symbolic forms of its expression?—but the free play of language—the nature of language as appropriatable and improvisatorial—also affords a space for inventing a scientific methodology of representation. It gives anthropology after Levinas and Stirner a characteristic shape: anthropology moves ideally from a position of solipsism—being at home in a particular, situated, conventional language—through a pretextual, nonconventional, acultural knowing—meeting the human other in the field—to an emergent technical textualization. This movement might be dubbed one from “culture” to “civilization” and a cosmopolitan emancipation (Rapport 2012b).

Two linguistic ventures come into play here. First, there is a scientific one; but there is also an aesthetic one, equally technical, by which the human others met in the field—the energetic things-in-the-world that look back at one—are borne witness to without “enculturation,” without incorporation or mythologization. An anthropological knowing comprises the progressive understanding of a universal human condition—a scientific discernment of human capacities—alongside a duty of distance and of ignorance concerning the substance of other individual human lives. One writes an aesthetic account of the event of meeting an individual otherness, as it seemed to oneself, at the same time as one is self-conscious regarding the fictional nature of one’s text. Anthropology does justice to the “passion,” the “anarchy” of the event of otherness without presuming to transcend or reduce its mystery.



## Coda: Roger Weir

I conducted my most recent field research by working for a year as a porter (or orderly) in a large state-funded teaching hospital in eastern Scotland (Rapport 2008b). Roger Weir became a regular interlocutor of mine. We had begun on the same day and had undergone the same induction procedure. Roger was some 20 years my junior at the time (in his early 20s), but I would match my insinuation into the institutionalism and hierarchy of the hospital against his. Timing our lunch breaks to coincide, we would sit together in a corner of the staff dining room, compare sandwiches, and discuss love lives while also comparing notes on our recent portering experience.

Roger was born 3 months prematurely, he informed me shortly after our first meeting. The tendons in his legs were too short, and that is why he still walked rather as if he were cross-country skiing: as if he were sliding across surfaces, knees bent and heels splayed out. He took up karate to stretch his tendons, and he has kept it up now for 8 years, three times a week. Not that that has helped his poor coordination—or his dyslexia, for that matter. His other great love is his music, he informs me: Black Sabbath and Ozzy Osbourne, to be precise. His feet will always mean that he has a partial disability in karate, but in music—writing songs and singing them in his band—there are no limits. He has no limits: “Keep on rocking, Nigel.”

While I remain a front-door porter, Roger is allocated to the operating theatres, an assignment he comes to hate. It is boring, it is dirty, and the people working there are officious and do not know the meaning of fun. He has to clear up after medical operations without proper training, he complains to me: bloody floors, bloody clogs. It is as if he were employed as a domestic. And he could catch a superbug. He is going to have to start telling his hospital bosses straight what he thinks of them. (It is not as if his job here were the real thing—as important as his band, or fun!) Roger repeatedly talks to me of two escapes: the annual Black Sabbath “Ozzfest” in Milton Keynes, near London, and a possible karate tour of Japan to embrace further the manners, spirituality, and most perfect gentlemanliness of the Japanese masters.

Meanwhile, Roger keeps on at Constance Hospital, determined to hold his own. He continues to be surprised, too, by the limits his fellow workers set themselves and would set him. Why behave as automata? Why be co-opted by the terms laid down by institutional dicta? Roger seems surprised by the very discourses of a hospital as a professional space and the positionalities apparently on offer: alignment and resistance, cooperation and contest. Furthermore, Roger’s experience of the otherness of the world occasions me to recognize *his* otherness. He is, he tells me, “a wild child, with a heart of gold.” (His reputation among the other porters, more often, was as a fool, if not retarded.) I must resist the temptation to objectify him—even to the extent of turning him into a figure I can easily imagine and for whom descriptive terms from my own experience are a ready fit (“cross-country

skiing,” “love lives”). The face and body abutting mine do not so easily give up their mystery.

An abiding image I have in my head is walking beside Roger down the long and wide public corridors, en route to a fetching or carrying job. I am in my front-door yellow polo shirt, with “N. Rapport, Support Services” emblazoned on the chest; Roger is in his operating-theater greens. We walk side by side, Roger with his characteristic gait (and me rather round-shouldered and flat-footed). While we walk Roger insists on playing loud Black Sabbath riffs on his air guitar, to the bemusement of passers-by; or else he practices his karate kicks on various of the swing doors and walls and noticeboards that we pass. I find Dr. Johnson and Boswell walking with us, too; Stirner and Levinas, too.

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## Comments

### Anne Line Dalsgård

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I welcome Nigel Rapport’s argument on a nontextual, culturally unaffected sphere of human existence for at least three reasons.

I have always found Rapport’s insistence on a particularly *human* capacity inspiring (as in this article: “to know, again, as human beings”). The notion of a universal, rational, and response-able individual, which he defends, is more a question than a fact for me, as I also see reasons for a less flattering notion of the human, one that includes an immense susceptibility to habit and adaptation. But even so, the integrity of Rapport’s argument is affirming. It seems to be not only about life in general but also a personal, hopeful quest for a meaningful existence, and if anthropology did not include a striving to understand one’s own being, I would find it a rather bizarre exercise in its prying examination of others’ lives.

Another reason for welcoming the argument is my own interest in moments of a different kind of knowing. I once worked as an actor in a small group theatre, and on the floor, especially when practicing, I got to rely on an intelligence that is not connected to the categorizing, analytical mind. It is an intelligence that understands complexities much faster than words can capture, as when you experience the atmosphere of a room change by the physical presence of an incoming person. Such moments arise in fieldwork, too, and have been described (especially in works from the mid-1990s [Csordas 1994; Jackson 1996b]), but despite their relevance to recent debates on affect and materiality, they seem to have disappeared from our methodological discussions, perhaps exactly because of their being human. I am not convinced, however, that such moments of sensibility and recognition of physical being are beyond culture (though well beyond “the

domain of conventional conceptualization and classification”). The interesting question for me as an anthropologist has always been how culture manifests itself in bodily and affective responses rather than whether it does so at all. However, Rapport’s proposal challenges this rather safe anthropological position and spurs a need to test it empirically.

Third, I simply welcome the idea of a sphere of knowledge beyond words for the challenge it poses to academia, namely, to put that which is nontextual into text or perhaps to find empty spaces for it to exist in the midst our writings. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s (2004) distinction between textual presence and meaning is worth considering here, as is the question of the form of arguments we produce. Rapport proposes aesthetic accounts of the event of otherness and its energetic effect on ego, but I find that much still has to be explored in terms of such descriptions. Can we write about events of otherness without losing the energy they originally brought to our reflections? Is there a way to keep them intact and active in description? As much as I really enjoy reading about Roger in the coda of the article, I also miss the sense of wonder that Rapport writes about. One could say that wonder is Rapport’s experience but need not be his reader’s. But I would not agree; for me, an anthropological argument should preferably work on more than the analytical level alone. But again, this of course applies to the question Rapport raises: “How does an individual human being come to know?”

