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Joseph Margolis

“Toward a Metaphysics of Culture”

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# Toward a Metaphysics of Culture<sup>1</sup>

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Joseph Margolis  
*Temple University*

I

I've been aware for a good many years that all my inquiries, no matter how scattered, have been converging with increasing insistence on the definition of the human self and the analysis of the unique features of the human world and our form of life. And yet, for all its plausibility, what I find to be its immense importance remains largely ignored in the academic literature.

Of course, it's not the generic notion that's discounted; it's the specific heterodoxy that I've come to favor that's been remarked, passingly, more for its whimsy than for its merit. "He says that, *qua* person, the human being is an artifact, not unlike a sculpture or a character in a play or a spinoff of a technology. But not a fiction." And, without quarreling, that's true. The only thing I insist on is that, if it's true—that is, in the double sense that that *is* what I say and that I stand by its being true as well, or, at least, that it's perspicuous as a model of the self, since no one supposes any longer that it matters whether the formulation is said to capture what's essential about humanity in the large—then the upstart doctrine is worth a second look. I mean the thesis that the self is not a natural-kind kind, but rather a second-natured transform of a natural kind.

My own quarrel has it that, since the eighteenth century (certainly in Kant and Hume and certainly in contemporary Anglo-American analytic philosophy), the theory of what it is to be a person has played no more

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than a minor role among the claims of the most influential movements, and that knowledgeable discussants are perfectly comfortable in their professional indifference because they believe there's no reason to think any sizable conceptual correction is needed along such lines. I take that to be a mistake.

I believe, instead, that a very large part of Western philosophy has perseverated much too long along seriously defective, unprofitable lines of inquiry and that the artifactualist position goes a long way toward restoring the promise of fresh lines of conceptual invention. If you ask me for the briefest digest of what's to be gained, I suppose the most straightforward answer runs this way: it would confirm the philosophical primacy (beyond the mere ineliminability) of the entire run of explicative concepts drawn from the forms of enlanguaged life (of thought and action and understanding, say) that appear, uniquely, within the space of what we usually have in mind in speaking of the cultural dimension of the human world.

Imagine, for instance, that, considered longitudinally (what I collect under the category of "external *Bildung*," paleoanthropology's turf), the human primate has transformed itself, gradually, into a functional self or person—that is, has done so, sequentially, episodically, innumerable times, diversely, over historical time, regularly changing or enlarging its newly emergent abilities through the transmissibility of its mastery of language from one generation to another and what (regarding sensibility, thought, feeling, creativity and the like) that makes possible. Imagine, that is, that the human primate, passing through the cultural phases of its developing competence (a matter of "internal *Bildung*, let us say), reinvents itself, progressively, as a proto-person on its way to becoming a full-fledged person: as it becomes increasingly aware of its evolving skills (linguistic, reflexive, agentive, "lingual"). It's not difficult to suppose that such a process might actually alter the selective breeding of favored features of its own biology, as well as entrench progressively more and more complex cultural "software" enabling new forms of neural and agentive fluency.

I find it not unreasonable to draw the principal corrective categories from a revision of Kant's immense initiative: from his emphasis on the discursive; the normative; the rational; the agentive; the autonomous; the cognitive; the practical; the intelligible; the committed; the conceptual; the perceptual; the imaginable; the creative; the responsible; the appreciable and the like. Kant, of course, features a pointed interplay between the transcendental and the empirical in his treatment of these and similar distinc-

tions. I should like to retire Kant's transcendental strategy altogether, or at least suppose that there is no principled cognitive or facultative distinction between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* or between the transcendental and the broadly empirical or commonsense. Furthermore, in the light of the two centuries-plus that have transpired since the appearance of Kant's first *Critique*, I would rather feature, now (though not disjunctively), the continuum of the animal and human; the artifactual transformation of the human primate that yields the functional self or person; the novel reflexive powers made possible through the invention and mastery of language; the invention of language itself and the lingual infection (so to say) of the entire world, as a consequence of the mastery of language; the linguistic, semiotic, meaningful, interpretable nature of whatever belongs to the human world, either by production, creation, deed, theorizing or practical thought—but especially language and whatever is instructively interpretable, analogically, as the result of human work and understanding; hence, most important, the thoroughly artifactualized (hybrid) standing (I dare add) of everything in the human world (including the whole of nature, as in science, art, and practical life); and, thereupon, the thoroughly historied nature of all the parts of that emergent world.

You cannot fail to see that the very notion that standard disputes about the scope and primacy of the "naturalism" issue—whether with regard (say) to language, culture, history, personhood, cognition or the like—can be resolved by consulting naturalism's prior constraints has got the cart before the horse: it's naturalism that must be tailored to what we take to be the executive facts of the human world. Imagine denying that Aristotle was a "naturalist" (in his time) or insisting that naturalism must continue to make *a priori* concessions (*now*) to the teleology of nature or the necessity of an Unmoved Mover.

By and large, it's naturalism that we continually adjust, *dependently*, in the light of what, reviewed in our time in history, we find all but impossible to deny convincingly, in our contemporary sketches of reality.

I, for example, find it more than merely difficult to deny that selves or persons are artifactual (hybrid), thoroughly natural, culturally emergent evolutes of a matching prehistorical process of gradually inventing true language, the achievement of creatures (ourselves, initially merely gifted primates) who become proto-persons in the very process. But, then, once conceded, what we take "nature" to "include" or "exclude" will be construed conformably. Spinoza's God belongs to one picture of nature; but the Abrahamic variants of the One Creator are, now, rather unceremoni-

ously thought to be unrecoverable within the terms of our various conceptions of legitimately testable inquiry. For what it's worth, let me add that naturalism and deflationism seem to have been the two most strategically placed philosophical doctrines elevated as distinctly autonomous or fundamental inquiries, arbitrarily (I should say), in contemporary Anglo-American circles—I assume, largely through privileges thought to have been gained by the "linguistic turn" of our relatively recent past, now contested or simply withdrawn.

Kant casts his account of the intelligible world in constructivist terms—though not, for that reason, as lacking realist standing; but, of course, the principal mystery of his entire venture is what to understand as the cognitive agent of *that* construction. My own conjecture is openly post-Darwinian: which is to say, all of Kant's essential categories and distinctions are, like the categories of language itself, artifactual transforms of whatever perception- and experience-based concepts and forms of cognition may be reasonably attributed to the prelinguistic primates (hominid and nonhominid) species (capable of some diminished form of cognition, *not* artifactualized in the human way), from which we take our race to have descended. In this sense, unlanguageed creatures capable of socially enabled learning may be said to possess and share a culture generically not altogether unlike our own enculturation—but severely limited in ways we are not. That's to say, the invention of language entails the invention of conceptual possibilities inaccessible to unlanguageed creatures.

What *Homo sapiens* gains in the way of novel reflexive powers—acquiring by generational transmission what it has gradually invented (collectively) over millions of years—alters our picture of the "nature" of human persons. It appears that we don't have to admit an immortal or changeless *psyche* if we admit the transformative acquisition of the self's inherently artifactual powers. But that's not to say we consult "nature" first and then cobble all that we believe about the human primate and the human person in order to make the entire argument conform to our most congenial prejudices. Our review of primate nature is already the conjecture of a society of accomplished persons.

I believe Kant's constructivism yields an intractable paradox regarding our cognitive access to the intelligible world, that is in principle completely relieved (if not entirely resolved) by restricting the constructivist aspects of human intervention to whatever falls out as a consequence of the artifactual emergence of the functional self itself (the import, chiefly, of the invention and mastery of language and of the effect of language's

penetration of the whole of human experience and feeling). Such formations, in turn, infect our "picture" of the natural world, conjecturally independent (metaphysically, as we say, but not epistemologically) of the conditions under which we are able to know the world at all and able to transform parts of it, artifactually, by way of the deliberate intentions and exertions of human agency, as in art and science and practical activity. The "independent" world is neither Kant's noumenal world nor any constructed (would-be realist) world: it answers to what we conjecture, constructively, is our best "picture" of the world. Its realist standing depends on our epistemology, which cannot therefore be either merely subjectivist or noumenal.

Kant seems, effectively, to have equated the intended realism of the noumenal world (a completely vacuous, even incoherent conjecture) with the realism of a "subject-ively" (but not solipsistically) "constructed" world that, according to Kant's own lights, is the "only world" we could possibly know (a completely self-defeating posit, if our purpose is to legitimate our realist confidence in a publicly discernible world that answers suitably to our sciences and practical inquiries). What Kant requires (I suggest) is the notion of an "independent world" (neither noumenal nor confined to "subject-ive" construction) that we may discern (though we deem it to be ontologically independent of human cognition). But, of course, to concede this would already obviate the entire labor of Kant's "transcendental idealism." There seems to be no plausible reading of the first *Critique* that is both textually reasonable and philosophically adequate to Kant's avowed task.

