

REFLECTIONS ON PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
AND ITS RELATION TO SEMASIOLOGY
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In her essay on philosophical anthropology, Sheets-Johnstone (1983) comments on the subject itself, especially in beginning sections of the paper. She concludes that "a philosophical anthropology is concerned with evolutionary continuities and existential realities" (p. 132). One would agree with that, but would want to add that the preoccupation with continuities connotes equal concern with evolutionary discontinuities and with the realities of certain significant differences between animals and human beings. Considerations such as these have also produced the notion that variations in the nature, powers and capacities of human beings are of a cultural and not a natural order.

Sheets-Johnstone's emphasis on the upright posture of humanity is apposite to the thought of a German scholar, Blumenbach (b. 1752; d. 1840), generally considered to be the father of physical anthropology. She is both clear and consistent regarding the intellectual warrants she establishes for making a case for her concept of 'bodily logos'. Few, if any, would disagree with her assertions regarding the importance of Merleau-Ponty's influence on philosophical anthropological thought, in particular his concern that science and the emergence of a "human subject-human world" go hand in hand (p. 132), or with his and other phenomenologists' concerns about the "humanizing of the science of mankind". However, in the interests of an increased understanding of that branch of thought known as philosophical anthropology, it seems necessary to point to the work of some of the scholars who preceded Blumenbach and Merleau-Ponty (b. 1908; d. 1961), lest too narrow a view be perpetuated. Not unexpectedly, I shall emphasise social and cultural anthropological, and some theological, views and contributions, in an attempt to redress a certain balance of discourse in our reflections upon nature, humanity and divinity.

While physical anthropology may have arisen out of the confrontation between western 'Man' and anthropoid apes, social and cultural anthropology may be seen to have arisen out of the confrontation between western 'Man' and other cultures, where prevailing and more or less classical values of western civilization came up against the values and customs of newly discovered civilizations -- 'new', that is, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. During the sixteenth century, the many problems arising from these cultural encounters, brought about by the voyages of western explorers, tended to be avoided. That is, 'naked American Indians', 'cannibals', Asians with different religious beliefs and all the rest were simply classified as 'non-human', 'sub-human', or more charitably, as 'pagan', 'barbaric' and/or 'uncivilised'.

Interestingly, it was Pope Paul III who had at least rejected the 'non-human' and 'sub-human' categories long before formal anthropology came along, in a Papal document entitled Sublimus Deus (The Transcendent God), in 1537. He said that 'savages' were human, that they had souls, and, however much one may deplore the subsequent developments connected with 'planting' the Christian church among peoples of the world, it was nevertheless directly from Christianity that the notion of the one-ness

of humanity originated. Paul III's declaration represented a key decision in the history of thought that preceded the appearance of modern social, cultural and philosophical anthropological thought, both because it recognized the diversity among peoples of the world and because it recognized that cultural values are relative. There had to be a new search for generalizations about humankind.

Looked at from the standpoint of the period 1600-1900 in western history, it becomes clear that the traditional thought of the West, including metaphysics, moral philosophy, psychology, religion and anthropology could not possess absolute cultural validity. White, adult, civilized, Christian men could no longer be the model for 'universal man', thus in one way of looking at it, cultural and social anthropology, as well as modern theology, find their origins in the context of events that amounted to an unprecedented humiliation for western 'Man' and his self-understanding.

With that bit of background out of the way, I now want to draw attention to some of the other scholars who have contributed to the field of philosophical anthropological thought over the centuries and will begin with an English physician, Edward Tyson, who, in the year 1699 produced for the Royal Society a by now famous comparative anatomical work that posed what was then and probably still is a central problem of physical anthropology: 'Is it possible to find, among the many anatomical and physiological characteristics of the anthropoid ape, the justification for asserting a radical difference between apes and 'Man', notwithstanding their anatomical and physical similarities?' The many existing theological arguments concerning souls at the time were ignored by Tyson, who set out 48 physiological features that made the ape similar and 34 features that made the ape dissimilar from humanity and connected it with other inhabitants of the animal kingdom. Tyson was unable to determine why the ape is incapable of thinking and speaking in the manner of humans from his thorough-going studies of its anatomy and physiology. He concluded that anatomical study was not everything and that there were other factors involved which would have to be studied through some other means.

