

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC POSSIBILITY

by

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M.A., The University of British Columbia, 1977

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
(Department of Anthropology and Sociology)

We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 1980

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ABSTRACT

The following work is a formulation of ethnography, and as such, should not be conceived of as a characterization of, description of, or commentary upon ethnography. This is to say that ethnography is not conceived of here as subject matter, i.e., ethnography is not conceived of here as matter to be engaged descriptively. Instead, ethnography is conceived of here as a form of inquiry and so, our engagement with ethnography can be formulated as an engagement with inquiry.

We understand ethnography as a concrete instance of inquiry that is conducted under the auspices of an authoritative version of inquiry. Further, we understand that any inquiry, including ethnography, forgets, in the Platonic sense, the authority under which it is done and from which it receives its possibility. In this sense, we do not address ethnography concretely, but instead we address ethnography analytically. This is to say that what we address is the analytic possibility of ethnography.

Thus, we treat ethnography as a text, as speech, and our inquiry seeks to formulate the authority, the grounds, under which that speech is spoken. In this sense, we conceive of any speech, including our own speech, as simultaneously covering over its authoritative grounds and

recommending those grounds as an authoritative version of inquiry. So we treat ethnography not concretely but as an occasion for us to display our grounds, our authoritative version of inquiry. Thus, what collects our work is a commitment to formulating the grounds of speech and thus a commitment to displaying that very commitment.

In Chapter 1 we address the notion of speech and the essential distinction between speech and language. Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to a discussion of the topicality and deep interest of speech. We then exemplify the argument presented in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 by addressing, more directly, the possibility of ethnography in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Finally, Chapter 7 is given over to the formulation of the idea of inquiry itself.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the co-operation and assistance of my dissertation committee. I would like to extend my gratitude to Professor Jay Powell for displaying the courage to join my committee at a late date and to engage my dissertation responsibly. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Ken Stoddart. He displayed a courageous patience in supporting me, through what I consider to be, a radical shift of orientation that took place in our four-year association. Professor Stoddart's outstanding paper "The Presentation of Everyday Life: Strategies for 'Adequate Ethnography'", provided much of the impetus for my dissertation. No one deserves more acknowledgment than Professor Roy Turner. I do not think of Professor Turner as my advisor, but rather I think of him as my teacher in the true Socratic sense. Following the Socratic tradition, I consider my thesis to be my child, and in the true maieutic sense, Professor Turner assisted me in bringing this child to birth and assisted me in the upbringing of this child. My relationship with Professor Turner is one of friendship and collaboration - a relationship that will not end with the completion of my dissertation.

I also wish to thank the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. The National Office of the C.N.I.B., as well

as the British Columbia-Yukon Division of the C.N.I.B., have provided me with financial support over the four years of my graduate work. I owe a special debt of gratitude to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their generous financial support over the course of my graduate work.

Finally, and most importantly, I wish to express my gratitude to my wife, Barb. She not only typed the first two drafts of this dissertation, but also provided invaluable editorial assistance as well as dedicated collaboration. Most importantly, Barb was an inexhaustible source of emotional support that served well to carry me through some of the stormy periods of my career as a graduate student. It is to Barb that my dissertation is dedicated.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### I.

Why write an ethnography and why read an ethnography? These questions are not meant to evoke a teleological response and thus to have done with them once and for all although such a response is indeed tempting. Such a temptation, however, forgets that these questions arise on each and every occasion of writing or reading an ethnography. They arise because the writing and reading of an ethnography, in each and every case, is a decision: To write or read an ethnography is to decide that it is a worthwhile thing to do. When we do ethnography, we decide that it is worthwhile doing, i.e., we decide its worthwhileness. So to rid ourselves of these questions by responding teleologically is not to get rid of the questions themselves, since they are always there, but rather it is to put the questions out of our minds, i.e., to forget them.

When the question "Why write or read an ethnography?" is conceived of as a decision that needs to be made on each and every occasion of writing or reading an ethnography, and since in this sense, the question forever remains and is never gotten rid of, or even abated, we must inquire into the conception of decision that permits re-decision and incompleteness rather than decisiveness and completion. There

is surely some sense in which deciding to write or read an ethnography is quite a simple matter. And when conceived of as a simple matter this decision need not necessarily be re-decided in each and every case. The decision to write or read an ethnography may, for example, be made on the basis that one is an ethnographer and that is what ethnographers do, or ethnography is an interesting thing to write and read, or some such thing.

But, these sorts of responses beg the question. They are the sorts of responses that aim at providing concrete reasons for writing and reading an ethnography and have as their impetus the forgetting of why ethnographers do what they do and why ethnography is interesting. What is forgotten is the decision to become an ethnographer in the first place and the decision to find ethnography interesting in the first place. In other words, what is forgotten is how ethnography is conceived of as a thing-in-the-world that is writable and readable and, as such, valuable.

The interesting thing is that when concrete reasons are invoked as a way to respond to the question of "Why write or read an ethnography?", these concrete reasons fail to address the very question to which they are a response. They fail to address the question (decision) in that they are a concrete production of that decision. To decide, in a concrete way, to write or read an ethnography or to find ethnography interesting or not, is to decide, in a deeper

sense, to conceive of a world in which ethnography is a concretely do-able thing and a concretely interesting thing.

The decision to engage in ethnography, then, involves not the provision of some good concrete reasons but involves the decision of seeing a world in a way that supports and makes possible that very engagement. So each and every occasion of writing and reading an ethnography, which is to say, that each and every case of writing or reading ethnographically makes reference to that decision. Moreover, each and every instance of ethnography is a re-affirmation of the commitment to seeing a world in a particular way and a re-affirmation of seeing one's place in that world.

In this sense, decision is intended as a way to speak about that which makes ethnography possible, i.e., that which gives ethnography its life. Decision is intended as a way to speak about the authority or auspices, or grounds of ethnography. It is a way to get at the notion that ethnography does not stand by itself but is steeped in tradition and commitment if tradition and commitment are understood as ways of seeing, conceiving, and understanding. Finally, decision is intended to make reference to the notion that ways of seeing, conceiving and understanding are indeed decisions, and hence, could be otherwise.

Thus, the question "Why write or read an ethnography?", as it is asked here, asks not after some concrete reason, but instead asks after that decision, those auspices, those grounds

that authorizes ethnography, i.e., that makes ethnography possible in the first place. It asks after that way of seeing, that way of understanding, that way of conceiving that although made reference to in each and every case of ethnography, is forgotten. It asks after what our writing and reading of an ethnography forgets. And now our task becomes one of making more clear (concretizing) our notion of "forgetting".<sup>1</sup>

## II.

It should be clear by now that when we speak of forgetting why we write or read an ethnography we are not speaking about the forgetting of some concrete reason for doing so, when concrete reason is conceived of as deriving its possibility from the same commitment that grounds (provides for the possibility of) the very thing it seeks to be a reason for. The provision of concrete reasons for writing and reading an ethnography, then, is itself reasonable only because it is a manifestation of the deeper decision to see the world in a way that allows for the possibility of ethnography. Thus, concrete reasons for writing and reading an ethnography are as much a re-affirmation of that way of seeing as is ethnography itself. And it is this decision - the decision to see the world in a particular way and to

place oneself in that world - that is forgotten. What we forget, then, is our origin. We forget the beginning (the decision) that makes it possible for us to write or read an ethnography.

It is in this way that each and every occasion of writing or reading an ethnography makes reference to, and re-affirms, the beginning and origin, and in this sense the possibility, of whosoever chooses to write or read ethnographically. And it is to this choice that the notion of forgetting points. What is pointed to, then, is our beginning and origin, and in the case of ethnography, that beginning and origin that authorizes our writing and reading of an ethnography.

If we think of the writing and reading of an ethnography as speech - as ethnographic speech - then we can find a way, by formulating our conception of speech, to show how our notion of forgetting is possible. And anticipating somewhat, that formulation of our notion of speech will show how we can formulate ethnography as forgetting its beginning and its speech and, indeed, forgetting that it does speak.

Heidegger tells us that:<sup>2</sup>

Man speaks. We speak when we are awake and we speak in our dreams. We are always speaking, even when we do not utter a single word aloud, but merely listen or read, and even when we are not particularly listening or speaking but are attending to some work



or taking a rest. We are continually speaking in one way or another. We speak because speaking is natural to us. It does not first arise out of some special volition. Man is said to have language by nature. It is held that man, in distinction from plant and animal, is the living being capable of speech. This statement does not mean only that, along with other faculties, man also possesses the faculty of speech. It means to say that only speech enables man to be the living being he is as man. It is as one who speaks that man is - man. (Heidegger, 1971:189)

What is Heidegger telling us if not that insofar as man is man - he speaks? "Man speaks" is surely not intended as some sort of a description or some sort of a characterization. Speech is not a faculty that is derivable from a list of faculties. Thus, "Man speaks" is not merely one of the many things that man does. In a sense, what Heidegger is telling us is that what man is is speech.

Insofar as "It is as one who speaks that man is - man", speech is "...natural to us", i.e., that "Man speaks" is natural - is man. It is not that speech "...arises out of some special volition" but that "Man speaks". Man does not decide to speak or choose to speak because that would be "unnatural" and would not be man.

In a sense, then, what Heidegger is saying is that there is no escape from speech. It is not that we think about (decide) whether or not to speak, for that (thinking, deciding) would already be to speak. Or, it is not that when we think

about speech, think about its nature, think about its characteristics, think about its features, etc., that we suspend speech, i.e., that we put it aside, as it were, in order to examine it, since the very putting aside of speech and examining it is to speak. Any speech, then, even speech about speech, is done speakingly, i.e., we do whatever it is we do by virtue of being speakers.

So when we speak about forgetting, we are not speaking about forgetting the decision to speak, since that is not for us to decide, rather we are speaking about forgetting the very fact that we do speak. What we decide, then, is not whether or not to speak, but how to speak. Since we have no choice but to speak, what remains for us to choose is a way to speak and to remember that we do speak. What remains our choice, then, is that which will authorize our speech, that which makes our speech possible. Our speech represents, or better, what is re-presented in our speech is its grounds, is a commitment to a way of life that grounds, is the auspices for, and provides for the possibility of our speaking the way we do.

As it is conceived of here, all speech is a mere surface reflection of its grounds. Understood thus, any speech that attempts to speak its grounds - formulate its grounds - is necessarily doomed to failure since all speech is merely a reflection of its grounds and is not its grounds itself.

Thus, to speak is necessarily to forget and what is forgotten is the grounds or auspices of speech. This is what was meant when we said that we forget why we speak or, in this specific case, why we speak ethnographically - why we write or read an ethnography.

In this sense, speech is understood here as inadequate or imperfect since speech cannot speak its own grounds. The inadequacy of speech is certainly not news for sociology. But the inadequacy of speech, as it is typically conceived of in sociology, is certainly different from our conception. Durkheim, for example, writes that:

Since the word "suicide" recurs constantly in the course of conversation, it might be thought that its sense is universally known and that definition is superfluous. Actually, the words of everyday language, like the concepts they express, are always susceptible of more than one meaning, and the scholar employing them in their accepted use without further definition would risk serious misunderstanding. (Durkheim, 1951:41)

Or, when Zetterberg discusses sociological theory and its verification, he says that:

Even highly educated speech is sometimes too imprecise or cumbersome for sociological discourse. As everyone knows, the word 'behave' might mean any activity, but sometimes it means 'to act with good manners'; the word 'society' might mean the largest social

system, but it might also mean the 'upper crust'. The sociologist needs some words of everyday speech which have such an emotive or affect value in ordinary speech that they must be re-introduced as formal definitions in sociological discourse; 'culture' and 'bureaucracy' are examples. (Zetterberg, 1965: 32-33).

When Berger speaks of sociology's object of study par excellence - society - he says that:

Like most terms used by sociologists, this one is derived from common usage, where its meaning is imprecise. Sometimes it means a particular band of people (as in "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals"), sometimes only those people endowed with great prestige or privilege (as in "Boston society ladies"), and on other occasions it is simply used to denote company of any sort (for example, "he greatly suffered in those years for lack of society"). (Berger, 1963:26).

Or finally, when Wootton formulates discourse as dilemmic he says that:

Hence, if our aim is to provide an adequate reading, formulation or description for a stretch of talk, the extent to which this is a fruitful analytic exercise will depend on whether we can extract unambiguously one formulation rather than a set of alternative formulations, and whether this is possible will depend on whether it is feasible to develop general criteria for deciding the meaning of words and general

criteria for deciding what sort of utterance an utterance is. (Wootton, 1975: 19).

What are Durkheim, et al. (Sociology), saying when, in their various ways, they recommend that speech as it occurs in everyday life be differentiated from speech that occurs in sociological inquiry. They are clearly saying that speech is inadequate by virtue of the possibility of alternative interpretations. Their version of the inadequacy of speech is that speech is unclear, imprecise, multi-interpretational, and the like. For them, speech is bad since to be good, speech would have to be clear, precise, and uni-interpretational.

Conceived thus speech becomes for sociology, nothing but words, things that correspond to other things, namely bits and pieces of the world, i.e., the world itself. So the intelligibility of the inadequacy of speech is to be located in the activity of matching thing with thing, of matching word with world. For sociology, speech is inadequate (bad) because it does not accomplish this match perfectly and speech is inadequate because it could, indeed, should, be otherwise, i.e., it should be good (adequate, perfect) and fulfill its destiny as the perfect match for the world.

But, according to sociology, speech needs help to be the perfect match, to be the good mate. The marriage between speech and the world is certainly in trouble, if they are

married at all, and like a godsend, sociology appears to smooth the waters. Sociology is just the help this troubled couple requires. Sociology as marriage counsellor and match-maker will bring speech and the world together and reconcile their troubles so they may live happily ever after as one.

For sociology, then, the inadequacy of speech becomes intelligible as a technical problem. And, as a problem conceived technically, what is required is a solution. The task for sociology is to provide the solution and thus to remedy and repair the inadequacy of speech. This is necessary because sociology can only speak intelligibly when it understands its speech as corresponding to the world. And how can it speak, how can it inquire, unless speech is first rendered adequate and perfect, i.e., unless speech is coaxed (forced?) to behave itself (to be good) and be faithful to its mate, the world?

The remedying and repairing of speech is not intelligible to sociology as inquiry. For sociology, inquiry is already to be speaking adequately and perfectly. So all remedy and repair work is understood as preparation for inquiry. Since inquiry (speech) for sociology, is to speak at one with the world, the inquestive tools (speech) must be rescued from this state of disrepair so that the job (inquiry) can get adequately done.

But how does this remedy and repair work proceed? Repair work requires tools, and what are the tools of the sort of repair work that sociology has in mind? Sociology wants to repair speech, but how? Since "Man speaks", sociology will have to speak as a way to repair and remedy speech. We find sociology in the bizarre position of remedying and repairing inadequate speech with inadequate speech and thus offering inadequate speech as the remedial result of its repair work. Sociology wants to speak about speech and yet it wants to do this without speaking. Sociology chooses to be nihilistic, it chooses not to speak, and what does it choose, to babble? Does its benevolent desire to act as marriage counsellor and match-maker reduce itself to babbling?

Sociology forgets why it speaks the way it does and, indeed, forgets that it does speak. It mistakes the remedy and repair work (its speech), which is actually the grammar of its inquiry, for preparation to inquiry, for non-speech. Sociology not only forgets the grounds and auspices of its speech, which is to choose to speak responsibly, but it forgets that it does speak, which is nihilistic, and thus it chooses to speak irresponsibly.

We, however, do not forget that we speak. Since we cannot speak the grounds of our speech, we forget. What we forget, in order to speak, is not, like sociology, that we do speak, but the grounds of our speech. We do not forget

that our speech is grounded, but, in speaking, we do forget those grounds that make our speech possible. Like sociology, we conceive of speech as inadequate but, unlike sociology, we do not conceive of this inadequacy as a problem to be remedied and repaired. We understand all speech, including our speech, as a reflection of the grounds and auspices that make it possible. Thus, to address the grounds of some speech is to produce more speech which itself is needful of grounding. That all speech is needful of grounding is how we formulate speech as inadequate. Thus, for us, speech is not bad unless it refuses to address the grounds of speech and display its commitment to grounds. Speech is good when it displays a commitment to that which it covers over, namely grounds.<sup>3</sup>

### III.

Conceiving of speech as a surface reflection of its grounds, which is to say, as a concretization of that which it forgets, i.e., its own possibility, has some important implications for how inquiry or theorizing is understood. These implications do not only make reference to the version of inquiry or theorizing displayed in this work, but make reference to all inquiry, all theorizing, wheresoever it is done.



Durkheim, et al. (Sociology) for example, are theorizing. One way of reading their theorizing is unreflexively. Reading unreflexively is to join sociology, in its forgetting. Sociology, forgets why it speaks and indeed, forgets that it speaks and we, reading unreflexively, forget why we read and forget that we read. Sociology writes its words down and forgets that the very writing down of its words provides a cover for that which makes the words possible and our unreflexive reading of its words finds the words to be all that there is and we forget that we are reading a cover. Sociology writes unreflexively insofar as its writing does not re-achieve the tension between its writing and its possibility and we read unreflexively insofar as our reading does not re-achieve the tension between our reading and its possibility. What this sort of writing and reading (speech) fails to recognize is the difference between speech and its grounds. It fails to recognize that in speaking we make this difference. Thus, what unreflexive speech aims at is not making a difference.

This is to treat the reading of any theorizing as not making a difference to the theorizing itself and hence to treat the reading not as itself theorizing in the way that what is read is theorizing. This version of reading provides for reading to be conceived of as some sort of an "innocent activity"<sup>4</sup> that segregates the activities of

writing and reading. It is to treat reading as the mere reading of words. It is to treat reading as though what is being written, what is being said, is to be found by looking at the words rather than addressing what the words cover over, their possibility. The concrete segregation of writing and reading treats the one as the innocent subsequent of the other and thus reading becomes a barren activity separated from speech and thus separated from its tradition, from its beginning, from its possibility. Where there was one, there are now many and the parts are mistaken for the whole.

To avoid such segregation and to become analytically open to the grounds of speech, it is necessary to understand reading, as Culler<sup>5</sup> puts it, as a "... 'recuperation' which one's critical discourse performs." (Culler, 1974: 22). "Recuperation", writes Culler, "may be defined as the desire to leave no chaff, to make everything wheat, to let nothing escape but integrate it in a larger scheme by giving it a meaning." (Culler, 1974: 22). And what is such "recuperation" if not writings' and readings' (speeches') reliance on its grounds. What our speech amounts to, then, is a re-affirmation of our grounds for speaking and any particular instance of writing, as well as any particular instance of reading, serves to re-affirm our version of adequate speaking.

Culler's notion of "recuperation" does not suggest that in our reading of theoretical work we will not find

matters that are puzzling, problematic, etc. for this surely happens. Finding there to be puzzles and problems does not suggest that we fail to recuperate, i.e., that we fail to turn the chaff into wheat. Rather, it is by virtue of recuperation that we find puzzles and problems. Puzzles and problems, then, do not represent the little bits of chaff that are left over but, like the rest of our speech, re-present the grounds that make it possible for us to find puzzles and problems in the first place, i.e., the grounds that make it possible for us to speak.

So a way to read the theorizing that is sociology, is unreflexively, which is to say, to recuperate its theorizing in the same forgetful way that it was done. In this sense, when we comment upon, make reference to, or criticize the theorizing of sociology, our commenting, referring, or criticizing is made possible by that which grounds the theorizing of sociology, and, in this sense, we do not comment, refer or criticize at all. What we do is to unreflexively join sociology, in its forgetting and thus to join it in its re-affirmation of the grounds of its speech by producing yet one more concrete instance (reading) of those grounds.

One way to read theoretical work, then, is to conceive of it as a report or an account of some state-of-affairs. To do this, we must re-affirm our deep decision to segregate speech from the world and to understand speech as standing

in a correspondence relation to the world. Adequate theorizing reduces to the production of agreement or disagreement in the worst sense. Either the theorizing (speech) corresponds to the world, and we agree, or it does not, and we disagree. The aim of this sort of theorizing is thus to produce agreement; theorizing is produced under the auspices of a community and every theoretical production is a re-affirmation of that community.

Theorizing that aims at producing agreement, where agreement is grounded in the notion that speech corresponds to the world, is theorizing that aims at an end of un-explicated finality and perfection. This sort of theorizing forgets its essential reflexive nature insofar as it forgets that which provides it with its possibility. This theorizing is not interested in formulating the grounds of speech, in formulating the grounds of that which is the object of its theorizing, but instead is interested in theorizing about; it is interested in not making a difference, and as such, subjects itself to the concrete authority of some state-of-affairs.

Another way to read a theoretical work or inquiry, a way which is here recommended as the best way, is reflexively. Any theoretical work or inquiry is a reflection and re-affirmation of the auspices under which it is done. Each and every occasion of reading, then, should be an occasion

to reflect on that which makes the theorizing or inquiry possible. In this way, each and every occasion of reading is taken not only as the opportunity to formulate the grounds of some other speech, but also as the opportunity to display the grounds of the reading itself. It is to understand theorizing or inquiry as making reference to, on each and every occasion of its production, some version of adequate theorizing or inquiry. This sort of reading is truly theoretical in that it understands any theoretical work or inquiry as the theorist's display of a recommended way to speak and a recommended way to live. Reflective theorizing or inquiry, whether it is displayed in writing or reading, is theorizing or inquiry that aims at re-minding itself of its deep decision to speak and to speak in a certain way. It is an attempt not to forget but to re-collect; to re-collect its decision, to re-collect the difference between it and its possibility, and to re-collect its possibility as its origin. This is to decide to theorize, to live theoretically, as over against the decision to report, to live technically.

#### IV.

Why write or read an ethnography? Why speak ethnographically? are then questions that make reference to the version of adequate inquiry displayed in ethnographic

speech. They refer to the fact that ethnography receives its sensibility and reasonableness from that which authorizes it. The appearance of ethnography, ethnographic speech, is different from its grounds and yet must partake in its grounds in order to exist. Any theorizing about ethnography will attempt to recover the sense of this tension, and at the same time, recover its own sense of tension between its appearance and its grounds.

In making ethnography our concrete topic, we have no desire, nor indeed do we have a need, to engage in such performances as review of the literature,<sup>6</sup> production of a typology of ethnographies, and the like. We have no desire or need to compare and contrast ethnographies as this is understood in the usual sense of finding concrete differences among ethnographies and recommending one way of doing ethnography over and against others. Finally, we have no desire or need to describe and evaluate ethnographies where this is understood as the production of a manual or handbook for the doing of adequate ethnography.

Why are these sorts of performances or activities not necessary? Each and every ethnography, regardless of its characteristics, e.g., cognitive, componential, ethno-methodological, etc., are re-presentations of the idea of ethnography and each makes reference to the grounds and good of ethnography. In this sense, concrete instances

of ethnography, whatever they might be, are appearances of the Real insofar as each and every case of ethnography finds its possibility in the idea of ethnography. A concern with appearances of ethnography, then, is a superficial concern in that such concerns find their possibility and speak under the same auspices as do the appearances of ethnography with which they are concerned.

So the topic of this work is not ethnography if by that is meant that this work is about ethnography. Instead, this work aims at addressing the grounds of ethnography, and as such, considers any ethnographic speech as usage that makes reference to its grounds. Usage, i.e., ethnographic speech, is the starting point of this work simply because there is nowhere else to start. But this work conceives of usage as the occasion to address the grounds that usage covers over. More than anything else, then, this work is the occasion to display our grounds and commitment to a version of adequate theorizing that aims at going beyond appearances to that which makes all appearances possible. In this sense, this work addresses its own possibility.

What this work requires, then, is usage. It requires the speech of an other. The relation that this work has to usage is one of collaboration.<sup>7</sup> Usage is listened to so that what it says can be formulated; What it says is not understood concretely in the sense that usage is saying something about

Cornerville life, about death in a hospital, etc. What usage is saying is something deeper than that. It is saying that it speaks under the auspices of some authority and it is to that authority that our inquestive ear is turned.

In this work we will make use of the ethnographic speech of others. Thinking, whether about ethnography or anything else, amounts to a conversation in the Socratic sense. So our relation with ethnographic speech is that of a conversation that exemplifies our thinking. So we collaborate with others, we use ethnographic speech (usage) and enter into conversation with it and address the grounds of its production.

## V.

Finally, we find it our task to address our desire and need to write an Introduction. For us, the writing of an Introduction cannot be merely an adherence to convention, for that would be to live under the auspices of contingency and social structure. To write an Introduction merely because convention demands it, is to place one's life wholly at the whim of convention and contingency and thus to abrogate responsibility for one's own life.



Setting aside the usual notion of convention for the moment, there seems to be at least one straightforward way to speak of Introductions, and that is, that Introductions introduce. Or put differently, what belongs to Introductions is the task of introducing. And this means, straightforwardly, that Introductions know that which is to be introduced. Embedded in the notion of Introduction, then, is knowledge, knowing that there is something still to come and knowing what that something is. Thus, the task that belongs to Introductions (that which Introductions accomplish) is to let someone, in this case the reader, know that there is something still to come and to introduce that something.

If the notion of Introduction is not to degenerate into sheer introduction, i.e., into introducing for the sake of introducing (convention) then there must be some sense in which Introductions find themselves to be worthwhile. In other words, Introductions must be grounded in a sense of worthwhileness if we are to understand them as worth doing and, in this sense, as necessary. To appeal to social structure and convention as the worthwhile ground of Introductions, is to conceive of Introductions as worthwhile and necessary in relation to social structure and convention. That is, the concrete doing of an Introduction would then aim at displaying the worthwhileness of convention and social structure. Introduction would then be an occasion to display

commitment to convention and social structure.

Introduction would then be an earthly sacrifice made to the god of convention and social structure.

This conception of Introduction is not without its implications and consequences in relation to speech. First of all, Introductions are speech. To suggest that one introduces (that one speaks) because it is conventional to do so, is to suggest that one speaks because of convention, i.e., that one's speech is causally related to convention. This is to say that speech is caused and, in the case of Introductions, it is convention that causes the speech. The interesting implication of this is that if convention underwent a metamorphosis, so would speech. Speech would change by virtue of a change in convention. So, for example, if Introductions were no longer a convention, they would no longer be spoken. Speech would take on the spirit of fashion, here today and gone tomorrow.

Another interesting thing about this causal relation between speech and convention is the very notion of convention changing. It is to conceive of convention changing, and indeed it is to conceive of convention itself, independently of speech. This is to conceive of convention as existing outside speech and, moreover, it is to conceive of convention as exercising coercion over speech. Such a conception depends for its intelligibility on the segregation of speech and

convention. There exists convention, and by virtue of its existence, there exists speech. At best, speech can only correspond to convention and, in this sense, speech becomes the handmaiden of convention. And all of this, convention, changing conventions, etc., takes place as though speech could be separated from the world.

Finally, the notion that convention causes speech has an interesting consequence vis-a-vis the speaker. What is consequential vis-a-vis this notion is that the speaker need not take responsibility for what is spoken. There is no need to take responsibility since, after all, it is convention that is causing the speech. This conception holds out no choice to the speaker. The speaker cannot choose to speak in this way or that because it is convention that will determine the way a speaker speaks. This is what we meant. when we said that to write an Introduction (to speak) merely because convention demands it, is to place one's life wholly at the whim of convention and contingency and thus to abrogate responsibility for one's own life.

To conceive of speech as being caused by convention, or being caused by whatever, is to forget why one speaks and that one speaks. It is to forget about possibilities, i.e., it is to forget that one could, after all, speak otherwise. That convention causes speech can only be conceived of when it is forgotten that one has decided to speak conventionally.

So to look to convention as an answer to the question "Why write an Introduction?", is, first of all, to treat this question as concretely answerable, and secondly, to forget that one speaks and decides to speak in a particular way. It is to say that one conventionally writes an Introduction and that is all there is to it. But as we have seen, there is more to it than that. It is to admit that speech is causally contingent upon convention and social structure.

Perhaps we can formulate the idea of Introduction more strongly if we examine more closely the notion of the worthwhileness of Introductions as well as that which belongs to Introductions, i.e., their task. What belongs to Introductions, as we have already noted, is the task of introducing. Their task is to notify the reader that there is something still to come and to introduce that something.

In that Introductions are speech whose task it is to introduce speech, they can, in this straightforward sense, be thought of as a beginning. The desire and need to write an Introduction, then, can be located in the desire and need to begin speaking. To begin speaking is no easy matter. It is no easy matter because we all know that our speech will be responded to, and as such, may be criticized, questioned, rejected, found to be uninteresting, found to be ridiculous and wrong, etc. To begin to speak, then, is an anxious and

and tense moment. This is especially true when we have something serious to say and the seriousness of what we have to say is to be evaluated or when we consider the possibility that our beginning will be judged as a poor forecast of what is to come and our audience will stop listening as a way to avoid the pending storm.

Think of the Introductions that are typically to be found in academic works. They too re-affirm the anxiety and tension of the possibility of producing writing that no one will find interesting enough, or worthwhile enough, to read. Introductions thus become places to promise and ask for patience. They promise the reader that what is forthcoming is worthwhile reading and ask the reader to be patient and read on. Introductions tell the reader what is forthcoming and tell the reader how what is forthcoming is both relevant and necessary to read. It belongs to Introductions to tell the reader that unless what is forthcoming is read the reader will miss something that he or she cannot afford to miss. The task of Introductions becomes one of captivating an audience; It belongs to Introductions to capture the reader by persuading the reader that what is forthcoming is worthwhile, interesting and necessary. For academics, as well as for others, the possibility of producing writing that no one will read is a reflection of the possibility of not producing communal speech and a re-affirmation of the risk of beginning to speak.

What Introductions promise, then, is to speak communally.

In this sense, introductions express the anxious possibility that no one will read what we have to write. But more, they are an expression of the impulse not to speak and thus to avoid the risk of rejection. Moreover, Introductions re-present the fact that we can begin to speak only with opinion and re-affirm the conception that opinions are risky matters.

As speakers, we have something to say, but beginning to speak is no easy matter and we would rather not begin but enter our speaking as though it could begin without us. Foucault begins one of his lectures in the following way.

I would really like to have slipped imperceptibly into this lecture, as into all the others I shall be delivering, perhaps over the years ahead. I would have preferred to be enveloped in words, borne away beyond all possible beginnings. At the moment of speaking, I would like to have perceived a nameless voice, long preceding me, leaving me merely to enmesh myself in it, taking up its cadence, and to lodge myself, when no one was looking, in its interstices as if it had paused an instant, in suspense, to beckon to me. There would have been no beginnings: instead, speech would proceed from me, while I stood in its path - a slender gap - the point of its possible disappearance. (Foucault, 1972: 215).

But, like Foucault, begin we must; there is no one who can set the stage for us, there is no one who can lodge us into our speech, there is no one who can save us from the risk of speaking, so we begin.

We begin by taking the risk. But we can choose to begin not by conceiving of our Introduction as having the task of promising or capturing, but rather by conceiving of our Introduction as having the task of teaching. What belongs to our Introduction is teaching; this Introduction is our attempt to teach our readers how to read what we write. We attempted, in this Introduction, to teach the sort of reading that would understand, not only this inquiry but all inquiry, as a depiction of a version of good inquiry.

Moreover, the task of our Introduction is not only one of teaching but is also one of learning. It was the task of learning how to write, i.e., how to do an inquiry that would display for others our version of good inquiry. The very writing of this Introduction was our attempt to learn about and understand the pain and anxiety of our desire and need to write an Introduction.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 The idea of "forgetfulness" is steeped in a philosophical tradition that stretches from Plato to Heidegger. Forgetfulness finds its contemporary expression in such theorists as McHugh, et al., 1974; Blum, 1974; Blum, 1978; Blum and McHugh, 1979; Raffel, 1979. Forgetfulness references the idea that speech is not self-sufficient, not perfect, insofar as speech is a surface reflection of that which authorizes it, its grounds. Grounds are not speakable insofar as speech is not first and thus speech re-presents the forgetfulness of its grounds, i.e., of its auspices, and forgetfulness references the possibility of speaking.

Again according to our conception of analysis, collaboration is necessary because to write is to lose one's grasp of auspices by attempting to formulate them: to write is to forget why you write; to be caught up in the activity of formulation is to face away from one's own fundamental grounds through which those formulations come about. (McHugh, et al., 1974:3)

To speak is to deny, i.e., to forget, the auspices of speech. Thus the necessity of collaboration; the necessity of entering into a conversation with speech (usage) in order to formulate the grounds of that usage as a way to display a commitment to an analysis (inquiry) that is committed to the formulation of grounds. This sort of inquiry is steeped in the Platonic tradition of "recollection" that is to be found in the Platonic dialogues particularly in the Meno. So when we speak about forgetting we are speaking about forgetting that which makes our speech possible. It is this idea of forgetting that is fundamental to our entire work.



In this sense the idea of forgetfulness can be understood only in relation to Plato's notion of the Good. (See p.138 of this work.) The Good does not refer to some set of assumptions that underlie a speech since a set of assumptions is speakable and is thus itself speech. Speech is valuable only insofar as it is a surface reflection of the Good, i.e., only insofar as speech is an appearance of the Real. The Good is not a speakable thing and thus any speech, including speech that formulates the grounds of speech, is itself speech that is needful of grounding, is itself speech that is grounded in the Good. The idea of the Good is formulated throughout this work and grounds the distinction that is made in this work between speech and language.