I concede at once that the artifactualist account entails ascribing an insuperably instrumentalist cast to the whole of our understanding of nature (to include, of course, ourselves and the encultured world we ourselves "produce," in the various ways we do); but I don't see that that disallows our adding that we come to a conviction about the independent (again, *not* the noumenal) world by way of a reasoned conjecture from the import we ascribe to the continuum of the animal and the human. Accordingly, the objective standing of any of our claims regarding the world does have its artifactual side; but that need not signify that the world (thus identified) is somehow a construction of the cognizing mind itself! I take this last notion to be one of the splendid corrections Hegel provides in his critique of Kant, whatever else may be said of Hegel's own extravagances. Broadly speaking, pragmatism is the upshot of "Darwinizing" this particular correction—where, by "correction," I mean to feature more

the *post*-Darwinian paleoanthropological record than the direct import of Darwin's own account of evolution—though the first depends, historically, on the second.

Epistemology cannot be governed by textualist loyalties alone: it becomes "genealogical" (or dialectical), so to say, once it abandons cognitive privilege. Permit me, therefore, to risk an unofficial manifesto here. From my vantage, the "best" way to read Hegel (and the Idealists in general) is to override whatever we deem to be their epistemological and ontological extravagances: to begin, then, by conceding, without *a priori* exclusions or privilege of any kind, whatever we avow as phenomenologically "given," more or less in the sense and spirit of the reflexive, interpretive bridge Hegel proposes (in his response to Kant's Critical undertaking), linking the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopedia*; and, going on from there, to construe, instructively, what the Idealists (or others) offer—for instance, figures like Ernst Cassirer and Charles Peirce—in the way of limning an admittedly constructed "picture" of what they thereby take to be the independent world, without invoking any would-be attributions regarding what Kant calls the noumenal world. This (or something similar) should serve well enough to signify the *bona fides* of any minimal grasp of the immensely problematic nature of any "post-Kantian" recovery of epistemology, metaphysics, methodology, first philosophy, skepticism or the like, all the while intending to advance our actual inquiries as to what is true about the world (hence, true about our knowledge of the world).

When I first considered what might be the best way of introducing this notion of what was important, philosophically, about the human career, I thought of featuring the perilous conditions of human survival and the problematic survival of that much-abused medium-sized planet that we still inhabit. I concede without a murmur the wanton nature of our exploitation of the earth and the simple truth that a thorough grasp of the fact is assuredly more important than anything I could possibly say about the loftier topic I've just mentioned. Nevertheless, I'm persuaded that my conjectures about the fate of the planet and the human race could never count for more than a tired bit of science fiction and moralizing; and, more than that, that the best of what I might say would itself rest on a prior reckoning of what I'm calling the loftier topic. The fact is, I favor a conception of the human that is not generally featured in contemporary philosophical discussions (an increasing part of which is now directed to recovering, however selectively, some of the main themes of Kant's own account in his first *Critique*). Nevertheless, I'm persuaded that

the artifactualist picture has definite advantages over the Kantian model, particularly in overcoming the unwanted dualisms of Kant's own effort (and those of his critics) and the cognate difficulties of Kantian-inspired revisions—with regard, say, to realism, knowledge, normativity, language and logic, interpretation, the compatibility of freedom and causality, the metaphysics of enlanguaged culture and persons, and the significance of historicity. Quite an imposing list of fundamental themes that would be—would have to be—altered by acknowledging the artifactuality of the self: the main themes of what I'm calling the loftier topic.

The beginning of a promising analysis, I suggest, starts with what I shall call the "Darwinian effect": not so much the lesson of Darwin's evolutionary theory regarding the continuum of the animal and human, but the specific formation of modern *Homo sapiens* that requires a sense of the biological oddities of the species, in terms both of its evolutionary trajectory and the inseparability of the latter (bearing on the emergence and epigenetic development of the primate members of the species) from the intertwined cultural evolution of true language and its unique (hybrid) powers effecting the social transformation of hominid primates into artifactual persons.

It's a curious, though undeniable, fact (the full import of which has dawned on me only in recent years) that I came to my present view about what a person is, *not* initially by way of biology but (if you can believe it) by way of my earliest work in the philosophy of art—especially regarding the interpretation of art. There's no question that the fine arts are occupied with the creation of an entire world of artifacts, essentially different from anything to be found in "nature" (as we say)—birds' nests, termite mounds—that may seem quite similar at first glance, but are not: because the first (but not the second) are enlanguaged transforms of natural or natural-kind things (possessing linguistic or semiotic import or something of the sort) as the emergent upshot of the deliberate work of human persons. That's to say, my theory of the self takes form by invoking a very strong analogy between the creation of an artwork and the *Bildung* of a person. I believe this bears on the artifactuality of the normative as well: a most important verdict, if true.

I take both persons and artworks to be hybrid artifacts, which I characterize as inherently possessing properties and powers of a linguistic, enlanguaged, or linguistically-dependent sort ("lingual," as I tend to say)—precisely because they are "second-natured," in a sense deeper than that intended in Aristotle's metaphysics, closer to Herder's and Vico's notions,



though the latter notions are not yet post-Darwinian, if I may put the point thus.

Everything of this kind—persons, artworks, words and sentences, actions, histories, preeminently—are similarly qualified and structured as hybrid artifacts (thoroughly “natural” things), that have (or are) histories rather than natures; are inherently interpretable (in the manner barely suggested); are functionally so characterized; are discernible by, and only by, persons; and are, as such, indissolubly embodied or incarnate in suitably natural *materiae* or lesser transforms, so to say. (The entire robotic world is flexibly accommodated thereby.) Everything so qualified belongs to a world (possibly many different worlds), accessible more or less in the same way distinct languages are accessed bilingually, as a space of “Intentional” things (taking “Intentional” as a term of art, written with capital “I”; to signify their manifesting inherent linguistic or semiotic import open to some *sui generis* sort of objective interpretation).

This allows, of course, for the pertinence of agents’ intending what they do or say or create or produce to mean or signify, in a suitable way, what they may thus be rightly interpreted to signify or mean. It also allows for the pertinence of the technical use of “intentional,” written with lower-case “i,” reintroduced from medieval sources by Franz Brentano and elaborated in different ways by other authors, so as to signify the so-called “aboutness” of mental states and the cognate features of the monadic structure of sentences regarding belief and the like (or of other similarly apt vehicles—the expressiveness of music, say, however quarrelsomely). Here, “Intentional” (with capital “I”) signifies a huge space of culturally interpretable structures that present serious puzzles regarding the determinacy of meaning or import, admittedly strenuous though not in principle impossible to resolve. Perhaps the most distinctive “metaphysical” feature of this world is that Intentional things actually emerge in culturally regular ways—are discerned, by persons, to be real—in the natural world (that incorporates whatever is thus second-natured), the (emergent) order of which is not known to “supervene” on the natural in any way that can be algorithmically or nomologically inferred from adequate materialist descriptions of its putatively enabling substrate.<sup>2</sup> In this precise sense, the cultural world(s) of human societies cannot be reliably correlated along either causally explanatory or semantically regular

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<sup>2</sup> If this be granted, then the entire cultural order defeats the supervenience claims of Jaegwon Kim, for instance in his *Mind in a Physical World: An Essay on the Mind-Body Problem and Mental Causation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

lines involving correct descriptions of its embodying *materiae*. I'm hinting here at two entirely different forms of emergence, both within nature: one, the Intentional transformation of natural-kind kinds, collecting the irreducible cultural emergents of the specifically human world; the other, restricted to the natural emergents of the macroscopic physical world, at least potentially reducible to a more fundamental stratum of physical nature. (I take the profound difference between the so-called "natural" and "human" sciences to rest on these two forms of emergence; although both forms may be coherently invoked within a "single" science: for instance, in contemporary genetics and in art criticism!)

## II

The profound inadequacy of the Darwinian model of evolution was effectively explored by a group of biologists and biologically-minded German philosophers known as the "philosophical anthropologists," more or less in the interval spanning the 1920s and 1960s. I first became familiar with them and others who, one way or another, responded, often unfavorably, to Darwin's published theory, through the excellent brief studies provided by the pioneer American philosopher of biology, Marjorie Grene, whom I'm pleased to have been able to count as a dear friend. I met Grene around the latter part of the 70s or early 80s, hence fairly close to the publication of important statements by figures like Helmuth Plessner and Adolf Portmann, though close also to the statements of such obliquely linked figures as Jakob von Uexküll and Arnold Gehlen, who overlap the outer bounds of the *floruit* of the anthropologists and share some of their problems. The latter two happen not to figure prominently in Grene's overview, but they seem to me to be essential to a rounded picture of the work of the philosophical anthropologists themselves; as, of course, is Grene, whose final paper, in *The Understanding of Nature* (1974), "People and Other Animals," suggested a way to reconcile my own biologically naïve view, formed in the early 70s, with an ampler grounding in biology, though by way of a more radical conjecture than Grene herself ventured. I began to see how to thread together, more effectively, the artifactual unity of the entire range of human culture manifested in the analogous formations of persons, artworks, histories, language(s), and actions, without which it would have been impossible to attempt to unseat, in a single stroke, an Aristotelian or a Darwinian biology or to make entirely plausi-

ble the radical notion that the human self is a hybrid, artifactual transform of the primate of our species.

