

Toward the Science of 'Human-Nature'

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1.

In order to examine the process whereby anthropology became established and developed in the modern West as an academic discipline, we should review how the study of human beings has come to establish its own unique sphere and methods. In the West, human beings are not only the subject of the study of nature, i.e. *physica*, but have also played an important role in *metaphysica*. Human beings are simultaneously a part of nature and beings specially created by God, meaning that it has been permitted to speak of God, nature, and oneself. It should not be forgotten that even for Descartes who succeeded in the methodical articulation of *physica* and *metaphysica* by deriving the dichotomy between the elements of matter and those of spirit, this division should be reconciled under a supreme God. He could lay the foundations for arguing for human beings separately from God and nature only by the major premise of this holy integration.

In the 18th century, with the power of God and the church dwindling, a growing number of people started to argue in an integrated fashion while still making the division between matter and spirit, body and soul, even without pursuing a particular inquiry into the existence of an all-knowing, all-powerful entity. In particular, those who debated "human nature" while focusing on ships' logs and travel writings paid attention to how physical elements such as climate and mode of life affected spiritual elements such as human thought and sensitivity, whether directly or indirectly. The quest for human nature aimed to solve the question of how the spiritual and physical worlds of human beings should be constructed. In practice, it was not unusual for reports from around the world to take the form of answers to this query. Many of these reports were set out in the form of *Directions for Sea-men, Bound for Far Voyages*, published by the Royal Society, with its list of subjects covering both physical conditions such as Soil, Rivers, Harbors, and Plants and the psychological and social conditions of Inhabitants, Character, Customs, Religion, Government, Police, and Arts. Categories relating to the natural world, society, and human beings were minutely classified, just as in a museum, and illustrated with actual examples. Joseph Banks, the president of the Royal Society, was a young devotee of natural history rather than Greek, Latin, and classical education, who led an expedition on the voyage of Captain Cook and made a considerable contribution to the Society.

Anthropology was a descendent of this lineage of natural history, and specialist research and teaching in the subject began from museums in Britain, with important contributions also made by the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle and the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadero in France. In its

initial period, anthropology could certainly be described as “the natural history of man.” According to George Stocking, “As it was institutionalized in the mid-Victorian period, the study of British anthropology looked less toward social theory than to antiquarianism and natural history, transformed as prehistory and Darwinian evolution.” *Notes and Queries on Anthropology, for the Use of Travelers and Residents in Uncivilized Lands*, produced in 1874 chiefly by Edward Tylor, the director of Oxford University Museum, was written with the systematic classification of natural history as its model, with one third of its space devoted to what is today called “material culture.” Alfred Haddon, who formed an expedition to the Torres Strait in 1889 that carried this book with it, was an anthropologist who had studied zoology and physiology, and defined this field as “the study of man in its widest aspect.” The psychologist Rivers and the pathologist Seligman, both members of this expedition, also became outstanding anthropologists. *Notes and Queries* was subsequently revised several times, and continued to provide a manual for fieldwork for over a century.

It goes without saying that museums held items in their collections related to a range of other disciplines, not just anthropology. In the latter half of the 19th century, natural scientists began to emphasize the shift from museums to universities as the locus of research. Having obtained the standing of independent fields as the result of the structural reorganization of the universities, these scientists were attempting to raise their level of expertise by separating themselves from the entertaining and educational nature of museums. Anthropology was no exception to this trend, and began proactively to establish its status as an independent university discipline while maintaining its base in museums.

2.

The reorganization of the universities was promoted by the novel dichotomy between the natural sciences and the humanities. Compared with the traditional dichotomy between *physica* and *metaphysica*, it can be seen that the fulcrum has shifted from God to the natural world. According to the traditional dichotomy, *metaphysica* provided a valid foundation for *physica*, but in this new schema it was the natural sciences that laid bare the necessity of the humanities. In other words, human beings had previously acquired their privileged position by means of God, but were now validated as the subject of the natural sciences.