The distinction between speech and language that is formulated in this work is to be differentiated from other formulations of the distinction between speech and language. For example, Chomsky writes that "We thus make a fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and performance (the actual use of language in concrete situations)." (1965:4) Chomsky goes on to say that a "generative grammar...attempts to characterize in the most neutral possible terms the knowledge of the language that provides the basis for actual use of language by a speaker-hearer." (1965:9) So Chomsky distinguishes speech (performance) from language (competence). For Chomsky, language is speakable insofar as he concretely recommends a generative grammar that will, in a sense, be the speaking of language. Concrete speech is, for Chomsky, generated by language and his analysis recommends that language can be brought to speech. This, of course, presupposes that Chomsky's analysis is also grounded in language and that that language is itself speakable. For us, on the other hand, language is not speakable insofar as we do not conceive of speech as first and absolute. We conceive of speech as imperfect, i.e., as not self-sufficient and so, every instance of speech is grounded in language, in language that is not effable. Any addressing of language is itself grounded in language and is thus itself needful of grounding. The fundamental differentiation between Chomsky's conception of language and our conception of language is that whereas for Chomsky speech is first and natural, for us, speech is sheltered by language including Chomsky's speech.

- 2       Heidegger attributes these words to Wilhelm von Humboldt. Despite this fact, we refer to these words as the words of Heidegger. In this work, we are attempting to say something that is important and so, we use Heidegger's words, or Humboldt's words, not as a verification, or evidence, for something we want to say, but we choose to use these words as a way to say something we want to say. In this sense, what is important is that the words have been said and thus, the question as to the concrete speaker of the words is a question of secondary concern. Heidegger did not cite these words in the conventional scholarship notion of citing, thus we take it that Heidegger also wanted to say these words (and did) and so, we attribute these words to Heidegger. In any case, we use these words as exemplary.
- 3       Blum (1974:64-94) speaks about "true speech" as speech that addresses its own possibility, i.e., addresses that which it covers over and "false speech" as speech that forgets that it is not first, absolute and necessary.
- 4       In his essay "From 'Capital' to Marx's Philosophy", which introduces Reading Capital Althusser says, "But as there is no such thing as an innocent reading, we must say what reading we are guilty of." (Althusser, 1979:14) Reading is not innocent insofar as we (readers) bring a tradition to our reading. This is not to say that we sheerly interpret but rather it is to say that our reading is grounded in a tradition that provides for its possibility. So reading is reflexive in that it reflects, and makes reference to, its possibility. Any reading, then, displays its version of good reading.
- 5       Culler (1975:137) employs the notion "recuperation" as a way to speak about "possibilities of meaning". Culler speaks of "recuperation" as "ways of naturalizing the text and giving it a place in the world which our culture defines." "To assimilate or interpret something", writes Culler, "is to bring it within the modes of order which culture makes available, and this is usually done by talking about it in a mode of discourse which a culture takes as natural." In a sense, then, what Culler is doing is reminding us that we take for natural what is conventional. In his paper "Wittgenstein's Voices", Turner (1979) occasions the work of Wittgenstein as a way to formulate the work of recuperation or naturalization.

- 6 Any citation from the ethnographic literature that appears in this work appears as an example of ethnography, as usage, and thus the ethnographic literature is not reviewed but is cited as an example of a way of speaking.
- 7 "Collaboration" is topicalized and formulated by McHugh, et al. (1974:1-20). . What is intended here is that the idea of collaboration is not restricted to a concrete understanding of conversation as the conversation between one concrete speaker and an other. In this sense, collaboration can be done with one's self. So our thinking about ethnography, our conversation, represents still another manifestation of the idea of collaboration insofar as we collaborate with ourselves as a way to formulate the grounds of ethnography.

## CHAPTER 2. TOPICS

### I.

We began the last chapter with the question why write and read an ethnography? This question was not asked in the spirit of question/answer or problem/solution thinking when by that is meant an inquestive formulation of questions and problems as well as the subsequent formulation of answers, solutions, explanations and justifications that aim at putting inquiry to rest. Instead, this question was posed in the spirit of an inquiry that seeks to re-mind and re-collect. This sort of inquiry seeks to re-mind itself of what it forgets, namely that it does speak and that it does speak in a certain way. It seeks to re-collect the deep decision that makes its concrete do-ability (inquiry, speech) possible. So inquiry that seeks to re-mind and re-collect does not turn its inquestive eye to its end, but rather turns its inquestive eye to its beginning and since each turn of the eye re-affirms its origin (that which permits the eye to turn) and is deeply reliant upon its origin for its turning, each turn marks the occasion<sup>1</sup> for re-minding and re-collecting the deep decision to turn in the first place, and as such, the turning, the inquiry, is never ending.

Thus, this chapter too can begin with a question, and that is Why write about ethnography? And again, this question does not ask for a teleological response, for that would put the question out of mind rather than bringing it to mind. Instead, the question asks after the desire and need to speak about ethnography. The question asks us to re-collect our decision to speak about ethnography, our decision to make ethnography our topic, or better, our decision to speak about anything or make anything our topic. The issue thus becomes the issue of "speech about", i.e., the issue of topicality.

There is one sense in which making ethnography our topic is limiting in the worst sense of that term. This limitation goes far beyond the natural limitation of the inadequacy of speech (see Chapter 1) and this natural limitation degenerates into the self-imposed oppressive restriction of topic. This is so when inquiry forgets about, and thus accepts, the topicality of its topic.<sup>2</sup> The very possibility of topic never becomes an inquestive concern but only restricts the inquiry itself.

Thus inquiry, rather than becoming liberated, becomes restricted by giving itself up to the authority which makes its topic possible. So inquiry that is restricted never seizes its topic as an occasion to speak, but is instead seized by its topic. Inquiry that is restricted by its topic is never liberated because it is but another instance of its

topic. The adoption of a topic without inquiring into the possibility of that topic itself and without inquiring into the possibility and necessity of adopting a topic, i.e., of inquiring into topicality itself, does not permit the inquiry to be liberated from the chains of the very topic it wants to formulate. Choosing a topic of inquiry while at the same time forgetting the grounds of that topic and forgetting the grounds of choosing a topic renders inquiry a slave to concrete states-of-affairs, i.e., a slave to concrete topics. What inquiry says, then, is oriented to, in a restrictive way, speech-about-the-topic and thus the speech of inquiry is not liberated speech. In this sense, inquiry chooses a topic because it wants something to speak about and not because it has something to say.

## II.

As was the case in Chapter 1, there seems to be some straightforward sense in which the issue of topicality can be addressed. But as was also the case in Chapter 1, the straightforwardness would necessarily concretize topicality and deliver it into the realm of contingency. It would understand topicality as some concrete matter to be discussed and understand the choosing of a topic as contingent upon

such things as biography and convention. In this sense, What brings topic about? is a concrete question; a question that is answerable by an examination of circumstance rather than by an examination of the impulse to topicalize and the possibility of topic itself.

Conceiving of topic as the rationale for speaking and conceiving of circumstance as the rationale for having a topic to speak about, is a degenerate way of making reference to worthwhile speech, i.e., to having something worthwhile to say. This conception is degenerate because it makes no attempt to re-collect the deep decision to speak in a particular way. A rationalistic appeal to topic, then, gives topic and circumstance as its rationale, its reason for speaking. This is to speak irresponsibly insofar as topic and circumstance now become responsible for speech.

What we are saying is that the notion of topic and circumstance as responsible for speech understands difference as an essential condition of speakers. It understands that there are as many speakers and speeches as there are topics and circumstances. The difference that a speaker makes is a difference that originates in topics and circumstances. The response-ability of a speaker is to be located within the speaker's topic and circumstances. It is topic and circumstance that makes a speaker able-to-respond and thus the worthwhileness of speech is reduced to the worthwhileness of whatever is spoken about.

On this view, topics become the most crucial and central parts of speech. They are crucial because it is from topics that the worthwhileness of speech is generated and they are central because it is around the centrality of topic that speech is collected. So the difference and togetherness of speech is understood in the most concrete way. What makes one speech different from another is topic and it is topic that brings one speech together with another.

This view suggests that speech is owned and what owns speech is topic. Topic is like a grand father that collects all of his offspring around him and differentiates his offspring from those of other grand fathers. This view must hold that the difference and togetherness of speech is an accident of birth. It holds that what we say is accidental because what we speak about is contingent upon such circumstances as biography and convention.

As a way to exemplify this point, let us think about some of the concrete ways we could respond to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, namely Why write about ethnography? If we conceive of anthropology as including ethnography we may find an example of a response to this question in the works of such anthropologists as Berreman and Scholte. Berreman says, for example, "We are having this session on 'Rethinking Anthropology' because many of us are...sick of anthropology as it is exemplified



in most of our journals, books and courses - even those we have ourselves perpetuated." (1969:83). Or, as Scholte says, "This essay is motivated by a sense of malaise - a vague sense, admittedly, but one which I think I share with many other anthropologists in this country." (1969:430).

What is the reason that Berreman and Scholte have for speaking about ethnography? They are surely speaking out of concern; Berreman is "sick of it" and Scholte "senses a malaise surrounding it". Now these are certainly genuine concerns and, in one sense, are reason enough for speaking about ethnography. It is suggested that ethnography is in some sort of trouble and that that trouble is worth addressing. We, too, could lay claim to such a concern. We could claim, for example, that ethnography is in trouble theoretically, methodologically, humanistically, or whatever, and suspend our doing of ethnography and opt for speaking about ethnography. In so doing, we could rid ourselves of the question Why write about ethnography?

Getting rid of the question, however, is not something that is done by virtue of merely answering it. The fact that the question is posed as an answerable thing is already to have gotten rid of the question. That is, the question posed concretely is already to have accepted the notion of topic as crucial and central to speech. It is to have accepted, without consideration, the topicality of ethnography as something worth speaking about. Ethnography as topic

securely in hand , speakers delude themselves into thinking that their speech originates with its concrete beginning. In this sense, speech is conceived of as originating with a thing-to-speak-about as a secure beginning.<sup>3</sup> Speech is response-able only insofar as it is topical.

Speaking about the trouble of ethnography, i.e., speaking about ethnography, is thus understood concretely as issuing from ethnography itself. Ethnography is a thing about which other things - speeches - can be said. The troublesomeness of ethnography as topic is something that is accidental insofar as that is how ethnography is found to be, i.e., in trouble. Berreman and Scholte find ethnography to be troublesome and it is this troublesomeness - ethnography - that they conceive as the origin of their speech. Berreman and Scholte do not understand that to see ethnography as troublesome or as not troublesome, or whatever, is already to have decided to see ethnographically. Berreman and Scholte, then, express an ethnographic concern for the troubles of ethnography. They are not suggesting that ethnography is not a good thing to do, on the contrary, they are saying that ethnography is good and are conceiving of this good as a concrete standard by which to measure ethnographic practice. What Berreman and Scholte do not understand is that their speech is not accidental. It is not that circumstance, the troubles of ethnography, provide them with something to speak about,

rather it is the decision to see ethnographically, i.e., to see ethnography as a good, that provides them with the occasion to see ethnography as troubled.

So we cannot formulate our reason for speaking about ethnography as a concern with the trouble of ethnography since that would not uncover the grounds of our speech. This would be the case for whatever concrete reason we gave for speaking about ethnography. We could, for example, appeal to biography. But this, too, would formulate our reason for speaking about ethnography as accident. It would be to say that we speak about ethnography because of happenstance, i.e., that we happen to be involved in ethnography, in one way or another, and thus it was available to us as a topic. It would be as though we wanted to speak and since we happened upon a topic, we can now speak.

This is the version of responsibility that we reject. We reject the conception that speech is responsible to its topic when topic is understood as a concrete thing-to-speak-about. A commitment to topics is a degenerate way of understanding the desire and need to speak. It is to transform the impulse to speak into the degenerate impulse to speak on topic. It is to enslave and restrict one's speech to the authority of a concrete topic. It is to speak as though speech were first and to segregate the relation between speech and language.

Topics, like Introductions, provide a surrogate beginning for speech and provide an instant relief for the suffering of re-collecting our origin and remembering why we speak as though that suffering was painful and not worth enduring. To speak on topic is a deep commitment to abrogating one's responsibility for deciding to speak the way one does. And yet, we speak about ethnography, we have a topic. So our task becomes one of analyzing the place of topic in our work.

### III.

It can be said that Socrates has topics; he speaks of friendship, love, courage, justice, etc. And it is possible, in taking up one of these topics as a topic of inquiry, to consult Socrates and see what he has to say about them. This would be to treat Socrates as a predecessor who just happened to speak about some of the things that are currently topical. But this would be to treat Socrates as current by virtue of submitting to the authority of topic and speech as first.

To make Socrates current, and thus to join him, by virtue of conceiving topic as first, would be to reject a Socratic invitation to participate in conversation. It would

be to reject the Socratic reminder to address our beginning from whose auspices all speech and topics flow.

In Book I of The Republic (352 d)<sup>4</sup> Socrates reminds Thrasymachus, and reminds us as well, that the question of justice "...is not a trivial one; it is our whole way of life that is at issue." Further on in The Republic (Books VI and VII) Socrates tells Glaucon and the others that the true philosopher is one who has a good memory. The philosopher, or theorist, does not require a good memory in order to remember the concrete details that are topics since topics, taken in the usual sense of things that are current to speak about, are present and available and need not be remembered. What Socrates reminds us of, what a good memory remembers, is that topics are trivial: Topics cover up a way of life that supports them and makes them possible.

So when Socrates speaks of justice, courage, etc., he is not submitting his inquiry to the authority of concrete topicality. When Socrates speaks of justice, courage, etc., he is not interested in the myriad concrete instances of justice and courage since these are things that are contingent and change from one time to another and from one place to another. What Socrates is interested in, what is truly his topic, that to which his speech truly belongs, is the idea of justice, courage, etc., to which all of its concrete instances, to which all concrete speech about, belongs. So

the true topic, as exemplified in Socratic dialogue, is not the concrete topics that are the many, but instead is the idea of life that is the One.

What we are saying is that we do not enlist Socrates as a consultant since that would be to treat him concretely as someone who had something to say about what is currently topical. Instead, we treat Socrates as an exemplar<sup>5</sup> that makes possible the remembering of that to which our speech belongs. By re-collecting our beginning, we address the origin of our speech and we do not submit our speech to the authority of contingency and change. When we submit our speech to the authority of concrete topic, say justice for example, we are speaking both of What Is and What Is Not. We are speaking about What Is insofar as each concrete speech about justice participates and gets its life from, the idea of justice. We are speaking about What Is Not insofar as any concrete speech about justice is only a surface reflection of justice itself and thus is not justice itself.

Thus, what we speak about is life; we speak about the way of life that is recommended by, and grounds, each instance of speech. This is to say that each instance of speech, each concrete topic, covers over a way of life that makes its speaking possible and, at the same time, recommends that way of life as worth living. So our topic is life but not life as it is concretely manifested in the many and different ways of living, for that would be to speak about

lifestyles. We do not conceive of life as stylish since that would be to conceive of life as changing and contingent, as coming and going. Instead, we conceive of life as an idea that is unchanging, permanent and necessary. "Man lives" is our way to reformulate Heidegger's "Man speaks". So it is not concretely different lives we are interested in since that would be an interest in the many and concrete. What we are interested in, what is our topic, is the permanent and singular idea of life that makes the concrete manyness possible.

What is re-collected, then, is the idea of life towards which all talk and conduct point. Life and speech are not conceived of as accidents or incidents that belong together by virtue of the fact that they can be collected under some concrete topic. Instead, what collects concrete talk and conduct is the idea of life to which it points.

#### IV.

So we join Socrates not through the mediation of consultation that formulates his speech, in the form of topics as first but through formulating his speech as exemplification. We formulate the speech of Socrates as an example of a way of life that is committed to understanding all inquiry,

including his own, as an instance of the Good toward which it aims. This is the Socratic reminder and invitation; that all inquiry is an exemplification of a way of life that aims at, and is grounded in, the Good to which inquiry itself makes reference. Socrates reminds us that our beginning is not to be located in concrete topics but in the Good toward which our concrete topics point and invites us to remember our origin by engaging in the Socratic conversation that is inquiry.

We are now able to formulate our desire and need to write about ethnography, i.e., to formulate our desire and need for a topic. Understanding ethnography, like any other course of action, as pointing to some Good, allows us to formulate the topic of our inquiry not concretely, as, for example, writing about ethnography, but rather as an inquiry that aims at addressing the Good of ethnography. This inquestive aim will, of course, degenerate if the Good of ethnography gets understood as the goal, or objective, of ethnography. This sort of concretization would formulate the Good of ethnography as some sort of a goal or value to which ethnography aspires. The Good of ethnography would then be concretely formulated as a value to be held up as a standard against which ethnography can be measured as good or bad. We are not interested in discovering whether ethnography is good or not when by this is meant whether or not it measures up to its own concrete standard, for that



would mean that inquiry would focus upon the generation of a list of standards that could be applied to a corresponding list of different kinds of ethnographies. These differences are inessential since any ethnography is a surface reflection, or a re-presentation, of the Good toward which ethnography aims. When we say we are interested in the Good of ethnography we are not saying that we are interested in whether ethnography is good, whether it meets methodological standards, whether it meets theoretical standards, whether it meets humanistic standards, whether it is practically useful, etc., instead, we are interested in addressing that which gives ethnography its life. In short, we are not interested in discovering what ethnography is good for, rather we are interested in addressing the Good of ethnography.

So we understand ethnography as inquiry; an inquiry that exemplifies a life that points to some Good. What is important to remember is the Socratic reminder that when we inquire into the Good of a course of action, that course of action itself, that inquiry, exemplifies a life. Thus, our inquiry points to some Good. Our inquiry, then, should not be understood in any other way than our attempt to exemplify our version of the good life, of good inquiry. In addressing the Good of ethnography, we exemplify a life that is committed to addressing its own Good.

V.

Speeches are concretely different; there are many different kinds of ethnographies, there are many different ways of living. But this sense of differentness is neither critical nor essential. To formulate the concrete differences between and among lives as essential, to treat life-styles as essential, is to treat sheer living and breathing as essential and first. It is to treat life as sheer survival and nothing other than that.

This understanding of life, that the essentiality of life is to be located in the differences between and among concrete ways of living, is the understanding exemplified in Socrates' "man in the cave".<sup>6</sup> What the "man in the cave" sees, and understands as essential, are the different shadows. What the "man in the cave" does not see is the light that originates the different shadows. The "man in the cave" does not see the originality, the firstness, the necessity, the eternality, of the singular light that casts the different shadows. The "man in the cave" does not see the one light that casts the many shadows.

When the "man in the cave" is forced to see the light, as is, for example, Schutz's stranger (Schutz, 1971: 91-105), the light hurts his eyes. The man is forced from the cave, forced from "thinking-as-usual", to borrow Schutz's phrase, and finds this to be hurtful. For Schutz's stranger, this hurt degenerates into pain, and as such, degenerates into a

desire for relief and alleviation. This theorist cannot sustain the conversation that makes a difference, cannot sustain the conversation that makes the essential difference between the many shadows and the one light, and thus cannot sustain the essential difference between the original and its reflections, between speech and language. The stranger does not want to understand the hurt as a suffering that is understanding, but wants to understand the hurt as a pain that requires alleviation and thus desires the cave, desires mere shadows, as first, original and Real.

So the desire and need for a topic when formulated as a desire and need for the shadows in the cave, is a desire and need to understand concrete topics as first and original. In this sense, the desire and need for a topic is the degenerate expression of a desire and need to speak and the desire and need to speak what is good. It is to understand the many and different shadows as essential and as all that is worth speaking. The shadows are the topics and there is nothing other. The desire and need for a concrete topic, is a metaphor for the desire and need to speak. Conceiving of topic concretely is to understand that there is nothing other to speak about than concrete topics, than the shadows.

So the place of topic in our work is an expression of our desire and need to speak and our desire and need to address the one idea of life that grounds the possibility of concretely different lives. We do not understand topic concretely, i.e., as there being nothing other than topic,

since what is Other than topic is the Good to which topic points and of which topic is a reflection. Our inquiry is an addressing of that Other, of that permanent, necessary and eternal One that is the source and origin of the concretely many and different.

This is not to say that we do not desire and need concrete topics, for this is certainly the case. We must start with concrete topics, start in the cave, since there is nowhere else to start. But concrete topics (the cave) are the start and not the beginning since concrete topics are the occasions to address the beginning. So concrete topics are essential in the sense that they are occasions for theorizing, for reflective conversation, as a way to address the singularity and eternality of the idea of life that is recommended by all concrete courses of action. Reflective theorizing, conversation into the idea of life, cannot be sustained without an examination of concrete lives as example. So our desire and need to speak about ethnography, i.e., to have a topic, can be formulated as our desire and need to speak in tune with language and with what is essential.

Like any other course of action, reflective theorizing is needful of the permanent and unchanging idea of life. Reflective theorizing recognizes that its source is in the permanent and eternal and in this sense it requires that source and requires, for it to be theorizing, a sense of the eternal. The eternal, the essential, is displayed through reflective

theorizing. To the eternal, reflective theorizing is inessential, but at the same time, is essential in the sense that reflective theorizing displays an understanding of that which is eternal.<sup>7</sup> And, it is in this spirit that topic finds its place in our work. It is in this spirit that we desire and need a topic. Our desire and need is to theorize about the Good, and concrete life (topic) is the essential occasion for us to display our commitment to our version of theorizing and thus exemplify a life.

So the question that was raised at the beginning of this chapter Why write about ethnography? was posed as an example of the idea of life. This is not a question that arises out of a course of action (concrete life) that is ethnography. Instead, it is a question that arises out of the Good toward which the life that is ethnography points. It is a question that addresses the idea of life that makes such a question possible in the first place. So, in this sense, a question of topic is a question of life. So our concern with topic is a concern only insofar as it is an expression of our desire and need to formulate conversation about the commitment of which topics are a result.

FOOTNOTES

- 1        This is what we meant when we said, in Chapter 1, that we start with usage because there is nowhere else to start. It is through the inessentiality of usage that the essential can be addressed. In this sense, usage is important insofar as it is an occasion for addressing the essential.
- 2        This would be to formulate topic as the authority of speech.
- 3        This is to conceive of speech as first and essential. But, this is to forget that what generates topical speech is that which generates the topic.
- 4        Here, as well as in the rest of the work, the works of Plato will be referenced by line number (Stephanus pagination).
- 5        Blum (1978) formulates the life of Socrates as an example. Blum also formulates an analytic connection between theory and life. (See especially pages 1 to 11).
- 6        The Republic, 514-521.
- 7        See Blum, 1978:1-11.

### CHAPTER 3. INTERESTS

#### I.

Speech says interest. It is not that some speeches are interesting while other speeches are not. It is not that some speeches speak out of an interest while other speeches merely speak. Interest is not a matter of choice. Insofar as speech speaks, it says interest. Insofar as speech is, it is interest.

#### II.

What speech displays is its interest, its interest in speaking. In speaking, speech shows itself to be interested, i.e., that it is interested in speaking. What speech shows is the interest that authorizes its speaking.

But speech cannot speak its interest since that would bring an end to interested speech and would offer nihilism as an alternative. If speech could speak its interest there would no longer be any interest in speaking. This would be, first of all, to equate interest with speech, and this done, it would be, secondly, to conceive of speech as its own author. This would be the worst kind of appropriation; it would mean that speech would have the desire to appropriate its authority to itself. Speech and its author would then be interchangeable.

On this view, speech would no longer say its interest, it would no longer display its interest, it would no longer depend on its interest, since it would be its interest and, in this sense, speech would then be first. This would finally solve Durkheim, et al.'s problem of the inadequacy of speech by making speech self-sufficient. Speech would be self-sufficient insofar as it would correspond to its interest and insofar as it would be faithful to that interest.

Thus, speech that wants to speak its interest, i.e., speech that wants to correspond and be faithful, to its interest, understands speech and interest in the most concrete way. It understands speech as having no other interest than itself. Since, on this view, speech speaks its interest, how could it be otherwise, how could speech be interested in anything else but itself? When speech is understood as first, there is nothing else that is of interest. Of course, speech may be interested in what it corresponds to but since it equates itself to what it corresponds to, an interest in its correspondence amounts to an interest in itself.

So when speech understands itself as self-sufficient, it understands itself as self-interested. This is another way of saying that this version of speech treats itself concretely (as a thing) that is concretely interested in corresponding to other things (interests). Thus, interest



becomes nothing but the most concrete thing; interest becomes understood simultaneously with such things as subject matter and topics. Self-sufficient or self-interested speech formulates interest as interesting things to talk about. What is of interest is concrete material, i.e., usage, and thus speech itself. Speech's interest is to be located within speech itself insofar as speech is conceived of as a presentation of interesting matter. What matters, then, is the matter of speech.

A usage notion of interest provides for speech to be interesting or not. On this view, whether speech is interesting or not will, of course, depend upon its matter. The matter of interest now becomes an interest of matter. Speech speaks interestingly when its matter is interesting and speech is uninteresting when its matter is uninteresting. This concretization of interests provides for the understanding that speakers must justify their speeches. So, for example, Zimmerman and Pollner can say that:

In contrast to the perennial argument that sociology belabors the obvious, we propose that sociology has yet to treat the obvious as a phenomenon. We argue that the world of everyday life, while furnishing sociology with its favored topics of inquiry, is seldom a topic in its own right. Instead, the familiar, common-sense world, shared by the sociologist and his subjects alike, is employed as an unexplicated resource for contemporary sociological investigations. (Zimmerman and Pollner, 1970: 80-81).

Or, Ryave and Schenkein in their discussion of the phenomenon of walking can argue that:

In treating this commonplace phenomenon as the problematic achievement of members, we hope to build towards a greater understanding of social phenomena as on-going situated accomplishments. It is, after all, these methodic practices that make the phenomenon of doing walking so utterly unnoteworthy at first glance to both lay and professional social analysts alike; indeed; it is through these methodic practices that the commonplace presents itself to us as ordinary, and the exotic as extraordinary. (Ryave and Schenkein, 1974: 265).

And finally, when Benedict speaks about the interests of the anthropologist, she says that:

He is interested in the great gamut of custom that is found in various cultures, and his object is to understand the way in which these cultures change and differentiate, the different forms through which they express themselves, and the manner in which the customs of any peoples function in the lives of the individuals who compose them.

Now custom has not been commonly regarded as a subject of any great moment. The inner workings of our own brains we feel to be uniquely worthy of investigation, but custom, we have a way of thinking, is behaviour at its most commonplace. As a matter of fact, it is the other way around. Traditional custom, taken the world over, is a mass of detailed behaviour more astonishing than what any one person can ever evolve in individual actions no matter how aberrant. Yet that is a rather trivial aspect of the matter. The fact of first-rate importance is the predominant role that custom plays in experience and in belief, and the very

great varieties it may manifest.  
(Benedict, 1934: 1-2).

What these authors are saying is that the matter to which their speech will attend (present, correspond) is "everyday life", "members" methodic practices", and "customs", respectively. Each of the authors is arguing for the interestingness of their speech. (Interestingly enough, each of these authors is using their speech to introduce, to promise, that what follows will be interesting.) In their various ways, each of the authors is telling us that the matter of their speech is commonplace and ordinary.

These authors are orienting to us as readers that read in a certain way; their notion of reading is that readers will only read what matters to them when by that is meant that readers will read only interesting matter. For them, readers are mere receptacles of interesting matter. These authors are afraid that if their speech is not interesting, i.e., if the matter to which their speech corresponds is not interesting, no one will listen. Each of these authors say that they will be speaking the commonplace but they are afraid that the commonplace is so commonplace that it will not be interesting. Unlike Foucault, who would have "...preferred to be enveloped in words, borne way beyond all possible beginnings", Zimmerman and Pollner, et al., dread the possibility of an

immediate entree into their matter, i.e., of starting with the commonplace. They are afraid that their readers will hear the uninterestingness of their speech (think of their speech as commonplace) and will stop reading. As a matter of interesting fact, they must convince their readers that their speech is a matter of interesting fact.

So Zimmerman and Pollner et al., justify their speech by pointing out its interestingness. And how could it be otherwise? Where else could these authors start except by promising us, and convincing us, that they are, first of all, going to speak about some matter and, secondly, that this matter is interesting. For example, Zimmerman and Pollner want to convince us that since "... sociology has yet to treat the obvious as a phenomenon", the obvious is ~~very~~ interesting. Ryave and Schenkein want us to think that the commonplace is interesting since its uninterestingness is the cause of our "methodic practices". What they are saying is that the "unnoteworthiness" (uninterestingness) of the commonplace is our own fault since we engage in "methodic practices" to make the commonplace uninteresting. Were we to look at our "methodic practices", or suspend our use of them, or some such thing, we too, like Ryave and Schenkein, would be convinced of the interestingness, and thus of the noteworthiness, of the commonplace. And finally, Benedict tells us that we regard custom as the "...most commonplace".

But she is quick to add that "As a matter of fact", she might have said as a matter of interesting fact, "Traditional custom, taken the world over, is a mass of detailed behaviour more astonishing than what any one person can ever evolve in individual actions no matter how aberrant."

So Zimmerman and Pollner, et al., are hesitant to say what they want to say since they formulate worthwhile speech as something (material) that is interesting. They are hesitant to say what they want to say since what they want to say is commonplace, ordinary and obvious, and as such, uninteresting and not worth saying. For them, interest is not conceived of as that to which speech points, as that to which speech makes reference, and as that to which speech owes its life. Instead, they understand speech and interest concretely and speech as interesting only insofar as it is matter that is interesting. On this view, all beginnings are understood in the most superficial way as starts and what speech must start with is its own justification, i.e., with its own formulation of itself as interesting.

The desire to begin is formulated by Zimmerman and Pollner, et al., as a desire to just-ify their speech, i.e., it is their desire to formulate their speech as matter that is interesting. This is their version of just speech, i.e., of speaking justly. Speech is just when it is matter that is interesting and speech is unjust when it is matter that is

uninteresting. Speech is just when it is first, absolute and eternal and speech is unjust when it is dependent, limited and temporary. The "world of everyday life", the "commonplace", the "ordinary", the "obvious", is Zimmerman and Pollner's, et al., formulation of justice. So when Zimmerman and Pollner, et al., display a desire to speak about interesting things, they are displaying a desire to speak justly. Thus, it is not that their speech is merely interesting and not interested, since the interest of their speech is justice. But Zimmerman and Pollner, et al., speak as though their speech was self-sufficient and not interested, i.e., what Zimmerman and Pollner, et al., forget is their interest. Just speech thus becomes speech that forgets its interest, that forgets why it speaks.

So by formulating interest concretely as interesting matter, Zimmerman and Pollner et al., forget that they have an interest. They forget that their speech aims at some Good, displays a life, displays an interest. They take concrete interestingness as essential, eternal and self-sufficient. What they fail to understand, by failing to re-collect what they have forgotten, is the essential interest toward which their concretely interesting speech points. Zimmerman and Pollner, et al., decide to see the commonplace as interesting but forget that they have decided. They have decided to see the commonplace as just but forget that this was a moral

decision - a decision that reflects their version of the good life.

Zimmerman and Pollner, et al., are engaged in inquiry and formulate the object of their inquiry variously as "everyday life", "the ordinary", and "custom". If we think of these inquiries as examples of ethnography, we can then address the deep interest that provides for ethnography. We address our inquestive attention to the formulation of the grounds of ethnography and thus display our commitment to understand each and every inquiry as an exemplification and display of a life.

### III.

Ethnography says it has an interest. Ethnography formulates its interest as an interest in some matter. What matters to ethnography, what ethnography is interested in, is human life. Ethnography formulates its interest in human life as an interest in the commonplace, in custom, in culture, in membership, in social structure.

While ethnography formulates its interest - sets itself an interest - as an interest in culture, it does not formulate its interest in finding culture interesting. This is to say that ethnography does not speak about the sort of interest that an interest in culture is. In other words, ethnography

does not address the interest it displays when it finds culture to be interesting, i.e., when it says it is interested in culture. Ethnography conceives of culture as its essential interest and, in so doing, does not conceive of its interest in culture as covering over the essential. Ethnography forgets the essential (the essential interest) by formulating its interest in culture as essential. In this way, ethnography forgets how it is that it finds culture interesting, or indeed, how it is that it finds culture in the first place. In short, ethnography forgets its own beginning and thus ethnographic inquiry does not provide for its own possibility insofar as it conceives of the inessential as essential, i.e., insofar as it conceives of its interest in culture as essential rather than a concrete interest that covers over the essential.

Ethnography speaks of its interest, its interest as an interest in culture and social structure, as essential and thus first. Within this understanding, the essentiality and firstness of culture and social structure is taken as the rock-bottom certainty from which all other ethnographic concerns spring. Ethnographic concerns such as findings, data, ethics, etc., thus find their intelligibility within the conception of culture and social structure as first. In a sense, then, concerns such as findings, data, ethics, etc., are understood as subordinate concerns that arise from an interest in culture conceived of as essential and first. So for ethnography, it is the world conceived of as culture



and social structure that allows ethnography to formulate the world as a problem of findings, or ethics, or data, and so on. The rationale for an interest in findings, etc., is given over to the essentiality and firstness of culture and social structure.