Following Plessner's lead, Grene herself, though never entirely persuaded (I think) by Plessner's somewhat idiosyncratic formulations, clearly thinks of persons *as* the mature, fully evolved members of *Homo sapiens*. (I see no evidence, in Grene's account, of a "metaphysical" transformation.) If I understand her correctly, then, when she says "we become human, not just by being born *homo sapiens*, but by relying on a complex network of artifacts: language and other symbolic systems, social conventions, tools in the context of their use—artifacts which are in a way extensions of ourselves,<sup>3</sup> she means that *the full measure of being human* (not, being "merely" human) depends on the *Bildung* of an enabling language and the culture it makes accessible (without quite answering whether infants, at birth, or just before beginning to learn a language, are, functionally, already persons). The Aristotelians construe the self as a native biological resource, though perfected, second-naturedly, by artifactual means. But then, they are unaware of the thoroughly artifactual achievement of true language *and* the entailed invention of the self that masters language. Grene remains more of an Aristotelian than she admits.

Grene does not hold (as far as I can see) that the very formation of a functioning self evolves, transformatively, only through the mastery of language and what that makes possible—always by means that cannot be characterized completely or primarily in biological terms. It's hard to see how the difference between languageless and enlanguaged primates, otherwise so similar biologically, can be a matter of mere degree: the "ontologies" of prelinguistic primates and of enlanguaged persons are so extraordinarily different. Indeed, I'm persuaded that the chance education

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<sup>3</sup> Marjorie Grene, "People and Other Animals," *The Understanding of Nature: Essays in the Philosophy of Biology* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1974), p. 358. Grene (as well as Plessner) seems oddly inexplicit. Thus she says: "We make ourselves what we are through the way we actively assimilate our perceived culture, and in so doing we remake it, and that is also to unmake it. . . . In short, our nature demands for its completion the unnatural, the indirect, and also the unreal. . . . [B]ut we *exist* as human beings on the edge between nature and art, reality and its denial" (pp. 359-360). My sense is that she means that we become "fully" human in assimilating our "perceived culture"; but I don't see that she ever says (or means to imply) that we become *persons* ("minimally") when we begin to acquire language. She specifically wishes to avoid admitting some new entity called soul or mind; and treats "the achievement of personhood as the *embodiment* of a culture" (p. 357). But chimpanzees also assimilate their "received culture" and they are unable to function as persons. My claim is that human cultures are already *enlanguaged* and that *assimilating them is undergoing* transformation into personhood (without "requiring" a soul or mind).

of the gifted bonobo (Kanzi) makes Kanzi an incipient person in a sense more convincing than the sense in which normal prelinguistic human infants may be said to be persons.<sup>4</sup> (Kanzi's achievement, you realize, is "impossible" on Chomsky's original thesis.)

Persons, I'm convinced, "suddenly" *acquire* novel, powerful, thoroughly artifactual abilities (when they acquire language), which they do not have as a result of merely being born as *homo sapiens* or of acquiring whatever abilities they may gain by prelinguistic means: languageless primates cannot refer to the fine-grained content of their own mental states; they cannot share such characterizations, in verbal ways, with (other) verbally apt persons; they cannot formulate complex alternative options regarding absent matters that are not (and cannot be) otherwise identified in the immediate contexts in which they are poised for pertinent responses; they cannot store or reliably transmit the accumulating memory of their own technological gains so as to advance, in culturally distinctive ways, from generation to generation. I won't deny that there is an uncertain range of phenomena regarding self-identity among chimpanzees and even elephants (apparently on seeing themselves in a mirror), but that is not yet "self-awareness" in the sense in which *we* gain the ability to identify ourselves as the very agents who acquire the abilities mentioned, or the ability to report and share the content of our mental life with apt interlocutors. For reasons of this sort, I originally favored the artifactuality of the self or person, by way of an analogy with artworks; but I was quickly persuaded that the biological evidence strengthened the thesis immeasurably in the same direction. (Think of the sheer rate of change in the accelerating history of modern painting. Nothing in biological evolution compares with that.) The process must, I suggest, be tracked ontogenetically as well as phylogenetically, so to say—that is, by way of cultural analogy.

The philosophical anthropologists and Grene tend to resist construing the human person as a hybrid artifact, a culturally formed transform of a natural-kind kind, the primate species we call (rather self-importantly) *Homo sapiens*, by way of a linguistically qualified *Bildung*. Grene and Plessner do speak of persons as "natural artifacts"<sup>5</sup> of course. But what they mean seems to signify that the "full" development of the human potential is largely due to our involvement with artifactual instruments and instru-

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<sup>4</sup> See E. Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, et al., *Language Comprehension in Ape and Child (Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 58, Nos. 3-4, 1993, Serial No. 233)*, pp. v-vi, 1-254.

<sup>5</sup> Grene, "People and Other Animals," p. 358.

mentalities. They do not openly commit (as far as I know) to the idea that persons *are*, as such, artifactual transforms, whatever marginal incipience we may suppose appears among human infants and prelinguistic animals. And, of course, they nowhere consider the need to explain the appearance of the advanced instrumentalities they themselves invoke. How do they explain the invention of language itself? Here you begin to see the precision that inheres *in* the deep informality of our conjectures.

All of this clarifies the sense in which most discussants of the "nature" of (human) persons conflate (or confuse) the analysis of the human primate and that of the human person. It's for this reason that the "biology" of the human being (featuring, say, its evolution, genetics, and epigenetic development—its ontogeny and phylogeny) must be joined to the paleoanthropology of the conjectured *cultural* evolution of the human person. All of this is missing, of course, in Aristotle and Kant; but it's also missing, it must be said, in the best work of such diverse but important (modern) figures as Cassirer, Husserl, Mead, the philosophical anthropologists, Sellars, Searle, Kim, and McDowell.

It's worth noting as well that George Herbert Mead, the Darwinian-oriented social psychologist and philosopher among the classic pragmatists, who most thoroughly engages the question of the right analysis of the self, explicitly construes the functioning of the "self" as primarily *social* and interactional, rather than *language-specific*. Mead was (at least at times) quite prepared to attribute a genuine sense of selfhood to chimpanzees for instance, because he took them to be able to respond to the "resistance" of objects and the bodies of other creatures in terms of tactile sensibility and related forms of external pressure and "opposition" in a manner akin to the human pattern. He meant, apparently, the capacity for social interaction—he may even have intended something like a dogfight (which he repeatedly mentions)—where it's clear that, thus construed, reference to the "self" could only mean an organism's awareness of its body and action being resisted or opposed by the body and behavior of another animal (and, of course, the "resistance" of what we regard as entirely inanimate). Mead was extremely perceptive; but I think the line of thinking I've just described, including what seems (to me) to be his inapt dialectic of the "I" and the "me" (for which, however, Mead is nevertheless deservedly famous), falls woefully short of what (as I am suggesting) the analysis of the human self requires.<sup>6</sup> The "I" and the "me"

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<sup>6</sup> George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society, from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934, 1965), Part III, especially §25.

must be aspects of the *self's* functioning; they cannot be mere prior phases of socially interactional processes (open to languageless primates) that finally *yield* (somehow, even without language) the functional powers of the self. The evidence is against such a possibility. I suggest that the social (or interactional) model of cultural learning very neatly accommodates the continuum of the animal and the human, but it does not allow for the profound discontinuity of the linguistic (within the continuity of the social itself) or for the unique powers that the linguistic makes possible. (This also marks the fatal weakness of Searle's account of primates and persons—accordingly, his account of language's contribution.)