Reaching this question almost toward the end, the article finishes with a puzzle rather than an answer. We may ask what anthropology is, if a dutiful remembrance of our “ignorance concerning the substance of other individual human lives” is kept at the heart of our endeavor. Or, put differently, how may we reach “a scientific discernment of human capacities,” if the experience of otherness is continually foregrounded? How do we as anthropologists come to know? To me, it seems that we have to move beyond the “awe before the finite human body” to interest and relationship, to risk the respectful distance in order to get close enough to be touched and disturbed. Walking with Nigel and Roger down that corridor, I wish to know what Roger asked Nigel about; how Roger’s otherness affected Nigel; how Nigel tried to test his impression of Roger by asking, looking, sensing; and what it feels like to be a bonebound identity. The recognition of the limits to our subjective life-worlds may be our rescue from naïve identification, or at least allow us to remember that empathy is just the beginning of a search (Leavitt 1996: 530). But I do not believe in any safe, civilized position to arrive at. Just human vulnerability.

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12 IX 14

Although himself a reader of anthropology, Emmanuel Levinas has as yet found less resonance among anthropologists

than other French thinkers (but see Benson 2008). Rapport proposes to (re)turn, with Levinas, to an anthropology beyond cultural comparison and textual relativism, insisting on ethnography as “humanist” pursuit, against the idea of ontological or cultural plurality as disciplinary linchpin. “Anthropology through Levinas” takes the radical alterity of the other human being (rather than the diversity of plural worlds) as an enigmatic starting point for a “pretextual or nontextual” ethnographic sensitivity, prior to relativism, culturalism, and their contemporary guises.

Rapport’s reading mirrors the philosopher’s own turn to anthropology. Writing on “Lévy-Bruhl and contemporary philosophy” in 1957, Levinas examined our maligned forefather’s writings on participation in primitive mentality and his gradual shift from positing the prelogical as cultural trait to the recognition of universal pretextual or nonrepresentational modes of human existence. Levinas understands Lévy-Bruhl’s project as quest for human being “before cultures” (if possibly more recognizable among certain peoples), searching a “profound reality [that] reveals its existing in dimensions that cannot be defined by any category of representation, but to which . . . we have direct access albeit through modes of our existence that are different from theory” (1995 [1957]:60). This echoes Rapport’s quest for fundamental, even absolute, knowledge and for a return, beyond common sense and language, “to a place from which we begin to know, again, as human beings.” Rapport’s trajectory of anthropological knowledge making—from conventional language, “through pretextual, nonconventional, acultural knowing,” to “technical textualization”—resembles Levinas’s call, “not to return to the primitive articles of faith” (i.e., the practices and structures that universal experiences have produced in certain cultures), but to rediscover universal ways of being by way of attention to the other (1995 [1957]:58).

My own reading of some of Levinas’s writings, while I was living in an East African village, helped me to think through relations between oneness and separation, mergedness and emergence, proximity and alterity, which we later discussed using Levinas’s term, as matters of “touch” (Prince and Geissler 2010). From this long-past reading, literally in a different field and guided by different encounters, I have some questions—ignorant curiosity rather than expert critique. For one, I wonder whether the opposition of language (as a “limit of my world”) and what Rapport calls “corporeality” holds or whether such “individual, bonebound being” is an appropriate rendering of what Levinas speaks of as “the face,” sometimes “body and face.” When Levinas, for example, proposes that language is proximity and touch, rather than mere representation or passing on of knowledge (1999 [1967]), the stark distinction between corporeal and discursive, body and language, is eroded. If language—in his terms as the “saying” rather than as the said—can touch the other, is that mainly corporeal? We drew on Levinas to discuss “touch” as a dimension of ethnographic fieldwork and central to a particular ontological possibility, but the metaphor of touch might be misleading in regard to its apparent corporeality.

Levinas speaks of touch and (similar to de Certeau's "tactility") "contact" in the face-to-face with the other, but he posits this not as opposed to vision, or indeed to language, but rather as the underlying modality of being, which can take place also in the regard exchanged with the other, or in words. The point is that touch as event precedes the relation and the being of those in touch. Speech and vision can touch, and from this contingent event, imbued with "tenderness and responsibility" (1999 [1967]:274–275), everything else stems. Rather than the question of the body, it is the relation of touch to responsibility, of face to demand—Levinas's primacy of the ethical—that orients the argument. "Respect" and "awe," yes; but for "the finite human body?"

This relates to a second question about Rapport's notion of humans as "discrete centers of energy."

Possibly because of my ignorance of Stirner's work, I wonder about the compatibility of this anthropology—and of Stirner's "ego" outside the normativity of language and culture—with Levinas's "destruction of substance" or of "substantiveness" (1995 [1957]:66) and his critique of phenomenological notions of intentionality and intersubjectivity. If the mystery of plurality consists of the fact that relation precedes entity, that objects always objectify relations—then where does the ego free from normativity fit? For Levinas, the face of the other elicits obligation before being; ethics precedes ontology. Is this fundamentally passive form of effect what Rapport aims at when proposing that anthropology study "the effects that human beings as individual, energetic things in the world have upon one another"? Or is there a tension?

These questions, posed in the spirit of shared curiosity, reduce in no way the value of Rapport's call to draw on Levinas for contemporary anthropology and to explore the enigma of fieldwork by acknowledging incommensurable otherness and the contingent possibility of seeing the other facing him "naked" in Levinas's sense, as in the coda and some of the author's other writings. Emblematic for the role of contingency—as both unpredictability and proximity—in ethnographic knowing, is Rapport's robin, somewhat unexpectedly arriving at the window midway through the text and its writing, eye to eye but beyond mutual control or intention: unpredictable and unfixable penetration of the other (human or nonhuman) into the horizon of representation, rupturing the bubble of the taken-for-granted, opening a momentary possibility to know.

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By asking "What is the nature of the knowing subject, and what is the nature of the known object?" this article con-

siders the possible forms that thought and action might take outside of the social and linguistic structures that shape human subjectivity. "The nub of the issue," Rapport suggests, is how a small, bonebound "organism-in-its-environment" with finite knowledge about itself, other humans, and the world can transcend overdetermination by the surrounding society or at the hands of anthropologists. Here Rapport strongly questions the dominant metaphors anthropology uses to theorize human subjectivity and asks, What might an anthropological model of human subjectivity look like if it was rethought, reassembled, and not seen through conventional analytical tropes of sociality, relationality, context, habitus, textuality, and so on? For, as Michael Jackson (1996a) points out, these are metaphors of analysis and explanation rather than determining agents, and it is erroneous to confuse the theoretical abstractions used to explain and analyze human beings with their experiential reality on the ground.

The concomitant problem, for Rapport, is the mistaken, yet epistemologically convenient, practice of inferring the content of people's thinking and being from the surrounding social context. Drawing on the existential philosophy of Stirner and Levinas and the ecological anthropology of Bateson, Rapport argues against anthropological claims to knowledge that equate human subjectivity with social, cultural, or national identity to the extent that an individual's "flesh and mind" simply become a black box that reflects the surrounding society. The issue is both ontological and moral in that, for Rapport, understanding human life rests less on the circumstances of where a person is born, socializes, works, and prays or how they are defined and categorized than on the existential fact of their belonging to the human race. Being human involves getting by in an uncertain world in which knowledge is not completely socially constituted and thus can take radically different forms, leading Rapport to argue for a disciplinary rethinking whereby other human beings are not so readily defined, explained, understood, categorized, or localized through a default recourse to social or cultural forms.