But what ethnography forgets is that to speak of the world as culture or social structure is its solution to the problem of what is first. Culture and social structure are thus metaphors to make unproblematic the problem of what is first and essential. Culture and social structure, rather than essential, are inessential in that they make reference to ethnography's deep decision to understand human life in a certain way. But ethnography forgets that it has decided to understand the world as culture and social structure and thus conceives of culture and social structure as inevitable, absolute and first. As inevitable, absolute and first, ethnography need not be responsible for culture and social structure, but the inevitability of culture and social structure as ethnography's decision to solve the problem of what is first, culture and social structure necessarily become ethnography's ethical and moral responsibility. But ethnography forgets that it has decided to conceive of culture and social structure as first and inevitable and thus forgets that ethnography itself is a moral and ethical decision that results in formulating the world and mankind as culture and social structure. Thus concerns such as findings,

data, ethics, etc., do not arise, as ethnography would like to think, from the inevitability of culture and social structure, but arise from ethnography's moral and ethical decision to formulate culture and social structure as its Good.

Concerns such as findings, data, ethics, etc., become, for ethnography, a concern with techne insofar as these concerns are found to be technically problematic for an ethnographic engagement with culture and social structure. It is not that concerns such as findings, data, ethics, etc., are technical concerns arising from, and subordinate to, the inevitability, absoluteness and necessity of culture and social structure, but rather that culture and social structure itself is a technical concern. This is to say that culture and social structure are not attributes that belong to the world, but instead are ethnography's method for generating the idea of that world. Thus, culture and social structure re-present ethnography's decision to generate a world in which culture and social structure are available as things (concrete interests) that can be formulated as the ethnographic objects of inquiry. So culture and social structure, rather than being inevitable, first, and necessary, are surface reflections of that which is inevitable, first, and necessary. So things such as culture, social structure, findings, etc., and the rest of ethnography's paraphernalia,

are things that point to ethnography's moral and ethical decision to generate and display ethnography's version of the good life.

Culture and social structure are ways of thinking about and understanding the world, are ways of thinking about and understanding mankind that organizes the world and mankind so as to command our attention. And, instead of being inevitable, this way of thinking is already a moral and ethical decision. So culture and social structure cannot be taken for granted, in the way ethnography takes it for granted, since culture and social structure, understood as decision, are what compel ethnography to see and understand the world, and persons in that world, as manifestations of culture and social structure. The world as culture and social structure is not inevitable since it is a decision, and as such, could be otherwise.

#### IV.

Culture and social structure is ethnography's way to make a difference. Ethnography, as an exemplification of an interest, or as an exemplification of a life, wants to make a difference. Ethnography understands itself as a worthwhile enterprise, as aiming at some good to which it aspires, and

as such it understands itself as making a difference. And, the difference that ethnography makes is culture and social structure.

Culture and social structure are a consequent of the difference that ethnography makes. What ethnography differentiates is human life. Ethnography understands human life as dispersed and invents culture and social structure as a way to collect human life. So, for ethnography, life is collectable by virtue of culture and social structure and differentiated by virtue of culture and social structure. For ethnography, life is the same in that it is formulated as culture and social structure and, at the same time, life is different in that it is formulated as culture and social structure. We all have culture and it is by virtue of this ethnographic fact that we are different.

So ethnography formulates essential difference as the difference between one life and another, i.e., as the difference between one culture and another. In this sense, we can only know ourselves; we cannot know our neighbours since they are different. Our neighbours are other than us in that ethnography formulates essential Otherness as culture and social structure.

In that ethnography formulates essential difference as the difference between one life and another, i.e., as the difference between one culture and another, it is essential that these differences be preserved.<sup>1</sup> Ethnography does not

understand the difference between one life and another, the difference between one culture and another, as inessential, and as such, understands this essential differentiation (culture and social structure) as natural. So any attempt at a reconciliation of these differences is, for ethnography, to prefer the unnatural over the natural, which is to say, to prefer the bad over the good. Any attempt at reconciliation, then, is understood by ethnography as a destructive attempt to overthrow the rule of naturalness and to institute the rule of unnaturalness.

Ethnography may be formulated as the self-appointed protector of the natural.<sup>2</sup> And how could this protectorship be anything but self-appointed? For it is ethnography that made the difference it now wants to protect. It was ethnography's deep decision, and deep interest, to generate the world as culture and social structure that made that world (culture and social structure) concretely visible, and concretely interesting, in the first place. But ethnography forgets its deep decision, its deep interest, and formulates its own invention (culture and social structure) as natural. So in protecting the natural, what ethnography is really protecting is its own interest.<sup>3</sup> What each and every case of ethnography protects, and in this sense re-affirms, is its deep interest in understanding the world as culture and social structure. So each and every case of ethnography is a re-affirmation of the decision to agree (community) that the solution to the problem of what is first is culture and

social structure. Culture and social structure, then, are the good of ethnography and make reference to, and exemplify, a life.

Ethnography understands culture and social structure as other than concrete life and understands concrete life as pointing to culture and social structure. In other words, life receives its life from culture and social structure. And, since there are many different cultures, there are many different lives. And that there are many different cultures and many different lives is surely the case. It is to these many different cultures, to these many different lives, that ethnography turns its inquestive attention. Conceived of an essential, as first, as rock-bottom and certain, these many different cultures and lives are what ethnography respects and holds in high esteem as its firm foundational starting point. Ethnography formulates its beginning (its decision to understand the world as culture and social structure) as the concrete certainty of culture and social structure and thus forgets its beginning. Ethnography does not address its beginning, and as such, does not provide for its own possibility.

This is not to say that anyone would argue with ethnography on the issue that there are many different cultures and many different lives. Ethnography, in various ways, formulates culture and social structure as ways of living since they invent culture as a way to formulate life. But ethnography cannot understand that there are many different

lives unless they understand the idea of life. It is the idea of life that is essential but ethnography chooses to understand culture, many and different lives, as essential. Thus, ethnography takes the inessential - many and different lives - for the essential - the idea of life. It takes the unnatural for the natural. Instead of understanding any life, any culture, as an example of the idea of life, ethnography understands a culture as a self-sufficient and essential life. The difference that ethnography chooses to make is inessential insofar as it conceives of difference as a difference between cultures. Ethnography does not choose to make a difference in that it does not address the idea of life that its notion of culture exemplifies and so, it does not address the idea of life that it (ethnography) exemplifies.

Ethnography's understanding that lives (cultures) are concretely differentiated from one another provides for ethnography's formulation of what it is to know another life, another culture or, indeed, culture itself. What we are entitled to know is ourselves and not our neighbours, which is to say, what we are entitled to know is our life, our culture, but not the life and culture of others. This is how ethnography generates its notion of informant. Within this conception, we can know other lives only if we are informed about other lives. This is what generates ethnography's notion of field-work. What is strange about this is that we cannot know about life and culture by reflection even though we have life and culture. Ethnography cannot

understand its life and culture as the occasion to reflect and understand the idea of life and culture. This is because ethnography forgets that any concrete life or culture points to the idea of life. So ethnography must be a culture vulture and chase cultures, one after another, so that it can understand culture since it conceives of culture as concretely differentiated. This is also ethnography's way to preserve the differentiation of cultures, i.e., to preserve its interest. Ethnography becomes the record keeper of the world and preserves the cultures and thus re-achieves its agreement (community) to take what is inessential (concretely different lives) as essential (the idea of life).

## V.

Ethnography's decision to conceive of life as culture and to understand this conception as first and inevitable, is ethnography's way of deciding that there are many right and good ways to live. Ethnography appeals to culture as a way to understand any life as rational. Any sense of unreasonableness is thus rationalized and explained by formulating the world, and life, as culture and social structure. Ethnography's commitment to culture and social structure is a commitment to rationality and reasonableness insofar as the rationale and



reason of a life is to be located within the notion of culture.

For Socrates, on the other hand, the rationality and reasonableness of a life is to be located within the life itself insofar as that life is held to be responsible for what it takes to be rational and reasonable. Unlike ethnography, which appeals to culture for rationality and reason, i.e., for the Good, Socrates addresses the Good through conversation which aims at sustaining the essential difference between language and speech.

In the Meno, Socrates asks the Thessalian, Meno, to tell him what virtue is. Among other responses, Meno replies that virtue is the power to acquire good and fine things.

Socrates:	Now you have just said that virtue consists in a wish for good things plus the power to acquire them. In this definition the wish is common to everyone, and in that respect no one is better than his neighbour.
Meno:	So it appears.
Socrates:	So if one man is better than another, it must evidently be in respect of the power, and virtue, according to your account, is the power of acquiring good things.
Meno:	Yes, my opinion is exactly as you now express it.
Socrates:	Let us see whether you have hit the truth this time. You may well be right. The power of acquiring good things, you say, is virtue?
Meno:	Yes. (78b,c)

Socrates is not an ethnographer; his inquiry is not committed to formulating the world as explainable and formulating the world as culture as a way to do the work of explaining. For ethnography, Meno's responses "Yes, my opinion is exactly as you now express it." and "Yes.", would mark the end of inquiry. Ethnography would understand virtue as interesting only insofar as it is a concretely interesting cultural matter of fact.<sup>4</sup>

Meno, as informant, can speak only rationally and reasonably, i.e., Meno's speech can only be natural. Ethnography formulates Meno the man as Meno the Thessalian, and as Thessalian, Meno speaks naturally. What is natural is Thessalianess, what is natural is culture. This is to say that Meno naturally has virtue in the same way that Meno naturally has kinship, economics, religion, etc. etc. Virtue, as the power to acquire fine things, is as natural to a Thessalian as the celebration of the rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries are to an Athenian. What Meno says is natural, reasonable and rational by virtue of Meno being a Thessalian. Ethnographic inquiry into what virtue is amounts to finding out what any culture says virtue is. Whatever Meno says virtue is, in that he is a Thessalian, in that he is culture, would be understood by ethnography as the Isness of virtue.

So for ethnography virtue is many different things. There are many different cultures, there are many different lives, and as such, virtue is formulated as plurality.

Ethnography's interest is an interest in the many. For ethnography, any virtue will do and ethnography decides that it will not decide.

Ethnography will not inquire into the truth or goodness of Meno's definition of virtue, as Socrates does, since the truth or goodness of Meno's definition of virtue has been decided by ethnography long before Meno has given his definition. Thus, there is no reason for ethnography to inquire into the reasonableness or rationality of Meno's definition of virtue since, by virtue of conceiving the world as culture, ethnography has already decided that whatever Meno says about virtue will be reasonable and rational.

Ethnographic inquiry ends where Socratic inquiry begins. Culture is ethnography's way to end inquiry whereas culture is Socrates' way to begin inquiry. Concrete differences between lives marks the end of ethnographic inquiry whereas concrete differences between lives marks the occasion for Socrates to begin inquiry. For ethnography, the many is the place to begin and end whereas for Socrates the many is only the place to begin. Ethnography chooses not to decide, that is to say, ethnography understands that virtue is many different things, because ethnography forgets its own virtue, i.e., ethnography forgets its interest, it forgets its decision to see culture and differentness as first. What ethnography forgets is that it does decide.

Socrates tells Meno that they will have to "...see whether you have hit the truth this time" and tells Meno that he "...may well be right." Socrates does not treat Meno as an informant, but instead, treats Meno as an interlocutor. Socrates does not formulate Meno's speech as true or right, as does ethnography, since Meno's speech is the occasion to address the true and the right.

Socrates treats Meno as an interlocutor in that it is the aim of his inquiry to address the difference between the One and the many and to sustain in conversation the difference between the essential and the inessential. The Socratic dialogue urges Meno to treat his definition of virtue as a place to start inquiry into the good that Meno's definition covers over. Socrates reminds Meno to remember what he has forgotten, to re-collect the beginning that is the true generator of his definition of virtue. Furthermore, Socrates reminds Meno that it is he, Meno, who is speaking and thus it is he, Meno, who is responsible for what he says, i.e., who is responsible for the reasonableness and rationality of his speech. Socrates urges Meno to remember that his speech is not accidental insofar as Meno decided to speak that way and that this decision is a moral and ethical one. Socrates reminds Meno that his speech is a recommendation of a way of life that is recommended as good and that this goodness is worth remembering and examining. Socrates thus makes Meno

account for what he says and makes Meno account for the rationality and reasonableness of what he says. Socrates does not hold Meno's speech as first and inevitable but understands Meno's speech as making reference to some good and addresses Meno's speech as a way to sustain the essential difference between speech and language. When Socrates treats Meno as an interlocutor, he treats the conversation as a way to address the life that the conversation exemplifies.

Ethnography does not care whether Meno has hit the truth or not and does not care whether or not Meno is right. Ethnography does not care to inquire into the truth since it already knows what is true. Ethnography does not care to inquire into virtue since it already knows what virtue is. Ethnography does not take care to hear Meno's speech as pointing to a beginning, i.e., it does not take care to listen for the Good that is covered over by Meno's speech, since ethnography hears Meno's speech itself as good. The care that ethnography takes is to carefully record whatever Meno says so as to have a record of Thessalian virtue and thus to preserve the concrete differentness between lives that is the interest of ethnography.

The decision to see ethnographically is the decision to organize the world culturally. What ethnography forgets is that it decides to conceive of the world as culturally organized, which is to say, that the decision to do

ethnography is the decision to relate to the world in an explanatory way, i.e., ethnography understands explanation as a good way to relate to the world. The limit of ethnography is culture. Conceiving of culture as first, ethnography limits itself to explanation, to describing, to not deciding, to forgetting that it does decide.

So ethnographic inquiry is committed to monologue and not dialogue. It is committed to seeing Meno, to seeing all persons, as concrete members; it is committed to seeing persons as members, as some culture. Ethnography decides to relate to membership concretely in the literal sense of membership in some culture. So ethnography does not care whether Meno is a good man or not, instead what ethnography cares about is that Meno, the Thessalian, is a good member of Thessalian culture. And, for ethnography, what else could Meno be but a good member? Ethnography's idea of membership as concrete membership in some culture is the very idea that ethnography wants to protect. For ethnography, concrete membership - ethnography's interest in concrete differentiation - is some thing that ought not be disturbed. This is how ethnography commits itself to monologue. To ethnography, Socrates appears as a membership disturber.

So ethnography sets itself the good of culture, i.e., what is good for ethnography is its insatiable desire for culture, for differentness. Ethnography understands culture

as first rather than understanding culture as its (ethnography's) own invention, i.e., as its own way of relating to the world. For ethnography, the good life is the ethnographic life - the cultural life - insofar as the good life is to be located within an appeal to culture. Ethnography holds no member responsible or accountable for what is good. No member is accountable or responsible for rationality. For ethnography, the rational way to live is culturally, or culture is formulated as what rationality is, culture is what provides for there to be such a thing as a rationale. The good of ethnography is culture, i.e., ethnography decides that what is good is culture. But ethnography forgets what it decides, and indeed, forgets that it does decide, and thus formulates culture as natural and first.

## VI.

What, then, is our interest? How is our interest to be formulated? What sort of interest does our talk display? We find the notion of interest to be interesting since we write about it, and our writing can be interesting only insofar as it is conceived of as leading back to our interest. Thus, addressing our interest - addressing that interest that

permitted us to formulate interest the way we did - is not the idle asking of an uninteresting question.

We write about ethnography and so we can begin to think about our interest as an interest in ethnography. Ethnography tells us many interesting things; it tells us that, as human beings, we are differentiated from one another on the basis that we are members of different cultures; it tells us many interesting things about different cultures, for example, it tells us that members of different cultures have different ways of understanding justice, have different ways of understanding kinship, have different ways of preparing their food and eating their food, etc., etc., in short, it tells us that members of other cultures live differently from us; it tells us that we have something in common with other cultures namely, that we are all members of some culture; it tells us that what we like and do not like, what we think is good and what we think is bad, and so on, is rational and reasonable because we are members of some culture; it tells us that we should not be quick to judge the actions of members of other cultures since, as members of other cultures, their actions are reasonable, etc., etc.

The question is Why do we find these things interesting? Where is the interestingness of these ethnographic things to be located? Is it that we, members of our culture, do not know these things about members of other cultures and thus



find them newsworthy and novel? If so, are we to think of ethnographers as news reporters who, along with the news, collect some trinkets and novelties from other cultures and bring them back for us to fondle and admire in cultural amazement? Are we to think of members of other cultures as news worthy and novelties? Surely not: No ethnographer would admit to being a news reporter and a souvenir hunter. No ethnographer would admit that the interestingness of ethnography was to be equated with the bits and pieces of cultural stuff brought back from a foreign land.

Our interest in ethnography must then be located elsewhere. It must be located in the difference that ethnography makes and our interest is in this very difference. In other words, what is interesting about ethnography lies not in the fact that it discovers news worthy and novel things, but in the fact that it discovers differentness. The differentness that ethnography discovers is that human beings are to find their essentiality in the realization that they are culture; it is in sociality that we are to find our essence.

Sociality, understood as culture, is what is essential to us insofar as it is essentially Other and, in this sense, eternal and first. And, this is what is interesting about ethnography. When all the ethnographic bits and pieces are

swept away, what remains is the most interesting thing ethnography has to tell us. It tells us that what we are is culture and that what is good about us is that what we are is culture and that what is good about us is that we are culture.

So what is interesting about ethnography is that ethnography recommends a way of life that is good. It recommends the life of culture, i.e., it recommends the life of concrete membership in some culture and it recommends the life of concrete differentiation between and among members of other cultures. Further, it recommends the life that is rational. This is not to say that ethnography recommends that we think about the rationality of our lives, instead ethnography tells us that we are, have been, and always will be, rational by virtue of being cultural. Ethnography does not tell us to account, or be responsible for our lives, instead ethnography provides us with a fool-proof escape from accountability or responsibility by telling us that we can appeal to culture as a way to explain our lives and since, for ethnography, culture is good, rational and natural, our lives are good, rational and natural.

What is interesting about ethnography is that it tells us that thinking and thoughtfulness are no longer necessary. It tells us that the question of naturalness and firstness is to be considered as a problem to which the

world, and the people in it understood as culture, is a solution. It tells us that the good toward which our life aims is no longer something to be reflected upon and sought since the seeking has come to an end, the good has been found once and for all, the good is culture. It tells us to live our lives, as Kierkegaard might say, inside the parentheses of culture and tells us not to think about the kind of life that chooses to live parenthetically.

Thus the interesting thing about ethnography is that it interests each and every one of us. It does this by telling each and every one of us that it has discovered, or better invented, a life that is good, rational and natural. It tells us about what is essential and eternal and thus tells us that the good way to live is culturally. What is interesting about ethnography is that it tells us what we are and what we should be. In this sense, ethnography is not merely a personal interest but an interest of every person.

Kierkegaard suggests that he has "...heard that Christianity proposes itself as a condition for the acquirement of this good," (eternal happiness) "and now I ask how I may establish a proper relationship to this doctrine." (Kierkegaard, 1941:19) Kierkegaard does not think of this understanding as an irrelevant interest in the self. Instead, he says that:

...my conscience is quite clear in this matter; it is not I who have become so presumptuous of my own accord, but it is Christianity itself which compels me to ask the question in this manner. It puts quite an extraordinary emphasis upon my own petty self, and upon every other self however petty, in that it proposes to endow each self with an eternal happiness, provided a proper relationship is established. ...  
(Kierkegaard, 1941:19)

This is not unlike ethnography; ethnography proposes itself as the solution to what is good, natural and first and, as Kierkegaard might have it, proposes itself as the road to eternal happiness. It might be objected that ethnography, unlike Christianity, does not overtly propose itself as the good life. Nevertheless, the inquiry that is ethnography is at the same time a recommendation of a way of life. Ethnography proposes culture for itself as its good and, by so doing, proposes culture as the good for each and every one of us. Unlike ethnography, who tells us what we do not know, i.e., that culture is essential, eternal and first, our inquiry aims at telling ethnography what it has forgotten, namely that it forgets that it is interested.

FOOTNOTES

- 1       Ethnography's impulse to preserve the difference between one culture and another is ethnography's impulse to live naturally. For ethnography, the unnatural life is manifest in such notions as cultural superiority, i.e., where one culture, understanding itself as superior, imposes itself on another. This unnatural life generates such ethnographic formulations as "acculturation" and "ethnocentrism. This is ethnography's way to remind us that we are culture and that notions such as cultural superiority and cultural inferiority are unnatural in that the difference between one life and another is essential insofar as this difference manifests the essentiality and naturalness of culture. In this sense, ethnography is a moral teaching in that it teaches us to live naturally.
- 2       For example, Stoddart says.  
  
          ...it has been indicated that for ethnographers -- as for all inquirers -- the "natural state" of any domain is any domain's paramount feature: ethnographers both in the formulation of their task and in their location of problems attendant to that task presume it and in the carrying out and reporting of their research activities seek to preserve it. (Stoddart, n.d.: 14-15)
- 3       Or, what ethnographic speech really re-affirms and re-achieves, and what ethnographic speech reflects, is its Self.
- 4       Pitkin (1972: 169-192) formulates the conversation between Socrates and Thrasymachus in Book I of The Republic as a problem in the formulation of the meaning of justice. She formulates Socrates' addressing of the problem of justice as a problem of meaning and formulates Thrasymachus' addressing of the problem of justice as a problem of sociological observation.

Socrates answers the question as if it were about the meaning of the word "justice"; or at least, we can recognize his answer as a plausible definition. This is not true of Thrasymachus' answer. He is not formulating a phrase more or less synonymous with the word "justice", but making a kind of sociological observation about the things which people call "just" or "unjust". The word "justice" does not mean "in the interest of the stronger," and Thrasymachus is not suggesting that it might. Thrasymachus is trying to tell us something about the things or situations people say are "just". (Pitkin, 1972:170)

In this sense, Thrasymachus becomes a sociologist whose interest is finding out from the members of a society what justice is. For Pitkin, whether or not Thrasymachus agrees with the members of society is another issue. What is important, for Pitkin, is that Thrasymachus, formulated as a sociologist, can contribute to our understanding of justice insofar as he can provide ethnographic data about justice. Socrates, on the other hand, is searching after a definition of justice and, in this sense, is understood by Pitkin as attempting to formulate the ideal justice (pp.191-192), i.e., what justice ought to be. But Pitkin does not understand that Socrates is not seeking after a definition or after a concretely ideal understanding of justice. What Socrates is doing is attempting to formulate usage (concrete speech about justice) and, as such, is attempting to occasion the inessential (concrete speech about justice) as a way to address the essential, the Good. Thus, for Socrates to provide a definition of justice would be for Socrates to conceive of the Good, the essential and the eternal, as an effable thing and thus as a thing not needful of grounding. But Socrates understands every speech, including his own, as needful of grounding and thus Socrates does not understand speech as speech that speaks its own grounds. All speech is responsible and Socrates attempts to re-collect the response-ability of speech. So instead of formulating Socrates' speech, Pitkin concretizes it as a way to concretely

explain and explicate the conversation between Thrasy-machus and Socrates not as conversation that is an attempt to formulate the tension between the essential and the inessential, but as a conversation that attempts to culminate in a concrete result. So Pitkin does not formulate Thrasy-machus' speech as an example of sociological observation as a way to address Thrasy-machus' version of good inquiry and as a way to address Socrates' version of good inquiry, but understands the speech of Thrasy-machus and Socrates concretely as itself inquiry that aims at a concrete result.

CHAPTER 4. DISINTEREST

I.

I seem to be in luck. I wanted one virtue and I find that you have a whole swarm of virtues to offer.  
(Meno, 72)

Even if they are many and various, yet at least they all have some common character which makes them virtues. That is what ought to be kept in view by anyone who answers the question: "What is virtue." Do you follow me?  
(Meno, 72c, d)

This puts us back where we were. In a different way we have discovered a number of virtues when we were looking for one only. This single virtue, which permeates each of them, we cannot find.  
(Meno, 74)

However, now it is your turn to do as you promised, and try to tell me the general nature of virtue. Stop making many out of one, as the humourists say when somebody breaks a plate. Just leave virtue whole and sound and tell me what it is, as in the examples I have given you. (Meno, 77b)

While the nature of virtue as a whole is still under question, don't suppose that you can explain it to anyone in terms of its parts, or by any similar type of explanation. Understand rather that the same question remains to be answered; you say this and that about virtue, but what is it? Does this seem nonsense to you? (Meno, 79d, e)



These are Socrates' words to Meno. These are not words of advice nor are they words of clarification. Socrates is not advising Meno on how to speak on virtue in front of large audiences without looking the fool since Meno is ept at these sorts of performances and, not engaging in these performances himself, Socrates has no advice. Nor is clarification Socrates' aim insofar as Meno understands clarity as the provision of a for-all-practical-purposes clear definition of virtue.

Rather than words of advice and clarification, Socrates' words are a reminder to Meno. Socrates reminds Meno that when he speaks about virtue he speaks about parts of virtue and examples of virtue and not about virtue itself. He reminds Meno that he has said "this and that about virtue" and reminds Meno that he has taken this and that for virtue when what is in question is not this and that but virtue itself. This is not to say that Meno merely forgot that when he spoke of this and that he was not speaking of virtue and Socrates needed merely to remind Meno as one would remind someone of an appointment he has forgotten or something of that sort. Meno did not merely forget, in the concrete sense of poor memory, that he was speaking about this and that when he should have been speaking about virtue, instead Meno understood this and that as virtue. Thus, when Socrates reminds Meno that he is speaking about this and that and not about virtue he is reminding Meno that he has decided to

Speak about this and that and so Socrates is reminding Meno to re-collect that decision.

And despite his rejection of Meno's offerings, of Meno's thises and thats, Socrates still addresses Meno's offerings insofar as they are Meno's offerings of virtue. Socrates tells Meno that he does not know what virtue is, and hearing this as a plea from Socrates to tell him what he does not know, Meno virtuously offers Socrates virtue. And it is this toward which the Socratic reminder points; that Meno's offering is not merely an offering of virtue but that his offering is a virtuous one. Socrates is not reminding Meno that he has offered him only thises and thats, i.e., bits and pieces that are convention, but is reminding Meno that his offerings, however meagre, point to a life that generated not only the offerings but Meno's desire to offer.

Socrates' words to Meno are a reminder in the sense of reminding Meno to address that which he truly offers when he speaks of this and that. Socrates does not conceive of Meno's offering of this and that as Meno's true offering but conceives of it rather as the meagre re-presentation<sup>1</sup> of what Meno truly has to offer. What Meno is truly offering is not some this or that or some bits and pieces of Thessalian culture, as ethnography would have it, but instead Meno is offering a life that is virtuous. Like every other

speaker, Meno is bold, i.e., his speech displays the life that has generated it and his speech offers that life as virtuous and good. And, like every other speaker, Meno needs to be reminded of his boldness, i.e., he needs to be reminded of that which his speaking forgets, namely that his speech is an example.

Meno offers this and that about virtue as a certainty on the basis of that which everyone knows, i.e., on the basis of common usage. If this view was taken up as adequate inquiry, the only recourse Socrates would have would be to determine whether or not Meno's usage was correct. And this procedure would be intelligible as an evaluative problem only insofar as Meno was conceived of not as Meno the man but as Meno the Thessalian. As Thessalian, what Meno has to offer as good is culture and culture is offered up in bits and pieces, thises and thats; today virtue and tomorrow perhaps kinship or even religion. Understood as Thessalian, as culture, a conversation with Meno would degenerately reduce to a monologue where Meno's interlocutor would patiently await the bits and pieces of culture that are thrown to him and voraciously gobble them up in the true manner of a culture vulture. These bits and pieces are exactly what the culture vulture has been awaiting, and needless to say expecting, so that one more bit could be added to the system that is culture that patiently awaits completion. Now if Meno will only offer up kinship, or even perhaps religion, tomorrow.

But Socrates reminds us that bits and pieces, thises and thats, are not the point. Bits and pieces, i.e., common usage, are not the point if by that is meant the point at which inquiry aims and the point at which inquiry seeks to come to an end. Usage is the point only when point is understood as the point of departure. We must all start in the cave, i.e., we must all start by looking at the shadows. But the point is not to see the shadows more clearly or to make the shadows less shadowy since shadows are by nature shadowy. Neither is the point to replace existing shadows with better shadows since that is to perpetuate the essential and natural as mere shadows and is the degenerate formulation of social revolution. The point is rather to turn from the shadows, to turn from the start, and to re-collect that which generates the shadows. It is to address the generation of the shadows we cast.

We are reminded by Socrates of our temptation and impulse to find usage interesting. The impulse to find usage interesting, however, is the impulse to forget one's origin, one's possibility, and marks an ethical decision to be disinterested in that origin and possibility. This is to be disinterested in that which is essentially interesting and interested in that which is inessentially interesting. But this is to forget that any interest in usage itself covers over the life that generates usage,

i.e., any interest in it, and a preoccupation with usage marks the worst kind of disinterest, a disinterest in what speech says.

So Socrates reminds us where our interest lies; our interest lies in that which our concretely interesting speech covers over. To be truly disinterested is to be disinterested in concretely interesting speech, i.e., in usage. Usage is interesting only insofar as it exemplifies an essential interest, i.e., the interest which is the life that is its generation, its beginning. Thus, the truly disinterested inquiry is not an inquiry that aims at producing some result, that aims at generating some finding, that aims at a solution to some problem, or the like, but is inquiry that aims at producing an example. i.e., it is inquiry that treats itself as exemplary of the life that makes it intelligible and sensible. Inquiry that finds itself to be interesting by virtue of a plea to the concrete interestingness of its matter is inquiry that forgets its deep interest and is inquiry that is disinterested only in the worst way, i.e., it is disinterested in itself, and as such, exemplifies a version of inquiry that aims at an indifference to, and a disinterest in, that which is essential. What this sort of inquiry forgets is that it is morally and ethically interested and that it is this deep interest that is the generator of the disinterest. So the truly disinterested inquiry understands its disinterest as

derivative not from the internal organization of the inquiry itself, but from the deep interest that generates the inquiry and of which the inquiry is an example. Materials for inquiry i.e., topics, subject matter, and the like, are interesting only insofar as they themselves display an interest and only insofar as they themselves are the occasion for exemplifying an interest.

## II.

In contrast, we can think about the social scientific, which is to say, ethnographic, formulation of disinterestedness. Since, for ethnography, to speak is to speak about, i.e., to speak about some interesting matter, speech is interesting and good insofar as it re-presents some matter. This is to say that speech is good when it imitates, i.e., when speech is understood as descriptive. As such, speech must guard against speaking interest when interest is understood as the idiosyncratic interest of the speaker. Thus, when speech fails to correspond to its matter, i.e., when speech fails to be limited by its matter, it is formulated as interested and bad and speech is formulated as good only insofar as it does not speak its interest where interest is understood as the idiosyncratic interest of the speaker.

On this view, good speech is impeded by the speaker and thus good speech is understood as speech disengaged from the speaker. For example, Schutz writes:

All science presumes a special attitude of the person carrying on science; it is the attitude of the disinterested observer. In this manner it is distinguished above all from the attitude of the person who lives naively in his life-world and who has an eminently practical interest in it... As a disinterested observer, not as a private person, which certainly he also is, the scientist does not participate in the life-world as an actor, and he is no longer carried along by the living stream of intentionalities...The life-world, as an object of scientific investigation, will be for the investigator qua scientist predominantly the life-world of Others, the observed. (Schutz, 1973:137)

This attitude of the social scientist is that of a mere disinterested observer of the social world. He is not involved in the observed situation, which is to him not of practical but merely of cognitive interest. It is not the theatre of his activities but merely the object of his contemplation. He does not act within it, vitally interested in the outcome of his actions, hoping or fearing what their consequences might be but he looks at it with the same detached equanimity with which the natural scientist looks at the occurrences in his laboratory. (Schutz, 1973: 36)

He (the observer) is not involved in the actor's hopes and fears whether or not they will understand one another and achieve their end by the interlocking of motives. Thus, his system of relevances differs from that of the interested parties and permits him to see at the same time

more and less than what is seen by them...  
The constructs of the observer are,  
therefore, different ones than those  
used by the participants in the inter-  
action, if for no other reason than  
the fact that the purpose of the  
observer is different from that of the  
interactors and therewith the systems  
of relevances attached to such purposes  
are also different.  
(Schutz, 1973: 26-27)

The interesting matter which is the topic or subject of  
speech is the "natural attitude" or the "life-world". This  
is what the observer wants to observe, what the speaker  
wants to speak, and this want is formulated as contingent  
upon disinterestedness. The interesting thing, the  
interesting matter, is the natural attitude, i.e., what  
speech is interested to speak is the natural attitude.

At first glance, this seems to be a bizarre situation;  
the observer is interested in observing the natural attitude,  
which is to say, the speaker is interested in speaking the  
natural attitude, but the interestingness of the natural  
attitude depends upon an attitude of disinterestedness toward  
that natural attitude. The observer must be disinterested  
in the very thing he finds most interesting, and indeed, it  
is only in disinterest that he will find that thing to be  
interesting. But this situation finds its intelligibility in  
the grammar and grounds of a life that is descriptivist.



"Disinterested observer" finds its intelligibility within a world conceived of as compelling observation and description. The natural attitude is compelling since it is amenable to observation and description; the natural attitude is compelling, too, in that a person lives "...naively in his life-world and...has an eminently practical interest in it..." and for the person living naively within the natural attitude, this attitude is the "...theater of his activities...". What is compelling to the observer, then, is that the natural attitude is conceived of as a thing that compels observation and description, and yet, the thingness of the natural attitude is only accessible through disinterest, i.e., the observer must presence himself in the world disinterestedly as a way to escape the natural attitude for the purposes of making it available as a thing.

Making the natural attitude available as a thing amounts to making the natural attitude disclose itself. It is this disclosure, i.e., accessibility to the eyes and the ears, at which the idea of the disinterested observer aims. This is to say that the good at which the idea of the disinterested observer aims is the observation and description, albeit a for-all-practical-purposes observation and description, or better, a for-all-practical-purposes social scientific observation and description, of the natural attitude. So disinterestedness in that which is most interesting - the

natural attitude -- is not, from this view, a bizarre situation, since an interest in the natural attitude is an interest in making that attitude accessible to the eyes and the ears and disinterestedness becomes sensible as the attitude, way to live, that will fulfill this good, i.e., that will serve to formulate the natural attitude as a thing, i.e., as an interesting thing.