Adolf Portmann, who is a remarkably perceptive zoologist, offers (I surmise) a stronger thesis than Plessner's, though one still too ambiguous regarding the onset of personhood: Portmann holds that humans "are *biologically* formed to be *cultural* animals," and that we "take on the full human nature" when we manifest "three chief characters: upright posture, speech, and rational action," all of which must be learned by human infants very shortly after birth, through contacts with competent adults (principally, the mother or surrogate mother). So that, in accord with Grene's summary of Portmann's position (which I'm drawing on):

the whole biological development of a typical mammal has been re-written in our case in a new key: the whole structure of the embryo, the whole rhythm of growth, is directed, from first to last, to the emergence of a culture-dwelling animal, not bound within a predetermined ecological niche...but, in its very tissues and organs and aptitudes, born to be *open to its world*, to be able to accept responsibility, to make its own the traditions of a historical past and to remake them into an unforeseeable future.<sup>7</sup>

My small complaint has it that the very skills Grene reports we *learn* (which Portmann favors)—possibly excepting upright posture—cannot be directly learned by way of prelinguistic skills; because the intervening *linguistic* skills cannot themselves be learned directly by mere prelinguistic skills. (There must be a continuum.) The onset of true language and personhood must be gradual, though at the greatly accelerated pace made possible in cultural as opposed to biological transmission. The best clue regarding this matter that I am aware of (in effect, the continuum of the prelinguistic and the linguistic) is entirely intuitive and informal: namely,

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<sup>7</sup> Grene, "The Characters of Living Things," in *The Understanding of Nature*, pp. 287–288. See, also, Adolf Portmann, *Animals as Social Beings*, trans. O. Coburn (London: Hutchinson, 1961); and *New Paths in Biology*, trans. A. Pomerans (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

the account given in the opening passages of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, where, as Wittgenstein explains,

A child uses... primitive forms [of language, such as Augustine suggests] when it [first] learns to talk. Here the teaching of language is not explanation, but training.<sup>8</sup>

Here Wittgenstein contrasts "explanation" (*Erklären*) and "training" (*Abrichten*). He means, precisely, that the child cannot yet understand the *use* of particular *words* (say, "red" or "five"), which would be learning a language in a manner too close to its full-bodied sense; at first, a child learns only to "act" in the right way (*handeln*). It does not grasp the "meaning" of the words it learns to mimic as utterances of sound.<sup>9</sup> That apparently dawns later; and, with it, as I would argue, it begins to gain the incipience of those functional abilities that belong to persons proper. (I'm prepared to backtrack some, if the evidence demands it, to admit that monkey and primate communication are more advanced, "proto-grammatically," than informed observers suppose.)

In fact, Wittgenstein provides, in an unmarked way, something very close to the analogy (I'm proposing) among a number of natural/artifactual pairs: sounds/words; movements/actions, primates/persons; and, may I add (roughly), media/artworks and events/histories. If you allow all this, you have already begun to formulate the general outline of my intended ontology of nature/culture; and, if, with me, you concede that each of these conceptual spaces behaves in its *sui generis* way, then you also have the beginning of a comprehensive theory of interpretation (which I have not yet fully worked out) that I think takes its most interesting forms in literature and art, language, history, psychoanalysis, moral and legal appraisal, and cognate disciplines among the human and social sciences. So the mapping affords a great economy. Once you have this much in place, nothing is put at risk—if the evidence supports the conjecture that there may be *some* incipience of selfhood in the languageless primate world (including the world of human infants). I concede the possibility, to avoid needless rigidity: we are only at the beginning of our understanding of animal intelligence. I am, of course, quite prepared to concede diminished forms of cognition among a great many animal species; and, I submit, the incipience of selfhood among monkeys and apes would, if plausible, probably be correlated with the incipience of functional analogues

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<sup>8</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: 1953), I, §5. Compare §1.

<sup>9</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, I, §§1–2.

of vocabularies and basic grammatical distinctions such as reference and predication within sub-linguistic communication.

It's worth remarking—though it's something of an aside here—that, among the members of the so-called Pittsburgh School, who have re-examined the prospects of reviving a Kantian-inspired theory of mind and knowledge, Wilfrid Sellars is clearly open to the possibility of a perception-based form of cognition (below the level of discursive cognition), whereas John McDowell adamantly opposes the possibility (on grounds of incoherence)—each arguing as surprisingly sanguine Kantians.<sup>10</sup> As far as I know, McDowell nowhere disputes the empirical evidence drawn from paleoanthropology and primate studies.

Allow me, then, to add two fairly important, relatively uncontested notions to my account, in order to give a proper sense of the amplitude of what I've now sketched: first, that, since, as I've already suggested, what is culturally artifactual by way of the mediation of language, is (transformatively) "second-natured," it is but a step to concede that what is second-natured is itself a distinctive part of nature; and, second, that the ontological strategy of permitting an individual thing of a more complex level of analysis to be indissolubly embodied or incarnate in an individual thing of a less complex level accommodates a clear distinction between the physical (or biological) and the culturally significant, without invoking any dualisms at all. It thereby affords a gratifyingly simple economy, without yielding to dualism or reductionism (hence, *contra* Immanuel Kant, P.F. Strawson, Wilfrid Sellars, Arthur Danto, Donald Davidson, Daniel Dennett, and others); and it obviates the need to be troubled by any claims of realism regarding thoughts, propositions, truth, meaning, and the like (for instance, in the manner of those who profess to be both naturalists and deflationists, in some deep or shallow degree: Paul Horwich and, more moderately, Huw Price, say).

I should add, as close as possible to the mention of Portmann's views about the inherently "incomplete" birth of the human infant, that this extraordinary challenge (or modification) of the Darwinian conception was made possible largely by the progress of embryology, almost entirely within the span of the twentieth century. Apparently, embryological studies were not pursued in any sustained way at the time of Darwin's speculations. But it is, precisely, Portmann's thesis that it is the development of the fetus that decisively confirms that the human species is, again in

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<sup>10</sup> I have explored the issue in an as yet unpublished paper, "In Advance of McDowell's Kantian Innovation."



Grene's summary, "*biologically* formed to be *cultural* animals."<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, one cannot fail to notice that both Portmann and Grene mingle very different competences as indisputably biological, without accounting, for instance, for language, normativity, responsibility and the like—alongside, say, upright posture.

Hence, in some sense, Grene and Portmann surmise, the unfinished birth of the human infant is already preformed *for* the second-natured cultural (perhaps even linguistic) transformation of the primate neonate! Of course, the charge, which, taken at face value, seems perfectly reasonable, counts as a serious paradox for the Darwinian account. Even so, Portmann's emphasis seems to be largely on the side of post-natal sociality; whereas the paradox draws us to the puzzle of the biological source of language itself—of what, following Kant's own intuition, may be called discursivity. In any event, it is indeed, within the terms of this incompletely explicated puzzle, that we begin to see the deep sense in which the second-natured functionality of language provides a promising answer to the dubious metaphysical economies of the analytic deflationists, on the one hand, and the excessive hypostatization of the self or soul or *Geist* of the human being, according to theorists like Max Scheler, on the other.

The moderate thesis I recommend is simply that of the self's hybrid, second-natured artifactuality. But that's enough to lead us to a thesis of the greatest importance: viz., that the achievement of the functional powers of enlanguaged selves is "culturally emergent" but *not* "supervenient" in any sense akin to the skillfully contrived (but demonstrably inadequate) arguments of theorists like Jaegwon Kim. The *reductio* (of Kim's proposal) rests with the fact that there is, and can be, no strategy by which to specify *any* determinate neurophysiological (or related) correlates of commonplace, culturally specified, linguistically informed events (or actions) along the lines of either causal or conventional rule-like regularities. You have only to think of the indefinitely open run of materially definable ways by which to make a chess move.<sup>12</sup> But if the counterargument holds, then reductionism will have lost its first line of defense.

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<sup>11</sup> Grene, "The Characters of Living Things," p. 285.

<sup>12</sup> See the definition of supervenience, in Kim, *Mind in a Physical World*, p. 9. Kim offers variants of his account in other of his books, but the essential criticism remains: he simply fails to explore the plausible differences between the physical and the cultural (hence, between the physical and the enlanguaged cultural)—a clear specimen of an apriorist speculation that masquerades as a kind of scientific empiricism.

## III

We've reached a plateau of sorts in distinguishing (without disjoining) the biological and the cultural and the biological and the linguistic. I hazard the guess that the final placement of the vocal cords in the human throat (already apparent at the fetal level) suggests that, paleoanthropologically, the specifically linguistic use of finely distinguished sounds was a serendipitous development beyond what contributed to the continuing improvement of prelinguistic communication, that happened to make improvements in proto-language possible as well.<sup>13</sup> That's to say, Portmann's conservative emphasis on the social rather than the specifically linguistic (the latter being Noam Chomsky's daring *biological* option—his innatism—now no longer featured in terms of a "universal grammar," but not abandoned altogether either)<sup>14</sup> may have been (even quite recently) the most plausible (though still inadequate) middle ground on which we might have hoped to fathom (indeed, *did* once venture to explain) the true sense in which the engine of the evolution of distinctly human competences was distinctly biological, even if not convincingly restricted to any form of reductive genetics.