Following Levinas, Rapport outlines a model in which other persons are irreducible in their alterity and encompass realms of knowing and being—including what might be described as pretextual or nontextual—that exist beyond social, linguistic, or hermeneutic understanding. Consequently, any attempt to understand the Other in and of themselves, as opposed to in terms of a social category, involves a systematic distortion wherein their actions, motivations, and worldview are made comprehensible by translating them into the familiar symbolic forms (social, moral, epistemological, political, etc.) of the Same. This effects a type of violence on the Other that fails to recognize them in their full humanity. As we cannot fully know other persons, our primary relation is therefore ethical rather than epistemological. This suggests a different kind of knowing subject and postulates a type of awareness and appreciation of other human beings that cannot be defined in terms of objective rational truth or shared, hermeneutic understanding but nevertheless offers a basis

for engaging with, learning about, and responding to other persons. In this model, individuality, uniqueness, and otherness are not the opposites of human commonality but the conditions that bring it into being as people engage with each other's emotions, motivations, and actions within the flow of quotidian activity. Performative action is thus less a script written by and about others than a mode of improvising and acting in relation to gaps and breakdowns in knowledge and comprehension. Action does not involve or imply radical renunciations of preexisting ways of being; instead, it is sufficient to be any activity (purposeful or otherwise) that reveals the contingency of society and habitual practices. Or, in Sartre's terms, "the small movement which makes of a totally conditioned social being someone who does not render back completely what his conditioning has given him" (1974:45). This is the province of the small movements of the finite, mortal human being who can live in, act in, and imagine the world otherwise.

In spirit, if not always in practice, it is an activity that is constituted in the face-to-face encounter. Here the Other—as prefigured by Martin Buber (1958 [1923]) before Levinas—is referred to not as "he," "she," "they," "working class," "elite," "English," "African," "informant," and so on, but as "you," placing them in a second-person position and thereby mediating the dualism between first-person subjectivity and third-person objectivity. In this reciprocal address of "you," grounds for mutual and embodied interaction are established that allow the possibility for a type of moral awareness and appreciation that provides a practical basis for engaging with, learning about, and responding to the experiences of other human beings in ways that do not reduce them to prescribed, third-person, categorical identities.

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Several major paradigmatic struggles exist in the history of modern social anthropology. Looking back on this history, one notices how important these confrontations have been in generating creative thoughts within the discipline, as in other disciplines. One also notices that in anthropology, in parallel with the development of paradigmatic thinking, influential scholars have also sought to bring the apparently opposing streams of ideas together or to generate reciprocal effects between them. Marcel Mauss's 1905 work on the seasonal variations of Inuit life springs to mind. In this incredibly creative, epoch-engaging work, Mauss expressed his political and scholarly interest in the ethnographic reality in which human beings are both individuals and nonindividuals, where social life can accommodate both the time we are communalists and the time we become anticomunitarians. Why did he do that? I think he was keen to bring together

what his mentor and uncle, Émile Durkheim, separated in *The Division of Labor in Society*. He was also deeply concerned about the escalating ideological tensions in French society and, more broadly, in Europe (remember the Dreyfus affair?). He called the two forms of Inuit socioecological life the "individualism" of summer and wintertime "communism." His later, better-known 1923–1924 work on the morality of gift exchange has to be read in relation to his earlier essay on the Inuit. Then, his concept of reciprocity, primarily associated with his *The Gift* today, and his efforts to imagine the horizon of human morals beyond the polarity of gift and monetary economies, appear with fresh meaning. As someone whose research centers around the sociocultural history of the Cold War and what anthropology can do to broaden our knowledge of this history, the concept of reciprocity that emerges from this reading is as liberating as the concept of liberty (when one feels suffocated by the imperatives of community) or of solidarity or of fundamental self-and-other relatedness (when one feels isolated and unconnected to others).

Ironically, in order to continue this important art of reciprocation or transvaluation, we need to continue to have paradigmatic things between which we can practice the art. Individualism and communism were such things for Mauss. For those of us a century later, there is individuality versus personhood, as well as many other varieties.

A few days ago, I was having a conversation over tea with a colleague about his new book ideas. At some point in our enjoyable conversation, we somehow hit upon the polarity of the individual and the person. My colleague emphatically said, "The battle has been won, has it not?" Nigel Rapport's new essay is a poignant reminder that this may not be the case. This battle is not something one side or the other side can declare a victory in—just like the Cold War. His essay provides a timely awakening to the fact that the battle continues and that it has to continue. I doubt there will be an end game to this, and I hope that there never will be.

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### James Leach

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"A man's head is not a bamboo tube." The phrase (used by Nekkini-speaking people of Papua New Guinea in the context of sorcery divination) is perhaps worth consideration in the light of Rapport's complex, sensitive anthropological project. Unlike a bamboo tube (used to hide sorcery materials), a man's head cannot be split open to reveal its contents. The thoughts and motivations of others are not available for inspection in that manner: a confirmation, it appears, of Rap-

port's "bonebound island" of individual knowledge. It is worth consideration because I would, in many other regards, draw on Nekgini thought and practice to question the image of individual and knowledge outlined here.

Nekgini speakers continually make explicit to themselves the constitution of any human being as the ongoing project of others. Flesh, for example, is specifically not "one's own," but the product of specific other people's labor and knowledge in growing crops, supplying protein, and undertaking sentient, directed nurture. To be corporeal is to share in, borrow, and make use of other's labor and knowledge manifested in your body being your body, your flesh. And this extends to thought and knowledge. Knowledge is rarely claimed to have arisen independently of particular relationships and the powers or work of others. Further, health is threatened not only by one's kinsmen's thoughts and feelings about the self but also, indeed, by the very unknown aspects of the self that lie beyond consciousness, emanating as spirit or ghost.

This is perhaps a predictable response to Rapport's arguments. It is perhaps too easy, and also not quite in the same register. And his arguments deserve to be taken seriously. It is, after all, "only" I who is forming these thoughts, and I am more than aware of their difference from those of other people. A sense of that reality of difference is made palpable by their very fleshly existence, clearly discernible as like and yet other to the self. Rapport makes a powerful (if complex) moral argument for humanist appreciation of the value of human exceptionalism through mutual recognition. His recommendation is that anthropology adopt this, rather than problematic conceptualizations of shared cultural understanding, as the focus for ethnographic and philosophical investigation.

Accepting the problems with "culture," his text made me reflect in a challenging way on my relationships with my friends among Nekgini speakers and, indeed, my own family. "This paradoxical relation—of knowing that one does not know, and cannot—calls for further elucidation." But as Nekgini practice suggests, the paradox extends to knowing that one does not really know self. There is a mystery there as well. As Kohn puts it, "We can never really know what other selves—human or nonhuman—are 'really' thinking, just as we can never be so sure of what we ourselves are really thinking" (2007: 9). Self—and knowledge of the world—is also a process, an emergence in each moment. It changes, surprises us, is formed through others, human and nonhuman, always there.