Thus, the idea of the disinterested observer becomes an eminently practical matter. Disinterestedness becomes a matter of techne, e.g., a necessary methodological step for the achievement of the good of social science. Speech, then, becomes formulated by social science as the way to re-present, or preserve, the disclosure technically initiated by the idea of disinterestedness. Unless speech can speak this disclosure, which is to say, unless speech can correspond to the natural attitude, social science will have nothing to say. In this sense, the idea of the disinterested observer becomes not only the way to make the natural attitude accessible as a thing, but also becomes the way to make speech into a thing, i.e., good speech is now formulated as a thing that imitates another thing; the disclosure of the natural attitude. Speech is now secured within the authoritative certainty of the natural attitude - of everyday life - and the idea of life that generates this certainty and to which this certainty points, is forgotten. Instead of understanding the idea of disinterestedness as the observer's method for generating a life the idea of disinterestedness

is understood as the observer's method for making what is already there and certain available to the eyes and the ears. Social science participates in the world disinterestedly, which is to say that its participation is unnecessary, and indeed, detrimental to its aim of making the world disclose itself. Social science's desire for monologue rather than dialogue now becomes more intelligible. Raffel writes that:

The observer need not participate or speak since the event is, as it were, doing all the work for him. Since the event is thought to show itself, the observer's job becomes to do, in effect, nothing, so as to let the event show itself. The observer need not speak and so need not expose himself to the contingency of opinion because there is nothing that needs to be disclosed through speech. There is nothing to be disclosed because the relevant thing (events) is disclosing itself. The minimal role left for speech is to remember what has been disclosed after it disappears. Again, speech in the form of records serves not to sustain participation but to sustain non-participation by allowing us to remain silent even in the face of the absent by converting the absent into the permanently present (records). The speech may be different from the event in that it remains but, analytically, what remains as long as the speech remains is the event. So although speech may be different, what makes the difference is not the speech but the event which makes the speech (record) possible. (Raffel, 1979: 58)

We can now understand more clearly why the ethnographer did not want to ask Meno, i.e., begin a conversation with Meno, whether or not his definition of virtue was good. To take the risk of dialogue rather than monologue would be, for the ethnographer, to risk the event (virtue) that was disclosing itself. This risk would be the risk of not speaking, not recording, not preserving, the event. Engaging Meno in conversation would, for the ethnographer, be tantamount to participating in the event and, at worst, preventing its disclosure and, at best, contaminating that disclosure.

And even if the ethnographer were to engage Meno in conversation, what would the ethnographer have to say? What the ethnographer would have to say is nothing, i.e., the ethnographer would have nothing to say. This is not to say that the ethnographer would have nothing concretely to say, for surely the ethnographer could find something to chat about, but it is to say rather that dialogue, for the ethnographer, is having nothing to say. That is, in a deeper sense, ethnographic speech is speaking the event and when speech is understood to participate in the event, for example, when the ethnographer engages Meno in conversation, speech is no longer ethnographic, and in this sense, conversation, for ethnography, amounts to speechlessness.

When people speak, ethnography hears culture and ethnography can hear culture only when it is disinterested, which is to say, does not participate, in what people say. So ethnography wants people to reveal themselves, or in ethnographic terms, to reveal their culture, but ethnography does not want to reveal itself for fear of speaking badly, i.e., for fear of not speaking people's culture. For ethnography, there would be nothing good in entering into conversation with Meno and together addressing the question of virtue. Ethnography does not want to be together with Meno in conversation since ethnography's idea of togetherness is for it to record whatever Meno dictates. Ethnography requires no help in addressing the question of virtue and understands that Meno requires no help in this matter either, for ethnography knows that virtue is whatever Meno says.

Even within the internal logic of ethnography, ethnography should understand, and perhaps it does, that as the speech of people reveals their culture, so does the speech of ethnography. Thus, when ethnography speaks it can hear its own culture, and if ethnography listens to itself at all, it could begin to address the life that generates its speech. But if ethnography were to listen to itself, it would listen ethnographically and listening to itself would amount to the production of an ethnography of ethnography. And, surely this could be otherwise;

ethnography could choose to enter into a conversation with Meno and thus together formulate the life that generates their speech; ethnography could choose to enter into a conversation with itself and thus dialectically formulate its possibility; ethnography could choose not to forget its deep interest and its beginning; ethnography could choose to have something to say. But then, alas, it would no longer be ethnography.

### III.

When we say that ethnography understands disinterest as an eminently practical matter, we mean that ethnography understands disinterest merely as a method for making culture observable. This is possible only when interest is conceived of as the concrete living of a concrete life and where this living hides from view that which organizes that life, namely culture. Thus, ethnography wants to make noticeable that which is unnoticeable (culture) and understands disinterest as a method for removing that which hides culture from view (life). In a sense, then, ethnography wants to remove life so that culture will show itself and be noticeable to ethnography.

But it is not the life of those ethnography observes that disinterest is intended to remove, for it is the grounds of disinterest, and not disinterest as techne, that has already removed their lives by formulating them as concrete, as things, as culture. Forgetting this decision, ethnography can only see life as concrete and can only see people, i.e., hear their talk, see their conduct, as things, as culture. So ethnography wants to see life, but only the life of others formulated concretely as culture. Furthermore, ethnography wants to speak life, but only when speech is formulated as an imitation of concrete life, i.e., only when good speech is formulated as concrete speech.

The life that ethnography wants to remove, then, the task that is the practical task of disinterestedness, is its own life. Thus, what hides culture from view is the life of ethnography formulated as concrete interest. Ethnography wants to see, but does not want to be seen and ethnography wants to speak but does not want to have anything to say. Seeing itself or speaking itself is, for ethnography, to obliterate from view that which it wants to see and speak. It is in this way that disinterestedness is understood by ethnography as a methodological device for removing interest where interest is understood as the concrete interests of an (any) ethnographer. This is why ethnography cannot engage Meno in a conversation; conversation would formulate Meno and the ethnographer, as decisive speakers who are

responsible for what they say; conversation would join Meno and the ethnographer as men who would understand their contact as concrete speech that is grounded in language, and their conversation, their joining, would sustain the tension of the essential difference between their speech and that which generates their speech. But ethnography does not understand speech as covering over that which is unspeakable, i.e., the grounds of speech, but rather understands speech as covering over that which is speakable, i.e., culture.

Thus, the version of adequate knowledge that ethnography recommends is experience.<sup>2</sup> To know is to know the knowable, which is to say, to know is to see the knowable but to see what is knowable (to see culture) is understood concretely by ethnography as putting oneself concretely in a position such that culture will display and disclose itself. This is the necessity of field-work; that being there, i.e., making oneself present to culture's disclosure, is knowing. This is the necessity of ethnographic reporting; that ethnographic reports (speech) copies the experience of being there and preserves it so that whoever shall read the report will also know.<sup>3</sup> This view understands knowledge as an innocent acquisition that will come to one who is patiently passive (disinterested).



For ethnography, disinterest thus becomes a step, perhaps the first step, on the way to the acquisition of knowledge. Indeed, disinterest is a step in the most concrete sense of the word. It is to step from one position, a position where concrete interests hide what is to be seen, to another position, i.e., to a vantage point, from where the best view can be had. In this way, knowledge is a thing that is foreseeable, inevitable, and a practical result, i.e., one cannot help but acquire knowledge when one is present at its disclosure; he who is there knows and he who is there can do nothing else but know. But understanding knowing as a sheer change of positions, forgets that this version of knowledge finds its intelligibility in a world understood as descriptivist and forgets that this version of knowledge is not a thing in the world to be discovered by changing places, i.e., knowledge is not a thing that belongs to the world, but is a method whereby the very idea of a world is generated.

So the life that is removed by ethnography, the life that is considered to be a matter of disinterest, is the life of ethnography itself. Ethnography is indifferent to its life because it understands speech concretely as being authored by concrete culture. Thus, life makes no essential difference and ethnography's aim is not to make a difference by formulating difference concretely as the difference between

one culture and another. What ethnography has to say, its life, is a matter of disinterest since to speak lively would make a difference and this lively conversation would contaminate the concrete differences among lives. To speak lively, then, to enter into dialogue rather than monologue, would make ethnography responsible for its speech and, for ethnography, this would be bad since it would no longer be speaking knowledge, but instead would be speaking mere opinion. From the ethnographic point of view, speaking knowledgeably is a speaking that is free from risks whereas to opine is to live dangerously. It is dangerous because to opine is to admit authorship of speech while to speak knowledgeably is to submit this authority to some concretely existing state-of-affairs. By rejecting any deep sense of community with those it observes, by forgetting unity, ethnography chooses to remain a stranger not only to its interlocutors but also to itself.

Kierkegaard writes:

Let the inquiring scholar labor with incessant zeal, even to the extent of shortening his life in the enthusiastic service of science; let the speculative philosopher be sparing neither of time nor of diligence; they are none the less not interested infinitely, personally and passionately, nor could they wish to be. On the contrary, they will seek to cultivate an attitude of objectivity and disinterestedness.

And as for the relationship of the subject to the truth when he comes to know it, the assumption is that if only the truth is brought to light, its appropriation is a relatively unimportant matter, something which follows as a matter of course. And in any case, what happens to the individual is in the last analysis a matter of indifference. Herein lies the lofty equanimity of the scholar, and the comic thoughtlessness of his parrot-like echo.  
(Kierkegaard, 1941: 23-24)

What, then, does ethnography do when it forgets its life? It forgets that it is interested. It seeks the passive solitude of objectivity as its way of alleviating the suffering of having something to say. For ethnography, to be passionately interested is to suffer the pain of living in ignorance. Ethnography understands its passion, its interest, as something painful that is to be alleviated by the practical application of disinterest. It does not understand its passionate interest as a suffering that is the dialectical engagement with its own possibility. Rather than having something to say, ethnography would rather produce "parrot-like echoes" which come from an engagement with the shadows in the cave as first and Real.

In Book X of The Republic (614-621) Socrates tells us of the myth of Er. Er, who was appointed by the gods to deliver a message to earth, tells of how souls choose their

lives. After choosing their lives, and before being born as mortal men, the souls drank from the Forgetful River, and thus forgot that they had chosen a life. Although each soul was compelled to drink from the Forgetful River, those without prudence and wisdom drank more than the appropriate measure. Each of us forgets that we have chosen a life when we speak and those of us who have drunk more than our measure from the Forgetful River forget also, that when we speak, our speech points to that life. Ethnography forgets that it, too, has chosen a life and ethnography has drunk heartily from the Forgetful River and thus has forgotten that when it speaks it makes reference to this life, i.e., ethnography forgets that it does speak. Moreover, on each and every occasion of speaking, ethnography forgets that each and every occasion of its speech marks one more occasion that ethnography drinks from the Forgetful River, the river that it names Disinterestedness.

FOOTNOTES

- 1        This is not to suggest that speech is meagre only and insofar as it is an offering that covers over its true offering. Speech that orients to speech as a covering over of its true offering, i.e., as a re-presentation, is speech that is not meagre. Speech that orients to speech as all there is, i.e., speech that orients to speech as the true offering is, however, meagre. Insofar as Meno offers definitions of virtue and offers these definitions in the spirit of a true offering, Meno's speech is meagre. But speech offered in the spirit of an occasion to address the true offering is not meagre.
- 2        See McHugh, et al., 1974:137-153, especially pp. 148-153.
- 3        Raffel, 1979.

CHAPTER 5.      OFFERINGS

I.

In some ways, Meno is like the ethnographer. His offering of a definition(s) of virtue is a formulation that is intended to collect the many and varied speeches about virtue. Meno recognizes that people say many different things about virtue and Meno also recognizes many different things that people do, as virtuous. Meno then sees his task as collecting this manyness by way of a definition that will encompass the manyness.

Meno hears Socrates' words, for example, "...they all have some common character which makes them virtues.", "This single virtue, which permeates each of them...", "...try to tell me the general nature of virtue.", or finally, "While the nature of virtue as a whole is still under question, don't suppose that you can explain it to anyone in terms of its parts, or by any similar type of explanation.", as words that criticize his definitions of virtue by characterizing them as many things when a definition, properly speaking, should be only one thing that each of the many things have in common. So Meno hears Socrates' words concretely, i.e., he hears Socrates as asking for a concrete thing, i.e., for the general nature of virtue, that will account for, or explain, the differences among the many and varied.<sup>1</sup> For Meno, then,

difference is essential insofar as difference is formulated as discoverable differences between and among many various things. That is, these concrete differences are essential insofar as difference is not conceived of as anything other than the concrete differences between and among things. Insofar as these concrete differences are understood as essential and first rather than as an achievement of the commitment to a way of life, they are understood as "natural effects" of the "natural cause" (thing) that unites them and provides for their commonality. It is Meno's commitment to the many and varied that permits him to understand Socrates' words as asking for the concrete thing that provides for the naturalness of the many and varied.

In this way, Meno is like the ethnographer because the ethnographer, too, conceives of difference concretely and conceives of his task as collecting these differences where collecting is understood as formulating the one thing that the many things have in common. The ethnographer's common thing is culture (or membership), and it is common insofar as it is a thing that unites, i.e., makes sensible and reasonable, all the many things. Sensibility and reasonableness are good, for ethnography, inasmuch as they are understood as the concrete good toward which ethnography strives. This is to say that concrete differences - differences between and among cultures - are good because they are things that are caused by, or are resultants of, the best thing of all, namely

culture or membership. Unlike members who see some of the differences among cultures as bad,<sup>2</sup> ethnography has discovered (invented) culture or membership as a way to see these differences as sensible and reasonable and as a way to see sensibility and reasonableness as good because it is cultural. Thus, ethnography stands above membership insofar as it collects difference under the unifying rubric of culture or membership. In this sense, ethnography uses culture or membership as its method of formulating the world, and the people in it, as a collection of differences.

But in this way, the ethnographer is no different from the member. Members understand difference concretely in that they conceive of themselves as different from other members insofar as other members live differently. This is sheer difference and whether this difference gets understood as good or bad is no longer relevant. What is relevant both for members and ethnographers is that this sheer concrete difference itself be preserved. Both the member and the ethnographer are interested in preserving this difference and this preservation is grounded in the deep interest and commitment to the many and various ways of living rather than to the idea of life that is the originator of these many and various ways of living and toward which this manyness points. Thus, ethnography and membership are the same because they



conceive of concrete difference - differences among ways of living - as essential, first and natural.<sup>3</sup>

Ethnography, however, conceives of itself as different from membership. Ethnography conceives of its "looking and seeing" as different from the "looking and seeing" of members. Members see only difference in that the way they live is different from how others live. On the other hand, ethnography sees not only this difference but also sees what these differences have in common, namely culture or membership. Thus, whereas members see only difference, ethnography sees that members' seeing is a representation of what is common to the differences. So members see difference while ethnographers see sameness. Sameness is formulated by ethnography as culture and membership and thus whereas members see only difference, ethnography sees the absolute - culture and membership. But this looking and seeing is no different from the looking and seeing of members because it is to formulate culture and membership as a thing that can collect all the other things that are differences. So, from this point of view, all membership and culture amounts to is another thing, another difference; it is another thing among the many other things.

Insofar as ethnography formulates culture and membership as another thing, as an other common thing, it does not see absolute culture since to see absolute culture means to address the idea of culture that grounds all the many

things, speeches about culture, including the common thing that ethnography formulates as culture. For ethnography, however, the idea of culture is conceived of as a concrete idea, or conception, and rather than grounding members' talk and conduct, it is itself needful of grounding. For ethnography, culture and membership are concrete ideas or conceptions that are useable in the sense of explaining, or accounting for, the world, and ethnography thus does not understand the idea of culture as its method, its way, of creating the idea of a world.

Ethnography conceives of culture and membership as effable things and thus does not understand that that thing it calls culture or membership is not absolute, first and necessary since, like any other thing, it is subject to different formulations. But, like any other thing, culture and membership point to a life that generates them and it is this idea of life, not a thing and not effable, that is essential, first, necessary and absolute. Things can be formulated in many different ways (Meno's definitions of virtue attest to this) because they are temporal and inessential. Thus, culture and membership conceived of as things can be formulated differently but the idea of culture that grounds the many different things that are culture is essential and eternal and thus not only cannot be formulated in many different ways, but indeed cannot be formulated

(completed) at all. Inquiry that seeks to address the idea of culture is inquiry that seeks to address the essential and eternal and is thus inquiry that understands itself not as ground and foundation, not as complete insofar as the eternal is speakable, not as the eternal word, but as inquiry that is itself needful of grounding and as inquiry that is itself needful of formulation. So inquiry that addresses the eternal and essential is not inquiry that addresses some thing, but instead is inquiry that seeks to address and achieve the essential difference between speech and language.

It is in this way, i.e., by hearing Socrates' words as asking for a general or common thing, that Meno continues to give Socrates definitions of virtue. That is, instead of hearing Socrates' words as an invitation to join him in the conversation that re-presents and addresses the idea of life that makes speech possible, i.e., to address the question of speech and language insofar as asking after how what is said can be said, Meno hears Socrates' words as a request for complete speech as though the matter (the matter of life) could be once and for all completed. In all the things that Meno recognizes as virtue - in speech about virtue and virtuous acts - Meno then hears the voice of the common thing and understands his task as that of reproducing that voice. Meno does not accept Socrates' invitation to listen to the

eternal and essential that is voiced in each and every speech because Meno formulates the eternal and essential voice concretely as the voice of the common thing and hence Meno's listening is oriented to a hearing of the most concrete thing. Formulated as a concrete voice, Meno does not conceive of the eternal and essential as ineffable, but instead conceives of the eternal and essential as a common thing and thus as speakable, i.e., as reproducible in speech understood as a thing that is complete.

Ethnography, too, orients its listening to the most concrete of voices. It formulates culture and membership as eternal and essential and thus when ethnography listens to members it hears the eternal and essential. And, formulated as a thing, as culture and membership, ethnography conceives of the eternal and essential as a thing that is reproducible in speech. The good of ethnography, then, is to produce the complete speech where completeness is understood as the reproduction of the eternal and essential. The thing that ethnography does not understand, however, is that its speech is yet another thing that is itself needful of grounding. As such, ethnography does not address its own possibility and does not address how it can say what it says.

II.

But, like Meno's definitions of virtue, ethnography's notions of culture and membership are not merely concrete collectors of bits and pieces of concrete speech. They are not merely ethnographic conveniences. If this were so, i.e., if culture and membership were merely sense-makers, if they were only methodological devices for the generation of sensibility, if they were merely ideas in the usual and concrete sense of this word, if they were merely notions, if this were so, then ethnography would have to admit that culture and membership were mere phantoms. That is, ethnography would have to admit that culture and membership were mere appearances and that the ethnographic enterprise was an enterprise that dealt with appearances (the temporal, the fleeting, the inessential) and like all other appearances, culture and membership may be here today and gone tomorrow.

On the contrary, as we said in Chapter 3, ethnography conceives of culture and membership as "the" solution to the problem of what is first, absolute and necessary. For ethnography, culture and membership are not mere phantoms or notions, i.e., they are not mere appearances, but are the Real insofar as they generate concrete speech. In fact, from the ethnographic point of view, it is concrete speech that is relegated to the realm of appearances insofar as it is concrete

speech that is not only generated by the Reality of culture and membership, but it is also concrete speech (appearances) that covers over and hides from view culture and membership (the Real). So it is in this sense that ethnography understands culture and membership not merely as sense-makers where this is conceived of as a methodological device for making sense, but ethnography conceives of culture and membership as the source of sense itself, i.e., it is by virtue of the Realness of culture and membership that there is sense in the first place.

So, for ethnography, culture and membership is a serious business. It is a serious business because it marks the beginning; culture and membership mark the beginning of humanity qua culture. It is a serious business because the business of humanity is serious and it is ethnographic vision that has seen the forgotten mystery of humanity and it is ethnography that seriously offers us the answer to this mystery. Ethnography has seen the answer to the mystery in our spreading of our words and aims now at offering us demystification by itself spreading the word. What is mysterious, however, is that ethnography has forgotten that it is its words that it is spreading. So ethnography demystifies the mystery of humanity by mystifying itself into thinking that the word it spreads has been spoken by some thing other (culture and membership) than itself and hence mysteriously offers us demystification.

III.

We may conceive of ethnography now as work, i.e., as a task. Ethnography's task, what belongs to ethnography, is the work of demystification where demystification is understood as formulating concrete speech as an appearance of the Real and formulating the Real as a concrete offering that reconciles the mystification of appearances. What belongs to ethnography, then, is to reconcile the concrete difference between one life and another by formulating this difference as the essential difference between one culture and another. So ethnography offers us demystification insofar as it offers us a way to reconcile, in the form of a concrete explanation or account, the concrete difference between one life and another as the concrete manifestation (appearance) of the essentiality and firstness of culture and membership (the Real).

Thus Malinowski can write:

The trade takes place between the visitors and local natives, who are not their partners, but who must belong to the community with whom the Kula is made. Thus, Numanuma, Tu'utauna and Bwayowa are the three communities which form what we have called the 'Kula community' or 'Kula unit', with whom the Sinaketans stand in the relation of partnership. And a Sinaketa man will gimwali (trade) only with a man from one of these villages who is not his personal partner. To use a native statement:

"Some of our goods we give in pari; some we keep back; later on, we gimwali it. They bring their arecanut, their sago, they put it down. They want some article of ours, they say: 'I want this stone blade'. We give it, we put the betel-nut, the sago into our canoe. If they give us, however, a not sufficient quantity, we rate them. Then they bring more."

This is a clear definition of the gimwali, with haggling and adjustment of equivalence in the act. (Malinowski, 1961:362).

Or, again, Whyte:

Although it is necessary to pay off the police, their toleration of the rackets does not depend exclusively upon bribery. Even so single-minded an officer as Clancy is influenced by his personal relations, and those who establish closer ties find their actions still more influenced by social considerations. A Cornerville barber commented to me:

Sergeant Clancy is all right if you talk to him nice, but if you answer him back, he's always out to get you. My boss (in the numbers and horse-race bets) always answers him back, and he's made my boss move his horse room a few times.....

Another Cornerville man discussed with me a related aspect of police protection in this way:

You and me, we could buy a patrolman and maybe a sergeant, but we couldn't buy a lieutenant or captain, not even if we had the money to do it. Suppose some punk paid money to the captain. He might go around boasting about it, telling everybody, "I bought the captain." That would sound bad. They can't allow that. They only want to



deal with people that they can  
depend on to do things in the  
right way.

In dealing effectively with the police,  
money is important, but so are position  
and personal relations. Neither is  
effective without the other.  
(Whyte, 1955: 135-136).

Or, finally, Sudnow:

When a child is unexpectedly delivered,  
as occasionally happens, obstetricians  
have been heard to telephone the father  
and break the news in the context of a  
joke, as in the following tape-recorded  
example:

Doctor: ...Say, this is Dr.M. at Cohen.  
Are you Mr. X?  
Husband: Yes I am.  
Doctor: Well I have something to tell you.  
It seems your wife came in here  
this afternoon and complained of  
a tummy ache and it seems that  
there was this baby - congratulations  
Mr. X. You have a nice new little  
boy.  
(Sudnow, 1967: 124)

What belongs to ethnography, the task that Malinowski,  
Whyte and Sudnow set themselves, is the task of formulating  
members' talk as mere concrete speech and transforming that  
talk into culture and membership. So when Malinowski's native  
speaks, when Whyte's barber speaks, when Sudnow's doctor  
speaks, the speeches are not heard as the speeches of sages or

wise men, but on the contrary, are occasions for Malinowski, Whyte and Sudnow to display, through their ethnographic vision, the society, the culture, membership, i.e., to display the very thing that generates the concrete speech. For ethnography, this displaying is beyond the capabilities of the native, the barber, the doctor, it is beyond members, since it is the very beyond (culture and membership) that ethnographic vision, and not members' vision, sees. In this sense, the ethnographic task is deeper, and more complex, than sheer reportage. It is not that ethnography merely reports to us what the native, the barber and the doctor said, it is not that they merely speak to us, instead ethnography tells us that in the concrete speech of the native, the barber and the doctor (in the appearances) is to be located culture and membership (the Real) and this, the offering of the Real, is the real work of ethnography.

But it is not in what members' concrete speech says, not in what the native, the barber, or the doctor say to us, that culture and membership is to be found. Instead, it is in what ethnography makes of concrete speech that culture and membership are to be found. It is this sense of making, this sense of work, that provides for ethnography to be formulated as the task of transforming members' concrete speech into culture and membership. It is in this sense that Malinowski, et al. (ethnography) treat members' concrete speech as an appearance of the Real.

That which belongs to ethnography, the task that ethnography assigns to itself, namely seeing Reality where others see merely appearances, allows for various concrete conceptions of ethnography. That is, ethnographers do not necessarily and simply agree with one another. Thus, Zimmerman and Pollner can write:

When ethnographers assemble their descriptions of settings, by reference to informants' formulations, the members' description and the ethnographer's description have an identical status in relation to the events reported on. The member's formulation, like that of the ethnographer is a possible reconstruction of the setting, that is, a version of the setting's reigning norms and resident attitudes, and it is often the case that the ethnographer must rely on the member's formulation as the definitive characterization of the setting. As in survey research, the fact that members are able to do formulations - to describe in recognizably orderly ways - is an uninvestigated resource.

Even if we ignore the strange catechistical relation that obtains between researcher and those he seeks to study, a plethora of unexamined, but nonetheless relied upon, procedures remain. The methods through which the production of recognizably reasonable talk is achieved, the methods through which responses are provided and appreciated as answers to the intended sense of questions, the methods through which understanding is displayed and detected as the occasion it is intended to be, the methods through which the occasion will later be demonstrated to have met the ideals of interrogation and description, are but a few tacit resources of social scientific investigation. (Zimmerman and Pollner 1970: 90-91).

So, for example, when Whyte studies Cornerville - does an ethnography - it is not the case that all ethnographers agree that the work has been completed. For ethnography, the completion of the work - the completion of the transformation of the appearances into the Real - depends upon the conception of how the Real is to be revealed. Whether or not the ethnographic task is completed on any occasion is not a question to which all ethnographers will respond in the same way since there are alternative conceptions of how the appearances are to reveal the Real. For Zimmerman and Pollner, for example, the Real is not revealed until the "uninvestigated resources" of the ethnographer are investigated. But what does this matter? Is it not the case that any ethnographic conception of how the Real is to be revealed - how appearances are to be transformed into the Real - derives its intelligibility from the fact that all (any) ethnography understands concrete speech as the surface manifestation of culture and membership and understands culture and membership, understands the Real, as a concrete speakable thing?

So the work of ethnography amounts to a search, a search for the Real that lies beneath the appearances. For ethnography, appearances take the form of concrete members' speech and what generates the concrete speech is the Real, is culture, is membership. It is in the work of ethnography, the search for and explication of, the Real, that members'

concrete speech comes to have a place. It is not the concrete speech of members that is analytically central for ethnography, instead the cogency of concrete members' speech is provided for by the analytic centrality of the ethnographic task of displaying the Real.

But this ethnography does not understand; Ethnography does not understand that the Real is not a thing, that the Real is not speakable, that its (ethnography's) task only points to the Real in the same way that any member's concrete speech points to the Real and thus ethnographic speech is as much an appearance as is the concrete speech of members that ethnography calls appearances. Ethnography does not understand that the Real is not a thing that can be captured in speech and thus does not understand that its own speech (culture and membership) only makes reference to the Real and is not itself the Real. So ethnography does not understand that it cannot speak its own grounds - speak its own origin - and thus does not understand that it can address its origin only by re-achieving it in its speaking. Concrete speech, speech that is culture and membership, is, for ethnography, the Real and what ethnography hears in the speeches of members (things), is yet one other thing, namely culture. So ethnography collects the many things under the one common thing of culture.

This is why Socrates urges Meno again and again to address virtue itself. Socrates understands that Meno's offering of a concrete definition of virtue, an other thing, an other common thing, is a concrete offering and so, Socrates urges Meno to re-achieve, in the Socratic work that is conversation, his true offering that is the life that grounds his concrete speech about virtue. In contrast to ethnography, which offers us the concrete demystification of the mystery of humanity formulated concretely, Socrates offers us an invitation to dialectically re-achieve our lives insofar as Socrates invites us to re-achieve in conversation the essential difference between speech and language and thus the essential difference between our concrete lives and the idea of life that makes them possible and to which they make reference. So Socrates' invitation to ethnography is to invite ethnography to theorize, to invite in its own speaking the re-formulation of its own speaking. Socrates invites us to think.

Socrates tells Theaetetus that he (Socrates) conceives of thinking:

As a discourse that the mind carries on with itself about any subject it is considering. You must take this explanation as coming from an ignoramus, but I have a notion that, when the mind is thinking it is simply talking to itself, asking questions and answering them, and saying yes or no. When it

reaches a decision - which may come slowly or in a sudden rush - when doubt is over and the two voices affirm the same thing, then we call that its 'judgment'. So I should describe thinking as discourse, and judgment as a statement pronounced, not aloud to someone else, but silently to oneself.  
(Theaetetus, 190).

If thinking is the conversation that the mind has with itself, then the conversation that is thinking is the dialectical work of re-achieving Self. Speech that is true to Self, then, is speech that attempts to exemplify this conversation. On the other hand, speech that attempts to be true to its subject matter, speech that attempts to be true to itself rather than true to Self, understands itself not as an exemplification of the conversation within the mind that is thinking, but as the unexamined firstness and finality that is a product whose origin is forgotten. So, for Socrates, theorizing is not the thoughtless preoccupation with the production of products that can be grasped firmly in hand, but is the thoughtful dialectical engagement with Self.

For Socrates, then, products (usage) is the place to start re-collecting the beginning and thus re-achieving the conversation in the mind that is thinking and this is the Socratic invitation to live reflectively or theoretically. So Socrates invites ethnography to re-formulate and re-achieve, through conversation, the ethnographic work that transforms members' concrete speech into culture and membership and thus

to reflectively re-collect the life that makes this ethnographic work possible. But if ethnography were to take up the Socratic invitation it would have to stop living ethnographically and start living thinkingly; it would have to choose to have something to say; it would have to speak decisively and take responsibility for what it does have to say; it would have to take the risk of speaking; it would have to achieve the life that generates its speech; it would have to live reflectively. But if this were so, if ethnography were to take up the Socratic invitation, we would alas no longer have ethnography.

#### IV.

Althusser tells us that:

For the Young Marx, to know the essence of things, the essence of the historical human world, of its economic, political, aesthetic and religious productions, was simply to read (lesen, herauslesen) in black and white the presence of the 'abstract' essence in the transparency of its 'concrete' existence. This immediate reading of essence in existence expresses the religious model of Hegel's Absolute Knowledge, that End of History in which the concept at last becomes fully visible, present among us in person, tangible in its sensory existence - in which this bread, this body, this face and this man are the Spirit itself. This sets us on the road to understanding that the yearning for a reading at sight, for Galileo's 'Great Book of the World' itself, is older



than all science, that it is still silently pondering the religious fantasies of epiphany and parousia, and the fascinating myth of the Scriptures in which the body of truth, dressed in its words, is the Book: the Bible. This makes us suspect that to treat nature or reality as a Book, in which, according to Galileo, is spoken the silent discourse of a language whose 'characters are triangles, circles and other geometrical figures', it was necessary to have a certain idea of reading which makes a written discourse the immediate transparency of the true and the real the discourse of a voice. (Althusser, 1970:16).

Does not ethnography treat "nature or reality as a Book"? Does not ethnography treat nature or reality as the "Great Book of the World" and does not ethnography conceive of itself as having the task, i.e., what belongs to ethnography, of reading the Great Book of the World? Is it not the case that, for ethnography, the characters of the Great Book of the World are social organization, i.e., kinship, religion, economics, etc., etc.? And, finally, is it not the case that, for ethnography, the Great Book of the World has already been written and it is the work of ethnography to read the Great Book of the World?

We now formulate ethnography as a task in the sense that the work of ethnography is reading, i.e., ethnography reads the Great Book of the World. And this is what ethnography claims; ethnography claims that it has the vision that is required to read the writing of the Great Book of the

World. So, for example, when Whyte's Cornerville barber speaks, or when Sudnow's doctor speaks, ethnography can now place that speaking, can find that speaking's place, insofar as that speaking is translated into the writing that appears in the Great Book of the World and thus the speaking of the barber and the doctor (members' speech) now finds its place in some mosaic, or in some large scheme, in the Great Book. What comes from reading the Great Book, what ethnography offers to us, is illumination, explanation and understanding. So it is by virtue of reading the Great Book that ethnography offers us illumination and understanding of our speech, ethnography offers us Renaissance. The concrete speech of the barber and the doctor, our concrete speech, would no longer be merely chat or trivia i.e., it would no longer be merely members' speech; instead it would be ethnography's way of making the machinery of the world visible.

On this view, it would be the ethnographer who would be the one who came to understand the machinery of the world, who came to understand the machinery of the world as culture, and who came to understand culture as the essential and the Real and thus the author of the Great Book of the World. Whereas we (members) could hear the speech of the barber and the doctor as boring, as trivial, as not important, i.e., whereas we could disattend that speech in some way, the ethnographer is able to see in the speech of the barber and the

doctor that, once more, culture was working, that the machinery was turning, and the ethnographer can now set himself the task of the technician who knows the working of the machinery and could thus tell us about how the machine (culture) works.