This transformation can be seen within the shift from *physica* to the natural sciences and from *metaphysica* to the humanities. The existence of God, which had formed the establishment of *physica*, was in the natural sciences (whether intentionally or otherwise) put on the shelf during the pursuit of self-sufficient principles within the realm of the natural world. In the other realm of the humanities, theology and metaphysics, which had been the chief elements of *metaphysica*, were weakened, while the central theme became naked humanity in the context of a hidden God. This humanity in its nakedness, by becoming the subject of the remorseless analysis of the natural sciences, posed this question both inside and outside the universities: There must be something in “myself” that is not reducible to the natural world. This “something” perhaps rephrases the question to the natural sciences as: What does it mean to make human beings into a natural

science? What are the human beings who engage in the natural sciences? In other words, the humanities can only put forward their own *raison d'être* premised on the authoritative existence of the natural sciences. The human "something" is what was known in *metaphysica* as the "spirit" or "soul." These were attributed to the standard for human intentions or actions and subjected to scientific analysis, and conversely were treated as incapable of such attribution, generating new spheres of rigid description and theoretical interpretation. It is well known that modern anthropology is not free of this tendency.

In general, while taking both the spiritual and physical worlds of human beings as its subjects, anthropology is an academic discipline that addresses the major themes of "culture" and "society" by means of the wide-ranging comparative study of human groups, and has built itself the status of a field in the humanities. If these comparisons are regarded as orthodox work comparing differences according to the same criteria, then as far as substances and bodies are concerned the same natural principles can be applied across different regions and eras, constructing the standpoint of investigating different spiritual worlds on the premise of this uniformity. To put it another way, the foundations are laid of material continuity and discontinuity of interiorities, corresponding to the "naturalism" of Philippe Descola. The leading school of modern anthropology has compared the concept of the soul between different groups in the context of the contiguity of the natural world, and has shown that these concepts are all respectively human in the same way as anthropologists and its readers. In other words, it was an enterprise that relied on the validity of the natural sciences in the quest for the unique nature of humanity, in the process humanizing all types of human groups. Of course, there were efforts to actively incorporate the validity of the natural sciences. These included not only research into the extent to which ecological conditions regulate and construct the spiritual world, but also repeated attempts in a range of forms to create a convergence of the assembled facts into "structures" or "systems" so as to bring anthropology itself closer in line with the natural sciences.

Nevertheless, the genealogy of natural history could not easily be swept aside. Just as *Notes and Queries* continued to be used as a manual for fieldwork, at its outset ethnography included descriptions of matters such as landscape, climate, livelihood, housing, and clothing, and in arguments over kinship, economy, and religion the reader was convinced by the identification of human behaviors and discourse with concrete images of the natural world and artificial objects. The reason for the fascination exerted on the reader by the ethnography established by modern anthropology was the unique atmosphere created by the great variety of events, things, and people, rather than because it emulated the Western classical style of adventures and returning heroes, a style criticized by postmodern anthropology.

Has the fact that anthropology carved itself a niche as a field of the humanities, and within that of the social sciences, really been a blessing for anthropologists? While taking a holistic approach, anthropologists cannot take a firm position on how to speak about the whole of their study region. While carrying out research, or describing research, there is a discernable gap between what they experience and what they can speculate about. For example, a clearly spoken speech during a ritual, heavy rain that drowns this out, the soil that absorbs the rain, the stars that fill the sky that

night, the babbling of brooks the next morning. It is unlikely that theoretical discussion could have arisen with such factors omitted, but it is extremely difficult to offer descriptions that include them, although the significance of a debate that excludes them is questionable. When putting forward an argument, it is always accompanied in some way by the confusion of homogeneity.

This confusion transcends the categorizations of practice and theory, and is also a force calling anthropologists back to their study region. The limitations of speculation demand a retracing of experience. Anthropologists frequently search their memory banks with the feeling that somewhere there is a self who can say things beyond those that have already been said, and who knows more than is already known. To put this in an optimistic way, they do not lose the chance to advance their studies even when they grow old. In pessimistic terms, they are uncertain about what they know from the start. Anthropology is the classic practice of meta-representation, in which others' representations are represented, and according to Dan Sperber this style of representation possesses the function of dealing with things that cannot be fully understood. For this reason, anthropological terminology is viewed as an expedient analogy, and it is no wonder that its methods of categorization consist of nothing more than "family resemblance."