But the head cannot be split open to reveal its contents as a bamboo tube can. The implication of Nekgini divinatory practice within which this phrase has meaning is that there are other means to know what is contained within the heads of men. The other both is and, at crucial moments, is not a mystery because their actions and behaviors do reveal truth about what is "in the head." Humans reveal because they

cannot help but act in regard of and with regard to others around them. The knowledge of self and other is shifting, emergent, and partial. The delimited consciousness is always penetrated by others and reaches out into others' consciousness as influence, motivation, concern, anger, fear, empathy. A man's head is emphatically not a bamboo tube. The "universality" of "autonomous, capable human actors" is not dependent on an irreducible interiority.

Asserting that self is already others is not to deny individuality, not to deny that knowledge is different from others', as Rapport outlines so poetically, and has its own motivational and knowledge generating capacity. I agree with Rapport: "While not isolated or independent, the life-worlds of different human beings abut one another with consequences that are unpredictable, not determinate." What we might question is the model of perception that sees the senses as media conveying outside to singular interior. That individual knowledge must somehow be separate from the knowledge of others. Whether we consider Nekgini speakers' practices that assume that a real knowledge is possible in the process of relating (when due care and attention are applied) or their equal acknowledgement of the unfolding of self in processes not wholly in awareness or under control, they point to the way entities and knowledge emerge in particular relationships. These can be analyzed for individuality, motivation, and identity.

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### Limits in Wittgenstein and in Anthropology

Nigel Rapport must be congratulated for this sophisticated essay on the nature of the pre- or nontextual sphere of human life. He challenges a long intellectual arc in which the symbolic and language-based dimensions of collective life have been foregrounded and treated as determining at the expense of self-conscious, reflexive persons. He does not, however, erect a straw anthropological man fashioned out of discursive determinism; rather, it is a version of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy that he attacks. And his theoretical concerns fold into questions about writing: he uses Stirner and Levinas contra Wittgenstein to attend to a richness and beauty in human life that have often been left unattended.

I wish to comment on two aspects of this essay. First, while I share Rapport's concerns about "ordinary-language philosophy," I think that a more generous reading of Wittgenstein is actually helpful. After all, if the intention is to free anthropology from the prison-house of ordinary language, then a richer dialogue with the alleged jailer is required. Sec-

ond, the vignette about heavy metal-loving Roger Weir serves to illustrate the human capacity to exceed. Weir emerges in a truly memorable way that asks questions about how anthropology writes about shared and yet singular humanity.

But what of the prison-house of ordinary-language philosophy? At times, Rapport's essay chimes with Ernest Gellner's *Language and Solitude* (1998), which situates both Wittgenstein's philosophy and the *mise-en-scène* of anthropology in the "Hapsburg dilemma," a culture war between atomistic individualism and the communitarian. Wittgenstein, Gellner says, shifted violently from the former to the latter (apparently, Malinowski merely shuffled the deck). Wittgenstein, Gellner says, granted a determining role to language, with forms of life enclosing rationality and each culture becoming self-validating and limiting. The valedictory *Language and Solitude* concludes by tilting at a narrow version of Wittgenstein: "The possibility of transcendence of cultural limits is a fact; it is the single most important fact about human life" (Gellner 1998:187). But a more generous reading of Wittgenstein is helpful. In the *Tractatus* he remarks, "The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world" (1961:5.632). The image suggests a visual horizon composed of always-incomplete perspectives on an unfinished world. Thus, limits are crucial, for the subject is, to borrow from William James, forever surrounded by *more*—uncertainty, doubt, and skepticism are anthropological data.

Today, key interlocutors such as Veena Das and Stanley Cavell also attend to limits, skepticism, and a broader reading of forms of life, even in Wittgenstein part II. Cavell (2013: 41–42 *passim*) pushes beyond the conventional "ethnological" version of *forms* of life, in which language agreement and rules seem almost contractual and underpin the naturally social human being. Beyond this, however, he explores another axis in Wittgenstein's thought concerned with (forms of) *life*. And along this axis, according to Das, "we can appreciate not only the security provided by belonging to a community with shared agreements but also the dangers that human beings pose to each other" (2007:15). Along this axis, then, one notes the limits (and abutting?) of forms of *life* and the potential for skepticism. Perhaps the prison-house may not be Wittgenstein's after all but, rather, the product of "ethnological" conventions through which the symbolic and language-based axis is foregrounded and treated as determining. This brings me to anthropological writing and its conventions.

I think this essay makes its most provocative contribution on the topic of writing: Rapport's conceptual work reveals itself to be partly methodological, and he asks questions about the anthropological language needed to attend to the human capacities of interlocutors. Of course, the heavy metal-loving Roger Weir who concludes the text has his own discursive determinism—Japanese culture filtered through karate—and Rapport has to willfully preserve Weir's mystery from the temptation to write about him as a "figure." It is this temp-

tation that interests me. What are the conventions in anthropological writing that compel one to find figures instead of human beings, and often anonymous figures at that? How might one explore more experimental forms of knowledge production with counterparts? These questions are being asked in diverse areas of anthropology today, for example, in work on expert counterparts, their errors, skepticism, and capacities for action within the contemporary. There, and in other areas, the curiously resistant conventions and unstated power relations of the discipline's *mise-en-scène* are shown to be unhelpful.

Rapport's essay concludes with bonebound Roger Weir karate-kicking his way down a hospital corridor, refuting conventions with every blow. I was left with a desire to read more anthropology that starts there, because the evidence that will support Rapport's theoretically sophisticated position will surely be found in the writing project that begins with Weir and others abutting a world. I was left with a desire to read more about collaborations, counterparts, and even possible interventions.

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First, I thank Rapport for his stimulating and ambitious paper. My intention is to use it to consider the more general issue of the relationship between anthropology and philosophy.

Rapport starts by examining the trajectory from Wittgenstein to the relativism of Winch and Evans-Pritchard. The argument seems clear, but it reflects a very specific period of English philosophy and anthropology that probably had little influence on the many other variants of relativism that remain foundational to anthropology more generally. For those of us interested in areas such as material culture and visual and digital anthropology, there have been many reasons to refuse any privileging of textual encounters and indeed of language. So while agreeing with Rapport's critique, one could argue that this commitment to nontextual knowledge makes very little difference to arguments about the significance of relativism or its role as foundational to anthropological studies of cultural variability.

In this case, however, Rapport wants to argue against this relativism not on the basis of such social and material domains but through presuming a pre- or supracultural form in the corporality and nature of each unique and individual human being. As it happens, this is a point that has also been made of textual knowledge. Recalling debates around the work of Chomsky and other linguists, we recognize that there has long been an argument that language must be accepted as an inherent capacity of merely being human, possessed by

each and every individual. While language has its essential social and cultural properties, we affirm that in both speaking and writing people retain the capacity to communicate unique experiences in unique ways. At the same time, acknowledging our biological affordance to language has not prevented the emergence of stridently relativist arguments, such as those of Wittgenstein. So rather than a dualist opposition, perhaps it is better to regard the claim to the uniqueness and individuality of each person as the end of a spectrum that also includes the claim to the uniqueness and specificity of culture.