The explorations that Tyson made, and that others have made since then between characteristics of animality and humanity left the central question unanswered. The solution had to be sought after between the physical and the metaphysical, or, (one imagines) in either Materialism or Supernaturalism and later, in a positivistic naturalism, to culminate in the present modern synthesis of an existential or hermeneutic naturalism (See Varela, 1983:145-146). Whilst Tyson long ago established the empirical terminology of physical anthropology and a methodology that was independent of theological pre-suppositions, thereby entering humanity into the ranks, perhaps for the first time, of natural living beings, neither Tyson's work nor that which followed it satisfactorily dealt with the problems of language. Tyson's contribution added to a line of thought that had continued for a long time under the aegis of a theory of the 'great chain of being' that had its roots in Hellenic philosophy and which Christianity incorporated in the creation story as a gradation from lower to superior beings, with the appearance of Adam and Eve on the sixth day as the crowning achievement of God. Theology then placed

angels and archangels above humans into a celestial realm that was between humanity and divinity -- the realm of transcendence -- an intermediate sphere between humans and the divine. It is almost as if the 'chain of being' existed on a horizontal, and the 'transcendent being' formulation existed on a vertical dimension of thought and the two did not meet.

The concept of the chain of being, generally accepted until the 18th century, encouraged scholars to look for 'missing links' on the animal-human continuum, and for Tyson, the Pygmy was the missing link between the rest of humanity and the anthropoids. The distinctive characteristic of humanity, later more firmly established by a Swedish naturalist, Carl von Linné (Linnaeus, b. 1707; d. 1778) was 'his' (not also 'her' at the time) capacity for reason which does not depend, he said, upon physiological characteristics -- an early statement, perhaps, of what we now know of as 'cultural' or 'social' anthropology, i.e. that variations in the natures of human beings are of a cultural, not strictly, or even solely, of a natural order.

Natural history defines itself by placing the boundary of its disciplinary concerns where humanity seems to end and the intermediate realm of the theologians begins. Natural history, according to Buffon (b. 1707; d. 1788) had no access to the supernatural. His work thus replaced theological considerations with logical non-classifications in 1749. Attempts systematically to address the question of humanity's place in a general and universal scheme of things are thought to begin with Buffon and were later carried further by Blumenbach, who is, if not 'the', then certainly 'a' father of modern physical anthropology. Of the features that differentiated humans from animals, Blumenbach pointed to the hands of human beings and to their technological, tool-making capacities as the most important, plus the fact that humans speak, and that they also laugh and cry. Humanity's erect posture plus the technological initiatives provided by the hands and the enlarged field of vision not available to quadrupeds and the feature of 'intelligence' were put forward as those characteristics that seemed to have ensured human survival, and these ideas in their turn led to the investigations of Lamarck and Darwin, becoming the guidelines for the then scientific and philosophical works of the 19th century.

Philosophical anthropology, in the synthesis conceived of up until the beginnings of the 19th century, mainly consisted of physical anthropology and archaeology, but it should not naively be thought that theology had no part at all in the discussions, even though, looked at from a standpoint of 'science', the arguments were muted. To some, the 18th century saw the beginnings of the decay of religion. Not only that, there are those who see as a 'triumph' of philosophical anthropology the present (or eventual) dominance of a-theism, but more of that later.

It is necessary to keep in mind that those who have contributed to this centuries-long discourse have ever had to contend with new evidence about the past (and present) developments of human language and culture, wherever it may be found, thus the still nascent field of cultural anthropology and its status, in the British context, as 'Mr. Tylor's science' during the latter half of the 19th century. Gradually, over many years, the homo sapiens of physical anthropology replaced the homo perennis (the 'universal man') of classical philosophy, but because of the very broad concerns of philosophical anthropology (what we might now regard as its inter-disciplinary nature), its spokesmen are obliged to deal, not only with physical anthropological and archaeological

concerns, but with the works of philosophers, linguists, theologians and modern cultural and social anthropologists. Just about anyone who undertakes to write on this subject must, along with Sheets-Johnstone, put together his or her own personal and professional orientation and interests with a more general description of what philosophical anthropology consists because it is not a 'school of thought', like, say, functionalism or structuralism and it is not taught as a subject in any curriculum that I know of.