We see more clearly now that the biological, alone or primarily, cannot be adequate. (The amplitude and uniqueness of emergent human powers are against it.) But even the supposed fixities of biology—for instance, of a particulate genetics—are being steadily superseded. The nature of what passes for an autonomous biology will have to be adjusted. It's not the specific mechanism of biochemical genetics that's decisive: it's the false separation of its molecular and sub-molecular processes from the holisms of actual animal life that must be reconsidered. The paradox in the evolution of the human is, precisely, that it is itself a hybrid and increasingly artifactual process. The telltale clue lies with the extraordinary rapidity (and acceleration) of cultural change and the glacial rate of biological innovation.

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<sup>13</sup> Compare Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind, and Body* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), Part II. Some of Mithen's conjectures may already be obsolete.

<sup>14</sup> See Noam Chomsky, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). In effect, Chomsky now denies that "universal grammar" is a biological organ. I should add that I have never been convinced by Chomsky's innatism or his biologism regarding grammar. It's important to remark that there are at least two distinct doctrines here. Chomsky has yielded on the innatism of grammar but not on biologism and not on the innatism of some deeper source of the systematicity of language.

It's the very idea of the unified (well, relatively unified) functionality of persons—which, in effect, extends the familiar “centeredness” of animal life (or organismic functionality, let us say) even where higher-order consciousness is not at stake—that provides the basic premise on which all of the more fine-grained analyses of the enlanguaged world finally depend. Correspondingly, the most fruitful lines of inquiry regarding the metaphysics of culture are bound to be more conjectural than the correction of the primitive notion that biological evolution is assuredly an autonomous discipline approaching, as well as it can, some ideal of “molecular biology.”

One cannot fail to see, here, the striking analogy between the easy atomisms of the extreme forms of genetic explanation (“biologism,” as Richard Lewontin names them)<sup>15</sup> and the social atomisms of the moral and linguistic theories of early modern figures like Hobbes and Machiavelli and late modern figures like Quine and Davidson. Also, as an unexpected bonus, we learn that Kant's transcendentalism and its fatal dualism of causality and autonomous agency can pretend no longer to have remained faithful to its strongest empirical intuitions. It's now quite reasonable to suggest that transcendentalism (strictly construed) is incompatible with the discoveries of post-Darwinian paleoanthropology. Time and the unpredictability of conceptual imagination have completely dismantled Kant's splendid architectonic by the merest detour. Human autonomy (or freedom) must be causally engendered by the processes of “second-naturing” *Bildung*.

That's to say: the best way to defeat Kant's transcendentalism (or apriorism) is not by way of a direct attack on epistemological grounds but by invoking empirical discoveries that we're unwilling to disallow (for Kantian-like reasons), as in challenging McDowell's argument, in his Woodbridge Lectures, regarding the necessary discursivity of perceptual knowledge (which effectively entails that languageless animals are incapable of even a diminished form of knowledge). The defeat of transcendentalism proceeds by demonstrating how straightforwardly we take *a priori* claims to be vulnerable to empirical counter evidence, as in challenging the *descriptive* adequacy of Kant's treatment of the *a priori* standing of Euclidean geometry vis-à-vis Newtonian and post-Newtonian physics. I should add that I have no particular interest in attacking or defending “transcendental” variants that abandon apriorism—or effectively con-

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<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, the pop discussion in R. C. Lewontin, Steven Rose, and Leon J. Kamin, *Biology, Ideology, and Human Nature* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

cede (say, along C.I. Lewis's lines) that the *a priori* may simply be an *a posteriori* posit.

The cultural (that is, the enlanguaged cultural) is itself necessarily hybrid (or so it appears); hence, so also are propositional thought and language. The fact remains that the emergence and evolution of persons is insuperably artifactual—in ways that begin to challenge our dawning grasp of more and more radical "revolutionary" possibilities—hybrid possibilities, of course, which will surely quicken in the near future—to experiment with the prospects of electronic modifications of neurobiological processes. There will be no clear line, finally, between natural and artifactual biology. Conjectures along such lines are already more than the whim of an insouciant commingling of science fiction and neuroscience. The hubristic rule remains provisionally valid, even if it is promethean: namely, that whatever biology lacks, technology will soon provide. In any event, the barest concessions of this sort confirm the laggard simplicities of both transcendentalism and reductionism.

If we allow these arguments to pass muster, then we cannot deny the blind contingencies of our own philosophical conjectures. Why should we now suppose that our present speculations will not similarly require conceptual revisions of a currently unimaginable kind? The great differences among the opposed theories of the past continually dwindle into minor variations. When I scan, unguardedly, the contemporary philosophical literature, I find I see less and less difference between the pioneer work of figures like Hume and Kant and Hegel and the strongest currents of (say) the last 70 years of "modern" modern philosophy: neither interval, let me suggest, features in a sustained way the artifactual, hybrid, historied, still radically evolving formation of the human person. Put metonymically: I doubt that what now passes for a reasonably adequate account of either science or morality will remain convincing in a fairly short span of time. You have only to think of Descartes's rationalist vision contrived under the shadow of Galileo's physics. (I concede that it's entirely possible I'm misjudging the inertial charm of entrenched theories, but that's not much of a rejoinder.) We need a more daring conception of philosophical imagination: the immense openness of our technologies entails the hubris of universalism; the empirical always trumps the transcendental.

There are, of course, clear signs of the human infant's unusual sociability, a biological gift open at once to artifactual transformation: passively, in its total dependence on the care of others; actively, in its inclination to track the movements of whatever moves in its social space, as well as

in its appetite for social play; also, uncomprehendingly, in the continual demands of its relentless crying. But nothing compatible with the initiatives of human agency is more socially efficient than language. So that the almost complete absence of adaptations for survival in the neonate may well be its greatest resource for survival: the intense, prolonged sociability that makes the successful mastery of language possible—the mastery of any human language, mind you, and in any human society—hence, also, bilingualism and agentive cooperation at any level of complexity. It's entirely possible that human neonates learn their first lessons in language by way of different native aptitudes than those that sustain maturity—and that those first abilities normally subside with maturation.

There's a fair sense in which the social insects form (again, not quite completely) a super-organism, of which diversely specialized, aggregated members comprise the living parts—very nearly a collective organism; in the human case, an artifactual language, reliably transmitted from generation to generation, never finally completed or closed and never completely mastered by any individual person or determinate aggregate of persons, constitutes something of a "collective" possession (accommodating diversity and change) by which every form of social or societal bonding is effectively enabled. There's nothing in the artifactual communities of the human world that functions like the queen in the natural collectivity of the bee world. But bees have their functional niches and humans have no *Umwelt* at all, which qualifies what we should understand by naturalism and normativity—which we capture by a bit of conceptual daring, in speaking of the artifactuality of the self.

I surmise that the ubiquity of bilingualism argues the presence of some subterranean biological commonality underlying the immense diversity of languages and cultural experience. We may reasonably suppose, therefore, that a person is indeed an individual creature, a "natural artifact" (to coopt the phrase most favored by Plessner and Grene but now read in a way that outflanks their own uncertainty), that acquires, in acquiring its second nature (effected, you remember, by the mastery of a home language), a "collective" aptitude and sensibility (as we may say) that does not restrict (actually, facilitates) its individual freedom and spontaneous initiatives.

Accordingly, persons, I surmise, exhibit something of the collective functionality of the language they share and of whatever of their practices their language subtends and informs. Certainly, distinct biological drives contribute to the same movable solidarity: sexuality, preeminently. But although I see no reason to suppose that some sort of collective identity

is (at this moment) an impossible achievement for the hybrid artifact that persons are (supplemented perhaps by science fiction's as yet unrealized inventions), persons *are, now*, individual creatures that possess something of a collective—something of a second—nature. That's to say: collectivity in any psychological or social respect seems to be restricted to what we predicate (as attributes) of distinct individuals and aggregates of individuals. I see no reason to yield, for instance, to anything quite like Emile Durkheim's *conscience collective* (collective consciousness or conscience) or Wilfrid Sellars's inchoate flirtation with "collective intentionality" along somewhat Durkheimian lines.<sup>16</sup> But what is lacking biologically is already on its way to being invented by our technologies. There is no collective mind now, but I'm inclined to believe that there could be; and, if that's true, then I think there will be. Think of a military force scattered in battle, sharing almost instantaneously (telepathically, if you like, though by way of technological modification) the same evolving experience, planning, critique, and commitment of a difficult maneuver: imagine doing so by activating electronic chips embedded in the bodies and brains of the force's members. Small-scale experiments along these lines are, apparently, now already underway.