Over many works Rapport has sought to rescue the appreciation of individuals against their suppression in anthropological generalization. Again, I would support Rapport in this, and I find that, in my own writing as in his, it is important to have the kind of stories he ends with to make that point. But I would suggest this should be a question of balance, not a simple opposition. So my criticism is that Rapport takes this to an extreme, and the reason for this in this paper is that he is not here writing balanced ethnography but turning to philosophy. Just because Levinas is a renowned philosopher, his claims that the relationship to the other is absolute and his discussion of the irreducible nature of the face of the other are not in themselves evidence for such claims. Indeed, these citations make clear that Levinas is largely concerned with the particular responsibility of philosophy as a discipline and his own theological concerns. It does not create an anthropological argument that when we pursue pre- or supratextual knowledge we thereby encounter a human corporality that is unique and a mystery.

This exemplifies the problem of anthropology's relationship to philosophy, which has become asymmetrical and detrimental to the discipline. Increasingly, anthropologists look to philosophy to resolve issues we find difficult, too fluid, and too disparate. Philosophy can certainly achieve the ambitions we have for it, because it provides levels of abstraction where things can be resolved in semantics and logic. Anthropology is better served by resisting this allure of philosophy and refusing to privilege any dimension of its encounter, be it language, cognition, or ego. Instead, it should retain its grounding in comparative ethnography and argue on the basis of what we find and can ourselves attest to. It may be harder, but I would suggest that it is always better to be unresolved anthropologists than resolved philosophers.

So I blame philosophy for leading Rapport from a useful critique to a concluding section where he argues that either we accept a social analysis where culture is homogenizing or determinant or we accept these philosophers' privileging of the unique individual. It is philosophy that requires this kind of precision and distinction. At least since Bourdieu, most anthropologists have accepted that culture, in the sense of the normative, is neither deterministic nor a rule. Many actual instances will fail to accord with cultural claims. We can respect individuals without mystifying their integrity. We will

always have to work in worlds that make many generalized claims and yet always through particular instances. For these reasons, anthropology is much better served by its commitment to demystification than standing in awe of any mystery of ego, or irreducibility of ontology for that matter. Let's leave that to the philosophers.

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In this thought-provoking piece, Nigel Rapport argues that human beings have the intuitive perceptual capacity to recognize a commensurateness in fellow humans that goes beyond the sociocultural and historical contingencies of time and place. The title is slightly misleading because the article draws on the philosophical thinking of both Emmanuel Levinas and the lesser-known Max Stirner. Rapport confronts us, once again, with an old tension within the discipline between the enlightened universalism of "anthropos" and the romantic diversitarianism of "ethnos" (Stocking 1992). Historically, the Westphalian system of sovereign nation-states and the era of imperial and colonial expansionism led to a disproportionate stress on the study of "difference." Mainstream sociocultural anthropology became conflated with the project of ethnography (Ingold 2008), namely, the systematic study and description of individual human cultures.

Ironically, processes of (mostly cultural) globalization have renewed the anthropological attention paid to human universals and universal humanity. This is most often couched in the popular language of cosmopolitanism (Wardle 2010). Rapport (2012a) himself has been promoting "cosmopolitan anthropology," which may be conceived of as a return to the discipline's Enlightenment origins (and an antidote to dominant postmodern ideas). When Immanuel Kant first formulated anthropology as a modern project, a science of humankind, what he had in mind was precisely the linking up of the individual human being, in its everyday diversity, and its more global historical commonality.

Inspired by Stirner and Levinas, Rapport advocates for "a duty of distance and of ignorance concerning the substance of other individual human lives." Anthropological knowing, he argues, comprises "the progressive understanding of a universal human condition" (a "scientific discernment of human capacities"). This point of view relates to a strand in anthropological epistemology that stresses the importance of "strangeness" in the ethnographic encounter and the fact that there always remains a (necessary) distance between the self and the other (Agar 1996). This leaves room for mystery and wonder, for passion and anarchy, in brief, for an aesthetic appreciation of the human other (*Autrui*) that exceeds the comprehension of the ego and exists independently of

any relation to that ego. While the anthropologist in the field may get close to grasping human complexity, from the moment ethnography becomes writing he or she is caught in (con)text and interpretation. What exactly gets lost in translating “pretextual, nonconventional, acultural knowing” to “an emergent technical textualization”? Would nontextual forms of data gathering and analysis serve us any better?

For Levinas, it is the “face,” the singularity of an impression that is absolutely unique, that reveals absolute otherness in the other person (Benson and O’Neill 2007). Rapport, too, stresses the importance of “ego’s face-to-face relation with the other.” However, in today’s world, many interactions between people no longer take place in a face-to-face context that allows a direct, prerational engagement with others. What does Rapport’s anthropology have to say about a humanity that is increasingly mediating human interaction through “distancing” information and communication technologies? How would he respond to the critique that his vision of anthropology is overly subjectivist and anthropocentric? Is it not putting too much stress on individuality and giving too much agency to the individual? Should anthropology automatically exclude that which lies beyond the human (however broad or narrow the latter is defined)?

All people on this planet may share a similar potential to become “an autonomous, capable human actor,” but far from everybody is able to realize that potential. Rapport’s stress on corporeality—the “flesh and mind” of the self (Stirner) and the “body and face” of the other (Levinas)—leads to questions regarding the “boundaries” of universal humanity. From which point in a person’s life trajectory does the human organ of perception that “enables *ego* to know *alter*” become functional, and when does it stop working? The proposed philosophical model is based on an ideal-type able-bodied and able-minded human. In which ways can the organ of perception malfunction, and what does this tell us about universal humanity? Moreover, if humans have “the perceptual capability of recognizing universally a humanity that is distinct from thinghood and from animality and from technology,” how do they deal with instances where individual corporeal boundaries are not all that clear (e.g., Siamese twins)? Answering these queries related to abnormality may help fine-tune the model.

Finally, Rapport stresses that his contribution is theoretical and epistemological. Indeed, the questions he addresses are mainly philosophical ones. Anthropology ideally addresses these issues “in the world,” but Rapport does not elaborate much on the methodologies through which anthropologists in particular can obtain access to the assumed commonality that unites humans. Which methodological toolbox do we have at our disposal? For many anthropologists, essays like this one are most likely perceived as highly abstract and difficult to apply outside the given conceptual frame. In sum, Rapport’s provocative text probably raises more questions than it answers.

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This essay, drawing centrally on Stirner and Levinas, nudges us to rethink anthropology by paying a new type of attention to the self-conscious individual human being. The kind of anthropology Rapport has in mind would reconnect us with the liberal idealist thinkers of a previous era, who placed free-acting individuality at the center of their (philosophical) anthropologies. In particular, he goes back to Stirner (methodological egoism), adapting Stirner’s concerns to those of a more familiar contemporary philosophical voice, Levinas’s (the mystery of the other), in order to highlight how marginalized the human self has become during the past decades of anthropological thought.