A product of this ethnographic task is a sort of satisfaction. This is to say, that we (members) experience an irreconcilable difference between and among our speeches and ethnography provides us with a way to reconcile these differences. As ethnography offers us the unfolding of the commonplace, it offers us unity, it offers us the unity of culture. Ethnography says that we (members) can feel at one with culture because when we speak, and when we hear others speak, we can, thanks to ethnography, understand that these speeches are generated by culture and understand that our speech is merely an appearance that hides the Real, that hides culture.

So when ethnography speaks, it does not hear its speech as idiosyncratic, it does not hear its speech as an exemplification of a life. Ethnography forgets that it is speaking and thus it conceives of itself as not responsible for what it has to say. And how could it be otherwise? For, ethnography understands itself, understands its task, its speech, as the reading of the Great Book of the World and understands the natural, the essential, culture and membership, as the author of that book. So when ethnography speaks, it

understands its speech as a reading, it understands its task as reading to us from the Great Book of the World. Thus, forgetting that it speaks, forgetting that it has written the Great Book of the World, ethnography conceives of its task as the task of reading. It offers us (members) the Great Book of the World since, as members, we do not possess ethnographic vision and thus cannot read the book for ourselves, and, indeed, we do not even know that there is a book since, unlike ethnography, we mistake appearances for the Real.

So ethnographic work amounts to being literate; it amounts to being able to read the Great Book of the World insofar as ethnographic vision is formulated as a vision that sees beyond appearances to the Real. Ethnographic vision penetrates members' concrete speech and uncovers the cause of that speech, namely culture and membership. For ethnography, members - members' talk and conduct - are merely the manifestation of the Great Book of the World, merely the manifestation of culture and it is ethnography that can understand these manifestations as manifestation and as manifestations of culture. Moreover, for ethnography, culture is not an invention, i.e., it is not a human creation, but is instead that part of nature that is manifested in concrete speech. As such, ethnography does not give anyone credit for what they say, ethnography does not find fault with any one speech, ethnography does not hold anyone

responsible for what he or she says, since it is culture that is naturally working itself out through us.

This is why the ethnographer would not enter into a conversation with Meno. Ethnography is not interested in what Meno has to say insofar as ethnography is not interested in whether or not what Meno has to say is good or bad, since Meno, formulated as culture, can only speak good. Meno can only speak good and naturally since, through Meno, what is speaking is nature - culture.

Ethnography does not understand why Socrates enters into conversation with Meno. Such Socratic conversation can only be understood by ethnography as a detailed and trivial way of attending to Meno's speech. Socrates attends to Meno's speech (attends to usage) as an exemplification and representation of a life that is recommended as good. Socrates' aim, then, is to address the Good at which speech aims. For ethnography, on the other hand, Meno's speech recommends nothing. Meno's speech is merely the concrete manifestation of the concrete reality of culture and membership. This is why Meno's speech is, for ethnography, good and the good which is Meno's speech is a concrete good insofar as Meno's speech is conceived of, and formulated, as evidence of, as a sign of, as a pointing to, in the most concrete sense of this word, the Real - the seeable, speakable reality of culture.

Seeing the working of the cultural apparatus, reading the Great Book of the World, is the task of ethnography. But this conception of task is the most concrete and degenerate conception. Ethnography forgets that it speaks, forgets that it writes the Great Book of the World, and understands the Great Book of the World as culture and hence, as essential and natural and thus understands nature to be the author of the Great Book of the World. The ethnographic understanding that the Great Book of the World is authored by nature - by God - provides for ethnography to conceive of culture as the beginning and so, ethnography conceives of culture as the Book of Genesis. So while we (members) superficially understand Sudnow's doctor's speech as a doctor telling a man that he is now a father, ethnography understands Sudnow's doctor's speech as social organization, as culture, as membership. This is what we meant when we said that ethnography was literate - ethnography is literate because it can read the Great Book of the World, whereas we (members) are illiterate because we cannot read that book, and indeed, do not even know that such a book exists. So in a deep sense, ethnographic work presupposes that all (any) society is illiterate and that it (ethnography) has evolved into literacy and thus offers us literacy as a way to rid us of ignorance. Ethnography understands ignorance in the sense that when we (members) speak we do not know what we say and

do not know the source of our speech. Unlike Socrates, ethnography does not invite us to engage in the conversation that is the work of addressing our beginning - our genesis - but instead, ethnography claims that it does that work for us insofar as it has already formulated and explicated our beginning and now presents it to us (members) in the concrete form of the Book of Genesis - culture and membership.

So the work of ethnography, what belongs to ethnography, is the search for, and the finding of , culture and membership in the concrete speech of members. Thus, what ethnography gives us, what ethnography offers us, is culture and membership. Ethnography - the literate one - offers us - the illiterate ones - a reading of what we cannot read for ourselves, it offers us culture as our genesis. Whereas others may offer us ignorance, sin, false consciousness, etc., ethnography offers us truth, Reality, culture and membership. In this sense, the ethnographic offering is an offering of reason insofar as ethnography offers culture and membership as our reason for being, as our mode of being. Thus, ethnography offers us our essence and formulates that essence as culture and membership and offers us an explication of culture and membership.. But in a forgetful way, ethnography does not inquire as to how this essence (membership) essences (memberships).

And, in this sense, when ethnography offers us (members) culture and membership, it offers us a version of nihilism,<sup>4</sup> i.e., culture and membership is a version of nihilism insofar as it does not address its own possibility and thus does not address the Good to which it points. It is in refusing to address the Good by merely pointing to culture and membership, that ethnography offers us nihilism. Ethnography speaks about culture and membership but does not inquire into the worthwhileness of this speech - into the worthwhileness of culture and membership. Ethnography is like Meno who merely speaks of thises and thats, merely speaks of examples of virtue rather than of virtue itself. Ethnography, too, speaks of thises and thats insofar as it merely speaks concretely about membership rather than speaking about the idea of membership, the idea of life, that grounds any concrete speech about membership.

So, for ethnography, concrete culture and membership are the rock-bottom, are the final arbiter, are the Real. For ethnography, it is this Realness that renders all else intelligible. And, if this were not enough, or perhaps it is enough, ethnography conceives of culture and membership as the completion of the task it has set itself of solving the mystery of humanity. Even though ethnography would admit that the details have not yet been worked out the task of understanding life has been completed by formulating life as



culture and membership. In a sense, ethnography is like Kierkegaard's man (1941:147) whose task it is to entertain himself for the entire day. But, Kierkegaard's man finishes his task by noon and in this sense is not finished the task at all. "So also", writes Kierkegaard, "when life constitutes the task. To be finished with life before life has finished with one, is precisely not to have finished the task."  
(1941:147)

Ethnography has set itself the task of inquiring into life and has invented culture and membership and so, has ended its inquiry. For ethnography, adequate inquiry amounts to being able to produce the complete and self-sufficient speech that is Reality. And, insofar as ethnography has discovered (invented) culture and membership, it has completed its task. But, ethnography does not understand that on each and every occasion of its speaking it re-produces its task insofar as it once more finds culture and membership in the speech of members. Ethnography does not understand that it continues to live ethnographically and thus at each moment of its life (of its speech) it makes reference to that idea of life that generates it and provides for its possibility. So ethnography has done with life before life has done with it. And it is this, to have done with life, that ethnography brings forth as its offering.

V.

In Book VII of The Republic (514-521b), Socrates creates the metaphor of the cave.

'I want you to go on to picture the enlightenment or ignorance of our human condition somewhat as follows. Imagine an underground chamber like a cave, with a long entrance open to the daylight and as wide as the cave. In this chamber are men who have been prisoners there since they were children, their legs and necks being so fastened that they can only look straight ahead of them and cannot turn their heads. Some way off, behind and higher up, a fire is burning, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them runs a road, in front of which a curtain-wall has been built, like the screen at puppet shows between the operators and their audience, above which they show their puppets.'

'I see.'

'Imagine further that there are men carrying all sorts of gear along behind the curtain-wall, projecting above it and including figures of men and animals made of wood and stone and all sorts of other materials, and that some of these men, as you would expect, are talking and some not.'

'An odd picture and an odd sort of prisoner.'

'They are drawn from life,' I replied.

'For, tell me, do you think our prisoners could see anything of themselves or their fellows except the shadows thrown by the fire on the wall of the cave opposite them?'

'How could they see anything else if they were prevented from moving their heads all their lives?'

'And would they see anything more of the objects carried along the road?'

'Of course not.'

'Then if they were able to talk to each other, would they not assume that the shadows they saw were the real things?'

'Inevitably.'

'And if the wall of their prison opposite them reflected sound, don't you think that they would suppose, whenever one of the passers-by on the road spoke, that the voice belonged to the shadow passing before them?'

'They would be bound to think so'.'

'And so in every way they would believe that the shadows of the objects we mentioned were the whole truth.'

'Yes, inevitably.'

'Then think what would naturally happen to them if they were released from their bonds and cured of their delusions. Suppose one of them were let loose, and suddenly compelled to stand up and turn his head and look and walk towards the fire; all these actions would be painful and he would be too dazzled to see properly the objects of which he used to see the shadows. What do you think he would say if he was told that what he used to see was so much empty nonsense and that he was now nearer reality and seeing more correctly, because he was turned towards objects that were more real, and if on top of that he were compelled to say what each of the passing objects was when it was pointed out to him? Don't you think he would be at a loss, and think that what he used to see was far truer than the objects now being pointed out to him?'

'Yes, far truer.'

'And if he were made to look directly at the light of the fire, it would hurt his eyes and he would turn back and retreat to the things which he could see properly, which he would think really clearer than the things being shown him.'

'Yes.'

'And if,' I went on, 'he were forcibly dragged up the steep and rugged ascent and not let go till he had been dragged out into the sunlight, the process would be a painful one, to which he would much object, and when he emerged into the light his eyes would be so dazzled by the glare of it that he wouldn't be able to see a single one of the things he was now told were real.'  
(The Republic 514-516).

Socrates uses the metaphor of the cave as an occasion to address and re-achieve the difference between the essential and the inessential. Socrates uses the metaphor of the cave as a way to create in speech this essential difference. This is not to say that Socrates conceives of creation in the sense that creation ought to aim at completion or finality. Speech is grounded in language and speech (the inessential) requires language (the essential). So when Socrates creates in speech the essential difference that is the difference between the essential and the inessential, his creation (his speech) is itself grounded in the essentiality of language. If anything essential is to be done with Socrates' speech at all, i.e., if the Socratic invitation is to be accepted, then what needs to be done is to reformulate Socrates' speech as an occasion for addressing what is essential.

'Now, my dear Glaucon,' I went on, 'this simile must be connected throughout with what preceded it. The realm revealed by sight corresponds to the prison, and the light of the fire in the prison to the power of the sun. And you won't go wrong if you connect the ascent into the upper world and the sight of the objects there with the upward progress of the mind into the intelligible region. That at any rate is my interpretation, which is what you are anxious to hear; the truth of the matter is, after all, known only to god.

But in my opinion, for what it is worth, the final thing to be perceived in the intelligible region, and perceived only with difficulty, is the form of the good; once seen, it is inferred to be responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything, producing in the visible region light and the source of light, and being in the intelligible region itself controlling source of truth and intelligence. And anyone who is going to act rationally either in public or private life must have sight of it.'  
(The Republic, 517a-517c)

What is essential, what is first, necessary and absolute, is spoken of metaphorically by Socrates as the Good. Since all speech is grounded in the essential, the creation of the essential in speech could only be conceived of as the understanding of what is essential, i.e., as a conversation that sustains and thus makes the essential difference between what is essential and inessential. This is the best kind of speech because it understands that it is not self-sufficient, it understands its own natural limitation of inadequacy, and yet, it understands its place as the conversation (inquiry) that speakingly creates and re-achieves the difference between what is inessential and essential, i.e., between speech and language.

So when Socrates creates in speech the difference between the essential and the inessential, he must speak metaphorically since to speak otherwise would be to have a version of speech as completeable and perfectible and thus as essential, first and natural. In other words, the metaphor

of the cave, the shadows, etc., are not the final word.

A notion of the final word is only possible when speech itself is conceived of as essential, sufficient, perfect and adequate. To aspire to the day when speech is essential is to aspire to the day when groundlessness rules the day.

Thus, when the Socratic task is understood as the creation of the essential in speech, we must understand creation as the conversation that exemplifies the "...discourse that the mind carries on with itself...". In this sense, creation is not conceived of as the offering of a concrete thing such as a description, a conclusion, a solution, an answer, etc. So when the attempt is made to create the essential in speech, this does not mean that the essential is offered up concretely for all to see. If this was so, if the essential could be concretized in speech, this would mean that what was essential was speech. This would mean that speech would refer to nothing, would point to nothing, would be sufficient unto itself and any sense of something other than speech would amount only to other speeches. This would lead to the ludicrous notion that knowledge of, for example, justice, could only be attained by examining concrete speeches about justice and that this could be done without prior knowledge of the idea of justice or the Good of justice. So the Socratic task of creating the essential in speech is a metaphor for the desire and need to address and re-achieve

the essential difference between speech and language. Creation conceived of as the attempt to bring this essentiality to speech places the responsibility for speaking on the speaker and thus any creative speech is a recreation of Self.

This is certainly in contrast with the ethnographic conception of creating the essential in speech. For ethnography, creating the essential in speech is a concrete task insofar as it amounts to a definitive description, conclusion, solution, answer, etc. Ethnography conceives of the essential as culture and membership and conceives of culture and membership as a thing that is speakable and so, conceives of the essential as speech. Ethnography understands culture and membership as essential and thus as ground and foundation. So culture and membership are not, for ethnography, concrete speeches that require grounding since they are the ground. Ethnography does not speak metaphorically. Culture and membership are not, for ethnography, ethnographic metaphors since, for ethnography, to speak is to offer the essential. Culture and membership are not, for ethnography, occasions to address and re-achieve the idea of life that makes such speeches possible. Ethnography is not interested in its own life since it conceives of its own life as having nothing to do with what is essential, namely culture and membership.

For ethnography, culture and membership is the concrete object that casts the light into the cave. Whereas we (members) see merely shadows, ethnography sees the object (culture and membership) that casts the shadows. The object of culture and membership is objective in the worst sense of that term. It is a concrete thing, concrete speech, and instead of understanding culture and membership as itself the shadow of some light, ethnography understands culture and membership as the object that casts the shadows.

'There was probably a certain amount of honour and glory to be won among the prisoners, and prizes for keen-sightedness for those best able to remember the order of sequence among the passing shadows and so be best able to divine their future appearances.'  
(The Republic, 516c-516d)

Among the prisoners in the cave, ethnography is surely to be found among those who are most keen-sighted. Ethnography's keen-sight does it well, and it knows the order of the passing shadows. Ethnography's sight is so keen that, on occasion, it can even predict the future order of these passing shadows. As a keen-sighted one, ethnography can offer the rest of the prisoners the ethnographic fact that they are looking at shadows and offer the ethnographic fact that these shadows are cast by the object culture and membership.



So ethnography understands its task as that of uncovering and making visible the light that casts the shadows, i.e., ethnography understands its task as uncovering and making visible the source (culture and membership) of concrete speech. Moreover, ethnography understands this task as an objective one insofar as the source that it uncovers is yet another object, an object in that as the grounds of concrete speech, this source can be spoken. This source of concrete speech, which is to say, culture and membership, is conceived of by ethnography as not requiring grounding insofar as culture and membership is conceived of as the ground, as essential and natural, and thus there is nothing other than culture and membership. Since culture and membership are conceived of by ethnography as the light that casts all of the shadows, ethnography finds it inconceivable that culture and membership are themselves shadows cast by some light. So ethnography's search for the light is over, its search ends with the finding of culture and membership.

An interesting consequence of such a notion is that ethnography must conceive of itself (of its speech) as the reading of the Great Book of the World. Ethnography's speech is not its own since it merely reads what is there. Ethnography merely reads what nature has written. The only care ethnography must take is to take care that it (ethnography) does not speak. Ethnography must take care that its speech is an innocent reading of the Great Book of the World and so, must take care so as not to violate this innocence.

Ethnography can desire innocence only when it forgets that it does speak, only when it forgets that it has written the book that it reads, and only when it forgets that it has chosen a life that makes such innocence intelligible.<sup>5</sup>

## VI.

Perhaps at the risk of being sacrilegious, we can follow the example of Socrates' myth of Er and construct the myth of ethnography. We have been addressing the grounds of ethnography and the creation of a myth will serve to animate this discussion.

## VII.

There was a time when people in the world lived in small groups and these groups were isolated from one another. Within each group, life was harmonious to the extent that each of the members of the group spoke the same language, ate the same food, procured their food in the same way, had the same religious beliefs, and so on. There were occasionally, of course, some disagreements among some of the group members. But these disagreements were minor in that they never reached proportions that would endanger the very life of the group. In short, everyday life continued unproblematically.

But there came a day when some of these individual groups happened upon some of the other groups. Although it was discovered that some groups lived similarly to others, it was also discovered that there were vast differences among the groups. First of all, some groups could not speak to others since they spoke different languages. Some of the groups had different religious beliefs from others. Some of the groups ate different foods from others, and so on. Simply put, it was discovered that some groups could not speak to other groups.

This discovery, the discovery that some groups were different from others, brought about severe problems. These differences were overwhelming and brought about not only confusion and bewilderment but also fear. Some of the groups could not understand why other groups lived the way they did and found these ways of living to be bizarre, outrageous and even bad. There were still others who found these differences to be curious and looked upon others as curiosities. Others understood the differences they saw in other groups as advantageous and sought to emulate them. And still others found the differences to be inferior and sought either to destroy them or to help these inferior groups live the right way, which is to say, their way. All in all, the groups found that in a crucial way, these differences were irreconcilable.

Whereas each of the groups thought they had the natural way to live, they now discovered other groups who also claimed naturalness. And thus, fear, confusion and bewilderment reigned.

But it also happened that living in one of these groups was someone whose name was Eth. Unlike the others in his group, Eth did not consider the differences between his group and other groups as something to be feared, or as something to be envied, or as something to be laughed at, but instead, Eth pondered the source of these differences. Eth saw that even though the groups were different, all the groups were made up of people, and even though they spoke different languages, all the groups did speak some language. In short, whereas all the others in the group saw only difference, Eth saw, albeit not clearly, some similarity and reflected upon this similarity.

The Mighty Creator of all of these groups saw that among all the confused and fearful people that Eth was not afraid and that he reflected upon the fear of others. To reward Eth for his prudence, the Mighty Creator lifted Eth into the heavens and bestowed upon him the vision that allowed him to see the source of these differences.

With his new vision, Eth saw that all the souls, as they were on their way to being born as mortals, were commanded to form a line in front of the Mighty Creator.

The Mighty Creator addressed the souls and told them that each and every one of them would receive all that was necessary for them to live as mortals. The souls were told by the Mighty Creator that each and every one of them would be given gifts that would enable them to live as mortals and that although these gifts took different forms, they were of the same value and one gift was no better, or no worse, than the next. Realizing that the Mighty Creator would hand all of them gifts of equal value, the souls were calmed and no one soul rushed to receive his gift first since all the gifts were the same. The souls formed the line in a quiet, ordered way and patiently awaited the Mighty Creator to hand out the gifts.

Now Eth saw that to the right of the Mighty Creator was a large container in which all the gifts were contained. He saw, too, that as the Mighty Creator reached into the container, he looked away so as not to see what gift he was selecting and thus the gifts were handed out randomly. And Eth saw that this was good. Since each gift was of the same value it was best to hand them out randomly.

Just before the Mighty Creator handed out the gifts, he addressed the souls once more. The Mighty Creator told the souls that he was Culture and that each of the gifts they were to receive were a form, a manifestation of, Culture. So

whereas some of the souls were handed magic, and others science, each was handed Culture in that they were handed its manifestation. Culture, the Mighty Creator, then told the souls that they were to take their gifts of Culture and when they were born, they would live in groups that would appear different from one another since their gifts of Culture came in different forms. He then told them that while all the groups would be different from one another, in smaller or larger degrees, they would all be unified in that they had all received the gift of Culture. The souls saw that this was good and, each in turn, received his gift and thanked Culture, the Mighty Creator, for the gift of unity.

As the souls received their gifts, they proceeded to the left where one of the Mighty Creator's assistants led them to a river and commanded them to drink. As the souls drank from the waters of the river, which was named the Forgetful River, they forgot all that the Mighty Creator told them and forgot that when they had received gifts such as magic or science, that they had received Culture. Thus, when they were born, having forgotten that they had received Culture, the souls thought that their gifts, which were actually the manifestations of Culture, were the real and natural things. The souls that received magic thought that magic was the natural and best way to live, whereas the

souls that received science thought that science was the natural and best way to live and on it went with the other gifts.

But before the Mighty Creator, Culture, returned Eth to his group on earth, he sat and spoke with Eth. Seeing that his people lived in fear and confusion on earth, the Mighty Creator commanded Eth to return to earth, and as payment for the reward of being given the vision of genesis, the Mighty Creator bestowed upon Eth the responsibility of speaking the truth to his people and thus delivering them out of ignorance by reminding them of what they had forgotten when they drank from the Forgetful River.

Culture instructed Eth to go back to earth and travel among the many and various groups. Eth was further instructed that his task, now that he had received divine vision, would be to see unity where all others saw difference. Eth was given the task of searching out the differences among the groups and seeing how each of these differences was a manifestation of Culture's gift of Himself.

But then Culture, the Mighty Creator, bestowed upon Eth the most divine task of all. Culture instructed Eth to speak only the truth, to speak only Culture. But Culture warned Eth that because this was the most divine task of all, it was also the most difficult task of all. Culture told Eth that because he, Eth, was a mere mortal, he continually faced

the danger of speaking from his own mouth rather than from the mouth of Culture. And this, the danger of speaking from his own mouth, Culture said, was the thing that Eth ought to fear the most. For, if Eth was to submit to the desires of his own mind, he would not speak the truth and would disappoint the Mighty Creator who bestowed upon Eth this most difficult task of all.

And finally, Culture gave Eth the task of crusader. Culture instructed Eth that, in his travels, he would speak the truth and would remind others of the truth that they had forgotten. Eth was instructed to tell all the groups that their gifts, whether they were magic or science or anything else, were neither better nor worse than the gifts received by any other group. Furthermore, Eth was instructed to tell the groups that their gifts were divine in that they were manifestations of the divine and that they should not be destroyed. Culture commanded Eth to tell the groups that they should honour not only their own gifts but the gifts of others. Thus, Eth was given the most difficult task of all, the task of speaking divinely and spreading the divine word. The Mighty Creator, Culture, raised Eth into the realm of the divine and bestowed upon Eth the task of delivering the people of earth out of forgetfulness by offering them the gift of remembrance. Eth's task became the task of offering the divine.



VIII.

What is being said in the Myth of Eth? The Myth is a formulation of ethnography that is provided for by conceiving of ethnography as an instance of theorizing. In other words, the Myth finds its possibility in our desire to formulate ethnography. So we can now go on to formulate the Myth. In other words, we can now go on to see what the Myth has to say vis-a-vis ethnography, i.e., how the Myth collects ethnography.

Ethnography formulates difference as a difference between one life and another. Ethnography formulates this difference as cogent insofar as it is impossible for one life to reason with another life on the basis of common-sense and everyday life. Thus, difference, for ethnography, receives its intelligibility and cogency from a concrete understanding of speech as inadequate. For ethnography, the inadequacy of speech is conceived of as a problem, and as such, as a problem that requires a solution. The problem of speech is posed by ethnography concretely as the problem of one life not being able to speak with another.

Culture and membership become, for ethnography, discoveries, i.e., they are the ethnographic discovery, which is to say the ethnographic creation, of a solution to the

problem of speech. Common-sense and everyday life become, for ethnography, reflections of, manifestations of or appearances of the Reality of culture. So when speech (concrete life) speaks, it speaks culture and membership. For ethnography, reason becomes personified in culture and membership and thus culture and membership become ethnography's solution to the problem of speech insofar as every life speaks culture and membership and lives, having culture and membership in common, can now speak with one another. From the ethnographic point of view, all lives do the same, i.e., they speak from their culture and membership and thus all lives can speak culture and membership to one another. So ethnography offers us a solution to the problem of speech by getting us beyond the impasse of not being able to speak with one another. What ethnography offers, then, is a reconciliation of the difference between one life and another. So in a concrete sense, what ethnography says is that whereas one culture may have science and another magic, it is by virtue of having science or magic that we (members) have culture and membership and it is by virtue of having this thing (culture and membership) in common that different cultures can speak with one another. But what ethnography does not say, is why what it (ethnography) has to say is worth saying, i.e., ethnography does not address the Good toward which its speech aims. And how could it, since ethnography says there is nothing Other to say, i.e., in

speaking culture and membership, ethnography has spoken the final word and so, how can ethnography have anything other to say?

Ethnography, then, proposes to say something (explain and account for) about how all men speak. That is, all men speak differently and ethnography formulates how all men speak (culturally) as a way of speaking that goes beyond the differences. So ethnography conceives of one life speaking differently from another but, nevertheless, each life speaks from culture so ethnography offers the many and various lives unity. And, for ethnography, unity is the speakable thing that is culture and membership. In this sense, culture and membership is ethnography's offering of a technical solution to the problem of speech as difference. So ethnography offers culture and membership as a way to reconcile men to one another. On this view, we (members) no longer have reason to feel angry, contemptuous, envious, fearful, etc., about one another since any man can see that just as he has culture and membership, so does an other. Ethnography becomes a crusade, it comes to the world to save it from the negative effects of difference by offering the source of the difference, the source that unifies. Ethnography crusades so that it can dispel that evaluation of difference.

So ethnography is the crusade that reminds.

Ethnography reminds us that whereas we may live differently from others, these differences are not to be evaluated as good or bad since in the difference is to be found unity. Ethnography seeks to remind us that in the difference is to be found sameness insofar as difference is difference only insofar as it is a manifestation of culture and membership. So ethnography reminds us to be humble; it reminds us that the difference between the way we live and the way others live are not to be evaluated since we (we and the others) have culture and membership. That one man has magic while the other has science is not to be evaluated since that is happenstance. In having magic or science both men have culture and membership and thus magic and science become merely contingent. So ethnography tells us that we are not responsible, we are not to be blamed, for the fact that we have magic or science, etc., one man is no better or worse than another, since what we have, our cultural things, are what we were handed. So members are not responsible for cultural things since cultural things are provided and are not a matter of choice.

Ethnography crusades because we (members) are not aware that we have culture and membership since we see only difference and not unity. So ethnography crusades as a way

to make us (members) aware of our essentiality (culture and membership) and crusades to remind us of that which we have forgotten. Ethnography seeks to de-tribalize the tribe. Ethnography seeks to wake us from our sleep of forgetfulness and seeks to remind us, i.e., to make us realize, that the difference between one life and another ought not to be evaluated since that difference is a mere appearance of a Real (culture and membership). By reminding us that all difference is trivial, by trivializing difference, ethnography offers the service of reconciling all men to difference.

So what ethnography seeks to do is to make us (members) realize culture and membership. That is, ethnography seeks to Real-ize culture and membership, i.e., to formulate culture and membership as the Real. For ethnography, there is no need to go beyond culture and membership. So what ethnography offers is cultural relativism, or better cultural Realativism. Ethnography need not go beyond culture and membership since ethnography understands itself as discovering the Real; ethnography is cultural Realativity.

And the offering that ethnography offers so freely is an offering that ethnography does not consider its own. Ethnography is free with its reminder but not free enough to turn its reminder upon itself. But this sort of turning would be inconceivable to ethnography. For, ethnography cannot

conceive of anything it has forgotten. For ethnography, there is nothing Other than culture and membership and so, ethnography cannot conceive of its own forgetfulness since there is nothing Other to forget. Since, for ethnography, culture and membership is natural, essential, first and thus perfect, and since ethnography conceives of culture and membership as a thing that can be spoken, ethnography conceives of its own task as speaking perfectly, i.e., as speaking culture and membership. So when ethnography speaks, it does not conceive of its own speech as requiring grounding, since its speech is essential and natural and thus is ground. So what ethnography speaks is not its own in that ethnography speaks culture and membership (perfection) and thus ethnography has no desire to ground what it conceives of as the ground. Ethnography can do all of this only when it forgets that it speaks, when it forgets that it decides, when it forgets that it recommends a life, when it forgets that it is ethical, and ethnography does all of this forgetting in the name of reminding.

## IX.

What, then, is our offering? What do we offer? We speak of ethnography as an offering, which is to say we speak

of speech as an offering, and so, we must speak of our speech as an offering. Perhaps the best way to begin this discussion is to explicate our formulation of speech as an offering.

In Chapter 4, we formulated Meno's definition(s) of virtue as an offering. Conceived concretely, what Meno spoke, i.e., his words, his sounds, would be understood as Meno's offering insofar as what would be examined would be the correctness, or the adequacy, or the appropriateness, or some such thing, of what Meno spoke. In other words, Meno's speech would have to be treated as all there is to hear, as all there is is what Meno speaks, as all there is is speech.

When speech is thus elevated to the realm of essentiality, and when offering is understood concretely, speech must be segregated from the speaker so that the worthwhileness of the offering can be evaluated. This is to say that a concrete conception of offering as all there is to hear is speech, makes reference to an engagement with the aboutness of speech. This view makes it necessary to hear speech as about some thing. This concrete conception of speech understands speech as worthwhile when speech can be segregated from the speaker. This is so because if speech cannot be segregated from the speaker then the thing which the speech is about, e.g., virtue, is understood as the idiosyncratic

creation of the speaker (bad speech) and not the creation of the thing that the speech is heard to be about (good speech). So, in this sense, the offering that a concrete treatment of speech generates is the offering of speech as a thing that is first and essential and thus the offering of segregation of speech from speaker.

This concrete conception of speech generates a notion of offering that is concrete because when speech is treated as all there is to hear, what is offered is definitude, finality, and perfection. The relation that concrete speech demands is one of evaluation. As an offering of a perfect thing, speech must be heard evaluatively and conversation becomes degenerately formulated as improvement and correction. Speech conceived of concretely, as the offering of a perfect thing, must first be evaluated where evaluation is conceived of as determining whether or not it is perfect (a glance at any social science research textbook will provide many formulations of this activity), after which conversation takes the form of humility to perfection or the form of improving or correcting the speech under the auspices of perfection as a motivation and aim.

So what is it that our speech offers? We offer a formulation of ethnography, and yet, we do not offer this formulation in the spirit of definitude, completion or finality. This is to say, that we do not offer our speech,



our formulation of ethnography, as a thing that is now to be evaluated. In other words, formulation is not intended concretely in the sense of a description. So whether our speech is good or not cannot be decided on the basis of whether or not it is a thing that corresponds to some other thing, namely ethnography. For, that would be to consider ethnography as a thing in the world rather than as a method for generating ethnography as a thing in the world and as a method for generating the idea of a world.

Our conception of speech does not make it possible to treat ethnography as a thing in the world about which other speech can be generated and where this aboutness is constituted as our offering. We conceive of speech as a concealment in the sense that speech conceals language. Thus, we do not listen to what speech speaks since that would be to conceive of speech as essential, rather we listen to what speech says, we listen to what speech covers over, we listen to language. Insofar as we listen to what speech says, insofar as we listen to language, our speech, our formulation of ethnography, is our attempt to formulate the language of ethnography. Language provides for the possibility of speech and is, at the same time, concealed by speech and as that which generates speech, language cannot be spoken. For, when we speak, when we offer our formulation of ethnography, we, too, conceal what we say, conceal language.

So even as speech reveals language, even as ethnography is formulated, that very formulation is not language insofar as it is not an offering of the thing language since language is not a thing.

We listen to what speech says, i.e., we listen to what ethnography says. And, our formulation of ethnography, our speech, is an offering of what we hear insofar as when we speak, we offer language. We speak, we formulate ethnography, as an occasion to display, and make reference to, our commitment. We are committed to listening to what speech says, to language, and our formulation of ethnography is our occasion to exemplify that commitment.

We do not conceive of ethnography, or, for that matter, we do not conceive of any speech, including our own, as the offering of words and sounds since that is a meagre offering that forgets what it truly offers. We formulated Heidegger's "Man speaks." as "Man lives.", and as such, what speech truly offers is a life that it recommends as virtuous and good. Speech, then, is a surface reflection of that life and speech re-achieves that life on each and every occasion. There are many different lives, but there is only one idea of life and it is to this idea that our speech points and makes reference. So what speech says is life and, as such, what speech offers is life.

So what our speech offers is life. Our speech invites formulation insofar as it offers life and insofar as it offers itself as an example of life. As exemplary, our speech can only be treated as an occasion to address and re-achieve a commitment to the essentiality of the one idea of life. So we use ethnography as an occasion to display, and make reference to, our commitment, i.e., as an occasion to re-achieve Self and we offer our speech for occasioning as a way to re-achieve and collect Self.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Is this not Pitkin's (1972) formulation of Socrates' speech on justice? (see footnote 4, Chapter 3)
- 2 This is to say that members conceive of some of the concrete differences between cultures, i.e., some other way of life, as unnatural. Ethnography, then, serves to remind us that whereas we may conceive of some way of living as unnatural, that way of living is, nevertheless, natural because it is culture. So ethnography reminds us of our naturalness and thus chides us for our formulation of any particular life as bad.