There is absolutely no need, however, to decide that anthropology is fatally defective. Just as Sperber calls himself a "naturalist," this is only to evaluate anthropology as it conforms with the methods of the natural sciences (which are only one method). It should not be forgotten that biased premises have been accepted even in the humanities, perhaps to secure a *raison d'être* in terms of the natural sciences. In the sphere of things that are irreducible to the natural sciences, one example was matters corresponding to the human spirit and soul, which were allotted disproportionate importance as major issues. Modern anthropology accepted this premise, encouraging the study of other groups on the basis of "material continuity" and "discontinuity of interiorities," and strove to show how the individual spirits of members of the same human race were fostered by culture and society and continuously supported by them. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately), this basic stance is anthropologically incorrect.

3.

According to Descola, when a human being encounters an *alter*, there is an understanding that is the exact opposite of naturalism. In the case of naturalism, whether the other is human or non-human, the self and other are seen as having similar physical embodiments and different interiorities. In the opposite way, there is also a way of thinking that understands both self and other as possessing different physicality and similar interiorities, and in this case the other is seen as having the same kind of interiority no matter how much they may differ in external appearance. According to this understanding, which may be called "animism," the other is regarded as subject to kinship rules and ethical codes in the same way as is the self. The body can be changed in the same way as clothes, and transformation into a different body occurs as a matter of course. Anthropologists have documented this "animism" as occurring at least in North and South America, in Siberia, and in South-East Asia.

This debate was continued by Viveiros De Castro. Taking Amerindian animism as an example,

De Castro emphasized that it creates an integrated perspective on the world of which both humans and animals are equally reflective as actors. What is seen by humans as blood may perhaps be seen by jaguars as maize beer. What is important is that whereas we see this as the product of the particularity of spirit and meaning with respect to the universality of nature, for the Amerindians the universality of spirit and subject is seen as the outcome generated by means of a corporeal diversity. If the former is referred to by the familiar term of “multi-culturalism,” the latter can be expressed as “multi-naturalism” that views nature or the object as the form of the particular.

Among the Amerindians, the soul has a universal morphology common to humans and animals, and continues to exist as an agent by means of the pronoun “I” as well as the function of deixis. Both humans and animals are subjects that possess a reflective perspective, and they regard “humanity” as the common condition insofar as “humanity” refers to the general form taken by this subject. Nature, on the other hand, is the object with respect to the subject, “that” with respect to “myself.” When others are understood as subjects in the same way as “myself,” they are regarded as persons who meet the standard for humanity, but in the morphological dimension of a different body they comprise nature. Humans and animals differ only in bodily respect, but the body is not a physical entity as it is in our language, but only a mode of being that makes up a *habitus*. That is to say, it forms “a system of active affects” that determines what to eat and where to live, and is always in the process of fabrication.

De Castro’s argument does not address the question of cultural awareness of nature and humanity among the Amerindians, but rather asks what nature and humanity comprise in their terms. Later, he states that “[...] anthropology’s true problems are not epistemological, but ontological.” In South and North America, Siberia, and Southeast Asia, universality is inherent in humanity and human society, and nature continues to change shape in an unstable manner in forms such as the body. In the West, in contrast, it is nature that is universal, and the human and social worlds do nothing but continue to waver between naturalistic monism (sociobiology) and an ontological dualism of nature/culture. De Castro makes the following statement. “The assertion of this latter dualism, for all that, only reinforces the final referential character of the notion of nature, by revealing itself to be the direct descendant of the opposition between Nature and Supernature. Culture is the modern name of Spirit.”