Suddenly, as it were, Rapport reveals to us that contemporary social inquiry shows little, if any, interest in actual selves, since the primary engagement is still with modeled subjectivities and these only for what they demonstrate about a larger cultural field, of which individuals are considered to be a fold. I strongly agree with the need Rapport is describing—the need to put the specificity (including the vagary, the inconsequence) of individual life back into the center of anthropological thinking and likewise the need to reassert philosophical anthropology as a counterpoint to structural or other modes of cultural-contextual accounting for human experience.

It is worth drawing on another nineteenth-century thinker here—Thomas Hill Green—to foreground key points. Green’s liberal idealism was posited against the social evolutionism of his day that would reduce individuality to an arbitrary expression of social-environmental forces. For Green (as for Rapport), the human individual is a spontaneous, self-realizing being whose self-consciousness freely and actively introduces newness into its relationship with the world. The individual is certainly, however, also a mystery both to others and to itself. The self remains a mystery to itself because it can know what it is only by remaking its personality in the world out of circumstances that its interactions have previously endowed with significance. Individual self-insight develops not absolutely but rather in time out of a series of contingent, will-imbued interventions.

As Green notes, the decision to give priority to the individual—as opposed to the social class, the in-group, the people, the state apparatus, the culture, God, or gods—is an epistemological one. Post-Enlightenment philosophy opened up the radical thought that everyone should count for one and none for more than one (a view shared, with diverging ramifications, by Stirner and J. S. Mill, for example), but this stance was (and has continued to be) challenged on all sides—by corporations and would-be power brokers of every stamp.



Meanwhile, the emerging art forms of Green's time, particularly the modern novel, acted as "expander[s] of sympathies," swelling the democratic and cosmopolitan impulse to see any individual life-project as of equal ultimate value to another (Green 1862:31)—an artistic democratization massively intensified via the media of our time.

In the ethnographic part of his essay, Rapport shows emphatically how it is possible to describe individual life and experience beyond the standard anthropological trope that human "rationality [is] circumscribed by the discursive opportunities made available by a 'culture,'" This element of the paper demands careful reflection. The main assertion, that Roger Weir's rationality is not limited to a given discursive or cultural set, is well shown and well taken. However, even if it does not determine how Roger Weir realizes himself, the discursive range does nonetheless index the circumstances out of which spring Weir's desires and his motivations; hence, it forms the background against which his particular élan shows up. This contrast is perhaps hidden by the fact that the hospital is a familiar type of place for most Euro-American readers. Even so, the hospital as a train of affordances is clearly and necessarily part of how we reflect on Weir's life. Hence, we are left with the question What is afforded to Roger Weir by this (as opposed to another) situation? But this should not overrule the equally important one, What does Roger Weir freely make out of his life?

In a world where the cosmopolitanization of experience is increasingly unavoidable, where in their sympathetic imagining individuals continuously find themselves both somewhere and elsewhere, the image of subjectivity as a fold of a prefigured culture must then become, if it is not already, intellectually unviable (Wardle 2000, 2009, forthcoming). Shifting our gaze from already-exhausted cultural forms to the potentials that individuals freely combine toward self-realization demands that we think, to use Green's words, about the "unapparent possibilities" of human individuality—"capabilities for [living in] some society not seen as yet" (1883:279). It may be that it is only through an epistemological reorientation toward subjective futures, then, that it becomes truly possible to make sense of the liberal claim (which I take to be crucial for Rapport, too) that everyone should count for one, none for more than one.

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## Reply

In *The Book of Disquiet*, published after his death in 1935, the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa wrote, "The only reason we get on together is that we know nothing about one another" (2010:236). (Likewise, from Baudelaire [1961:1297]: "If, by some mischance, people understood each other, they would

never be able to reach agreement.") And Pessoa goes on: "Every gesture, however simple, represents a violation of a spiritual secret" (2010:256). There are Levinasian echoes here: the ignorance pertaining to what can be known of other human beings; also the incommensurateness of any attempt to translate that radical difference—the gratuitousness or absolute is-ness of individuality—into symbolic-conventional terms.

In a recent essay on translation, the classicist Anne Carson urges an acceptance of untranslatability as a human condition. Verbal usage and experience have at their core a kind of metaphysical silence, Carson writes (2014:4). The only way to overcome this in conventional terms—in terms of our normal practices of transliteration—is to have recourse to cliché. But clichés must be refused if one's intention is to provide authentic testimony to the otherness of other human beings and their gratuitous expression.

Carson offers three examples, the first drawn from the trial of Joan of Arc (the others are from the painting of Francis Bacon and the poetry of Hölderlin). Caught in battle on May 23, 1430, Joan of Arc was tried from January to May 1431 (and burned on May 30, 1431). Joan's "defense" was that her guidance, military and moral, came from a source she called "voices," commanding her dress, her actions, her politics, and her beliefs. The prosecution insisted that she name and describe the voices in terms of orthodox religious imagery and in a conventional narrative—that they could then disprove. But Joan refused this, blocked it as long as possible. Her voices had no conventional forms; they were simply an experienced fact, and Joan refused to translate them into theological cliché: she insisted on their irreducibility to formulaicism. Finally, on February 24, 1430, as a kind of summary of her position, Joan said, "The light comes in the name of the voice." Was this not a sentence that, as Carson declares (2014:10), "stops itself"? Joan's words are apparently simple yet remain impressively foreign and unownable in essence.

*The Face of God* is the title of a recent book of metaphysics by philosopher Roger Scruton. "The face shines in the world of objects with a light that is not of this world," Scruton writes (2012:49). He refers to both "the light of subjectivity" and the light of a divinity that instills in the human an intentionality, activity, and freedom that cannot be distilled in objective terms. Is there not a terrible separation between a self-conscious human being and the world to which he or she belongs, Scruton ponders, and does not the human face embody an extraordinary portentousness?

I find myself drawn to insight of this existential kind—delivered here by a poet, a classicist, and a philosopher. They speak to me of what Michael Oakeshott—another philosopher—referred to as "the conversation of mankind" and what he saw as the greatest human accomplishment. In this civil conversation, "thoughts of different species [science, poetry, history] take wing and play round one another," respond to and provoke one another, in an unrehearsed and

cumulative intellectual adventure (Oakeshott 1962:197–200). I wish my anthropology to partake of this humanistic conversation, and I want to allow myself to be inspired by it. Each discipline of genuine inquiry will have its metier, but the point is to converse. Must I clearly demarcate an “anthropological” practice, however? My immediate response is that I am led to find inspiration in the above insights (Pessoa’s, Baudelaire’s, Carson’s, Scruton’s, Oakeshott’s—Stirner’s, Levinas’s) because they resonate with my ethnographic experience: I feel empowered by the comparative and interdisciplinary corroboration of the truths that is effected. My anthropology can be found party to an ongoing accumulation of knowledge in which different modes of inquiry and of expression collaborate. Together, a universalist human science is grown.