The present-day syntheses of modern philosophical anthropology probably owes as much to the work of Ernest Renan (b. 1832; d. 1892) than to anyone, although its tendency towards bifurcation into theistic and a-theistic modes should not be attributed to him. Renan was a French philosopher, historian and scholar of religion whose studies encompassed the natural sciences and budding 'sciences' of a different order; namely ethnography, history and descriptive anthropology, because naturalists do not take cultural traits into account in their observations, because there are none. Where Renan's work formally included what may have been the roots of an idea of a social science, as did E.B. Tylor's and Durkheim's, Buffon's earlier analyses emphasized the close mutual connections between physical, mental and cultural factors in the human realm and for him, as for many others who came after him, the most significant feature of humanity was that of its variety of articulated languages and the unique nature, powers and capacities of human beings that are based on language-using and meaning-making.

Saussure's later distinctions, for example, made circa 1913 (perhaps earlier), between la langue and la parole, can be seen to underline what Buffon also stressed; that 'language' per se, does not depend solely upon the existence of physical organs for speech. Animals and some birds can be trained to mimic the speech utterances of humans, but in spite of that, they do not possess the neural capacity for 'language', thus an infinite distance between animality and humanity was postulated by Buffon and later, Renan, that I believe was echoed years later by Jakobsen and many others who postulate a 'gap' between language-less creatures and humanity, thus drawing attention to the discontinuities between animals and human beings, and pointing, perhaps, to the multi-dimensional character of the universe that is in my view far from being fully comprehended.

The theme of the continuity or discontinuity between animality and humanity continues to preoccupy scholars from diverse fields. The distinction between nature and culture, which points to discontinuities, was hotly debated during the Enlightenment. It is the same theme that has a distinguished spokesman in modern anthropology in the person of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who turned the distinction between nature and culture into a structural opposition. For Lévi-Strauss' predecessor, Buffon, the variations among diverse peoples were best explained by climactic conditions or by modes of living, an opposition that reflected differences between later deterministic understandings of humanity based upon natural (climactic) or cultural (modes of living) factors. He made precise studies of the dwarfs of Madagascar, the Patagonians in South America, the Hottentots in southwest Africa, American Indians and several groups of people who were native to the Pacific Islands explored by Cook and Bouganville. These explorations, plus earlier

circumnavigations of the earth were significant for the rise and development of social and cultural anthropology because of the many unresolved questions regarding humanity's cultural and social nature that were by no means answered or explained by the meta-theories of biological commonality and continuity espoused by the evolutionists.

If the discovery of the anthropoid apes gave rise to physical anthropology and natural history, that discovery also -- and at the same time -- created a need for recognition of the distance between animality and humanity. The notion of a 'natural man' contrasted with a 'civilised man' arose whose major well-known 19th century spokesman for many of us is Rousseau (b. 1812; d. 1867). "Primitive Man" was conceived of as being closer to an initial 'natural state' from which it was thought that part of humanity, at least, had extricated itself. Because many of my listeners today are interested especially in the dance, I would want to say at this stage of the discussion that it is probably from this period of history that present-day taxonomies of the dance arose; from 'natural man - civilised man' continua. The well-known 'primitive dance - civilised dance' continuum is apposite to these kinds of ideas, as are naive unilineal evolutionary theories of the dance, and 'if I were an ape' theories. Perhaps it is the case that a later permutation of taxonomic distinction, the 'ethnic dance' designation for all non-western dance forms, also finds its roots here.

The notion that nature and culture might be able to be ordered in the same perspective, with nature designating the point of departure on a continuum that had 'civilisation' as its finished state, conceiving of 'primitiveness' as the original stage from which everything had moved seemed to be a reasonable supposition in the 18th and 19th centuries. Fitting 'savages' onto the continuum as the intermediate stages between apes and human civilizations did not seem peculiar; the 'zero point' on this continuum of animality-humanity was 'hominization' conceived to be the starting point for humanity on the continuum of the anthropoid. As it later turned out, this notion was recognized as a delusion, for it became apparent that the "absolutely savage savage" pictured by Buffon was only a fanciful image. However 'primitives' might be conceived of, they were not 'natural' in the same sense as were animals, because they were deeply affected by their languages, their religions and their cultures. The basically religious view of all this was, of course, that humanity was 'in essence' always and everywhere the same. There were, as well, various dualistic philosophies of mind and body, the more familiar, perhaps, being that of Descartes (b. 1596; d. 1650), the mathematician and philosopher who is considered to be the father of western epistemology. It is perhaps the case that Descartes' cogito, the 'I' or 'self' of intellectualism, gave rise to modern philosophical anthropological concerns with self-awareness, and self-understanding, which, together with a concept of an incarnate 'person', comprise at least two major concerns of philosophical anthropology today.