Mullin (1979:47) in his formulation of phenomenology, says that "To know one lives in a finite province is to know it is impossible to experience what is strange; and this is good because familiarity insures identity...For the mundane world is that to which and within which no man is strange. Thus to orient to that world is to overcome the possibility of meeting strangers, since everyone can be seen to belong to it." So by formulating the concrete difference between one life and another as essential, i.e., by formulating culture as essential, ethnography generates familiarity between one life and another. Ethnography understands strangeness as threatening - as threatening to the conception of culture as essential - and, therefore, understands strangeness as potentially destructive to the true understanding of man's identity as culture. For ethnography, strangeness formulated concretely as the difference between one culture and another, is lack of understanding. To see a culture as strange, then, is not to see culture at all and is thus not to see the collectibility, togetherness, of men identifiable as culture. So ethnography reminds us of our togetherness, of our culture, and says that there is no possibility of strangeness and so, says there is no possibility of anything else other than culture insofar as, for ethnography, culture is first, absolute and natural.

- 3       Members conceive of the concrete difference between lives as natural in that members conceive of their concrete life as natural. Ethnography conceives of the difference between concrete lives as natural because concrete lives are lives formulated as culture. In this sense, ethnography and membership are the same and where they differ is that ethnography will remind membership that one concrete life is as natural as another.
- 4       This is to say that ethnography offers us speechlessness by reminding us that it is not we who speak, but instead, it is culture who speaks.
- 5       In other words, ethnography can conceive of itself as an innocent reading only when it forgets its guilt.

## CHAPTER 6. ETHICS

### I.

Every art or applied science and every systematic investigation, and similarly every action and choice, seem to aim at some good; the good, therefore, has been well defined as that at which all things aim. But it is clear that there is a difference in the ends at which they aim: in some cases the activity is the end, in others the end is some product beyond the activity. In cases where the end lies beyond the action the product is naturally superior to the activity.  
(Aristotle, 1094a)

This is what Aristotle has to tell us; that the good is "...that at which all things aim.", and "Since there are many activities, arts, and sciences, the number of ends is correspondingly large...". (ibid.) So what Aristotle wants to tell us is that all things (speeches) find their auspices in the good toward which they aim. And surely this is something important for Aristotle to tell us but the importance of this remark diminishes when, with Blum (1978:1), we see that Aristotle proceeds "...to concretize the very understanding from which the remark issues...".

How can we begin to think of Aristotle's remark that the good is "that at which all things aim" and Blum's remark that Aristotle proceeds "to concretize the very understanding

from which the remark issues"? How is it that Aristotle can say something wonderful and then proceed to remove that wonder? How is it that Aristotle does not wonder about the very wonder of what he says?

Socrates says that the good is "...responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything...". (The Republic, 517c) So the good for Socrates, is that at which what is right and valuable in a thing aims. This is to say that a thing is right and valuable insofar as it aims at the good that endows it with rightness and value. What is truly right and valuable, then, is to be addressed when things (speeches) are understood as usage that cover over what is truly right and valuable. The remark that all things aim at the good issues from the Socratic understanding that all things (all speeches) are reflections of the grounds that make them possible.

Thus, the speech that is right and valuable is the speech that recognizes and re-collects the source of its rightness and value, namely the Good. In this sense, to see the right and value in a speech is to re-collect the grounds of the speech, i.e., is to re-collect the standard of good speech at which any speech aims. And this is the Socratic reminder; Socrates reminds us that our speech makes reference to the Good and that right and valuable speech is speech that re-collects that which is responsible for its rightness and value by addressing the right and value, i.e., possibility, of any speech.

And, Aristotle takes up this Socratic reminder when he says that the good is "that at which all things aim." Aristotle surely speaks in the Socratic spirit when he says this and surely speaks in the Socratic spirit when he recommends, as a philosophical task, the recovery of the good at which all things aim. Aristotle recognizes that what is right and valuable in a speech is to be recovered in the good toward which it aims.

Aristotle then goes on to say:

Let us return again to our investigation into the nature of the good which we are seeking. It is evidently something different in different actions and in each art: it is one thing in medicine, another in strategy, and another again in each of the other arts. What, then, is the good of each? Is it not that for the sake of which everything else is done? That means it is health in the case of medicine, victory in the case of strategy, a house in the case of building, a different thing in the case of different arts, and in all actions and choices it is the end. For it is for the sake of the end that all else is done. Thus, if there is some one end for all that we do, this would be the good attainable by action; if there are several ends, they will be the goods attainable by action.  
(Aristotle, 1097a)

Now we can see, with Blum, how Aristotle proceeds to concretize the very understanding from which his remark, the good is "that at which all things aim", issues. Aristotle



formulates the good at which all things (speech) aim as itself a thing; the good is some thing different in different actions and the thing that is the good of any action is observable. So Aristotle proceeds to formulate the good as predication and as observable and hence available for taxonomic consideration.

Aristotle then formulates his notion of aim as end. So the good is now understood by Aristotle as an end toward which all things aim insofar as all things aspire to reach the end that is good. Formulated concretely, the good now becomes an attainable (speakable) thing. Since there are many actions, it follows that there are many goods and Aristotle can begin to collect the multiplicity of goods, i.e., the multiplicity of ends, under the one end that is common to all the particular ends. For Aristotle, the one common end, i.e., the one common thing that collects particularity is Happiness.<sup>1</sup> So Aristotle concretizes the notion of the good by formulating it as a thing that is attainable (speakable) and, for Aristotle, the right and valuable speech is a Happy speech.

In this sense, Aristotle has wrested speech from its bonds insofar as Happy speech is Aristotle's way to formulate speech as self-sufficient. The good no longer possesses speech, speech now possesses the good. So for Aristotle the good is a concrete end at which speech aims where end is

conceived of concretely as the point of self-sufficiency. The good at which Aristotelian speech aims is to possess (speak) that very good and, in this sense, Aristotelian speech aims at finality and self-sufficiency that is to be located in the formulation of the good as an attainable (speakable) end.

Thus, when Aristotle speaks about recovering the good of speech, he speaks about speech as a course of action that aims at attaining that which rightly belongs to it, namely the good. The good, from which Aristotle's speech issues, is concretized by Aristotle as a thing and, as a thing, is spoken of by Aristotle as a thing that speech ought to possess. For Aristotle, the notion of aim is nothing more than sheer philosophical progression to some end point of speaking perfectly or, as Aristotle would have it, speaking Happily.

The Socratic remark that speech aims at some good conceives of aim as that which speech points at or to which it makes reference. Socrates says that it is the good that is responsible for what is right and valuable in anything and insofar as we speak, our speech aims at, points to, or makes reference to that which is responsible for all things. Responsible speech, then, is speech that aims at making reference to the Good by formulating speech as an occasion to address that which is truly right and valuable. Responsible

speech is speech that speaks in tune with what is truly right and valuable by re-collecting the right and valuable in any speech. Responsible speech is speech that remembers its grounds and remembers its possibility by re-achieving the Ethic, i.e., the very understanding from which it issues.

Aristotle can proceed to concretize the very understanding from which his speech issues by forgetting the Ethic under whose auspices he speaks. So Aristotle's Ethics is Aristotle's way to divest speech of its true rightness and value. Ethics becomes the Aristotelian method for speech not to concern itself with rightness and value since it can now possess rightness and value and control value-judgements. For Aristotle, ethics becomes subject-matter, topic, a concrete thing, and Aristotle can speak about ethics only when he forgets the Ethic that grounds his very speaking about. Aristotelian ethics thus becomes a way to formulate the forgetfulness of speech by endowing the notion of ethics with predication. Ethics becomes a concrete concern only insofar as speech forgets the Ethic that makes it possible.

## II.

Ethnography formulates ethics as a concern and as a concern that arises from its work where work is conceived of as the concrete production of ethnographic research and reports.

Ethnography is concerned, and so it writes about its concern and formulates its concern as an ethical one, for example, Rynkiewicz and Spradley, 1976; Weaver, 1973: 1-61; Filstead, 1970:235-280. What is ethnography's concern? What sort of a concern does ethnography formulate for itself as an ethical concern? How is it possible that ethics can be a concern for ethnography? What version of ethics does ethnography's formulation of itself provide?

One way that ethnography expresses its concern and interest in ethics is to structurally segregate ethics from the rest of the ethnographic report, for example, Whyte, 1955: 279-358; Humphreys, 1970:167-232; Davis, 1970:271-274; Lofland, 1970:275-277. In this sense, ethics becomes, for ethnography, an appendage to its work. In other words, ethnography finds ethics to be relevant (as a problem, as a constraint, as a restriction, etc.) only after it has formulated its work concretely as gathering data, producing descriptions, etc. So ethnography formulates ethics as contingent or convention. Ethnography formulates ethics concretely insofar as it conceives of ethics as contingent and convention and formulates ethics technically insofar as it conceives of ethics as a trouble, or a problem, requiring solution.

But ethnography forgets the grounds of its speech i.e., it forgets its deep decision to see and look ethnographically. Ethnography does not conceive of its speech (including its speech on ethics) as a surface reflection that makes reference to that which provides for its possibility, and so ethnography does not understand its speech about ethics as yet one more concrete instance of the Good toward which its speech points and to which it owes its possibility. Ethnography forgets that it decides to create a world in which ethnography is a possibility and thus forgets that the deep decision to speak ethnographically is already ethical. Ethnography's forgetting of the Ethic that makes it possible provides for ethnography's concrete understanding of ethics as a problem, or trouble, that arises from its concrete formulation of itself.

Ethnography does not formulate its speech as making reference to that which makes it possible and thus how else could ethnography formulate ethics except as a concrete thing that presents troubles, problems and constraints? Ethnography formulates ethics concretely and forgets that ethics (speech) is one more concrete instance of ethnography's beginning, i.e., is one more concrete instance of ethnography's deep decision to conceive of life in a particular way, namely as culture and social structure. And it is this beginning that

is truly Ethical and, in this sense, the possibility of ethnography is already ethical. So ethnography's treatment of ethics as technical and concrete is only superficial and thus relies upon, and makes reference to, the firstness of Ethics - the decision to look and see ethnographically in the first place.

Thus, ethnography forgets that it is ethical in that it makes an ethical decision to be ethnography. Ethnography then treats ethics as though it could be segregated from its work (formulated concretely) and thus ethics degenerates to an object of concrete ethnographic work. Ethnography treats ethics as though it arises from a concrete formulation of ethnographic work, i.e., ethnography does not understand itself as ethical insofar as it formulates membership concretely as an object of study, insofar as it gathers data, insofar as it produces reports, etc. So ethnography formulates concrete ethics (concrete speech) as first and forgets that such a formulation is already ethical insofar as it represents the deep decision to conceive of a life in which ethnography is possible.

In this sense, ethics may be formulated as an eternal feature of any concrete formulation of ethnographic work and it is this eternality that ethnography forgets. What ethnography forgets is that its concrete formulation of ethics (its speech) makes reference to ethnography's notion

of the good life, namely culture and social structure. Because ethnography understands the good as convention, it formulates ethics concretely as convention. Thus, the concrete problems and troubles that ethnography understands as ethical would disappear if cultures decided that they did not mind being studied, or that they did not mind being oppressed, etc., etc.

Conceived of as convention, ethnography can only understand ethics as an imposition. Convention, as the ethnographic good, has the right to impose itself since, after all, convention is, for ethnography, first, natural and absolute. Ethics is thus ethnography's way to respect the first and natural and is ethnography's way to come to terms with the firstness and naturalness of convention. In this sense, ethnography can only hope;<sup>2</sup> it can only hope that it can come to terms with the troubles and problems that it formulates as ethics, or it can only hope that the particularity of convention will change and thus rid the world of the troublesome and problematic thing that is ethics.

### III.

First, there was the question of just who my informants were. Bars are public places, frequented by large numbers of people, many of whom are transient. Although my role as waitress allowed me to interact with and to observe everyone in the bar, it was obvious that it would not only be impossible, but incongruous in terms of bar culture and my role in it, to attempt to inform every individual who

came into Brady's of my special interest in them and their activities. This same problem faces the anthropologist who does fieldwork in a more traditional setting. Does she attempt to offer an explanation to everyone in the village and to gain everyone's permission? Or just her primary informants? In my case, did this mean I should tell all the customers? Just the employees? Or, because I was studying the perspectives of cocktail waitresses, need I gain only their permission? Or, furthermore, should I keep this information entirely to myself? (Mann, 1976:99)

All research is secret in some ways and to some degree - we never tell the subjects "everything." We can escape secrecy more or less completely only by making the subjects participants in the research effort, and this process, if carried far enough, means that there would be no more "subjects". So long as there exists a separation of role between the researchers and those researched upon, the gathering of information will inevitably have some hidden aspects even if one is an openly declared observer. (Roth, 1970:278)

How is it that Mann and Roth can say what they say? What provides for the intelligibility of their speech? They both express some sort of a concern; Mann is concerned with the issue of how all of ethnography's informants are to be informed about the research (informed consent) and Roth is concerned with the issue of how an ethnographer can inform



all of his "subjects" about the research project. Both Mann and Roth display a sense of hopelessness and submission. Their speech depicts the Garfinkelian world of "for-all-practical-purposes".<sup>3</sup> In this sense, what exists for Mann and Roth is the human condition of essential incompleteness and this is formulated concretely as the essentially incomplete solution to ethics conceived concretely as a trouble and a problem. The speech of Mann and Roth points to an understanding of the world that conceives of ethics as a thing in the world. For Mann and Roth, ethics amounts to a course of action where action is understood as essentially incomplete and therefore their sense of ethics is ethics for-all-practical-purposes and not ethics for-all-ethical-purposes.

Mann secures a job as a cocktail waitress in Brady's bar for the purpose of conducting ethnographic research. In this sense, she is not seeking membership in the way Schutz's stranger orients his activities to the goal of unreflexive thinking-as-usual. Instead, Mann orients to her activities as a cocktail waitress, and orients to the activities of the other cocktail waitresses, as activities that are amenable to ethnographic research. So, for Mann, cocktail waitress is oriented to first as a methodic activity, and second, an activity worthy of ethnographic attention.

Although Mann is not seeking membership in the sense of becoming a cocktail waitress qua cocktail waitress, there is one sense in which Mann seeks membership. That is, working as a cocktail waitress, for Mann, is formulated as the ethnographic way to attain presence to membership so that it (membership) will reveal itself. And this desire (to have membership reveal itself) generates the ethnographic problem of simultaneous presence and absence. It is this sense of work that generates the sense of such ethnographic notions as disinterestedness, detachment, objectivity, etc.

Mann's notion of ethics as an essentially incomplete accomplishment is pointed to in her (ethnography's) desire to be ethical. Mann finds, however, that being ethical is not an easy matter and, indeed, is a perplexing one. This perplexity manifests itself in the form of decision. Ethnographic ethics tells Mann that at least one version of ethical ethnography, and hence one way of being ethical, is to communicate her research interests to those she studies. Presumably, this communication of research interests will interactionally engage those, to whom these interests are communicated, in decision making. Having had the research interests communicated to them, those who are being studied must now decide whether or not they will consent to being studied. Put differently, Mann's problem of deciding who to

communicate her research interests to is a problem of (1) deciding who she is studying and (2) obtaining informed consent, i.e., formulating a version of free conscience, or innocence, as a version of good research.

The practical problem that Mann faces, the problem that points to the notion of essential incompleteness, is the practical problem of how to delimit membership for the practical purposes of producing an ethnography. Mann formulates this problem as a practical, i.e., technical, problem insofar as Mann aims at studying the activities of cocktail waitresses and insofar as cocktail waitresses interact and orient to everyone in the bar, Mann is studying everyone in the bar. This includes those members of the bar that Mann calls "transient", for, when transients are in the bar when Mann is in the bar (ethnographically observing) then Mann is orienting to these transients ethnographically and, as such, Mann faces the practical problem of whether or not to communicate<sup>4</sup> her research interests to these transients as well. And, of course, this sort of reasoning could be extended to include many others. But, this is not practical. So for ethnography ethics is a practical matter.

And are not the same notions of essential incompleteness operative when Roth says "We never tell the subjects everything", or, "We can escape secrecy more or less completely..."? The sort of decision-making that Roth is referring to, then, is

not only the decision of who to communicate research interests to, but also the decision of what should be communicated. And so for ethnography, decision is formulated concretely insofar as decision is conceived of as a practical concern of what should be said to who vis-a-vis research interests. But this concrete notion of decision makes reference to, and finds its intelligibility, in the deep decision to speak ethnographically in the first place. Formulated concretely, decision generates ethnographic arguments against covert research where the implicit claim is that ethnographers should tell those they study everything. But, Roth is suggesting that this telling of everything is an essentially incomplete accomplishment. What Roth is saying, then, is that although one way of being an ethical ethnographer is to tell those studied everything, keeping nothing secret, the telling can never be completely accomplished. That is, Roth is suggesting that for the practical purposes of producing an ethnography, some things will be revealed (concretely spoken) to those studied while other things will not (will be kept secret). Again, as was exemplified in Mann's speech, Roth's speech suggests, that for ethnography, ethics is a practical matter.

In saying that ethics is a practical matter, a problem, ethnography is saying that ethics is a constraint. Ethnography forgets that its deep decision to speak

ethnographically is a truly Ethical decision and so, it formulates ethics not as a concrete manifestation of its Ethic, i.e., another instance of ethnographic speech, but as a constraint to ethnographic speech. Ethics becomes, for ethnography, a constraint, a problem, that requires repair and resolution so that ethnography can continue to speak ethnographically. So ethnography wants to find a solution to ethics, formulated as a problem, so that it can continue speaking. In a sense, then, ethics is a thorn in the side of ethnography that requires removal so that ethnography can be free to speak. And this is the ethnographic understanding of freedom; that good speech is possible only when Self is segregated from Self.

#### IV.

This sense of urgency was uppermost in my mind as I surveyed the villagers who waited for me to treat them that morning in 1962. I had come to India for one purpose: to conduct a study of acculturation among the Bhils of southern Rajasthan. "I'm not here to become a doctor or start a medical practice," I had said to myself again and again during the first months of research. I chose to work in Ratakote, a Bhil village in the Aravalli Hills, because a road had recently opened it up to outside contact, not because its people were sickly or needed medical attention.

But now I faced the dilemma more clearly than ever before. One man waited to be interviewed, a strategically important informant. Twenty-five others waited to be treated, people plagued by illness and disease. In the back of my mind a larger question kept surfacing: "What was I going to be for the next year, be an anthropologist or a paramedic?"...

Anthropological fieldwork is unique in at least one respect. It creates a close social relationship between anthropologist and informant. I think that for many of us this intimacy and involvement with people was an important drawing card into anthropology. I had not come to India to define people like so many laboratory specimens or subjects for observation. Furthermore, the relationships that had developed even during these early months had facilitated my research. They involved obligations, responsibilities, mutual respect, and a willingness to assist. And I gladly accepted the fact that it was not a one-way street. But now something was happening in the way people defined my role in the village. I had unwittingly acquired an obligation to treat illness in this community. I had become a local healer without knowing it!  
(McCurdy, 1976:7-8)

What McCurdy does is pose a problem, a problem that McCurdy treats concretely in that he does not address that which generates the problem. McCurdy went to India under the auspices of some purpose, namely "...to conduct a study of acculturation...".<sup>5</sup> But, since he possessed some medical skills and since some of the villagers required medical

attention, McCurdy found himself in a position to treat some of the medical problems the villagers had. Now, on the surface, it becomes difficult to conceive of this situation as a problem. One way to conceive of this situation is that McCurdy will be spending the next year in a village in India. He discovers that some of the villagers are in need of some medical attention and that, by virtue of the fact that he possesses some medical skills, he can accommodate the villagers. In other words, there are some persons who are sick and McCurdy can help. Presumably, the only problem that most would see in this situation is the villagers requiring medical attention. Not to provide such attention, especially when one has the skills, would typically be understood in a negative sense, a sense that is captured in such current speech as "He does not want to get involved".

This situation could be understood in some humanistic sense in that it could get conceived of as another indication of rampant inhumanity where one does not care about his fellow man. That is, it is some condition of inhumanity that would motivate one to neglect the sick, when, in fact, he could help. And, in fact, Rynkiewicz and Spradley (1976:1) suggest that within this frame of understanding "Few people would say 'No!' " when asked to help. Even though the situation McCurdy describes could be understood as un-

problematic, McCurdy nevertheless conceives of the situation as a problem. "What was I going to be for the next year, be an anthropologist or a paramedic?"

Posed thus, McCurdy's question formulates the problem. The problem is not that McCurdy does not want to help the villagers by providing medical attention, and as such that McCurdy is a terrible person. Rather, McCurdy's problem is deciding "what to be", namely whether to be an anthropologist or a paramedic. This decision, however, is not merely deciding to be either an anthropologist or a paramedic, but involves much more. What is involved in such a decision is a conception of one's, as McCurdy puts it, purpose. The problem is a problem of McCurdy's relationships with, and among, the villagers, but not of relationships as it is typically and concretely formulated by such glosses as interpersonal relationships, instead, it is the problem of re-achieving one's relation to, and in, the world vis-a-vis one's purpose in the form of history and tradition. For the anthropologist, then, the problem, as expressed in the concrete case of McCurdy's problem is the problem of membership. The anthropologist re-achieves his purpose, his history, his tradition, which is to say his place in the world, by formulating the problems of members (sick villagers) as an occasion to decide and re-achieve, in some concrete way, a commitment to ethnography. And, a commitment to ethnography



is formulated by ethnography as disinterestedness, detachment, objectivity, etc., etc. The paramedic, the one who heals, the one who helps, becomes understood as one who is interested, and as such, as one who must account for his interest.

McCurdy poses the problem of having to give up ethnography in order to give medical help. And this problem is posed as an ethical issue. But, how is this an ethical issue? How is deciding whether or not to give medical help formulable as an ethical issue? When does McCurdy need to decide who will receive his medical help? For example, does this decision face McCurdy when he is back home with friends and family? Does helping a friend or family member in need of medical attention become, for McCurdy, an ethical issue?

These questions allow us to see that it is against the background of that at which ethnography aims that the formulation of helping others is generated and made intelligible as an ethical issue. Ethnography formulates the good life as culture and membership and ethnographic speech aims at preserving the good life. In other words, ethnography does not want, like Socrates, to be a membership disturber. Ethnography wants to speak membership and to give medical attention is to speak otherwise. McCurdy must then account for his speech - his speech which is not membership - by formulating it as an ethical issue.

McCurdy says that he "...unwittingly acquired an obligation to treat illness in this community." and as such became "...a local healer without knowing it!". Now, this obligation presented McCurdy with problems in that treating people medically took time and energy away from his obligation as an anthropologist. This problem (formulated as an ethical issue) was something to be resolved and overcome if McCurdy was to carry out his research. Clearly, one solution that was available for McCurdy was to simply not provide any medical attention. But, not only would this solution potentially endanger McCurdy's ethnographic task of collecting data in that McCurdy would find his informants not informing, but also this solution would not resolve McCurdy's dilemma of having something, medical skills, that others, by virtue of not having them, needed. Nevertheless, time spent at treating the villagers medically was time wasted at fulfilling the anthropological purpose.

McCurdy then formulates his interest in, and desire to, help people as a practical matter, which is to say, as a matter of ethnographic ethics. And as a practical problem, ethics cannot be tolerated ethnographically and thus requires resolution. Like any good ethnographer, McCurdy looks for, and finds, the resolution.

But I came to find time spent treating people was not completely wasted in the context of fieldwork. Curing could generate field data as well. Through medical activity I learned folk classifications of disease and treatment. (McCurdy, 1976:16)

McCurdy's problem, then, was resolved in perhaps the best ethnographic way. What McCurdy came to collect were data and what the problem generated were data. What McCurdy came to observe was membership and what the problem disclosed was membership. What McCurdy required was a resolution to his problem and what the problem generated was this resolution. So the problem was not McCurdy's personal problem but was anthropology's problem. And as any good science will do, anthropology provided, through such notions as taxonomy and data, the resolution. McCurdy gave up ethnography in order to give the villagers medical help, i.e., McCurdy gave up ethnography in order to do the right thing, in order to be a good guy. But there is a lesson to be learned, there is a moral to this story, namely that goodness will be rewarded. McCurdy gives up ethnography in order to give medical help and his virtue is rewarded by ethnography coming back to him. So McCurdy's decision was not a decision between ethnography and medical help, i.e., McCurdy's decision was not choosing between the two. McCurdy's decision was more an issue of how to accommodate the fact

that villagers needed medical help and the fact that he could give this help into his ethnography. McCurdy's decision degenerates into a technical decision, into deciding how many hours to spend at giving medical attention and how many hours to spend at ethnography. So in this sense, McCurdy gave up nothing; it was McCurdy's commitment to speak ethnographically that generated his problem, and generated it as an ethical problem, in the first place, and it was McCurdy's commitment to speak ethnographically that resolved this problem. In other words, McCurdy formulated his problem technically and practically as a problem in ethics which was, at the same time, the generation of a solution.

V.

So ethnography exemplifies a version of theorizing that provides for ethics as a practical matter where ethics amounts to an occasion for theorizing as the formulation of a practical problem that sends theorizing on the search for a resolution. Ethnography, then, exemplifies a degenerate form of theorizing insofar as theorizing amounts to a concern with the technical and with programmatic and insofar as this theorizing does not provide for its own possibility and, in this sense, is not theorizing at all.

It is this formulation of ethics that is pervasive throughout the ethnographic literature. For example, in his discussion of ethics Barnes (1970:235-251), a discussion that is appropriately - appropriate for ethnography's understanding of ethics - entitled "Some Ethical Problems in Modern Fieldwork", states that:

As professional sociologists and anthropologists we have an abiding interest in seeing that we are regarded as responsible professionals by all those we work with, and the interests of the profession outlast those of the specific investigation or investigator. A professional code of ethics would not make any easier the solution of the many problems discussed here, but it might at least remind ethnographers that these problems do have to be solved and cannot be ignored. The "wide uncontaminated open stretch of nature," postulated by Malinowski, no longer separates our informants from the wide world or from us, and we have to allow for this. (Barnes, 1970:249)

Another example is Erikson's (1970:252-260) discussion on ethics where he argues against the ethnographic technique of what he calls "disguised observation". Not only does Erikson argue that "disguised observation" is an "unethical practice", but also that disguised observation introduces an effect upon the setting studied that cannot be determined. This methodological argument, of course, trades for its sensibility upon the ethnographic notion that if ethnography can put itself into the proper observational position,

membership will reveal itself. Placing oneself in the proper observational position amounts to ethnographically removing the extraneous - in Erikson's case the effects of the disguised observer, which is to say the observer - so that membership can be observed and reveal itself (purely?) as what it is. In introducing his discussion on ethics Erikson states that:

In taking the position that this kind of masquerading is unethical, I am naturally going to say many things that are only matters of personal opinion; and thus the following remarks are apt to have a more editorial flavor than is usual for papers read at professional meetings. But a good deal more is at stake here than the sensitivities of any particular person, and my excuse for dealing with an issue that seems to have so many subjective overtones is that the use of disguises in social research affects the professional climate in which all of us work and raises a number of methodological questions that should be discussed more widely. (Erikson, 1970:252-253)

Erikson suggests that "...we will have to seek further for a relevant ethic..." and proposes "...at least as a beginning ...." that:

...first, that it is unethical for a sociologist to deliberately misrepresent his identity for the purpose of entering a private domain to which he is not otherwise eligible; and second, that it is unethical for a sociologist to deliberately misrepresent the character of the research in which he is engaged. (1970:259)

Jorgensen formulates the anthropological concern with ethics in the following way:

There is a need for discussion of ethical problems in anthropological research and for the drafting of a voluntary code of professional ethical conduct to articulate the values anthropologists should share. Furthermore, though a voluntary code would be an excellent beginning, I do not believe it will be sufficient; consequently, I think that ethics committees should be established by the various local and national anthropological associations. Agreement upon, and enforcement of, ethical standards for the profession would permit ethical scholars to conduct research without causing suspicion or fear among their hosts and help a researcher decide whether he should tackle research projects in which, for instance, free and voluntary consent cannot be accommodated with the integrity of the research. (Jorgensen, 1973:19)

All three of these authors, in their various ways, formulate ethics as a problem for the social sciences (ethnography). And, since the notion of problem formulated concretely is not intelligible without the notion of solution, each of the authors proposes that a solution should be sought and each of the authors goes on to propose that a code of ethics be adopted by the social sciences as a solution to the problem of ethics. These authors are quick to point out, however, that codes of ethics are not final solutions "...but it might at least remind ethnographers that these problems do have to be solved and cannot be ignored." (Barnes) Or,

Erikson describes his proposal as "...at least as a beginning..." to the solution of the problem of ethics, or, although Jorgensen proposes, as a solution to the problem of ethics, a "voluntary code" he adds that he does not "...believe that it will be sufficient..." but that it "...would be an excellent beginning...".

In that Barnes, Erikson and Jorgensen suggest that proposed solutions to the problem of ethics represent ethnographic attention to ethics as a problem or represent only a beginning to its solution, their speech suggests either that (1) ethnography should attend to ethics as a problem or (2) ethnography should begin to systematically resolve the problem. In any case, what these three authors are saying is that the problem of ethics should not be ignored and that it must be resolved. In other words, like most other practical problems, the ethnographic problem of ethics must be resolved so that the "business of ethnography" can carry on.

There resonates in this talk a sense of urgency. The ethnographic problem of ethics is not a problem that can be discussed and then set aside for further consideration. The mere raising of ethics as a problem is raised by ethnography in the spirit of a threat. It is a threat to the enterprise of ethnography itself. When something threatens a course of action, it requires not merely to be addressed and attended



to, but this addressing and attending to is urgent for the preservation of the enterprise it threatens. To preserve requires an understanding that what is being preserved is worth preserving. But instead of formulating its speech about ethics as an example, i.e., as making reference to the good of ethnography and thus occasioning ethics as an opportunity to address the Good, ethnography formulates ethics as nothing but a practical problem. And, this sense of ethics, as a threat to ethnography and thus requiring urgent attention, is implicit in the writings of ethnography generally and the writings of Barnes, Erikson and Jorgensen specifically. Fichter and Kolb state the urgency of the ethnographic problem of ethics more explicitly when they write, "An explicit code of ethics which will govern the social scientist in reporting such data" (ethnographic) "seems urgently needed." (1970:262)

Even though Barnes, Erikson and Jorgensen do not explicitly state that a resolution to the ethnographic problem of ethics is urgently needed, they do, in a more explicit way, speak of the threat that ethics presents to ethnography. For example, Barnes points out that an abiding concern of professional sociologists and anthropologists is that the "...interests of the profession outlast those of the specific investigation or investigator." And, Erikson suggests that "...a good deal more is at stake here than the sensitivities

of any particular person...". He says that the use of covert (disguised) observation "...affects the professional climate in which all of us work...". And, finally Jorgensen says that an enforcement of "...ethical standards for the profession would permit ethical scholars to conduct research..." without "...causing suspicion or fear..." among those they study and thus will enable investigators to maintain "...the integrity of the research".

Clearly, then, what Barnes, Erikson and Jorgensen are expressing is a concern: they are expressing a concern for the well-being and worthwhileness of ethnography. But this is not so unusual, this is not unusually gallant, this is not unusually protective, for each and every instance of ethnographic speech is an expression of the worthwhileness of ethnography insofar as each and every ethnographic speech points to, makes reference to, and relies upon, a version of the good life. This is to say that any ethnographic speech is grounded in its deep interest and so, any ethnographic speech reflects this interest. When ethnography speaks about ethics it formulates its speech as topicalizing the concrete work of ethnography, i.e., its concrete work of gathering data, reporting findings, etc. And the topic is whether or not this work is worthwhile where worthwhileness is conceived of superficially as for example, whether or not informed consent has been obtained, whether or not medical help is given, etc.

But what is not topicalized is that which provides for any ethnographic topic, any ethnographic speech, including ethics. Ethnography does not address the Ethic, the deep decision, the commitment, that generates its concrete speech. To address the good of ethnography is not to enter into debate about whether or not ethnography is ethical, for it necessarily is so, but is to re-achieve its Ethic, its beginning in speech. And this is the strong sense of ethical inquiry that finds its degenerate expression in ethnographic speech about ethics.

Ethics arises as a concern for ethnography out of its conception of detachment and disinterestedness. Detachment and disinterestedness are ethnography's ways of posing and resolving the problem of simultaneous presence and absence. This conception finds its sense in the ethnographic formulation of a world that is available, i.e., observable and disinterestedness is conceived of as a condition for the availability of that world. And it is this sort of disinterestedness, disinterest embodied in the notion of disinterested observer, that ethnography formulates as problematic. It is problematic, for ethnography, in that it generates the problem of whether or not disinterestedness is a right and valuable thing where this problem is concretely manifested for ethnography in such situations as whether or not to give medical attention to villagers.

Ethnography, then, comes to terms with the problem of right and valuable conduct by appealing to ethics. The concern for the right and valuable way to live becomes reformulated by ethnography as a concern with ethics. So the methodological formulation of disinterestedness is understood, by ethnography, as the generator of various practical problems of living that are formulated concretely by an appeal to ethics as a technique for coming to terms with these problems. Ethics is ethnography's concrete expression of its desire to be good and of its desire to worship and display deference to that which is natural and absolute, namely culture and social structure.

But ethnography exemplifies forgetful speech in that it forgets that it is deeply interested and in that it forgets that its speech recommends a version of life that it depicts as good. Moreover, ethnographic speech is the worst kind of forgetful speech insofar as it forgets that it does speak and forgets that its speech is an expression of Self in that its speech reflects the possibility of Self. Ethnography's concern with disinterestedness, a concern that is grounded in the tradition called science, is ethnography's disinterest in its deep interest, i.e., is ethnography's disinterest in its Self. What is ethical about an inquiry is its commitment to re-collect the Ethic that provides for its possibility.