I appreciate, too, the intellectual engagement and the generosity practiced above by my nine commentators. I judge that there are (at least) nine discrete charges, which I briefly attempt to answer.

*First charge.* Is there not a clear distinction to be observed between anthropology and philosophy as disciplinary orientations? Whereas philosophy operates at a level of abstraction where semantics and logic can be looked to for specific resolutions, anthropology devotes itself to a comparative ethnography, to providing evidence of a world where things normally remain unresolved (Daniel Miller). For instance, it might make philosophical sense to model a typically capable human being, but anthropology must place these issues in the world where potentials are not realized and the functionality of perception is not equally shared (Noel Salazar).

*My response.* I feel that I share with the philosopher—with the humanist as such—three specific questions I would wish my anthropology to answer: (1) What are the truths of the human condition, and how may we know? (2) What are the appropriate forms for representing these truths? (3) What ethical living arrangements best respect these truths? I also admire the cogency of argumentation that philosophy demands of itself. I respect absolutely Kant’s ontological insights, say, Nietzsche’s aesthetic insights, Mill’s ethical insights. Indeed, I would define my anthropology (après Kant) in “cosmopolitan” terms: it is a project about the ontology of our humanity, about the aesthetics of representation, and about the morality of a free society. But this is not to say that anthropology does not make a distinctive and vital contribution: it provides the pure data from which universal formulations of ontology, aesthetics, and ethics are to be derived. It is the empirical exploration of the materiality of bodies and the resistance of the world. It delivers insights into consciousness in media res: in an individual body, in time, in space, in situation, operating amid a world of specific otherness (organic and inorganic). How near can I approach to Roger Weir, and how near to the others with whom he interacted? Anthropology-cum-philosophy spans the arc between the particular and the general, individuality and humanity, the actual and the potential.

*Second charge.* Is not a reciprocation between contrasting positions and paradigms more intellectually rewarding than polarizing their worth? Is not the truth of social life its capaciousness: a space where both individuals and nonindividuals, individualism and communalism, thrive? There is no victorious endgame here, only continuing transvaluation (Heonik Kwon). Balancing unique individuals, then, are unique cultures, and balancing cultural claims to rules are actual instances of indeterminacy. Privilege neither dimension, and avoid the irreducibilities of ontology (Daniel Miller).

*My response.* But truth is more important than compromise. I do not want to give respect to a contrastive position that is untrue; there is too much at stake. The truth of social life is that its constituent units are living individual human beings, not communities or cultures or classes. Individual human beings and (individual) cultures and communities are things of different kinds: they do not share the same status in reality. Human beings possess an ontological reality, while cultures and communities are constructs of discourse: fabrications about which we fantasize. I feel that it is a humanistic duty to recognize an absolute difference between an ontological truth and the world it evinces, on the one hand, and the world of symbols and rhetorics, on the other. Not to privilege the former over the latter—not to push for a victorious endgame here—and not to insist on the irreducibility of ontological truths is to give credence to nescience. It is to invite all manner of human repression, in the name of “culture”, “tradition”, “multiculturalism”, “identity politics,” and so on. The endgame must be when individuals are respected as things-in-themselves: not means to others’ ends, not identified according to others’ categorical ascriptions, not trapped in belongings—cultural, ethnic, religious, communitarian—that are not of their own mature choice.

*Third charge.* How does the register of anthropological discourse accord to ethnography? Take the Nekgini-speaking people of Papua New Guinea. In their thought and practice, the constitution of a human being is the ongoing project of others, both in terms of body or flesh and in terms of consciousness: both are the product of the labor and knowledge of others with whom “one” is in relationship. Here, “self” is already “others,” and consciousness always penetrated by others and aimed at others (James Leach).

*My response.* I hope cosmopolitan anthropology to be a component of human science, deepening knowledge of what it is to be human: concerning human capacities and how individuals come to operationalize or substantiate these. Our capacities possess a factual character that is a common limiting factor to our universal humanity, while individual substantiations may include fabrications or inventions that occupy imaginative terrains. In human life, certain “facts” stand by themselves, we might say, while others depend on human recognition and maintenance. “Science” is a name for the former facts and “religion” a variant of the latter. This is not to say that “dependent” facts or fabrications (religion, mythology, ideology, fantasy) cannot have real consequences when

people act as if they were independent facts—"I am a suicide-bomber because God ordains this a holy act"; "It is destiny that my lover and I should marry"—but it is to insist that anthropology always makes the distinction. It is an independent fact that human beings are mortal and that penicillin is curative; it is a dependent fact that women have no souls or are intrinsically modest or that the world is flat or that people can become jaguars. Does the anthropologist have a duty to respect others' dependent facts? As aesthetic choices voluntarily undertaken in maturity, such facts can be recognized as fulfilling significant desires for belonging, for beauty, for pleasure, for meaning: "I like belonging to this synagogue or the Conservative Party, or to support Arsenal Football Club, not Chelsea"; "It brings me pleasure to read Virginia Woolf, or to speak the Nekkini language"; "I find Stanley Spencer's paintings beautiful, and equally so fantasizing that my consciousness is penetrated by my kinsmen"; "My life's meaning attaches to material security, or to hearing divine voices." However, anthropology does not confuse or conflate ontology with aesthetics. Indeed, it is an ethical project to work to ensure that human beings do not suffer from the distinction's being unrecognized or ignored. The aesthetics of how a particular life is substantiated—how it accrues meaning, pleasure, beauty, and belonging—is ideally a matter of universal individual choices, choices made in the knowledge of a growing human treasury of what is factually true.

*Fourth charge.* Was not being touched by another human being—literally and metaphorically—for Levinas a foundational event: something that preceded identities, categories, and relations? Touch elicited being and also elicited obligation between the entities that emerged (passively) from it (Paul Wenzel Geissler). To be touched by difference is to be disturbed, pushed beyond a predisposition to habitude, even toward radical reevaluation (Anne Line Dalsgård).

*My response.* I appreciate these as aesthetic claims: "Touched when encountering Roger Weir, my life began anew." But I do not accept them as ontological truths. In order to be touched, my body and its interpretative capacities—including a predisposition to be touched—must precede any such encounter. In order to recognize something as an environmental affordance—in order to have my sense of self and my practical habits exist in an assemblage comprised of my body in conjunction with other things in the world (other bodies, tools, food)—I must first have the capacity to be a center of energy that may recognize and may exist. Second, I will possess a particular history of recognizing and existing, an ontogeny, that is unique to me. This unique history of being a body that interacts with what lies around it may be touched and disturbed, certainly, but not in such a way as to absolve it of that history and elicit a new being. There is only one beginning to a life and one end. More than this, the unique history of being a body that a human being begins, with its own energy or "intentionality," even before birth—engaging with what lies beyond it in an exploratory and learning way in its development of consciousness—and that ends only with death means that at any point along that unique trajectory of

a life it will be touched and disturbed in ways consequent upon its own history of knowing. The meaning of any encounter is irreducibly individual, however shocking, dishabituating, and new: made by individual sense-making energies and capacities and also party to a life history of such sense making.