Especially has 20th century phenomenology postulated the inherent nature of 'culture' in humanity, besides providing alternatives to the methodologies and philosophies of hard-core empiricism and radical behaviourism. It was, perhaps, thanks to the phenomenologists and

existentialists that cultural phenomena came to be understood as irrevocably linked to the physical presences of human beings. Deprived of all consciousness, the body of a human being is simply a cadaver, thus in that 'grey area' of discourse shared by philosophers, anthropologists, theologians and others that is known as 'philosophical anthropology', the bodily incarnation of a human being is joined to a 'social' incarnation as well, and it is this double incarnation that makes humanity unique. That the notion of 'incarnation' has its roots in theological discourse and that it also includes the divine is an idea that is entertained usually only by those of a theistic turn of mind in the realm of discourse. But, it is the nature/culture distinction that will make further demands on our attention here.

It is an old distinction, but one that seems to continue to provide interesting questions: just how close to 'Nature' is human nature? Dilthey, a German philosopher (b. 1833; d. 1911), wrote in 1883 that 'Nature' is essentially alien to human beings and he conceived the human world as 'Society'; the conditions of human life as reciprocal relations of internal and external forces that animate society. Probably his most interesting contribution for semantic anthropology and certainly for semasiologists, consists of his insistence that the methodologies of the sciences of humankind had to be different from the methodologies of the natural sciences. Human science, in other words, had to have a methodology that was compatible with a concept of 'person', human interaction, 'creativity' and such.

A 20th century philosopher, Ernst Cassirer (b. 1874; d. 1945) developed the notion of homo animal symbolicon (the human symbolical animal), and he was one of the philosophers who extends the ideas of Immanuel Kant concerning the ways in which human concepts structure the natural world. As is well known, Cassirer was Susanne Langer's teacher and mentor. He taught that the human, concrete, day-to-day world consisted of those generally accepted symbols that are appropriate to a particular society at any given moment of its history. It seems necessary to draw attention to historical figures like these, and to their ideas, in order to avoid over-determinisms of thought that are potentially misleading because of the ever-present tendency to be convinced by arguments, like Sheets-Johnstone's, the persuasiveness of which lies in their probably unconscious suppression of counter-arguments or positions.

Over the past two centuries, it seemed to be the case that the problems of 'anthropology', writ large, gradually overtook -- if they did not entirely replace -- theology, especially for those who see as a 'triumph' of the discourse an exclusion of concepts of divinity. To those who hold such views, the primacy of anthropology tends to reduce, if not eradicate divinity from the picture entirely. To them, 'God is dead' is less a theoretical or philosophical proposition than it is a statement of fact. Especially did Materialists consider God to be the mere shadow of Man; an illusion nourished out of his own substance. Writers like Stirner (b. 1806; d. 1856) considered God to be the product of an alienation of the human being, contrived for the purpose of keeping humanity from being itself. Feuerbach (b. 1804; d. 1872), a philosopher and moralist, attacked the concept of personal immortality and proposed instead an immortality by which human qualities are re-absorbed into

nature. Thinkers like these ever seem to strive toward severing the traditional basis of philosophical anthropology: that of nature, humanity and divinity, aiming to turn it into a dualism of nature and humanity, perhaps, or else they would collapse the whole into a continuum consisting of nature, animality and humanity.

Nevertheless, the co-relation between theology and anthropology has persisted in spite of fashionable trends, their inter-relation best perceived through examination of comparative studies of religion. The over-arching concern of those who would advocate a theistic philosophical anthropology over that propounded by those who advocate an existential atheism turns around a vision of humanity thrown into an absurd world that is basically devoid of compassion, mercy, charity, meaning, values, ethics: the 'moral spaces' of humanity, spoken of by Crick (1975), including personal ones. The desacralization, secularization and profanation of humanity, to many of us, simply points to a world of genocides, haphazard developments and chaos; to a world-view that is characterized by random events, entropy and chemical agencies that offers an eschatology that is indifferent to human values and where the ultimate governance of the world can be attributed to blind physical forces. In contrast to this, a religious world-view is characterized by the notions of moral order, purpose, grace, sacrifice, and some concept of a spiritual dimension -- the inclusion of 'divinity' that in our own culture is closely related to and sometimes taken over by what I have referred to elsewhere as a 'quasi-religious' view that ultimately propounds an eschatology of art.