What is ethical about an inquiry is its commitment to re-collect the right and valuable by conceiving of its speech as a concrete expression of that which is right and valuable. What is ethical about an inquiry is its commitment to manifest in speech that Ethic that is responsible for its rightness and value.

What is truly right and valuable for ethnography is what it formulates as natural and absolute, i.e., culture, membership, social structure. It is not surprising, then, that ethnography would display a sense of loyalty and protection toward membership. It is not surprising that the ethnographic understanding of ethics is expressed as a concern for the firstness and value of membership. And what else could ethnography be except loyal and protective toward that which naturally deserves loyalty and protection?

But notions such as loyalty and protection are superficial ways of formulating ethnography's concern about members as it is expressed in the ethnographic notion of ethics. So as ethics appears and surfaces concretely for ethnography, ethnography speaks of ethics in terms of loyalty to members, protection of members' rights, etc. More deeply, however, ethics makes reference to the first decision, to the deep interest, to the good of ethnography. When understood as an example of the good life, notions such as loyalty and protection to members become surface reflections of ethnography as an example of the life that is good, of the

life that is just, of the life that is virtuous. So when ethnography says that it is loyal and protective toward membership, it is saying that it has an obligation to formulate the life it recommends as good, just and virtuous. This is to say that ethnography's loyalty and protection toward membership is ethnography's loyalty and protection toward its Self insofar as ethnography is deeply Ethical and the rightness and value of its speech (data, findings, ethics, etc.) is to be formulated by re-collecting the Ethic that is responsible for its speech. But ethnography speaks; it collects data, it reports findings, it speaks about ethics, and in so speaking it divests its speech of what is truly right and valuable. Ethnography forgets its Ethic and conceives of its speech as the sheer reproduction of what is first and natural, and as such, does not understand its speech as exemplary of a good life that requires formulation. Ethnography's desire to be good, its desire to be lively, its desire to be right and valuable, submits to the ethnographic impulse to speak perfectly rather than to speak responsibly. Rather than raising ethics as a deep concern, rather than bringing ethics to life, ethnography buries ethics in a deluge of self-sufficient speech.

VI.

In Book I of The Republic, Socrates has a conversation with an old man, Cephalus, and Cephalus' speech exemplifies the kind of pragmatically motivated theorizing that is also exemplified in ethnography's concern with ethics. Cephalus welcomes Socrates to his home by saying: "As it is, you ought to come here more frequently: for I myself find that as age blunts one's enjoyment of physical pleasures, one's desire for rational conversation and one's enjoyment of it increase correspondingly." (328d) During their conversation, Cephalus tells Socrates that;

For you know, Socrates, when a man faces the thought of death there come into his mind anxieties that did not trouble him before. The stories about another world, and about punishment in a future life for wrongs done in this, at which he once used to laugh, begin to torment his mind with the fear that they may be true. And either because of the weakness of old age or because, as he approaches the other world, he has some clearer perception of it, he is filled with doubts and fears and begins to reckon up and see if there is anyone he has wronged. (330d-e)

Old age and death are occasions for Cephalus to theorize about life. And this is surely admirable, for old age and death are certainly occasions for exemplifying the conversation in the soul that Socrates calls thinking and old age and death are certainly occasions for addressing

the idea of life that provides for their intelligibility. So Cephalus is eager to converse with Socrates, Cephalus is eager to have Socrates as a collaborator.

But Cephalus was not always eager to theorize, i.e., Cephalus was not always eager for conversation. Now that he is old and the physical pleasures of youth have waned, Cephalus is eager for the pleasure of conversation. Moreover, Cephalus is old and death is imminent. The stories about another world and the stories about punishment in a future life for wrongs done in this life, stories at which Cephalus once used to laugh, now torment him and he fears that these stories may be true. Conversation that once took a back seat to the pursuit of physical pleasures is now useful to Cephalus insofar as Cephalus hopes that conversation will ease the torment of his mind.

Ethnography finds that it is confronted with problems; should time be taken away from ethnography in order to give medical assistance? Is it right and just to disguise the fact that one is an observer? Is it right and just for ethnography to produce reports that will get into the hands of evil-doers? Is it right to get so much from informants while giving so little in return? etc., etc. Like Cephalus, ethnography is tormented with its wrongdoings. Like Cephalus, ethnography seeks an end to this torment. Like Cephalus, ethnography turns to theorizing about its life as a way to end the torment of its soul. Cephalus turns to conversation with Socrates as a way to preserve his soul and ethnography



turns to ethics as a way to preserve its soul.

But Cephalus and ethnography have lived for a long time. And not until they were confronted with problems did they reflect upon their life. And even now, faced with problems, their reflection amounts to a search for a technique that will rid them of the matter of their life and restore them to the security of unreflective living. Cephalus and ethnography do not understand what conversation is and do not understand that conversation is a life-long formulation of life. Cephalus and ethnography begin to theorize with a goal of ending their theorizing as quickly as possible and so, Cephalus and ethnography do not theorize at all.

During his conversation with Socrates, Cephalus' son, Polemarchus, interrupts. Cephalus then says: "I bequeath the argument to the two of you, for I must go and see about the sacrifice." (331d) And what else could Cephalus do but bequeath the conversation to his son and Socrates, what else could Cephalus do but withdraw from theorizing? Conversation is not a technical thing that can be taken up occasionally as a device for easing the torment in the soul. Conversation brings to speech that very torment insofar as conversation seeks to exemplify the conversation in the soul that is thinking. Conversation is demanding, it demands that Cephalus conceive of his speech as an example of a life worth living and it

demands that Cephalus take responsibility for that life. Conversation would exemplify that life and to continue in conversation with Socrates for the purpose of easing the torment in the mind, would lead Cephalus to the kind of torment exemplified in the person of Alcibiades in The Symposium.<sup>6</sup> (214e-222c)

Cephalus wants conversation to result in a product insofar as he wants conversation to produce the word, the answer, the solution, the technique, i.e., Cephalus wants conversation to produce a way for him to ease his torment. But Socrates, i.e., conversation, can produce no such product, conversation can produce nothing new, conversation cannot produce the word that will ease the torment of the soul. Conversation, as the attempt to bring to speech the movement in the soul that is thinking, is the art of midwifery that attempts to bring to birth that which is already conceived.<sup>7</sup> (Theaetetus, 149-152) So what Cephalus will gain in a conversation with Socrates is not the word that will ease his pain, but instead Cephalus will gain the opportunity to examine the possibility of his life and to examine the rightness and value of his life. And it is this gain that is too costly for Cephalus, for Cephalus would then have to take his life seriously as an example of the good toward which his life points. Rather than bearing the risk of treating his life as an example of the good life, Cephalus opts for the passivity of sacrifice as a way, as a technique, to ease the torment of his soul.

Ethics provides ethnography with the opportunity to engage itself in conversation. It provides ethnography with the opportunity to bring to birth that which is already conceived. But like Cephalus, ethnography is searching for the word that will ease the torment in its soul, that will solve its problems that it formulates as ethical problems. So like Cephalus, ethnography withdraws from conversation since conversation does not lead to the product, to the answer, to the solution, of its ethical problem. Instead, conversation leads to the life of ethnography and gives birth to that life. Conversation would demand that ethnography examine the rightness and value of its life, i.e., the worth of its offspring, the worth of ethnography. And like Cephalus, ethnography chooses the passivity of sacrifice, i.e., ethnography opts for the production of codes of ethics. In one sense, ethnography's speech about ethics is the most interesting thing ethnography has to say and it is this most interesting thing that ethnography belittles, trivializes, and technicalizes.

## VII.

From the ethnographic point of view of the natural as culture, i.e., that whether we have magic or science, that whether we have cross-cousin marriages or not, etc., it is no wonder that ethnography chooses monologue over dialogue.

It is no wonder that ethnography would not enter into conversation with Meno about the good of his speech on virtue. For, whether or not ethnography understands Meno's speech about virtue as concretely good or bad, as acceptable or distasteful, there is nothing that ethnography can say on these matters since Meno is speaking culturally. Moreover, ethnography formulates its task concretely as that of describing and analyzing cultures and thus to have anything to say on the rightness or wrongness of Meno's speech about virtue would be for ethnography to be speaking culturally and hence the task of describing Meno's culture would be in jeopardy.

What ethnography searches after is the truth, which, according to it, is culture and social structure manifested in concrete ways of living, and thus whether the truth turns out to be concretely good or bad, or good or bad in any other way, is not for ethnography to say, i.e., is not for ethnography to decide. This spirit is captured in Weber's sense of social science.

It is commonplace to observe that something may be true although it is not beautiful and not holy and not good. Indeed it may be true in precisely those aspects. But all these are only the most elementary cases of the struggle that the gods of the various orders and values are engaged in. I do not

know how one might wish to decide  
'scientifically' the value of French  
and German culture; for here, too,  
different gods struggle with one  
another, now and for all times to come.  
(Weber, 1946:148)

For Weber, difference, as manifested in cultural  
or social differences, is of interest to social science  
"scientifically", which is to say, is of interest insofar as  
it is true where truth references some notion of What Is, i.e.,  
some notion of Reality. That "various orders and values" are  
recognizable by the social scientist, e.g., various cultures,  
only demonstrates, for Weber, elementary cases of the struggle  
among gods. To recognize these struggles is the business of  
social science but to choose among them is, for Weber, an  
issue of "value-judgement" and, as such, not the business of  
social science. In other words, there is no way for Weber to  
decide scientifically among the gods. So for Weber, any god  
will do in that value-judgement and not social science (members  
and not the theorist) is the only way to decide. Or, as  
Strauss (1950:45) formulates it, "Follow the demon, regardless  
of whether he is a good or evil demon." Or, " 'Follow God  
or the Devil,' which means, in nontheological language,  
'Strive resolutely for excellence or baseness.' " (ibid.)

But it is precisely against such formulations that  
ethnography argues. Ethnography does not speak of gods or  
devils, ethnography does not speak of the struggles of various

cultures for dominance as the struggles among gods. For ethnography, there is only one god and that god is culture. There are no choices involved for ethnography in the sense that we cannot choose among cultures, for that is not our choice. We cannot choose another culture over ours since ours was not our choice. And, from the ethnographic point of view, what would it mean to choose one culture over another? To value one culture over another would be sacrilegious. It would be to commit the same sacrilege that Weber committed, i.e., to mistake a particular culture (demi-god) for universal culture (god). For ethnography, any particular culture is only the manifestation (part) of the universally natural culture (whole). So while ethnography agrees with Weber that scientifically choices cannot be made between one culture and another, ethnography reminds Weber not to speak of particular cultures as gods since there is only one god (culture).

What we must vigorously oppose is the view that one may be "scientifically" contented with the conventional self-evidentness of very widely accepted value-judgements. The specific function of science, it seems to me, is just the opposite: namely, to ask questions about these things which convention makes self-evident. As a matter of fact, Schmoller and his associates did exactly this in their time. The fact that one investigates the influence of certain ethical or religious convictions on economic life and estimates it to be large under certain circumstances does not, for instance, imply the necessity of sharing or even esteeming those casually very significant convictions. Likewise, the imputation of a highly positive

value to an ethical or religious phenomenon tells us nothing at all about whether its consequences are also to be positively valued to the same extent. Factual assertions tell us nothing about these matters, and the individual will judge them very differently according to his own religious and other evaluations. All this has nothing to do with the question under dispute. On the contrary, I am most emphatically opposed to the view that a realistic "science of ethics," i.e., the analysis of the influence which the ethical evaluations of a group of people have on their other conditions of life and of the influences which the latter, in their turn, exert on the former, can produce an "ethics" which will be able to say anything about what should happen. (Weber, 1949:13)

Like ethnography, Weber formulates social science as the reminder. The function of social science is to "ask questions". And to what are these questions addressed if not to life? Weber wants to remind us that we take our lives for granted, which is to say that we take for granted the naturalness of our lives. We take as "self-evident" that the way we live is the natural way to live. And this is how Weber can formulate "various orders of value" as gods in struggle with one another.

What Weber wants to question is "...these things which convention makes self-evident." So what Weber's questioning amounts to, is not a questioning at all, Weber's question is not a questioning of life at all, but instead, Weber's questioning of life is a formulation of life. Weber

formulates life as "convention" and formulates the self-evidentness of this convention as based not on "scientific" (which is Weber's version of rational) grounds, but rather based on the unscientific (irrational) grounds of "value-judgement". For Weber, then, there is no rational (scientific) grounds for choosing from among the various "orders of values", i.e., from choosing among the various ways of living, since rationally (scientifically) one life is no better or worse than another. Thus, value judgements have no place in the social sciences, according to Weber, except as objects of social science investigation and insofar as the order of value of the social scientist formulates the problems of social science.<sup>8</sup>

Weber is "emphatically opposed" to the understanding that a "realistic science of ethics" can produce "an ethics which will be able to say anything about what should happen." And how could it be otherwise for Weber? Questions such as "What shall we do, and, how shall we arrange our lives?..... Which of the warring gods should we serve?" (Weber, 1946: 152-153), are questions that are grounded in the irrationality of value-judgement and are thus not legitimate questions of the social sciences and if these are questions to which answers are possible at all, "...only a prophet or a savior can give the answers." (ibid) And at least one value that Weber holds emphatically is that the social sciences ought not to be in the business of prophecy or saving.



Weber cannot recommend one life over against another since he does not know, which, for Weber, amounts to cannot determine scientifically or rationally, what should happen, what we should do, how we should arrange our lives, etc. This is Weber's notion of an ethically neutral social science; an ethically neutral social science that Strauss formulates as "ethical relativism". (1950:44) Thus a science of ethics, or what amounts to the same thing, an ethically neutral social science is, for Weber, a science that minds its own business. And from Weber's point of view what the business of science amounts to is "...the establishment of empirical facts..." (Weber, 1949:11) Weber goes on to say that the social scientist should separate empirical facts

(including the "value-oriented" conduct of the empirical individual whom he is investigating) and his own practical evaluations, i.e., his evaluation of these facts as satisfactory or unsatisfactory (including among these facts evaluations made by the empirical persons who are the objects of investigation.)  
(Weber, 1949:11)

So Weber does not know; he does not know what should happen, i.e., he does not know how we should live. What Weber knows, however, is how we do live formulated as "empirical facts". So the business of the social sciences

may, from this point of view, be formulated as the establishment of the What Is in the sense of empirically determining how it is we do live.

But the social scientist, according to Weber, must keep "...his own practical evaluations, i.e., his evaluation of these facts as satisfactory or unsatisfactory..." to himself. So whether a life is satisfactory or unsatisfactory is understood by Weber as a practical matter. It is a practical matter of value judgement and thus there is no room for these matters in the social scientific domain of the establishment of empirical facts.

But, what is more important is that Weber cannot recommend whether a life is satisfactory or unsatisfactory because he does not know. Weber does not know because such matters are practical matters of value-judgement and in this sense cannot be scientifically determined. That individuals do show a preference for one life over another is because of an order of values, or an order of ethics, and one order is as good or as bad as another. In a sense, then, there is no rational way of deciding whether one life is better than another since this sort of decision can only be based on value judgement. Social science has nothing to say on this matter because its only concern is What Is and not what the Is ought to be. Weber cannot speak of what a life ought to

strive for in order to be good since what a life ought to be is beyond human understanding. In other words, Weber cannot recommend what he does not know. Weber is not willing to give his preference since that would not constitute good social science.

Weber is, however, willing to compromise. He says that a social scientist can assert his own value-judgements but only if he makes them "...absolutely explicit to the students and to himself." (Weber, 1949:10) So, presumably, the social scientist may assert his value-judgements to his students, and it might be added, to other social scientists, under the proviso that he make them explicitly clear. In other words, if the social scientist states his value-judgements, which is to say, segregates his value-judgements from empirical facts, he will not be stepping outside the boundaries of the social sciences. The social scientist must state his value-judgements (display his irrational self) but segregate them from his social scientific empirical facts (display his rational self).

Is this not another way of asking for perfect speech, i.e., is Weber not asking for perfect speech? Weber says that the good social scientist (good speech) is one who segregates values from fact, is one who does not speak value-judgement. For Weber, good speech is speech that is segregated from value insofar as the social scientist can either (1) speak

only fact, or (2) add value-judgements by making them explicit, which is to say, by segregating them from fact. On the other hand, bad speech is, for Weber, speech that implicitly contains value-judgements. So Weber says that the speaking of value-judgements is optional, i.e., it can be included in the speech of social science only if it is explicitly differentiated from the speaking that is social science, from fact. Weber treats value-judgements as fully explicable, as fully speakable and as segregatable from fact. It is in this sense that Weber asks for perfect speech.

But after all of this, after all of Weber's distinction between fact and value, what still remains is the value of Weber's speech, i.e., what still remains is the fact that Weber's speech about ethical neutrality is itself not ethically neutral. What abounds is absent-mindedness. Weber's speech has forgotten its own possibility insofar as Weber has forgotten the Ethic to which his speech makes reference and upon which his speech relies for its rightness and value. It is no wonder that Weber recommends a social science that does not speak its mind, for Weber has forgotten the mind of the social science he recommends. It is no wonder that Weber recommends a social science that is ethically neutral, for Weber has forgotten the Ethic that his social science recommends.

Weber recommends that social science question the "...things which convention makes self-evident." So Weber wants to remind us that our value-judgements are just that, value-judgements. He wants to remind us that our value-judgements will vary depending on our place, depending on our culture, depending on our convention. So like ethnography, Weber wants to remind us that what is first and essential is convention. And this sort of reminder recommends that Self is a reflection of place, or of culture. Thus, our lives are valuable insofar as our place is valuable and so, a search for value amounts to a search for a valuable place.

So how can Weber speak of a social science that is ethically neutral? Weber's speech displays the Ethic that makes it possible insofar as Weber recommends sheer place, sheer culture, as first, essential and valuable. What Weber forgets is not that he can get rid of place or culture, since that would be to get rid of usage and speech, but Weber forgets that he has chosen to conceive of place and culture as essential and Weber forgets that that choice is an ethical, moral choice. When Weber speaks of the methodology of the social sciences, he forgets that he is not merely recommending social science technique. Weber forgets that his interlocutor is social science and that his methodology is a recommendation that orients to that interlocutor and

recommends to that interlocutor a version of the good, i.e., a version of the good social science. So Weber offers his Self, formulated as the good social science, and thus his methodology, his version of what social science ought to be, is a reflection of Weber's notion of the good and hence a reflection of Weber him Self.

What Weber and ethnography forget is that their speech recommends a life worth living. This forgetfulness is a rejection of the Socratic reminder and invitation to collect the life in speech, i.e., to re-collect that which makes the speech possible and to remember that any speech, including the speech of Weber and ethnography, recommends a life that man ought to live.

By realizing that we are ignorant of the most important things, we realize at the same time that the most important thing for us, or the one thing needful, is quest for knowledge of the most important things or quest for wisdom.  
(Strauss, 1950:36)

And in what way is the speech of Weber and ethnography wise? In what way is the speech of Weber and ethnography a quest for wisdom? What wisdom do Weber and ethnography have to offer? Is not their wisdom that convention is wise? Is not their wisdom that wisdom abounds in convention and that wisdom awaits all of us insofar as we can understand and realize that we live conventionally? Is this not the wisdom that Weber and ethnography have to offer, that to live

wisely we ought to live conventionally? But their wisdom is stronger than this, their wisdom tells us that there is no ought at all, that there is no choice but to live conventionally. While we may think otherwise, these wise men know that there is no otherwise since what there is, all there is, what is first and essential, is convention. And if this were not enough, these wise men also want to be ethically neutral.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Aristotle (1097a-1098b).
- 2 For ethnography, contingency rules and thus life finds itself controlled by contingency. Man cannot take charge of his life because his life is in the charge of contingency, and at best, what is left to man is to recognize those contingencies which are relevant, a task which is itself contingent. It is no wonder, then, that ethnography can only hope; it can only hope that the rule of contingency will be a benevolent rule.
- 3 The notion of a "for-all-practical-purposes" world is to be found in Garfinkel (1967), Garfinkel and Sacks (1970). The world is an interactional accomplishment and interaction accomplishes the world for-all-practical-purposes. In this sense, Garfinkel formulates the member as an artist, as an artist who, through his interactions, can achieve a world. Thus, the only thing that is necessary is to be a member, which is to say, is to be an artist.
- 4 Mann's interest, then, is not merely to communicate a research interest, in other words, communication is not, for Mann, merely the passing on of information. Instead, communication is understood by Mann as a way to formulate her work as ethical. But what Mann does not understand is that her communication - her formulation of her work as ethical - is already a display of an Ethic and is speech that is generated by the beginning, the deep decision, that generates the possibility of ethnography.
- 5 It is interesting to note that McCurdy went to India to study acculturation. In other words, he went to India to study "outside contact" that was caused by a road being built. What is interesting is that McCurdy did not conceive of himself as an instance of acculturation, i.e., as an instance of outside contact. In this sense, McCurdy has already formulated acculturation, i.e., has already studied acculturation, before going to India. McCurdy does not seize his (ethnography's) conception of acculturation as an occasion to formulate that to which ethnography owes its life.



6       The torment that Alcibiades suffers is a torment that springs from conversation, i.e., it is a torment that springs from Alcibiades' inquiry with Socrates. Alcibiades says "He (Socrates) compels me to realize that I am still a mass of imperfections and yet persistently neglect my own true interests by engaging in public life." (216a) In other words, conversation gives birth to the torment that is in the soul and demands that the life that grounds the torment be examined. This examination provides the occasion for Alcibiades to live differently, i.e., to allow the examination to be consequential. But instead of facing the possibility of consequences, Alcibiades says that "I stop up my ears and take refuge in flight." (216a) So Alcibiades is ashamed; he is ashamed to face Socrates, he is ashamed to enter into the conversation that is inquiry, since that conversation is consequential. To avoid such shame, Cephalus, too, "takes flight", i.e., Cephalus goes to prepare his sacrifice.

7       Maieutics says that what we need is that for which we cannot imagine Other: since that for which we cannot imagine Other is life (that which cannot be divided), the whole is reconciled by speaking under the auspices of such a need. What we need is not something that we lack, but that which we have: our need is to sustain and re-achieve what we have. (Blum, 1978:129)

When ethnography searches for ethics, i.e., when ethnography seeks the solution to ethics conceived concretely as a problem, it seeks something new in that it formulates that which it seeks as something that it does not have, as something that it lacks. But ethnography already has an Ethic; ethnography already has a life and, in this sense, ethnography lacks nothing. This is why theorizing (conversation) finds nothing new since a search for ethics is a search for Self insofar as conversation re-collects and re-achieves the Self.

- 8 Weber suggests that the "values" of the social scientist will influence his choice of a research topic and that social science has a value insofar as it "...strives to attain 'valuable' results, meaning thereby logically and factually correct results which are scientifically significant; and that further, the selection of the subject-matter already involves an 'evaluation'." (Weber 1949:11) In this sense, Weber is not interested in his deep interest, i.e., Weber is not interested in re-collecting the Rationale of his speech, but instead Weber is interested in producing rational speech.

## CHAPTER 7. INQUIRY

### I.

Dear Reader,<sup>1</sup>

To title your magazine The PLAIN TRUTH is really sticking your neck out!

But after 45 years of publishing articles that give the news behind the news, show the trends, and even predict major events, the editors know the magazine's title speaks for itself.

The PLAIN TRUTH is a 48 page full colour unique family and world news magazine filled with facts you need to know. Regular articles about social trends -- where the family is headed, how to have a happy marriage, how to hold down a good job. Matters of international importance -- everything from the Russian naval plan to dominate the West to the continuing worldwide energy crisis. General interest -- including editor-in-chief Herbert W. Armstrong's meetings with leaders around the world. Articles that discuss religion from a refreshing viewpoint, morality, nutrition and health, science, economics, politics, the many facets of our contemporary world -- its history and its future, its problems and the solutions. All are explained in a clear, down-to-earth manner.

The PLAIN TRUTH is sent out free-of-charge in the public interest. You can have a free copy delivered to your home regularly -- without sticking your neck out! Just send in the coupon on the opposite page. No bill will follow -- that's a promise.

Yours sincerely,

Subscription Department

Results, results are the promise. The promise of no bill to follow is eminently insignificant in relation to the promise of results; "Where the family is headed, how to have a happy marriage, how to hold down a good job, the many facets of our contemporary world," in short, "problems and the solutions". For such results, for such solutions to the problem of life, who cares whether or not a bill will follow?

What is important are the results. And, the results take on this importance when life is formulated as problematic. Life is a problem, or better, a series of problems that must be recognized, that must be addressed, that must be coped with, that must be dealt with, in a word, life is a problem that must be resolved. In a sense, the idea of results formulates life as a problem that must be resolved, i.e., that must be brought to an end, so that life can continue. This is indeed a strange formulation of life; life needs to meet its end so that it can live.

The authors of the PLAIN TRUTH offer not only to save us from problems, i.e., to save us from troubles, but offer also to save us from the trouble of formulating our own solutions to the problem of life. They offer us results; they offer us the results of their inquiry and so, their inquiry does not matter, their inquiry does not matter to us nor does it matter to them. What is important is that they have results. They have inquired into the problem of life

and this inquiry has produced solutions, i.e., has produced results. So what matters is results, what matters is that inquiry produces results. The inquiry itself does not matter since it is merely the trouble and the effort that needs to be gotten through on the way to results. The idea of results, then, formulates inquiry as trivial and troublesome and hence as something that must be prosecuted in favour of results.

So The PLAIN TRUTH is doing us a magnificent good. It is handing us, free of charge, results, i.e., it is handing us the solutions to the problems of life and, what is more magnificent, is that it alleviates for us the burden and troublesomeness of finding these solutions ourselves. What The PLAIN TRUTH is offering us, then, is the end of life, the end of life formulated as a problem, and thus is offering us problem-free living.

The notion of inquiry that generates the notion of results necessitates life formulated as a problem and as a problem to which solutions can be located. Life formulated as a problem to which there exists solutions, generates inquiry. Inquiry surfaces as a response to the problems of life. Without problems, there would be no inquiry. So the end that results promises is the end of life insofar as results promises the end of problems and thus the end of inquiry. The idea of results, then, is a way to formulate the end of inquiry insofar as it formulates the good life

as the life without inquiry. Instead of a life of inquiry, the idea of results promises the good life of application, i.e., the good life as achieved through the application of the results. And who but the one who conceives of life as responsibility, would refuse the gift of PLAIN TRUTH, i.e., would refuse the gift of a life of application over an everlasting life of inquiry?

In the Charmides, Socrates addresses "temperance". Socrates formulates Critias' conception of temperance as wisdom in the following way:

But then what profit, Critias, I said, is there any longer in wisdom or temperance which yet remains, if this is wisdom? If, indeed, as we were supposing at first, the wise man were able to distinguish what he knew and did not know, and that he knew the one and did not know the other, and to recognize a similar faculty of discernment in others, there would certainly be a great advantage in being wise, for then we should never make a mistake, but should pass through life the unerring guides of ourselves and of those who are under us. We should not attempt to do what we did not know, but we should find out those who know, and hand the business over to them and trust in them. Nor should we allow those who were under us to do anything which they were not likely to do well, and they would be likely to do well just that of which they had knowledge. And the house or state which was ordered or administered under the guidance of wisdom, and everything else of which wisdom was the lord, would be sure to be well ordered, for with truth guiding and error eliminated, in all their doings men must do nobly and well, and doing well means happiness. Was not this, Critias, what we spoke of as the great advantage of wisdom - to know what is known and what is unknown to us? (171d-172).

What has Socrates formulated if not the life that is offered to us by The PLAIN TRUTH? In other words, the life that is offered us with wisdom conceived as results, is a life where we do not "have to stick our necks out". And, "there would certainly be a great advantage in being wise, for then we shall never make a mistake, but should pass through life the unerring guides of ourselves and of those who are under us." And what would the notion of problems come to mean in such a life? The problems of life have been solved and our only problem would be to find those who have the solutions "and hand the business over to them and trust in them." And, the business is life. So what results recommends is that we hand the business of life (our lives) over to others since it is their business insofar as they have solved the problem of life. Their generosity amounts to offering us a life that is unproblematic and so, offering us a life that requires no inquiry and thus their offering is an offering of passive tranquility insofar as our responsibility, our business of life, need no longer be an issue for us since the business has been taken care of.

And to whom does The PLAIN TRUTH speak? Who is the "Dear Reader" to whom The PLAIN TRUTH speaks? What version of reading does The PLAIN TRUTH generate? In the Laches, Lysimachus and Melesias ask for the counsel of Nicias, Laches and Socrates with regard to the question of how they shall raise their sons to be virtuous. During the conversation

Lysimachus says that:

But this is our proper business, and yours as well as ours, for I reckon you as one of us. Please then to take my place, and find out from Nicias and Laches what we want to know, for the sake of the youths, and talk and consult with them, for I am old, and my memory is bad, and I do not remember the questions which I intend to ask, or the answers to them, and if there is any digression I lose the thread. I will therefore beg of you to carry on the proposed discussion by yourselves, and I will listen, and Melesias and I will act upon your conclusions. (189c - 189d)

What Lysimachus asks for is not inquiry but the results of inquiry. Lysimachus does not want to engage in conversation (inquiry) as a way to formulate the virtuous way to raise his son. Lysimachus wants to raise his son virtuously but does not want to inquire into this upbringing and instead wants to act upon the conclusions of others, of others who have inquired and who have produced the conclusions, the results. Lysimachus says that he is old and that he has a bad memory and so, he cannot engage in inquiry but that he is old and that he does have a bad memory does not preclude him from living a life of application, i.e., from applying results. So Lysimachus wants to subscribe to The PLAIN TRUTH and, as such, Lysimachus subscribes to a life of passive application. Lysimachus wants to be virtuous and wants others to tell him how to be virtuous. But Lysimachus does not understand that his request for virtue, his request for



conclusions, is his way to formulate the virtuous life and Lysimachus does not understand that he will continue to formulate the virtuous life despite his old age and despite his bad memory.

Lysimachus, then, exemplifies the reader that The PLAIN TRUTH requires and formulates as the good reader. The PLAIN TRUTH formulates the good reader as one who does not need a memory since results, i.e., solutions to the problems of life, are available concretely and do not need to be remembered. The PLAIN TRUTH does not want a reader who will engage in inquiry since the inquiry has already been completed and the results are in. Moreover, The PLAIN TRUTH recognizes that inquiry is a risky business and so, the reader is formulated as one who would, and should, prefer to avoid the risk and so, The PLAIN TRUTH promises results and thus promises that the reader will not have to stick his neck out, will not have to inquire. The PLAIN TRUTH gives Lysimachus what he wants; Lysimachus wants to raise his son virtuously and The PLAIN TRUTH will provide him with the technique for doing so and thus will provide Lysimachus with a life that will never require Lysimachus to think about, or to decide, whether or not he is raising his son virtuously, i.e., whether or not he is living the good life.

II.

Meno, too, is concerned with results. Meno exemplifies a version of inquiry that formulates its good as the production of results. For Meno, the whole point of inquiry is that it terminate in results. In this sense, the very asking of a question is asked in the spirit of obtaining results, which is to say, questions can be asked of those who are conceived of as having the results.

Meno asks Socrates to tell him whether or not virtue can be taught. And, for Meno, this is a problem that presses inquiry into service as a way to produce a solution to the problem, as a way to produce results. Thinking that Socrates knows, thinking that Socrates has a solution to the problem, Meno asks Socrates to share the results. And, even if Socrates does not know the answer, does not have the results, Meno is satisfied to solicit Socrates' help in finding the answer. So Meno has a problem, whether or not virtue can be taught, and Meno engages in inquiry to produce the solution to this problem. In this sense, Meno is inquestively all set, he has a problem and his inquiry has a point, namely to produce results.

But Socrates tells Meno that he (Socrates) does not know what virtue is and tells Meno that before they can inquire into the problem of whether or not virtue can be taught, he

(Socrates) will have to know what virtue is. Meno formulates this response within his notion of inquiry. The point of Meno's inquiry is to find a solution to the problem of whether or not virtue can be taught and Socrates' response is formulated by Meno as a temporary stalling of the point of his inquiry. Meno hears Socrates' response as Socrates asking him (Meno) to tell him (Socrates) what virtue is so that they can get on with the inquiry into whether or not virtue can be taught. Being a confident young man, and filled with the desire to have Socrates tell him whether or not virtue can be taught, Meno proceeds to tell Socrates what virtue is. But Socrates responds by questioning Meno as to the good of his definition of virtue. Meno offers still another definition, and another, and so on, and Socrates responds in each case by questioning Meno about the good of his definition(s). Meno hears Socrates' questioning as a refutation of his definition(s). Finally, after still another refutation of still another one of Meno's definitions of virtue, Socrates says, "Then go back to the beginning and answer my question. What do you and your friend say that virtue is?" (79e). In exasperation, Meno replies:

Socrates, even before I met you they told me that in plain truth you are a perplexed man yourself and reduce others to perplexity. At this moment I feel you are exercising magic and witchcraft

upon me and positively laying me under your spell until I am just a mass of helplessness. If I may be flippant, I think that not only in outward appearance but in other respects as well you are exactly like the flat stingray that one meets in the sea. Whenever anyone comes into contact with it, it numbs him, and that is the sort of thing that you seem to be doing to me now. My mind and my lips are literally numb, and I have nothing to reply to you. (80-80b).