I take note of these possibilities and conceptual temptations because we must concede that what we mean by the solidarity of relatively well-demarcated human societies depends, in good part, on what we mean by the *sittlich* (hybrid, artifactual) practices and shared forms of understanding of historically evolving societies. Human infants, confronted with the task of mastering their home language (*and its concepts*) are ineluctably immersed in the *sittlich* (collectively shared) practices "always already present" in their ambient world. Hence, there is no practical possibility that, in the normal course of societal *Bildung*, we are likely to be unable (in any massive sense) to understand one another when we function, in public, as the linguistically apt creatures that we are, though (I concede) we possess private mental lives as well. I'm convinced that it was part of Wittgenstein's intention to expose the deep incoherence of opposing the idea (even before we venture the extreme proposal of a "private language,"). But I also see no way to make sense of the correction without admitting the collective import of *sittlich* life itself. Wittgenstein's correc-

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<sup>16</sup> See Wilfrid Sellars, "Imperatives, Intentions, and the Logic of 'ought'," in Hector-Neri Castañeda and George Nakhnikian (eds.), *Morality and the Language of Conduct* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963). See, also, Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. Sarah A. Soloway and John H. Mueller (New York: Free Press, 1938).

tion is often grossly ignored or opposed, as when bilingualism and the condition of mastering a language are not invoked at all: as, for instance, in the very different but distinctly bizarre (notably influential) views of such important theorists as Quine, Davidson, and Searle.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, no one familiar with Charles Peirce's concept of a person will fail to see the more than incipient convergence between Wittgenstein and Peirce. You have only to recall Peirce's daring formulation at 5.421 (of the *Collected Papers*) to grasp the force of his double remark: "a person is not absolutely an individual"; "a man's circle of society... is a sort of loosely compacted person in some respects of higher rank than the person of an individual organism." In fact, it's the union of these two notions that (on Peirce's own view) confirms the true sense in which "absolute truth" and "what you do not doubt" are, effectively, one and the same doctrine (a brilliant aside on the meaning of realism and Idealism.)<sup>18</sup>

#### IV

I mean these small forays to count primarily toward a sketch of a larger argument. But they already provide enough of a sense of how the argument should go, to allow us to shift our attention safely to another level of explication needed to bring a sense of closure to the normativity question.

Frankly, I've been addressing the most basic and orderly part of the argument, the part that focuses on the jointly (even, intertwined) bio-

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<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Willard Van Orman Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960); Donald Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), particularly pp. 134–135; and John R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and his earlier *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995). See, also, the brief discussion of Searle in my *Pragmatism Ascendent: A Yard of Narrative, A Touch of Prophecy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), Ch. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934, 1935 [1962, 1963]), "What Pragmatism Is," §5.421. See, also, Vincent M. Colapietro, *Peirce's Approach to the Self: A Semiotic Perspective on Human Subjectivity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), Chs. 2–4 (especially Ch. 4). Colapietro essentially applies the thrust of Peirce's argument against Umberto Eco's account of signs and of Eco's reading of Peirce's thesis. See Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Exploration in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979). Colapietro is on the right track here, but does not press the matter far enough to begin to expose just how remarkable Peirce's semiotic may be. See, for instance, §5.424, at which Peirce suggests that "an" experiment is a "part" of a "single collective experiment" in a sense akin to that in which an "individual person" is a "part" of a "loosely compacted person... of higher rank" (a society). "What Pragmatism Is" is one of Peirce's most instructive papers. A single person is rather like a single sign or a single quality, effectively ineffable, or "negative."

logical and cultural evolution of the continuum embracing the late development of the hominid primates, gradually transformed (through the companion—equally gradual—invention and mastery of true language) into functional selves or persons, creatures that thereby acquire important new (artifactual) competences that cannot be accounted for by reference to biological factors alone.

I'm speaking of the evolutionary phase at which we first acknowledge the appearance of a uniquely new kind of entity—beings, "things," phenomena, functional competences, even attributes (let us say), things that evolve, emerge, or are deliberately produced in novel ways, things said to possess, inherently, culturally significant or significant import or meaning, "Intentional" things (reading "Intentional," with capital "I," as a term of art).

These are things often loosely (and inadequately) collected as, or as manifesting, "intentionality" (with lower-case "i"), answering (*instead*) to the well-known but altogether different psychological or phenomenological claims advanced by Brentano and Husserl. "Intentional" (with capital "I") is a distinction I offer as a sort of typographical convenience, meant to range, at least ontologically, over a sweep of artifactual, hybrid things and their distinctively adequated attributes—preeminently, persons, societies of persons, actions, linguistic texts, texts and utterances of cognate sorts, speech, artworks, histories, technologies and what may be produced by them, traditions, institutions, suitably attributable meanings and complex properties incorporating meaning or meaningful structures (as in expressive music, representational paintings, speech acts), legible or discerned exclusively by persons; things that appear as indissolubly embodied or incarnate in selected *materiae* (physical or animate things) that lack full Intentionality themselves—hence, things that emerge or supervene in distinctly *sui generis* ways. I count this a reasonable first pass at a sketch of the neglected ontology of the complex, uniquely enlanguaged world of societies of selves and of what selves do, make, produce, create, alter, and effectuate.

On my reading, a proper grasp of the ontology ventured entails, at one stroke, the artifactuality of language, discursivity, normativity, rationality, agency, cognition, realism, and the historicity of the human form of life, that is, everything that is unique to human culture. It qualifies, therefore, all of our presumptions regarding the objective and realist standing of our pertinent claims in every sector of human interest. But since, as far as we know, we are the only creatures capable of pursuing such in-



quiries, we take our labors to be capable of yielding no more than "second-best," interest-driven, instrumentally enabling, somewhat heuristic, perspectival "pictures" of the world that we nevertheless count as having realist import—"constructed," therefore, though not in the guise of detachable representations (Lockean or Kantian, say) that we might test or correct from some putatively independent or neutral cognitional vantage. These "pictures" of the world are not to be construed as *epistemological intermediaries (tertia)* of any kind between ourselves and the world; they are, rather, the historied expression of our putatively realist grasp of the world (Hegelian or pragmatist, I dare venture), which cannot be traced to their separable evidentiary sources in cognizing agent and cognized world. Our judgments, here, take an "internalist" form that is indissolubly symbiotic rather than a subjectivist (let us say, a Kantian) form. (I find it suggestive to say that our "pictures" of the world are "monadic" rather than "dyadic." They produce no regress or paradox, but they are forever provisional without being tentative, forever poised to be superseded by a shift in vision or experience.)

What I mean by this is no more than what I mean by the conviction that we emerge as persons through the mastery of language, freighted with the contingent baggage of societal memory and entrenched habits and beliefs that language makes possible: which is to say, enabled and constrained by the *sittlich* aptitudes of our functional understanding and sense of agency shared with other selves similarly second-natured, addressed primarily to the relatively assured things of the common world to which we've been already fitted.

What we must still consider, however briefly, in order to gain a proper sense of the functional novelty (so to say) of a thoroughly enlanguaged culture, is at least an inventory of what is most alien, even discontinuous, vis-à-vis the continuum of animal and human evolution. In a way, the answer has already been given: viz., that the artifactually transformed powers that we acquire, which are made accessible uniquely and (it seems) exclusively by the very creation and mastery of true language and the Intentional import of the *sittlich* world we thereby inhabit, are, as far as we can see, *the condition of our own survival and viability*. No doubt we've drawn important parts of the animal world into our *sittlich* world (as with dogs and horses, but also with crows and apes and tigers). But whatever it is such creatures understand of our behavior and form of life, they understand only in their own perception-bound, languageless ways. They cannot, for instance, ever know, as persons can, that today is Wednesday

and we're meeting in Helsinki. They cannot discern at all what I've been calling the uniquely Intentional nature of human culture. And yet the higher animals assuredly possess and depend on cultures of their own (or on hybrid, partially artifactual cultures, as with domesticated dogs and horses).

I suppose it's impossible to single out what, within our *sittlich* world, are its most important processes and interests. Perhaps no more than the maintenance and extension, or the continual change and yet stability, of that world (or worlds, since human societies are distinctly plural—sometimes, even wildly diverse). But within any such viable world, we do successfully introduce new infant cohorts to the accepted cognitive, emotive, agentive (and however otherwise construed) *Sitten* of our contingent world. By "*sittlich*," then, I understand the quotidian routines and habits of doing everything we do, as selves, in that extraordinary sense in which we understand and are reflexively aware of the Intentional import of whatever it is we do, spontaneously and standardly, in practical, causally and normatively qualified ways—which we willingly support in accord with our grasp of the received practices and traditions of doing just that. I also understand "*sittlich*" to extend to the revision of whatever deliberate changes in our "always already present" practices and interests we champion as improvements of our *sittlich* ways, which (in turn, in time) settle into *sittlich* practices themselves.