*Fifth charge.* Might there be more equality in conceiving of social relations (après Buber) as "I-You" that is missing in the more conventional conceptualizations of "I-It"? "I-You" mediates the dualism of first-person subjectivity against third-person objectivity and so might obviate othering. "I-You" introduces the possibility of a practical engaging with, responding to, and learning from, another human being that is mutual and moral, as against prescribed and categorical (Andrew Irving)?

*My response.* I hear how similar Buber and Levinas can sound, also in their naming of God as the final guarantor of meaning. (Buber: When we speak to Him ["I-You"], not of Him ["I-It"], we encounter a living God. By a combination of divine grace and human will we can enter into a relationship with another as a unique fellow subject, not an It that we objectify according to our own norms and categories.) I am nevertheless wary of privileging relationality, of accepting a dialogics of identity whereby the self is constituted only by and through the other. I would argue that, in important ways and extents, the social relations to which I am significantly party are dependent on my imagination of them—whether those relations be with my spouse or with Friedrich Nietzsche or with Mrs. Dalloway (a fictional character). I inhabit my relations according to my construal of them, even in extremis (Primo Levi: "It must be remembered that each of us, both objectively and subjectively, lived the Lager in his own way" [1996:56]). When Buber writes that my authenticity, my presentness, and my freedom depend on the I-You relation, then I feel that a state of intrinsic difference is being misrecognized. When I depict the empirical focus of anthropological study as the effects that human beings as individual energetic things-in-the-world have on one another, I anticipate a relationality that, however potentially reciprocal, is also likely to be tangential, indirect, and unintended. Relations begin from discrete things-in-themselves, and their substance and effects end with discrete things-in-themselves.

*Sixth charge.* Does not context have to play more of a role here? Since individuals' insights develop in time and space, prior circumstances, while not determinant, may still provide a background. Think of the hospital as a range of discourses against which Roger Weir's life proceeds (Huon Wardle). Or think of how new information and communication technologies increasingly mediate social interaction that is no longer face to face, close, or direct, whether in a hospital setting or elsewhere (Noel Salazar).

*My response.* I am leery of the way in which context is deployed to "explain" individual action and consciousness: "This is why so-and-so acted as they did." It is so often an impersonalizing and departicularizing analytical device; there are, moreover, so many possible "contexts" to a life. Two

contexts would seem primary. First are the perspectives that individuals construe, the worldviews: the lives that they perceive themselves to be living and the lines of action, the life-projects, that they adjudge appropriate, given their circumstances. Second is the circumstance that an individual's species nature entails. A human life is finite, with a range of capabilities and liabilities. Context is afforded by the fact that an individual human being can imagine social relations but cannot physically fly, and so on. Any other contextualizations are epiphenomenal on these foundational or ontological ones. For instance, the individual may live in a sociocultural milieu where his or her individuality is not recognized or esteemed; perhaps they are narrowly categorized as a specific kind of actor—"elder," "slave," "impure," "apostate," "celebrity," and so on. Certainly, these epiphenomenal contextualizations are consequential: the individual is kept in purdah, perhaps, or kept hungry, or is feted; the individual is perhaps invited to communicate by electronic media, at a distance, more than face to face. Even granting that these contexts are not determinant of identity, individual or human, how do we describe their role? I return to the distinction that Simmel saw as foundational (and borrowed from Kant) concerning forms as against meanings. In order to describe the effects of sociocultural forms in social settings—forms such as hospital discourses or information and communications technologies—the anthropologist always needs to discern the meanings that individual users are making by way of them. There is an ambiguity intrinsic to any discourse of social engagement, a plasticity, such that there need be no homogeneous or determinant relation between the forms and their particular usage. What is the meaning of purdah, of celebrity, of the *Lager*, of being a hospital porter? I must anticipate Roger Weir's freedom: I cannot prejudice how an individual life is "contextualized" by a discourse of public symbolic forms.

*Seventh charge.* Might we not expect culture to manifest itself somehow in individuals' moments of sensibility, in their bodily and affective responses (Anne Line Dalsgård)? Is not the distinction between body and language overcome when Levinas insists that "language is proximity": something that concerns penetration more than mere representation (Paul Wenzel Geissler)?

*My response.* How a body immerses itself in a set of symbolic forms—how it is "penetrated" by a language, for instance—is individually empowered or energized, I have argued, and possesses an individual character or effect. Reading John Stuart Mill's words in *On Liberty* conjures a powerful affective "reaction" in me: I feel grateful, hopeful, vindicated, empowered. However, I would feel demeaned were it suggested that my response was intrinsically "cultural": rote, normative, passive. Derrida made the argument that language could be proven to be sui generis for the effects it manifestly had beyond "authorial" intention and after "an author's" death. But there is always intentionality: wherever cultural forms gain meaning (and affect), it is on the intentions of those who employ them (who put themselves in a position to be affected) that attention has to focus.

*Eighth charge.* Do we not need to maintain a sense of the incompleteness of human subjects, their being less than rational wholes and not simply secure in their identities but also vulnerable and susceptible: skeptical of themselves, ignorant of themselves, forever uncertain, open, and in danger (Mark Maguire)? Do not individuals remain a mystery—to themselves as well as to others? Viewed positively, this means individuals able to find themselves continuously in "unapparent possibilities," to realize themselves in "elsewheres" not yet seen (Huon Wardle).

*My response.* Yes, I would not like to be seen as advocating closure. I have used the concept of "life-project" to explore the ways in which human beings can go on making themselves—being ironic in relation to themselves, authoring ongoing futures for themselves—and how having the right and the space to effect this is the mark of a free society. I have also used the concept "cosmopolitan politesse" to examine the ways and extents to which others might assist and succor individuals in their life-projects—in what are intrinsically private and personal matters. This implies that we are our own mysteries—our own incompletenesses, our own irrationalities, and our own insecurities—and no one else's. Moreover, the extent to which we are mysterious and the ways in which we are mysterious calibrate with no external or public or normative measurement. There can be no specific ("cultural") way in which incompleteness or mysteriousness should be done; and there can be no exterior ("social") mechanism by which individuals have it done for them. Anxiety is the feeling of freedom, in Kierkegaard's formulation.

*Ninth charge.* The challenge is to textualize in anthropology what is nontextual in experience: from the sensory materialities of life to the wondrous, the disturbing, and the empty. Fieldwork opens one up to unpredictability. How do we write of the energizing effects of these ruptures (Anne Line Dalsgård)? How do we get beyond the anthropological convention of writing about anonymous social "figures"? Should we not experiment (collaboratively with our research subjects, too) to find ways of representing the human beings we have actually come to know (Mark Maguire)?

*My response.* Yes. I would hope for experimentation that is not precious about disciplinary boundaries or traditions of representation. (I have certainly drawn inspiration from others' artistry: E. M. Forster, Philip Larkin, W. G. Sebald, Stanley Spencer.) The objective always is to transliterate an experience of another life or lives. There is no formula for this and no limit. Each research, authentically acknowledged by the anthropologist—What did I experience, and what do I feel I came to know?—ideally opens up its own way in which it feels appropriate to be represented.

—Nigel Rapport

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