What is the source of Meno's perplexity? Why are Meno's mind and lips numb and why has Meno nothing to say to Socrates? What version of inquiry provides for such perplexity?

Meno enters into conversation (inquiry) with Socrates with something in mind, i.e., there is a point at which Meno aims. Meno aims at results insofar as Meno aims to discover whether or not virtue can be taught. But Socrates tells Meno that they ought to hold his aim in abeyance and ask after virtue itself. At this suggestion, Meno was not perplexed. It seemed, after all, reasonable to him that since he knew what virtue was, and Socrates did not, that he would oblige Socrates by telling him what virtue was and, in that way, he and Socrates could go back to Meno's original point, namely to produce a result to the problem of whether or not virtue could be taught.

Meno was not perplexed at this point in the inquiry since he was still able to formulate Socrates' request for a search after virtue as an inquiry that aimed at results.

In other words, Meno saw the worthwhileness of searching after virtue since, after all, this search could be formulated as an inquiry that aimed at terminating itself upon reaching the point at which it aimed, namely the discovery of virtue. So Meno did not understand the dropping of his point - whether or not virtue could be taught - by Socrates as the generation of an inquiry that did not aim at results. Rather, Meno's understanding was that although his point was dropped by Socrates, it was dropped only temporarily, and most importantly to Meno, he conceived of Socrates' question as a question that aimed at results. For Meno, then, Socrates' detour was still worthwhile in that it still had a point insofar as it still aimed at a result.

Meno's perplexity arose, however, at the point in the inquiry at which Meno could not formulate the inquiry as having the aim of producing a result. What perplexed Meno was Socrates' request for him (Meno) to go "back to the beginning". To Meno, this was perplexing, in a sense, this was pointless. There was some sense in which Meno could not see the point of going back to the beginning. Going back to the beginning, for Meno, represented a perplexity insofar as Meno's version of inquiry provides a notion of movement toward an end and not a movement toward the beginning.

Going back to the beginning, then, is Meno's way of seeing inquiry as failing, as failing to move toward its termination. Meno's version of inquiry provides for an understanding of inquiry as getting somewhere, i.e., the point is to get to some end, to some result. So Meno's version of the inquiry resonates with a notion of progress. That is, inquiry conceived of as terminating in results, as having a point, as going somewhere, is inquiry that is understood as a progression. In this sense, inquiry is taking steps toward, progressing toward its end, its result. In this sense, inquiry is conceived of as a road that leads to its termination in the form of results.

To conceive of inquiry as a progressive movement toward its termination is to formulate the good of inquiry as results. Insofar as results are conceived of concretely as the good to which inquiry aims, the results are known. This is to say that Meno knows what the point of his inquiry with Socrates is, namely to find what virtue is and insofar as Meno's version of inquiry formulates its good as termination, Meno knows at which point the inquiry should terminate. Meno's version of inquiry provides that Meno understand the good of an inquiry into virtue as the production of a definition of virtue, as the production of results. Without an orientation toward results, inquiry is, for Meno, perplexing.

Socrates responded to many of Meno's definitions of virtue before Meno finally became perplexed. After each response to his definition, Meno offered still another definition of virtue. In this sense, Meno went back to the beginning on several occasions during the inquiry. Presumably, Meno saw nothing perplexing in this. Meno's understanding of inquiry provides for the possibility of false starts. Inquiry may start on the wrong road and thus come to understand that it has lost its way to its termination. It is, therefore, reasonable to go back to the beginning and start once more.

So what is it about Socrates' explicit request that Meno go back to the beginning that Meno finds perplexing? Meno's perplexity is to be located within his version of inquiry. For Meno, inquiry is the production of results, is the progressive movement toward termination. To begin inquiry, then, is to get on the right road, to take the right steps, toward termination. Having gotten on the wrong road, or taken the wrong steps, it is necessary to begin again. And, it is this concrete notion of beginning that Meno's conception of inquiry provides and which, in turn, provides for Meno's perplexity. Taking an inquestive road that leads round back to the beginning, and repeating this procedure several times, is, for Meno, going round in circles and getting nowhere. It is to begin several times, it is to take several roads, only to find that each road leads back to the beginning. Embarking on several inquestive roads

that only lead back to the beginning is, for Meno, perplexing insofar as this does not represent a progression toward termination.

For Meno, inquiry leads to results, leads to its termination, and thus inquiry that leads back to its beginning is perplexing since this sort of inquiry does not produce results. So Meno understands his inquiry with Socrates as going round in circles, as getting nowhere, and thus as pointless and perplexing. But what Meno does not understand is Socrates' conception of beginning. Whereas Meno conceives of beginning concretely as some concrete place to begin inquiry, Socrates conceives of beginning as the origin of inquiry. So Socrates is asking Meno to address the origin of his speech. Socrates is asking Meno to re-collect the good that generates his speech and toward which his speech aims. Socrates is reminding Meno of his forgetfulness. Meno speaks and forgets the possibility of his speech and it is to this possibility, to this origin, that Socrates asks Meno to return. Meno wants to produce speech that is self-sufficient. Meno wants to produce self-sufficient speech in the form of results and thus Meno wants to terminate inquiry. Socrates reminds Meno that concrete speech is a reflection and a recommendation of the good life. And, it is this idea of life that Socrates asks Meno to re-collect. Socrates reminds Meno that inquiry is everlasting



because all speech is grounded in a commitment to the Good and it is the task of inquiry to re-collect the Good. So Socrates does not terminate inquiry by formulating a notion of results since the possibility of results are themselves needful of inquiry, of grounding.

Meno is perplexed. The source of his perplexity is to be located in his version of inquiry as terminating in results. What perplexes Meno is that Socratic inquiry aimed not at termination but at continual re-achievement of its origin, of its possibility.

After some inquiry into what virtue is, an inquiry which for Meno met with failure, Socrates tells Meno (80d) that although he (Meno) may have known what virtue was before their inquiry, it looks now as though he (Meno) does not know what virtue is. "Nevertheless", says Socrates, "I am ready to carry out, together with you, a joint investigation and inquiry into what it is." (80d) And, the perplexed Meno replies:

But how will you look for something when you don't in the least know what it is? How on earth are you going to set up something you don't know as the object of your search? To put it another way, even if you come right up against it, how will you know that what you have found is the thing you didn't know? (80d).

Socrates then reformulates Meno's perplexity as an instance of what he (Socrates) calls the trick argument:

I know what you mean. Do you realize that what you are bringing up is the trick argument that a man cannot try to discover either what he knows or what he does not know? He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for. (80e).

For Meno, this trick argument arises out of his conversation (inquiry) with Socrates. In other words, this trick argument is Meno's formulation of Socratic inquiry. In this way, Meno is saying that the source of his perplexity lies in Socrates' version of inquiry. So the source of the trick argument is, for Meno, not his version of inquiry but the Socratic version of inquiry. That is, the trick argument arises, for Meno, as a response to, a conclusion of, a comment upon, a characterization of, in short, the trick argument is a consequent of Socratic inquiry. Meno is, in a sense, accusing Socrates of engaging in inquiry that just goes round in circles, that aims at no result, and is, indeed paradoxical.<sup>2</sup>

What Meno fails to understand, however, is that the source of this formulation (trick argument) is not Socratic inquiry, but rather is his (Meno's) own version of inquiry. The source of Meno's perplexity and his formulation of

Socratic inquiry, then, lies in the version of inquiry that Meno holds, lies in Meno himself. Meno's version of inquiry provides for the sense that, first of all, when something is known there is no point in inquiry. In this sense, results supercede inquiry and inquiry becomes the handmaiden of results. Inquiry becomes the way (method) to attain results. The point of inquiry, then, is to produce results and when results are already present, there is no point to inquiry. Secondly, inquiry must orient its progress to its own termination. This is to say that inquiry must aim at producing self-sufficient speech. When Socrates formulates speech as an example of a life that generates the speech, and formulates inquiry as the conversation that formulates that life, and formulates this conversation as itself an example, Meno cannot see the results of such inquiry insofar as Meno cannot see the point at which this inquiry terminates.

Meno desires the Plain Truth. What Meno desires is results. Results, i.e., solutions to the problem of life, formulate the good life as the life in which inquiry is unnecessary. Inquiry into life formulated as a problem requiring solution, aims at completion. Inquiry is complete when results are produced. When the results are in, when the solution to the problem of life is discovered, life can continue unproblematically. Life can continue as though we were not responsible for our lives, as though we did not

make decisions, as though we were not ethical and moral speakers. This is truly amazing, but what is more amazing is that this version of inquiry does not recognize its own Ethic and its own morality.

### III.

The 'mode of investigation' is Marx's several years long concrete investigation into the existing documents and the facts they witness to: this investigation followed paths which disappear in their result, the knowledge of its object, the capitalist mode of production. (Althusser, 1970:50).

Marx's inquiry lasted for several years. It was a long concrete investigation of the facts that culminated in the knowledge of its object, i.e., the capitalist mode of production. The several years of concrete investigation were then worthwhile, they produced knowledge. These several years of concrete investigation were valuable and their value is to be located in the fact that they produced a result.

But these long years of concrete investigation followed paths which disappeared. The paths, which represent the several years of Marx's inquiry, disappeared in the results. But who will mourn the disappearance of the paths? Who will mourn their loss? Who will chide Marx for being so careless an investigator as to permit the disappearance and

loss of his paths? Who will ignore Marx's concrete results and address Marx as an investigator who did not complete his investigation insofar as he allowed his paths to disappear? Who will ask, What sort of investigator would allow his paths to disappear?

That Marx's paths disappeared, that Marx's inquiry disappeared, is, however, not a coincidence or happenstance. It is not that in the production of a result Marx's inquiry coincidentally disappeared or happened to disappear. It is not that the inquiry just happened to disappear as a coincidental matter of inquestive course. The sense of the disappearance of inquiry can be located only within the version of inquiry formulated by the notion of results. So the disappearance of inquiry receives its intelligibility, and indeed its necessity, in the version of good inquiry exemplified in the notion of results.

The production of results is a version of inquiry that does not take itself seriously, i.e., is a version of inquiry that formulates itself as not mattering, as not making a difference. What makes a difference, i.e., the essential difference, is results and thus the inquiry, the paths, must disappear in order for results to exist as the essential goal of inquiry. What are valued are results and the inquiry itself, that which led to the results, are rendered valueless.

This is not to say that the appearance of results renders the inquiry valueless but that the very formulation of the good of inquiry strips itself of its value. The good of inquiry formulated as the production of results necessitates that it (inquiry) treat itself as a laborious, laborious in the worst sense, task that secures its value insofar as it produces results. So this version of inquiry formulates itself as a trivial matter by inventing the notion of results as a way to terminate its life. Thus, it is not simply that inquiry seeks results but that inquiry is so designed, so formulated, as to be the sort of inquiry that could, in the first place, have results, i.e., that could have an end.

Inquiry thus formulated, sells out, so to speak, inquiry itself. This is to say that the strong sense of inquiry is removed by the degenerate formulation of inquiry as results. This degenerate formulation of inquiry conceives of inquiry as not good in and of itself and conceives of the good of inquiry concretely as concrete paths (method, theory, etc.), that lead to the production of results. On this view, any inquiry that takes itself seriously is necessarily conceived of as valueless since the value of inquiry is not to be located within the inquiry itself. Any inquiry that takes its possibility seriously, i.e., that addresses its origin, is necessarily conceived of as valueless since it is concretely formulated as inquiry that goes round in circles,

that gets nowhere, insofar as it is conceived of as inquiry that is unproductive. Inquiry that addresses its origin and its possibility, in other words, inquiry that addresses the Good, and thus takes its Self seriously, is understood as self-indulgent insofar as it does not strive to produce any thing. This is so because inquiry that formulates its good as the production of results does not understand the notion of results as a reflection of Self, as an example of a recommended Ethic.

Hegel had taught that every philosophy is the conceptual expression of the spirit of its time, and yet he maintained the absolute truth of his own system of philosophy by ascribing absolute character to his own time; he assumed that his own time was the end of history and hence the absolute moment. Historicism explicitly denies that the end of history has come, but it implicitly asserts the opposite: no possible future change of orientation can legitimately make doubtful the decisive insight into the inescapable dependence of thought on fate, and therewith into the essential character of human life; in the decisive respect the end of history, that is, of the history of thought, has come. But one cannot simply assume that one lives or thinks in the absolute moment; one must show, somehow, how the absolute moment can be recognized as such. According to Hegel, the absolute moment is the one in which philosophy, or quest for wisdom, has been transformed into wisdom, that is, the moment in which the fundamental riddles have been fully solved. Historicism, however, stands or falls by the denial of the possibility of theoretical metaphysics and of philosophic ethics or natural right; it stands or falls by the denial of the solubility of the

fundamental riddles. According to historicism, therefore, the absolute moment must be the moment in which the insoluble character of the fundamental riddles has become fully manifest or in which the fundamental delusion of the human mind has been dispelled. (Strauss, 1950:29).

What is Strauss speaking of if not a formulation of inquiry that aims at the end of history, at the end of the quest for wisdom, at the solutions to fundamental riddles, in other words, an inquiry that aims at results? And, inquiry that aims at results is inquiry that aims at its own termination and insofar as it aims to end, inquiry renders itself valueless.

At the risk of severe oversimplification, it can be said that Hegel proposed that he lived at a time when history could come to an end. Clearly, Hegel was not proposing that the end of history was synonymous with the end of life, i.e., Hegel was not proposing that the end of inquiry brought with it an end to life. Somehow life would go on but history would come to an end. According to Strauss, Hegel conceived of all philosophy, up to his own, as a "conceptual expression of the spirit of its time". So, in this sense, Hegel had written the System, the System that was the result of his philosophic inquiry. In this sense, it was the result of Hegel's inquiry, of Hegel's thinking, that brought history to an end.



What understanding of history could generate the desire to Systematically bring it to an end? Again, somehow life would continue while history came to an end and so, history must be segregated from life and the life that will continue after the end of history must be conceived of as a life without history. But if Hegel conceived of all philosophy, with the exception of his own, as an expression of history, then the end of history would necessarily bring an end to philosophizing insofar as Hegel's philosophizing produced a result (System) that aimed at making it unnecessary to philosophize. What Hegel's System produced was the result of wisdom which rendered the quest for wisdom unnecessary. So wisdom is now Systematically available and the wise man would amount to the man who could successfully apply the wisdom.

If history stood for the effort, the struggle, the quest for wisdom, i.e., inquiry, then what the end of history recommends is the end of inquiry. So when history ends, inquiry ends. But this does not propose that life ends, it proposes that inquiry ends, that struggle ends, that effort ends, that the quest for wisdom ends, that thinking ends.

In other words, the end of inquiry proposes that the question of life has been solved and that the world is permeated with an omnipresence of prediction, of truth, of wisdom, and of knowledge. Choice and responsibility now

become obsolete because there is nothing to choose, nothing to be responsible for, insofar as the question of life has been solved and choice and responsibility become unnecessary. Inquiry formulated as results, understands responsibility and choice as a life that is permeated with struggle, effort and pain. Thus formulated, inquiry understands itself as benevolent insofar as it aims to alleviate the life of responsibility. So inquiry that formulates its good as the production of results aims to terminate in the achievement of a life that is problem-free, i.e., aims to terminate in the achievement of a life of blissful irresponsibility. Inquiry formulated as results, aims at constructing a building in which the good life, the life of no inquiry, can be lived.

It is impossible to exist without passion, unless we understand the word "exist" in the loose sense of a so-called existence. Every Greek thinker was therefore essentially a passionate thinker. I have often reflected how one might bring a man into a state of passion. I have thought in this connection that if I could get him seated on a horse and the horse made to take fright and gallop wildly, or better still, for the sake of bringing the passion out, if I could take a man who wanted to arrive at a certain place as quickly as possible, and hence already had some passion, and could set him astride a horse that can scarcely walk - and yet this is what existence is like if one is to become consciously aware of it. Or if a driver were otherwise not especially inclined toward passion, if someone hitched a team of horses to a wagon for him, one of them a Pegasus and the other a worn-out jade, and told him to drive - I think one might

succeed. And it is just this that it means to exist, if one is to become conscious of it. Eternity is the winged horse, infinitely fast, and time is a worn-out jade; the existing individual is the driver. That is to say, he is such a driver when his mode of existence is not an existence loosely so called; for then he is no driver, but a drunken peasant who lies asleep in the wagon and lets the horses take care of themselves. To be sure, he also drives and is a driver; and so there are perhaps many who - also exist. (Kierkegaard, 1941: 276).

And how would inquiry that aims at results formulate the driver of this wagon? What would inquiry formulated as results understand as the good driver? A driver with passion would certainly not be its aim. For what would be the place of passion in a life formulated as the application of results? Or, perhaps the contention would be, and it would be indeed a bizarre contention, that results could be applied with passion. Passion is surely reserved for a life that addresses its Self, for a life that re-collects its deep decision to live, for a life that is responsible. Passion is surely reserved for a life of inquiry that aims at formulating the essential difference between the worn-out jade (the concrete) and the winged horse (the eternal) and passion is surely reserved for the life of inquiry that is the conversation that sustains the tension between the concrete and the eternal. And passion is reserved for this life, for it is an everlasting life of Self formulation and reflection that is manifest in an inquiry

that cannot speak the eternal and thus in an inquiry that seeks its possibility and, in this sense, in an inquiry that is never-ending.

But what of the driver that is wanted by inquiry formulated as results? For this sort of inquiry, the more drunk and the more asleep the driver is the better. And what else could the driver be but asleep in the wagon? Does not the idea of results strive to be the trainer of the horses? Results, the trainer, wants to train the worn-out jade and the winged horse to run controllably together. Results wants to train the horses to run at the right speed, to run in the right direction, and to arrive at the right place. Results wants to train the horses to run without reins and thus results wants the driver to be drunk and asleep in the wagon allowing the well-trained horses to take him where they will since their will is wisdom. Results wants no driver at all. But what results forgets is that the horses need to be driven, results forgets that it is a driver. Results forgets that it chooses to be a driver without passion. So results drives but it drives while it is asleep and drunk. And it is the sleeping drunken driver that forgets that he, nevertheless, drives. In this sense, the Self becomes a mere reflection of contingency and concrete place.

IV.

Inquiry, formulated as results, is not merely a temporal matter. This is to say that inquiry does not simply proceed and continue until results have been produced. It is not that inquiry terminates with the production of results, although in a concrete sense this is the case. So in a deeper sense, the concrete notion of temporality - however long a time or short a time an inquiry takes - does not provide for the intelligibility of an inquiry that seeks to terminate.

The termination of inquiry in results is inquiry that, from the beginning, nullifies itself. The very (original) decision to formulate the good of inquiry as results is already a termination of inquiry. Results, as the end of inquiry, is inquiry's way to trivialize itself and to turn away from its beginning. So inquiry that seeks results is inquiry that turns away from its own possibility, is inquiry that turns away from its origin and its Ethic and is thus inquiry that turns away from responsibility. What inquiry that formulates results as end trivializes and turns away from (forgets) is the life that it recommends as good.

Once results have been invented, inquiry ends. In this sense, inquiry that aims at results cannot be spoken of in terms of concrete temporality. Results is a way for inquiry to turn from the infinitude of originality and results is

thus excessive in the finite. (Kierkegaard, 1954: 162-168). So results is inquiry that is excessive, it is inquiry that is excessive in the concrete. Results is inquiry that clings desperately to the concrete difference between inquiry and inquiry, which is to say, the concrete difference between results and results and so, has no understanding of what is needful since, to understand that would be passionate. Results, as an exemplification of excessiveness in the concrete, is inquiry that terminates, is inquiry that loses its Self, and is thus inquiry that does not understand its passionate responsibility to re-collect its Self. Inquiry that seeks results as its end is inquiry that, as Kierkegaard would have it, has pawned its Self to the world. (Kierkegaard, 1954: 168). It is inquiry that gives its Self up to the cave that Socrates speaks of and is inquiry that strives to be just one more shadow among the multitude of shadows except that it strives to be the most perfect shadow.

But what animates this version of inquiry? Inquiry that aims at results aims at resolving some problem or trouble. When problems or troubles arise, inquiry is pressed into service as a way to bring about the solution, the result. Thus, no problem, no inquiry. And this is part and parcel of Hegel's notion of the end of history. In other words, once problems and troubles have been solved, once a result has been produced, life will go on problem free. And, of course, life

without a problem is a life without inquiry. In this sense, inquiry is pragmatic and so, it is pragmatism that animates inquiry.

Pragmatism's formulation of problems formulates results as the once-and-for-all solutions to problems. And, this is certainly a concretization of the notion of problems insofar as this formulation segregates problems from the idea of life. (Kierkegaard, 1941). Pragmatic inquiry orients to life as an interlocutor that is conceived of as the problem of life and thus pragmatic inquiry enters into the conversation that is resolution. Pragmatism conceives of life as a problem and conceives of its (pragmatism's) task as formulating solutions as its way to achieve the good life, the life of the end of inquiry. So pragmatism reformulates life as responsibility into life as problem. Once the problem of life is solved, life can go on. This is like Descartes (1951) who wants to prove that he merely exists so that he can go on merely existing.

Pragmatic inquiry formulates itself as life, but life understood as autobiography. Conceived of autobiographically, pragmatism does not take its life seriously and thus treats it as a trivial matter that must be suppressed. Pragmatic inquiry has no deep conception of its life, which is to say, of life, and thus conceives of its life as merely and superficially autobiography. So the life that is inquiry is

reformulated by pragmatism as the trivial everyday life of the inquirer.

Formulated as autobiography, the life that is inquiry naturally comes to an end, it naturally dies. Whereas death is the end of a human life, the life of inquiry formulated autobiographically finds its death in the production of results. So results become the death of inquiry. As man lives autobiographically, his life is terminated at death and as inquiry lives autobiographically, its life is terminated at results.

But pragmatic inquiry is happy to die, it is happy to attain results. Results is what it lived in order to attain. Results is its progeny. Results are not more inquiry. So life after death is a life without inquiry. Life after death, results, are not inquiry, but instead are information. Life after death is a life without inquiry, life after death is a life of information and so, life after death is not the inquestive life but the informed life. The informed life precludes responsibility, precludes ethical choice, precludes effort and precludes suffering. The informed life has no need for inquirers, it has only a need for librarians. Librarians become the guardians of the how-to-do-it books where the it is understood as life. The informed life is the life of certainty and thus is a life without risk and a life without passion. Such a life recommends that we join



Descartes in merely existing. But like Descartes, such a life forgets that it does recommend.

V.

Following Lessing, Kierkegaard writes: "that, if God held all truth in his right hand, and in his left hand held the lifelong pursuit of it, he would choose the left hand." (1941:97). But now we must ask; What is it to choose the left hand over the right hand? What is it to choose the lifelong pursuit of truth over truth itself? This is clearly a preference, but what sort of preference? Moreover, this is clearly a recommendation, but what sort of recommendation?

Surely Kierkegaard is not saying that God prefers the inquirer who, although intending to, did not achieve results. That is, God does not prefer the inquirer whose death precedes the death of his inquiry, i.e., whose lifelong pursuit of results achieves only the pursuit and not the results. Kierkegaard is not saying that God prefers this inquirer over the inquirer who produces magnificent results. So when Kierkegaard says that God prefers the lifelong pursuit of truth rather than truth itself, Kierkegaard is formulating a version of good inquiry.

For Kierkegaard, good inquiry is not inquiry that aims at results, i.e., Kierkegaard does not understand the truth as the production of results. To choose the lifelong

pursuit of truth is to choose the life that is inquiry. It is to choose the life that is inquiry and it is to choose to treat that life seriously. In this sense, the life that is inquiry is not formulated as autobiography since that would be to concretize the life of inquiry and to formulate the aim of inquiry as termination in results.

To choose the life that is inquiry is to choose to formulate life not as life as problem, as pragmatism does, but is to choose to formulate life as responsibility, as Socrates does. Socrates' conversation with Meno exemplifies life formulated as responsibility. Meno offers a definition(s) of virtue and Socrates invites Meno to formulate that definition(s) (that usage) and so, invites Meno to formulate the life that makes his speech possible and to formulate the life which his speech recommends. In this sense, to speak is to choose and thus to choose the lifelong pursuit of truth over truth itself is to choose to understand life as responsibility and thus is to choose to re-collect that responsibility.

Life formulated as a problem can come to an end, and indeed is at an end, because the aim that life as a problem has is solution. Life formulated as responsibility, however, can never come to an end since there is no end to responsibility. The good is displayed in every speech and thus inquiry that takes itself seriously chooses, on each

and every occasion of inquiry, to re-collect the Good.

So to formulate life as responsibility is to say that life is responsive to the Good. For pragmatism, the good life is possible insofar as pragmatism formulates the good life as the life without problems. But for inquiry that chooses the lifelong pursuit of truth over truth itself the good life is possible only when inquiry chooses to be responsible to the Good, which is to say, inquiry that conceives of itself as an example. It is inquiry that conceives of itself as a driver of Kierkegaard's team of horses and is inquiry that conceives of the driver as a driver whether the driver is asleep or not.

To choose the lifelong pursuit of truth over truth itself is, as Althusser says of Marx, to choose not to allow, the paths of inquiry to disappear in results. Conceiving of inquiry as a path that ought to disappear in the results, which is to say, to conceive of the good of inquiry as results, is to conceive of inquiry concretely and is thus to bring inquiry to an end. But this is not to say that inquiry, conceived concretely as a path, ought to be preserved. For, that would be to preserve the concrete details of inquiry such as the everyday concrete procedures of the inquirer. This would be to preserve (describe) the trivialities of inquiry. And this notion of preservation would be done in the spirit of inquiry that seeks to end. That is, inquiry would

produce results and then formulate the inquiry as incomplete insofar as the production of results left one thing out, namely the description of the trivial way in which the inquiry was conducted.<sup>3</sup>

So the criticism is not that pragmatic inquiry does not preserve itself in the sense of producing a description of how it was concretely accomplished, but rather the criticism is that pragmatism does not value the life that is inquiry and, as such, trivializes that life and makes out of that life, at best, one more thing to be recorded and described. So the recommendation that inquiry ought to take itself seriously is not a recommendation that inquiry ought to take itself seriously autobiographically. Inquiry that takes itself seriously, that values its Self is inquiry that re-collects its Good. In this sense, inquiry animated by pragmatism cannot be repaired, i.e., an inquiry that takes its life seriously will necessarily not formulate its good as the production of results. Inquiry formulated as results does not value its Self and, as such, is not inquiry at all.

So what then is chosen and what is recommended when Kierkegaard says that God would choose the lifelong pursuit of truth rather than truth itself? If it is the lifelong pursuit of truth that is chosen rather than truth itself, then what is chosen, what is valued, is the life of inquiry. And, if what is valued is the life of inquiry then the formulation of truth as results cannot be valued, for that

would be to choose to trivialize inquiry and thus to remove its value. So what is valuable is inquiry it Self, and this is to say, that what is valuable is the life that is inquiry. What is valuable, then, is the life that inquiry makes reference to and to which inquiry points.

Thus, truth cannot be conceived of concretely since that would be to remove the value of life. In this sense, truth references that to which speech (inquiry) owes its life and that to which speech points and, in this sense, that which speech covers over. What speech (inquiry) covers over is the Good and so, good inquiry is inquiry that addresses the Good. Good inquiry is the speech that re-collects its origin, re-collects its ground and since every speech covers over its ground, good inquiry is inquiry that is the lifelong pursuit of the truth. Good inquiry is inquiry that treats its Self seriously insofar as good inquiry is inquiry that re-collects its Self insofar as every inquiry reflects its Self. So the lifelong pursuit of truth is a way of speaking about the lifelong re-collection of the possibility of Self.

Now we can understand why Kierkegaard said that the choice between the lifelong pursuit of truth and truth itself is a choice that belongs to God. For, speech cannot speak its grounds, speech is not self-sufficient and so, speech cannot speak the truth. So the choice between a lifelong pursuit of truth and truth itself is a choice that is not

available to inquiry. Inquiry can, however, delude itself into thinking that it has attained truth by formulating truth concretely as results. But, rather than being the ground, rather than being truth, results are themselves needful of grounding and, in this sense, results are not truth. A commitment to a lifelong pursuit of truth is a commitment to inquiry that continually re-achieves its Self by addressing the Good toward which it points. Inquiry that is committed to addressing grounds is inquiry that is itself needful of grounding and, in this sense, is inquiry that is everlasting and is inquiry that treats itself as valuable. It is no wonder, then, that Kierkegaard has given the choice between the lifelong pursuit of truth and truth itself to God, for it is God that can only have the truth and so, it is God to whom the choice belongs. So our (the mortal) choice amounts to either treating our Self seriously, i.e., as valuable, or treating our Self in a trivial way, i.e., as valueless and unimportant. In any case, the choice is ours and we do choose.

## VI.

Blum tells us that:

The theorist finds his self by reformulating the deep structure of his theoretic language, and he accomplishes this by discarding

what is concrete and conventional from what is bedrock in his language. The fact is, as theorist one continually returns to this bedrock through theorizing itself. (Blum, 1970: 319)

Or again,

Theorizing is the attempt to bring the experience of thinking to speech. If thinking is a conversation within the soul, what one speaks about ought be exemplified as a moment in this conversation. (Blum, 1974: 33).

Does not Blum's speech exemplify and recommend a version of inquiry (theorizing) that takes its Self seriously? For inquiry to take its Self seriously it must not allow the paths of inquiry to disappear in results. In fact, serious inquiry is not inquiry that conceives of its Self as a path that leads to results. Serious inquiry finds its origin in the eternal and, as such, cannot have an end and thus cannot aim at results.

Blum says that the theorist (inquirer) "finds his self". But this finding Self is not a finding in the sense of the production of findings that is understood in the notion of the production of results. In other words, inquiry that takes its Self seriously, theorizing that finds its Self, is not a concrete path of investigation that culminates and ends at Self conceived of as a result. In fact, if the inquirer continually returns, in his inquiry, to what is

bedrock in his inquestive language, i.e., continually returns to what is essential, and if thinking is a conversation in the soul, then inquiry that finds its Self is not a finding understood as a result, but instead is a finding understood as a reminding.

If inquiry is to take its Self seriously, if inquiry is to value its life, then inquiry ought to be the attempt to bring the conversation in the soul to speech. If inquiry is to take its Self seriously, then inquiry ought to be the speech that exemplifies the responsibility of commitment, i.e., inquiry ought to be speech that is re-sponsive to its possibility, to that which gives it life, to that which provides for its value. Thus, speech cannot own that which provides for its possibility, i.e., speech cannot speak its grounds, and as such, inquiry that is the exemplification of speech that addresses its grounds is inquiry that is everlasting. Inquiry is everlasting because all speech, including inquiry that addresses its bedrock, including inquiry that attempts to bring the conversation in the soul to speech, is itself needful of grounding.

If the conversation in the soul that is thinking is conceived of as a thing that can be concretely spoken, i.e., is conceived of as a potential result, then what the notion of inquiry as result recommends is an end to the conversation in the soul, which is to say, an end to thinking. Conceived



thus, what the notion of result recommends is a life of unthinking application. Results is a way to formulate the good life as the life of unthinking application and thus it is necessary for results to have its paths disappear, to lose its paths. The life of unthinking application finds it unnecessary to re-achieve the thinking that produced the results. Moreover, the life of unthinking application finds it unnecessary to conceive of results as a continual re-achievement of its origin.

But the paths that led to the result do not merely disappear and are not merely lost. The paths, conceived of as the conversation in the soul that is thinking, are forgotten and what results forgets is that it chooses to be results, i.e., it chooses to forget its Self, and as such, results chooses to partake of the choice that Kierkegaard says is reserved only for God.

Inquiry that is the attempt to bring the conversation in the soul that is called thinking to speech, is inquiry that is not a finding, but is inquiry that is a reminding. It is inquiry that seeks to remind itself of its Self and it is inquiry that seeks to remind itself of the life that it recommends as good. There is nothing to find, there are no results, there are no conclusions. Each and every speech is exemplary and no speech that takes its Self seriously can claim completion, can claim to have spoken the final word, which is to say, can claim to have spoken the first word.

Each and every speech is bold insofar as each and every speech exemplifies and recommends a life that is good and so, each speech is re-sponsive to that life and thus there is no end to responsibility. The Socratic reminder reminds us that we are deeply responsible and invites us to speak responsibly by re-collecting what is right and valuable in our speech.

FOOTNOTES

- 1       The Plain Truth (Supplement to the Vancouver Sun, Sat., Jan. 19, 1980).
- 2       One way that current philosophy formulates the Meno, specifically the section discussed above, is as a paradox, for example, Moravcsik (1971: 53-59). (See especially p.54). But these formulations come from a concrete reading of the Platonic dialogues and thus formulate paradox as a feature of the dialogue and not as a feature of the concrete reading. In other words, the formulation paradox does not address the reading that generates that formulation. Paradox will exemplify a concrete reading of the Platonic dialogues insofar as the dialogues would be read as a treatise and not as a dialogue. What the formulation paradox requires is a forgetting of the dialogues in that the dialogues are a conversation that exemplify movement in the soul (thinking) and exemplify the responsibility of speech in that speech is responded to and formulated. What the formulation paradox forgets, then, is the maieutic work that generates the dialogue.
- 3       In this sense, along with results, there is one more thing to produce, one more thing to describe, namely the everyday activities of the inquirer. A glance at any ethnography will exemplify this sort of description, particularly in the ethnographic talk about the Setting, Entree Into The Field, etc. A good example of how the life of inquiry is formulated as autobiography can be found in Smith Bowen (1964).

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