Hence, the self-corrective or revisionary tendencies of human societies are as *sittlich* as those that precede them. The difference between these two phases of the *sittlich* are temporal and critical—in what I'm calling "Intentionalist" (or symbiotized) ways—a matter of considerable philosophical importance, since it signifies that the continual transformation of the norms of knowledge, understanding, commitment, and critique, no matter how far such changes may seem to depart from the *sittlich*, may be fairly regarded as belonging to the *sittlich* world itself. The process requires something of Peirce's sense of the collectively enabled (and "effective") "higher" self of which he speaks. This is an idea essentially opposed to Durkheim's thesis as much as to Umberto Eco's and John Searle's.

What's decisive here is the provision of higher-order levels of the normative reflection affecting everything that claims objective, valid, or legitimate standing.

The thesis is neatly captured by conceding: (a) that normativity cannot but be discursively enabled and constrained (a Kantian thesis), though active only within *sittlich* contingencies, which are themselves artifactual

(a doctrine utterly incompatible with Kant's philosophical intentions); and (b) that, accordingly, our would-be norms—bearing on any and all forms of knowledge, intelligence, understanding, rationality, judgment, commitment, agency, responsibility, critique, appreciation and the like (once again, a Kantian run of interests)—cannot, given the artifactuality of the self, claim any normative standing beyond the "second-best" (which, is itself utterly incompatible with Kant's philosophical intentions). These theorems (if I may call them that) confirm, therefore, the sense, already remarked, that Kant's entire program, construed as transcendentalist, is completely incompatible with my reading of the philosophical import of post-Darwinian paleoanthropology.

It's in this sense that normativity takes a constructivist form, drawing on *sittlich* stabilities already in place and on whatever, arguably, may be introduced on "internalist" grounds (long-standing interests, for instance), as reasonable revisions and adjustments of prevailing *Sitten*. Ultimately, normative validation is consensual—though not criterial in any privileged sense and, hopefully, not arbitrary or regressive. In any case, there are no independent sources of normative discovery to be had (in nature at large): pertinent (second-order) responses to perceived threats to survival, quality of life, capacitation, and the like are essentially reflexive concerns, plausible (if plausible at all) only in the extended *sittlich* manner I've just sketched. In short: if, being the artifactual beings that we are, we have no natural *telos* to consult (*pace* Plato), we cannot reasonably claim independent normative grounds for maintaining or improving societal life that are not effectively entrenched or perceived to be prefigured in the *sittlich* way; nevertheless, we cannot deny the deep contingency and diversity of the viable forms of life that human persons confront.

Survival, a measured sense of societal stability and quality of life, and the absence of any deep or widespread repudiation of the *sittlich* interests and objectives we accept are as much as we can hope for in validating the purposes we champion. What's decisive here is that all such reflections take an "internalist" form that cannot be shown to be unconditionally binding on ourselves, or universally binding on the entire race. The forms of human life domesticate the alien quality of reflexive life itself by constructing the inertial powers of second-natured practice as nature's own. I take the normative (but not the merely valuative) to be inherently discursive (language-bound), though I leave the argument to that effect for another occasion. If that's the right way to go, then there's a profound asymmetry or division among Kant's primary concerns: cognition and

agency take distinctly different forms among animals, but there is no animal normative. This goes against the insinuated but not developed thrust of Alasdair MacIntyre's well-known argument.<sup>19</sup>

## V

I've now provided, very slimly I admit, two essential features of the artifactually hybrid world of enlanguaged persons—a world invisible to all but persons or, by a conceptual courtesy, to include the first glimpses of those languageless primates (effectively, neonates) who, dawningly, will come to engage the same world we ourselves engage. That world, I suggest, requires a dual sense of *Bildung*: first, "external" *Bildung*, the longitudinal process of intertwined biological and cultural evolution by which hominid primates first "invented" (and mastered) true language and transformed themselves (into persons) in the bargain; and, second, "internal" *Bildung*, the inter-generational process by which neonates are enabled to enter the lists of a supportive society of apt persons, as persons themselves, precisely by mastering the language and practices the mature members of their society already share. The first signifies the endless variety of the manifestations of *Intentionality* that, ontologically, qualifies all that belongs to the artifactual world of persons and that, accordingly, is accessible, cognitively and agentively, to the members of one or another such society; and the second signifies the spontaneous familiarity of the habits, practices, customs, norms, behavior, and alterability of the *sittlich* stabilities of any Intentional world, such that, as with bilingualism, the *Sitten* of every culture are in principle intelligible and defensibly revisable in accord with the historied life of some pertinent society. Intentionality, then, is the unique and ubiquitous feature of the ontology of enlanguaged cultures, and *Sittlichkeit* is the most basic ground for the appraisal of the normative standing of any and all kinds of supposed values. Persons, then, are aggregated beings who manifest in their hybrid "natures" the collective linkages they require in mastering a natural language and the *sittlich* culture that that subtends.

Here, I must remind you of a final claim, already hinted, which helps to explain the strategic importance of a third feature of human cultures that I have yet to propose. I have in mind the finding that the cultural world emerges from (or "supervenes" on) the physical world in ways en-

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<sup>19</sup> See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Humans Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

tirely different from the ways in which we suppose, in principle, macroscopic physical phenomena may be taken to be theoretically identical with appropriately selected microtheoretical entities if the properties and behavior of the first may be satisfactorily analyzed in terms of the nomologically regular properties and behavior of things of the second kind (lightning, say, in terms of suitably characterized, ionized molecular structures). It is enough for present purposes to take note of the fact that Intentional phenomena normally do not yield to inter-level theoretical identities of the sort applied to purely physical "things"—the salient reason is the absence of anything like exceptionless causal laws in the Intentional world (which we typically claim may be confirmed with respect to physical nature). But the deeper reason rests with the difference between the very emergence of a macroscopic material world and the emergence of a macroscopic Intentional world that manifests properties that do not obtain in any natural world that lacks language. This is not a disjoint or dualistically structured "world," of course, but the kind of emergence Intentionality manifests defeats reductionism—and constrains naturalism, deflationism, and the analysis of normativity hands down.

The simple fact is that the Intentional description of the things of the cultural world cannot (normally) be reduced in any known way to permit analyses open to reductive identities of the sort just mentioned. Hence we treat cultural entities (if we admit them at all) as ontologically different from mere physical entities; although, as we have seen, they can usually be matched in a regular way with things appropriately drawn from physical or biological nature; so that Intentional entities (and their adequated properties) may be seen to be embodied or incarnate in corresponding natural entities and their properties (for instance, paintings and painted canvases, actions and bodily movements, spoken words and uttered sounds, persons and members of *Homo sapiens*), but are not reducible in merely physical terms.

If, furthermore, we allow that the natural sciences are (as, of course, they are) cultural undertakings themselves, constrained in whatever ways the conceptual and cognitive powers of human persons are constrained, then it will not seem unreasonable to suggest that all the sciences are, finally, human sciences insofar as they make systematic claims about the true facts and the explanation of such facts regarding natural things. This shows the way to conceding that everything belonging to the natural world may be trivially "transformed," verbally, by merely making a natural thing the subject of scientific description and explanation. Thus, the

sedimented strata of the Olduvai Gorge may be *interpreted* so as to confirm Louis Leakey's dating of the fossil remains of early forms of the genus *Homo*, in spite of the fact that the Gorge itself is not, in any otherwise pertinent sense, an Intentional thing. By a counter-process, certain forms of schizophrenia may be redefined in terms of hormonal or other biochemical imbalances in such a way as to retire their would-be Intentional standing. (I take the latter guess to provide an important clue to the continuity, and difference, between agency and causality, which Kant confounds.)

Here, we may claim a triple clue regarding substantial differences between the natural and human sciences that spells *finis* to the immensely influential, notorious, but misguided, unity-of-science thesis, which, at the same time, accounts for the enormous importance of various interpretive inquiries favored among the human sciences and cognate disciplines. I have already identified the essential difference between natural and linguistically qualified cultural things, namely, *Intentionality* (written with capital "I"), which defines the scope of the cultural world itself; I have also collected the entire range of the intelligent, cognitive, rational, practical, agentive, and interpretive ways of engaging the natural and culturally transformed worlds open to all the practices favored by societies of selves, now construed as so many diverse forms of *Sittlichkeit*. In this way, I acknowledge the continuum of animal and human evolution, which, signifying the survival and viability of the human race, obviates all the canonical demands of familiar regress arguments affecting the validation of realism and the objective standing of normativity itself. Given the symbiotized sense in which animals survive within their ecological niches (so to say) and the otherwise baffling sense in which persons (being the artifactual creatures that they are) have no such *Umwelt*, the minimal sense in which we live, adaptively, in the world is, in a perfectly plain sense, the only viable space in which questions regarding realism and the objectivity of normative provisions are intelligible at all. Answers to each and both are, as I say, no more than second-best.