The culture, society, and humanity that have been the subjects of research by anthropologists have continued to exist within the confines of modern Western naturalist ontology, although it is impossible to wipe away all premodern traces. As De Castro insists, anthropologists today are able to call into question this ontology itself, and in fact are in a situation where it must be questioned. The relationship between humanity and nature has been exposed to the powerful forces of naturalism that reduce it to the natural world, but today technology based on the natural sciences has come to occupy a major proportion of the connection between self and other. Not only this, but in many cases the question of the relationship itself between humanity and the environment (including others) has been raised in the form of the installation of technology or measurements by means of technology.

This situation is evident in the “biosociety” posited by Michel Foucault and “the normalization

of bare life” identified by Giorgio Agamben, not only generating the viewpoint of “a kind of animalization of humans” but also allowing the interpretation of Paolo Virno that sociology and biology are in complete agreement. The important point is that even if we adopt this argument to criticize the present situation, the doorway will never open as long as we maintain humanity within naturalist ontology. This is because insofar as the defense of humanity (that is, the salvation of spirit and soul) comprises the preservation of the body, which makes humanity real, care for biological life is necessarily required. The claims of humanity and the governance of life are two sides of the same coin and continue to construct our daily reality, constantly generating new configurations that deprive us of humanity (such as depression, panic disorder, and somatoform disorder) as well as methods of treating them. Even if the social sciences and the humanities seek the causes giving rise to human actions in structures and systems as formulaic means, they cannot redeem the human beings who are the subjects of natural science and technology. For people who are surrounded by the products of technology and continue to introduce some of them into their bodies, there is no guarantee of the certain existence of their own spirits as anything more than such non-human agents, and the proposition that as the possessors of a spirit they are required to make use of these agents is sufficiently heavy to crush their own independent agency.

4.

In the social sciences and the humanities, movements criticizing such naturalist ontology and making a fresh argument for the concept of humanity are beginning to stand out. Anthropology is no exception. Marilyn Strathern was the first to pioneer this direction. In *The Gender of the Gift*, published in 1988, she developed her research on personhood in Melanesia to depict the way in which the relationship between humans and things constructs a person. In contrast to the dominant view of social sciences, which takes as the premise of its argument that a person forms relationships as an entity, she viewed a person as the outcome that emerges at a node of relationships, and paid attention to the actions of other persons and things that generate this outcome. In this redrawn Melanesian world of gifts, the successive generation of objectification, personification, and genderization transcend the difference between humans and things, bringing about other transformations.

The ontology of humans and things posited from the Melanesian world by Strathern has posed a succession of novel questions concerning contemporary UK kinship, the new genetics, and property rights. Her academic influence has not only been significant on the well-known figures of Roy Wagner and Alfred Gell but is also widespread among the younger generation, and is in the process of bringing about what they call a “quiet revolution” in anthropology. What this new anthropology has in common is its suspension of the orthodox dichotomies that have comprised the humanities, such as those between human and non-human, spirit and matter, and subject and object, and its investigation of how various elements exert agencies to interact with each other. It pursues the questions of how a range of different agents construct a certain framework and introduce movements deviating from this, as well as how these movements link one framework with another and create subsuming frameworks, further leading to even greater deviations.

With respect to the underlying dichotomy of human versus nature, these anthropologists have set up as their subjects assemblages of various actants that should be called “human and nature complexes.” They are taking the direction of actively collecting materials in the similar way as classical anthropology, while abandoning efforts to cast aside nature such as those of modern anthropology. In terms of the experience of fieldwork, the possibilities expand to enable them to extend their activities across a far wider scope than modern anthropology. The problem of metarepresentations is not simply that the identification of the same things, on which the representation is premised, is problematic, but also that it is consigned to secondary status as a result of the thematization of the uninterrupted formation of relationships.

Of course, not everything is rosy. A common criticism is that analysis covering an entire lifestyle is rare, with conspicuous research focusing only on limited activities. In particular, the human and nature complex is easy to argue under conditions of advanced science and technology, with this social life resulting in specialization and complication with links at both the national and global levels, frequently creating the impression that the analysis of a certain set of assemblages provides only a limited understanding. A method frequently used in practical research and analysis is to adopt the arguments of Science and Technology Studies (STS), such as those of Bruno Latour and Michel Callon, and to contextualize these (sometimes overtly, sometimes implicitly) with reference to Foucault's or Agamben *et al.*'s discussion of the contemporary world. If this contextualization is weak, anthropology appears to be an applied field of STS, and conversely if the contextualization is prominent the discipline could be regarded as existing purely to praise Foucault and the others.