One would want to argue that both of these world-views in any of their permutations and combinations consist of a set of very human assumptions about the world. They are highly developed, sophisticated sets of assumptions that should themselves be examined. I would suggest, although I shall not pursue the matter here, that we investigate levels of abstraction, types of symbolization and the nature of symbolic discourse itself -- of which semasiology attempts to elucidate those aspects of human symbolic communication called 'body languages' -- if for no other reason than to free ourselves of the many forms of polarized arguments known to us in the past as the 'science-religion' debates, the 'art-science', or the 'art-religion' debates. Suffice it to say that for me (seen professionally as the architect of a theory and methodology for the study of dance and human movement) and for many other social and cultural anthropologists, a major task consists of preserving the human meaning of human existence, and in order to do that, a theological dimension -- or some reference to God or to 'divinity' -- is indispensable, if for no other reason than effectively to check or counter-balance ideologies that would, in their zeal to destroy divinity, also destroy humanity.

What is 'anthropology' anyway? It is, like philosophy and theology, linguistics or any other academic discipline, a set of writings, connected to practitioners who are involved with attempts to answer some questions about the human estate. It is not, as you well know, adequately defined as 'the study of mankind'; a naive, dictionary-definitional approach that does not suffice to explain anything any more than anything is explained about 'philosophy' to say that it is a 'love of wisdom'.

Perhaps social anthropology itself is best thought of as a disciplinary framework that enables the description of human beings in their concrete presences, but with particular emphasis, in its modern forms, on their language-using, meaning-making, role-creating and rule-following capacities -- a view of humanity that has had many distinguished predecessors and protagonists, past and present. My point is this: ever since Renan, Buffon, Linnaeus and many others, anthropologists have distinguished characteristics of human beings that are not of a solely physiological or biological nature, although they may be connected to human physiology, neurology and biology in ways which, so far as I am concerned, have yet to be discovered.

We have known for a long time that it represents severe conceptual confusion to describe people with the same vocabularies that we can apply to chimpanzees, dogs, pigeons and rats, and we who are primarily concerned with human movement studies and with alleged 'non-verbal' sign systems and the dance are particularly aware of this, since we share the ambiguous term 'behaviour' with latter-day Skinnerians, kinesiologists, ethologists, sociologists and virtually everyone else. We are obliged to inquire into the nature of these human dancers about which we wish to speak and write, thus the old familiar distinctions of philosophical anthropological discourse are important in very real ways; they are not simply exhausted questions.

As human beings, we may indeed be prisoners of our own cultural, linguistic and social spaces, but the mental and moral spaces that these imply do transform and change. As many of my audience know, I view culture as a "languaging process" (Williams, 1976) and see any human cultural 'moment' as analogous, I suppose, to a moment in a dance. That is to say that it is a 'pause' as it were, in the eternal process of being and becoming. Neither human culture nor human dancing consists of biologically triggered, organized behaviours of a strictly animalistic kind. While it is true to say that each human being is a product of his or her language and culture, it is equally true to say that cultures are produced by humanity -- and these truths balance and complement one another. They need not be seen as a 'dichotomy', or as paradoxical or as mutually exclusive. An Einsteinian, multi-dimensional world of being and becoming is in any case too complex to comprehend through one or two oppositions of a simple digital kind.

Human beings must be understood as persons in a human world, where the human condition is predicated on human groups considered as the subjects and not the objects of fundamental values. It is true that single individuals usually do not create these values, whether in our own or in some other culture, because they are received from the ethnicity into which he or she was born, however, like the received values of any given dance tradition, they only have authority over individuals to the extent that, individually or collectively, they commit (or submit) themselves to them. Perhaps it is thus that the commitment to values and the obligation to share insights acquired through formal training in social and cultural anthropology serves, in semasiological studies at any rate, for the only exercise of 'freedom' that human beings possess. This is a freedom that many of us in semasiology initially discover through studying, performing, teaching and choreographing in one or many

idioms of dancing: the freedom to reach a notional state of 'complete freedom' through limitations and discipline. Conditional freedoms, in other words, that search for a kind of order in which individuals attempt to imprint personal or collective marks on found circumstances.