The clue to the third schematized distinction of the encultured world rests with the finding that the forms of emergence confined, disjunctively, to "merely" natural things are fundamentally different from the forms of emergence open to the hybrid forms of whatever exhibits Intentionality and is characteristically governed or guided by the historied forms of *Sittlichkeit*. Once again, that difference rests, metonymically, with Intentional and normative attributions. But, here, *if*, as argued, the In-

tentional world cannot be reduced or explained in ways open to whatever emerges in the "merely" physical world (the world without "second-natured" things)—because the distinctive properties of the enlanguaged world depend on the uniquely artifactual nature of language (and what language makes possible), and because there are no known nomological or algorithmic regularities joining natural and pertinently emergent cultural phenomena (except, perhaps, what may be deliberately introduced by human persons, as in playing chess or communicating by a secret code, or operating an adding machine or by other such "second-natured" means).

Hence, the explanation of the things of the cultural world, analyzed, redescribed, explained, explicated, interpreted in ways addressed to the specifically Intentional and *sittlich*, must be pursued in accord with the categories of the perceived Intentional world itself (or some extension or modification of same). But that, of course, is not to preclude the play of natural causes *in* the encultured world (for instance, as in the recently reported, unintended tear of an immensely valuable Picasso painting or the effect of a bad cold on the received meaning of a delicate courtship).

There are at least two fundamental distinctions that separate the physical and the human sciences: for one, the irreducibility of human agency (as a form of causality or as incorporating causality in a uniquely complex way) to any of the usual forms of causality admitted within the natural world; the other (partly as a consequence of the first), the ineliminability of interpretive disciplines addressed to the different forms of explicating the import of anything Intentional that belongs to the encultured world (as in grasping history, the critical analysis of artworks, the practice of the law, and the fluent comprehension of an improvised conversation).

I mean these last remarks to introduce the vast openness of the most distinctive features of the human world—what I think Roland Barthes must have meant by his term, *l'ouverture* (already present in Lévi-Strauss): namely, the dependence of all the forms of human agency on our perspicuous powers of *interpretation*, in the arts and sciences and in practical and theorizing life, as well as the dependence of the endless novelty of interpretation itself on the inventive posits and products of human intervention. I take all of this to yield the essential clues to our own historied second nature.

All that I've assembled under the cover of the metaphysics of culture now leads back to the theory of the human self and its endless preoccupation with interpreting (coming to understand) itself and the Intentional

world it creates and continually transforms. Thus, I regard the innumerable disciplines of interpretation to be far too diverse and too responsive to emergent history ever to be satisfactorily systematized. Nevertheless, they are all fulgurations of one endeavor: that is, to understand ourselves and our earthly career and how we have changed our world and ourselves in the process. Interpretation, I suggest, is the articulation of the Intentional in all its forms. You cannot find a single method here: our strategies are no more than second-best, in the same sense in which normativity itself is second-natured.

The modes of interpretation must be adequate and adequated to the variety of interests of the entire race: the devices of psychoanalysis cannot be the same as those of applying positive law to criminal cases, or either of these to the practice of art and literary criticism. In any event, the distinctive rigor of viable forms of diagnosis, analysis, and interpretation in any given discipline must be adequated to the distinction of the specimen instances we take ourselves to be obliged to address. The same precept applies in the physical sciences, of course, and for cognate reasons. But I can offer at least two summary constraints that bear in an essential way on appraising the sufficiency of any conception of interpretation applied to the exemplary instances of any standard practice regarding Intentional things. Every interpretive effort will seek some objective order of Intentional coherence, of course; but it cannot be found in any would-be paradigm instances—if, as is true, human life is itself profoundly historied. It can only be proposed in the general sense in which whatever we interpret is, finally, a form of self-interpretation—a hermeneutics—that is, a way of understanding how we understand ourselves essentially as persons, through what we do and produce and how we function.

Accordingly, in doing that, we find ourselves enabled and constrained by the discovery that what is Intentional (culturally significant, let us say) is, as enlanguaged or “lingual,” *determinable rather than determinate*—meaning by that that (as with language itself) there is no assured sense in which the import that we take ourselves to fathom, in whatever way we interpret the world, *has* a single, uniquely correct, objectively discernible sense to plumb. If what is interpretable is open in the historied way I suggest it is, then interpretations are themselves constructions fitted, evolvingly and multiply, under the condition of the historied artifactuality of the effort itself. Here, again, interpretation is inherently consensual though not strictly criterial. There may be relatively determinate facts to be ascertained, of course—for instance, the date of Abraham Lincoln’s as-



sassination; but the interpretation of the meaning of the last phase of Lincoln's life cannot be determined with anything like that sort of specificity. What it is will be various, changeable, diversely (possibly incompatibly) formulable, and open to further transformation in ways we discover we are unwilling to do without. Hence, interpretation may be rightly deemed to be the most compendious and absorbing activity of the human self, in a sense that also completes this first sketch of the metaphysics of culture. All the things of the human world, I should say, are Intentional, *sittlich*, and determinably so.

Now, to admit such a finding is also (I suggest) to admit, at least incipiently, a reasonable paradigm of human cognition addressed to the world. For, for one thing, there cannot be any source of epistemic confirmation separable from our reflexive powers as persons, regarding the Intentional import of whatever we take to be thus qualified; and, for another, nothing that we take to have Intentional attributes (as they've been characterized) can have public standing, among us, except as indissolubly incarnate (according to our lights) in some discernible *materia*. I am quite content to argue that if we admit the plausibility of trusting to a corrigible grasp of linguistic practices—including constructed claims addressed to what, reflexively, we avow in the phenomenological sense (already sketched)—then whatever we are prepared to defend as a viable realism will, of course, be adequate enough in the *sittlich* way in which avowals are already shared.

This is not meant to yield any *apriorist* certitudes about the way the world is or the confirmed status of human knowledge; but it does convey the sense in which our claims about the world are not weakened in any discernible way by merely conceding that we know no way of avoiding the sheer contingency of their advent or the normal informality of the evidentiary sources of assurances that we have come to rely on. Given *that*, then once we abandon cognitive privilege and foundational assurances of any kind, we cannot hope to defeat the familiar forms of skeptical demands; and given that claims about the nature of truth, knowledge, reality, meaning, confirmation and the like cannot (then) disallow the matched pertinence of the usual forms of reflexively iterable challenge (which is itself tantamount to incipient skepticism), we cannot hope to establish the validity of such claims beyond what is merely "second-best"—namely, whatever serves, confirmationally, in the *sittlich* way.

My thought, here, is that normativity itself, in all its forms, cannot exceed a merely *sittlich* form of confirmation; but, then, also, that such laxity is normally sufficient for human purposes. By such means, we hold

skepticism and transcendentalism at bay, without disordering the normal practices of the human world. Thus, if we add a further conjecture: viz., that the line of reasoning that leads to the conclusion just drawn includes what—with Charles Peirce, I should now call an “abductive Hope”—is not itself an argument that can be evidentially tested or confirmed in any way, though it usually yields testable claims. The crisp claims of philosophy, like those of science and practical life, trail off and finally morph into the compelling (but obviously contingent, historied, possibly accidental) “constancies” of societal lore. Philosophy is holistic in this sense; hence, also, then, incapable of being recast as a closed system of determinate principles and arguments of the sorts attempted by Kant and the post-Kantian Idealists.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, I take the “abduction” just summarized to be a variant of the convergent (but distinctly different) “abductions” advanced (in the guise of testable assertions) by the classic pragmatists, Charles Peirce and John Dewey. It spells out my conviction that very nearly the whole of Western philosophy prior to the post-Darwinian application of the import of Darwin’s evolutionary discoveries (even if contested in the way I’ve reported) has been effectively deprived of a fresh way of conceiving the “nature” of a human being—and, as a consequence, a fresh way of conjoining the Darwinian and Hegelian themes (otherwise, the post-Darwinian paleo-anthropological and post-Kantian Idealist themes) in effectively combating the threat to the viability of philosophy, drawn from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sources. It’s a threat that still looms in the middle of the nineteenth century and, I should add, even in the second decade of the twenty-first century. I take the proposal I’ve advanced to be the leanest and most promising way of confronting skepticism and the opposition of other contemporary philosophies—a new form of “pragmatism” (so to say), freed from its own parochial beginnings, an answer that depends on a fresh conception of the metaphysics and epistemology of culture.

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<sup>20</sup> I take this to be an answer to the question posed by Kant and the Idealists’ response to Kant, along the lines spelled out in an extraordinarily clear way, in Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), especially chs. 1–2.

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