Those engaged in this “quiet revolution” are exploring study subjects and methods and seeking ways of establishing themes that avoid falling into these pitfalls. At this point, I would like to put forward some possibilities for the new anthropology by giving a short introduction to my own research.

5.

A public old people's home in Suva, the capital of Fiji, is known as “dumping place” where elderly people live alongside people with mental disabilities and patients with terminal elephantiasis. For both the indigenous Fijians, who strongly emphasize kinship ties, and Indian residents, who form the island's two main ethnic groups, to place a family member in such an institution is a shameful act that should not take place. This is particularly true for indigenous Fijians. As expressed in English by Fijian nurses working there, “They are not us. Fijians shouldn't be like this,” Fijians participate in a variety of rituals as members of their clan or church, and continue to be Fijians in a particular position by means of their gift-giving practice. That is to say, while Fijian residents of such an old people's home are the victims of acts that are inappropriate for Fijians, simultaneously they have become non-Fijian Fijians.

Within the home, there is a constant sense of tension stemming from the fact that neither residents nor staffs know how to accept the fact of their presence. From the residents' viewpoint, they want to criticize the ungracious attitude of the staff, but also feel a sense of guilt themselves. They could become friends with the person in the next bed, who shares their troubles, but there is

also the embarrassing reality that this would amplify and reveal aspects within them that they do not want to examine. Such tension can be further exacerbated by the poor financial situation of the home. Meals do not satisfy hunger, the number of diapers is limited, and there is no guarantee that soiled clothing or bed linen will be changed. The water from the shower room hose with which the caregiver washes them each morning is cold, and they have no confidence about where to hide their purse, which contains only a few small coins, during that time.

Residents' support their lives with limited things. A bed with broken springs. A hard pillow. A coarse blanket. A few old clothes. Water in an aging plastic bottle. A wheelchair with broken brakes. And, above all, the Bible. As Fijians who always pride themselves as pious Christians, they listen eagerly to the preachers from four different churches who visit each week. With people constantly dying around them every day, they are powerfully aware of both the far side of death and their present environment, and believe that some day the time will come when they will see God on the other side.

Nevertheless the fact that they can sometimes be seen in an abstracted state in their wheelchair or bed, a tranquil expression on their faces, is not because they are imagining heaven. Nor is it because their children or grandchildren will be coming to visit in the near future. In many cases they are calling to mind a fond memory from the past, which evokes a different scene that leads to yet another, and in the process imagining a past different from that of their own memories and envisioning themselves as a different person from the one in their present situation. They do not go so far as to express this clearly, but if I seize a favorable opportunity to ask them then they return to themselves, sometimes letting out a sigh, and tell me they were remembering when they were a child, when they were young, or when they were first married, drawing the attention of the listener to a self who can no longer exist or a different self who might not have been in the home. In their present hopeless situation, they sink without being aware of it into memories, remembering in a daze a reality different from the one before their eyes.

Putting up with hunger, mindful of their caregiver's mood, worried about their family who never visit and their own physical condition, in this taciturn daily life where they are forced into idleness, Fijian residents of the home slip into dreams without noticing, and a sort of dazed atmosphere looms. Excluded from social activities, under circumstances that preclude their existence anywhere other than the anomalistic environment of the home for the rest of their lives, they gaze in bored fashion at the garden or lie on the bed, remembering in a daze the things they can no longer do or what might have been.

What I questioned was not the "bare life" that emerged between traditional values and the new biosocial system. It was the state of ennui or dazed reverie that attracted attention from neither.

6.