I have never met a first-rate professional dancer who believed that humans have a 'divine right' to freedom or that 'freedom' is achievable in any case without considerable effort. I have also never met a dancer who believed that a Baryshnikov, a Hopi kachina dancer, Martha Graham, a devadasi, or a Kabuki dancer is a 'product of nature'. The freedom of a human dancer, like that of any professional artist, is self-chosen in its degree and is only achieved through discipline. It seems to be the case, given these pre-suppositions, that human freedom is always provisional and must always be liberated through an individual's imposition upon himself or herself, of the obligations that comprise the essential responsibilities of human life. People can, of course, play with their lives, just as some people play at dancing. Human freedom and the concept of free will include all the possibilities and all of the avenues, whatever they may be -- good, bad or indifferent. Perhaps the divine thing about it all is the nature, powers and capacities that provide the potential for freedom.

There seems to be a preoccupation these days among thinkers, whatever their disciplinary persuasion, that consists of deep concern over just what it is that ensures that the findings of an empirically-based or strictly behaviourally-based science conforms to benign human values. To make the 'organism' or the human body different from the spirit of humanity; to take refuge in dualisms is no more an answer for social anthropology or philosophical anthropology itself than it is for human movement studies (See Best, 1974, for thorough discussion in the latter context). More recent anthropological studies of human movement, specifically those carried out from a semasiological standpoint, affirm incarnation. That is to say that they stress the unity of body and spirit, thus there is a sense in which they affirm a kind of anthropological monism (not the doctrine that there is only one kind of substance or ultimate reality and not an ontological monism, as in Materialism, which denies the spirit, or its reverse, Spiritualism, which denies the body), but a kind of epistemological monism, referred to, but not explained, in Williams (1976) that is concerned with knowledge rather than 'being'.

Perhaps I do nothing more here than to point to the meta-theoretical premises and ideological implications involved with adopting a semasiological point of view, in contrast to the Darwinian-universalist tradition (See Hinde, 1972, for summary); a more 'psychological' approach dealing with the human body (See Fisher, 1973); or a specifically phenomenological-philosophical approach, a resumé of which is to be found in Zaner (1971). These three approaches address the notion of 'incarnation', but they seem to lead either to an intense Personalism, or to a denial of pre-conceptions in structured systems of human movement, to Phenomenalism, or to formulations like Sheets-Johnstone's 'bodily logos', all of which are unsatisfactory from a social anthropological point of view, because they do not adequately address the problems of language and culture. Moreover, they all seem to lead to the notion of a human world without divinity.

This is a fairly impossible world for an anthropologist of human movement because so many of the world's dances, like so many traditions of military arts and so much else pertaining to human actions in the realms of human ceremony and ritual are tied to notions of divinity, ethics, morals, obligation, grace, spiritual attainment and such. It therefore seems necessary to contrast a semasiological point of view with a philosophy of Materialism regarding the body and human self-understanding, because Materialism in all its forms tends to reduce personal existence to an extrinsic condition of a physical or biological nature. It also seems necessary to oppose semasiology to various forms of sociology, taken to mean that passive submission to a collectivity is the only recourse open to individuals, whether they are anthropologists, dancers, philosophers or whoever.

Likewise, it seems necessary, given a semasiological standpoint, to oppose the historical materialism of Karl Marx, and Marxist anthropological accounts of dancing,¹ because this philosophy seems to subordinate individual consciousness to the economic regimen of societies and to the notion of 'social class'. One would want to ask if there is any more value in a liberation of humanity conceived of in some remote future following a political revolution than there is in a naive view of a Christian or Muslim heaven reduced to the notion of postponed gratification. And is 'total gratification' what knowledge, being and becoming is all about anyway?

Semasiology might be said to affirm the irreducible mystery of each personal life, and therefore, the mystery of 'culture' and the human condition itself. It does not differ in this regard from most of modern social and cultural anthropological thinking. It offers a set of 'open structures' and a few propositions concerning the structural invariants that are universal to human movement and its spatial environment. It does not postulate semantic universals. If those exist, they remain to be found. Because of its emphasis on structures, some of semasiology's detractors have mistakenly thought that its theory and methods eliminate humanity entirely from the scene. Lévi-Straussian structuralism has been criticised for the same things. Semasiology certainly owes Lévi-Strauss and structuralism an intellectual debt, but it is dissimilar to Lévi-Straussian structuralism in important ways: we cannot consent to the Freudian overtones in other structuralist views, for example, because there is too much of biological materialism present in Freud's thought. Neither do we elevate a logical model of the 'unconscious' to a determinant (a kind of in-built cybernetic control system), but we also continue to remain unconvinced that Lévi-Strauss, who said somewhere that he was not a structuralist, meant this when he spoke of the "structures of the human mind" at a semiotics conference at Indiana University in the 'fifties.