The human abilities of memory and imagination have been popular subjects of research in natural sciences and the humanities, but basically no one has paid any attention when they take the form of reverie, of which the active significance is hard to discern. Examples of arguments that a world unlike the reality before our eyes does not constitute "unreality" are limited to a subsection

of physics in the natural sciences and of philosophy in the humanities. Other than these, reverie is either reinterpreted as a “work” or “doctrine” in the context of art, amusement, or faith, or identified as an issue in the form of a “delusion” or an “ideology.” Neither the natural sciences nor the humanities in their present form allocate anything but slight value to the idle evocation of another world. While we understand that from the principles of natural science this is an illogical act, it is not a sufficiently serious event to seek for a logical explanation. For specialists in the humanities, on the other hand, it does not present the attractive theme of whether it is human or inhuman. In Western history, people who engaged in reveries were described in poems, novels, and diaries, but were not incorporated into the fundamental question of what makes a human being. Even 20th-century philosophy, which doubts both human rationality and subjectivity, has little light to throw on human beings who do not act but idly call to mind a different reality.

This action, however, which seems perfectly normal in terms of both nature and humanity, is spreading through contemporary society in a new form. This is because the unprecedented increases in the populations of foreigners, refugees, patients, jobless people, those not in employment, education, or training (NEETs), and elderly people means that they can now be seen everywhere, dazed in idleness, fantasizing about what they are no longer or what they might have been. Despite the fact that many of them are facing the difficult circumstances that Agambem called “bare life,” they remain in a reverie at a loose end. The debate over “biosociety” and “a kind of animalization of humans” should pay attention to the fact that here and there, personhood that thinks idly of a different reality is taking shape. From the viewpoint of science and technology, it must be argued that people linked by new technologies such as food, medicines, electronic equipment, transport, and communications are sitting still, without attempting to extend these links further, or are lying down, having become residents of a different world. Although this may be an action that human beings have continued for thousands or even tens of thousands of years, it is a completely different type of action from that of constructing reality by means of the continued unambiguous pursuit of what is true with an insistence on only monolithic judgment, that is, the practice of science, technology, or industry, and the further project of imparting a direction to the human beings responsible.

This project of opening up an unrealized world hidden within reality appears to be the exact opposite of the direction emphasized by Latour and Michael Fisher, that of opening reality to the outside and bringing to light things that are unknown. Compared with the former project of creating an alternate reality within the present reality, the latter involves seeking a new reality with connections outside the present reality. Whereas the former consists of creating a subject to be actualized, the latter indicates a course toward actualization. In order to deconstruct naturalist ontology and revisit the question of the possibilities of the human-nature complex in a more practical fashion, is it not necessary to explore the style of “actualization of the virtual” provided by the former, rather than the latter? That is to say, both should be viewed in complementary fashion. How can new realities and truths be formed in the space between reality and unreality, truth and falsehood? It should be possible to develop a profound discussion by shedding light on these two contrasting styles concerning actualization.

In days when it was still difficult to separate the study of humanity from that of nature, Giambattista Vico explored the theory of *topica*, which questions the conditions under which something can become truth, separately from that of *critica*, which distinguishes between truth and falsehood, and proposed a “new science” (*scienza nuova*) that brought *critica* and *topica* together. *Topica*, which antedates *critica* both logically and historically, is established at the command of memory. In practice, it involves the three functions of *memoria*, remembering the various events of the past; *fantasia*, representing those events; and *ingenium*, recreating those events in the context of a new situation.

The *topica* depicted by Vico reminds us of the figures of anthropologists making use of the memory bank and prefigures the latent power inherent in those who fantasize. Both anthropologists and daydreamers imagine the events of the past and attempt to reorder them in new relationships, with the aims of speaking of things beyond those that can be spoken of, knowing beyond what can be known, and transcending the reality before their eyes that cannot be regarded as true. Even entrusting the future of anthropology to activating *ingenium* and implementing *topica* in parallel with their research subjects (sometimes synchronizing themselves with them) is not to miss the mark too widely. In our contemporary world, where an attempt to survive in both the natural sciences and the humanities involves emphasizing the utility of technology within a naturalist ontology, an ideal science may emerge beyond the trail blazed by anthropology with its emphasis on *topica*.