In the end, my own disagreements with functionalism, behaviourism, materialism, a-theisms of several kinds, phenomenism, personalism, sociology, spiritualism and other similar 'isms', are based upon philosophical anthropological questions concerning how and in what ways the relations between nature, humanity and divinity are seen. The nature of human dances and the variety of meaningful structured systems of human actions that exist on this planet compel consideration of such matters. It is impossible to investigate and accurately to report

on human danced traditions, and nearly all other forms of human actions, in the context of paradigms of explanation that deny a concept of person, a concept of divinity, the human faculties of reflexivity, will, volition, thought, inter-subjective understanding, perception and sensing, except as epiphenomenal off-shoots of the human 'organism's' inter-relation with its biological environment. I contend, unlike Sheets-Johnstone (1983:140), that it makes a great deal of difference whether the 'hand' that reaches out to touch another's is the hand of a human being, the hand of God or the 'hand' of a chimpanzee.

To make the point even more plainly, empirical and conceptual concerns are inter-related. 'Scientific' investigation and verification need not, and are not always and everywhere tied to empirical observations that in turn are tied to an experimental model and quantitative calculations, after the manner of an Argyle (1975) or a Peng (1978). It simply seems tedious to have to keep repeating that "... like the concept of human 'culture', human movement is not itself a material phenomenon", and that "Human movement is a cognitive and semantic organization of a material phenomenon: the human body (or bodies) in a four-dimensional space/time" (Williams, 1982:162). In these domains, the usefulness of 'pure empiricism' (whatever that may be) ends.

Concerns like these belong to that ambiguous inter-disciplinary realm of thought not offered as a 'course' somewhere, but they are no less real for all that. They are of special interest to anthropologists of human movement partly because of the slowly changing status of movement studies, in particular, systems of signing, into the category of 'language' and out of a relatively mindless, 'non-verbal' designation. It is possible, of course, to study human movement in terms of any existing paradigm of explanation or methodology. Movement investigators can choose, these days, from a fairly broad array of theory and methodology, including proxemics, kinesics, choreometrics, an 'emic/etic' approach, statistical surveys, experimental models, case studies, typologies, participant-observation, formal models of explanation and so on.

Social and cultural anthropology provide at least six major theoretical and methodological approaches to movement study. All of these approaches represent, like their parent disciplines, systematic searches, no less than philosophy, anthropology, theology, sociology, linguistics -- or for that matter, any academic discipline -- the results of which must continually remain in question, because every affirmation of a 'general truth', far less of 'ultimate truth' is a human affirmation that is marked by specific socio-historical circumstances.

Part of these circumstances for semasiologists include a fashionable intellectual trend towards ethologism: witness as a single ethnographic example, a current item on the menu of national American television fare, the 'star' of which is a trained chimpanzee; "Mr. Smith, A Chimp Off the Old Block". We cannot help that kind of thing, but neither can we ignore the implications or the consequences of current interpretations of Darwinism or evolutionism of a certain genre. These ideas present an inhospitable climate of decidedly over-deterministic thinking that leads, if not to humanity's inclusion into the anthropoid world, then

the inclusion of the creatures into ours. As if deliberately following Feuerbach, although one is sure that relatively few have ever heard of him, these currently accepted 'truths' about the human estate seem to subsume divinity under the category humanity. Humans become the top of the anthropoid scale, leaving transcendence out of the picture entirely in ways that Varela has so succinctly pointed out (1983). It is as if modern synthesizers want to use -- perhaps cannot do without -- the language of theology, religion and divinity, i.e. 'logos', 'spirit', 'incarnation', 'transcendence', 'grace' and the like but with the proviso that they are divested of centuries-long fields of meaning and human experience. Semantic fields are operated upon, hacked to bits and amputated beyond recognition.

In view of all this, current notions of 'truth', like notions of 'objectivity', 'certainty', 'transcendence' and 'incarnation' must constantly be re-examined. The utter wretchedness of humanity without God was clearly apparent to writers like Pascal (b. 1623; d. 1662) and Kierkegaard (b. 1818; d. 1855), a Danish religious philosopher who ranks among that distinguished company of those who combined their attacks on the Church with pleas for an even sterner Christianity and for greater assumptions of individual responsibility. What one protests against with reference to modern syntheses of old philosophical anthropological questions like the relation of animality and humanity, or the nature-culture distinction, is that they seem to ignore any other view except currently fashionable ones.

Like Narcissus gazing into a pool, there seems to be an extraordinary fascination with a 'history of ideas' that extends not very far beyond 1900 -- a shallow pool indeed! Who is to say what treasures are ignored by not sounding greater depths? It may be the case that the reflections of 'the prince of the Scotists', Francis of Meyronnes (b. 1285; d. 1328) are more valuable. At least he was ahead of his time, in that he did not think it absurd to conceive of an heliocentric universe, although he preferred traditional geocentric theory. One wonders just how much concern we have for our own historical 'flat-earthisms', and if we really believe that we have relinquished or transcended them? In older formulations of the nature-humanity-divinity relation, humanity enjoyed the distinction of being 'in between'; of being both a sender and a receiver of 'messages' from both sides of a tripartite equation.

The Christian theological doctrine of free will never did presuppose an inevitable outcome of the success or failure of humanity -- seen as a kind of galactic experiment stuck in an obscure corner of the universe. There is a sense in which humans are both the authors and actors of their own truths, but to eliminate divinity from the triangle or, worse, to dichotomize nature and divinity seems to represent folly. Delivered from divinity, humanity is threatened by the determinisms of the natural sciences where human beings can be seen merely as complexes of pre-determined reactions, or by the determinisms of certain paradigms of explanation in the social sciences where the individual person is absorbed into some collective representation of the environment.

For some time now there have been those who have claimed that God is dead. Nowadays, there are those who claim that humanity is dead, and by this, they seem to mean that personal identity and individual worth and existence are merely an illusion. One hears occasionally that science is dead; an expression, perhaps, of the fear of the determinisms mentioned above. No one seems to claim that nature is dead, although we are reminded of the entropic tendencies of the planet every so often. The modern view of the world in all its being and becoming that seems currently to clamour for attention in the United States is that of an organized anarchy of chance and chaotic redundancy, whose heroes belong to the 'me-cult' and who are applauded for their elevation of survival over 'old-fashioned' notions of sacrifice. If this is the case, and if the prophets of this kind of world are to be believed, then this seems to be all that is left: a world in which the only anthropology that would be possible is an anthropology of the absurd in the melomaniacal universe of punk rockers.

In the contemporary crises created by threats of nuclear annihilation, it seems that a major task consists of efforts to preserve humanity, and along with it, the animal and vegetable kingdoms and whatever non-chemically induced loop-holes there may be left to divinity. The task of Scholastic philosophers may have been to try to 'prove' the existence of God. Today, we had better prove our own existence first. I do not think, however, that it is up to us simply to ignore or to deny twenty-five-hundred years of cultural history that in fact included divinity on the basis of a couple of hundred years of thinking that we can do without divinity. This thinking itself resulted from an intellectual tradition, after all, that is part and parcel of what we call 'western civilization' that was predicated on a notion of divinity and still includes it.

It strikes one as uncommonly strange when the idea of 'science' and 'technology' under the aegis of science itself makes it easy in the twentieth century to replace divinity, either with animality or with science itself and the technological idols of its applied manifestations. It seems as necessary to protest against the imperialistic overtones of these notions, as it has seemed necessary for others in the past to resist the imperialisms of certain clerical and ecclesiastical formulations. We inherit a civilization that for at least two thousand years held 'God' and 'divinity' to be important and real categories. It simply makes cultural and social anthropological nonsense to decide, after a mere hundred years or so, to drop the distinctions implied by the categories.

Is it the case that we unconsciously imagine that we can substitute the categories of natural science for other human cultural and religious categories, revealing extraordinary presumption and insolent pride in the implied claim that if we understand electricity and nuclear fission, and we possess modern plumbing and motor-cars, then we have no need for divinity?

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28 September, 1983

NOTES

1. I refer here to articles in Blacking, cited below, by Petrosian (pp.67-72), Mladenović (pp.73-78), Zhornitskaia (pp.79-92), Anđelić (pp.177-184) and Comigel (pp.185-204).

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