

Rhetoric In the Moral Order. A Critique of Tropological Approaches to Culture

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Abstract: From the early modern work of Francis Bacon, but particularly among the Moral Philosophers of the 18th century, Hume, Smith, Ferguson etc. inquiry into human nature, its propensities and possibilities, was conceived of under the rubric of moral philosophy, and more particularly as the study of the dynamic of the moral sentiments, the natural play of feelings of antipathy and sympathy in society that contributed or subtracted from social order. From Bacon on down moral philosophy was pronouncedly interested in the role of rhetoric in exciting or depressing the moral sentiments. As the 18th Century freed itself from the Old Order it became increasingly interested in an Enlightened understanding of Moral Order itself. One might well argue that it was the nature of the Moral Order that really interested the Moral Philosophers. Can this still be a productive interest in anthropology, particularly at a time when the moral economy based on considerations of the “just community” has been largely replaced by the currency of a free wheeling market economy driven into increasing income disparities by the bottom line if not just plain individual avarice? Assuming that this interest can still serve us, and perhaps even more so at our present juncture, this paper, anchors itself first by reflecting on the moral authority and rhetorical practice of “intercommunicating clusters” in the life of learning. It then addresses some contemporary issues having to do with the “play of tropes” in culture and which are relevant to the ambiguities of the “moral sentiments” and hence to the complex dynamic of the Moral Order. It argues that paying attention to the Moral Imagination’s role in Moral Order is, in any event or circumstance, central to the ethnographic task.

I. “Intercommunicating Clusters”:

As a preliminary exercise (*progymnasmata*) let me begin with an ancient common place or *topoi*, and a social dynamic, “communicative clustering.” *Antecedence*, of course, is an old rhetorical ploy. And the *controversia* of life in which rhetorical ploys are frequent, particularly in the academy, tend to produce “intercommunicating clusters,” often with a strong, real or imagined, sense of antecedence and anchorage in time. They also tend to have characteristic *topoi* to which they appeal. And *antecedence* is an easy trope by which to stake out claims and gain conviction in the argumentative relation between clusters.

The notion of “intercommunicating clusters” was Margaret Mead’s idea about how the professions do their work. She was about as intercommunicating a colleague, and reached out as widely as a member of as many clusters, as anthropology has ever seen. Impressive also was Mead’s capacity in various venues and through various media to communicate to a very wide public audience. She was one of the most compelling “public intellectuals” that anthropology has

known. This capacity for public communication brought considerable criticism of Mead from more tightly defined clusters with “special vocabularies” within the social sciences and a suspicion of her scientific credentials presuming, apparently, that the vocabulary of science was not or should not be, by definition, broadly communicable. Late in her life, in the 1970s, Mead would regularly complain that anthropology had lost its role, present during the 2nd World War, for example, to be taken into account by and to influence government and the political process. One must admit some truth in her critique and observe that contemporary intercommunicating clusters in socio-cultural anthropology do not, as a rule, enjoy very wide publics, and communicate mainly within the cluster itself probably because of the development, through a kind of cultural involution and intellectual specialization endemic to densely packed and inter-competitive sub-disciplinary populations, of a very special and publicly opaque vocabulary.

At the heart of Mead’s idea of clustering, or any dynamic of clustering, for that matter, lies the ever-present dynamic of social inclusion or exclusion, a particularly pertinent interest in current social science, but also of inevitable interest to rhetoric as far back as the sophist’s interest in rhetoric’s place in community formation and leadership claims.¹ It is also a dynamic shot through with moral issues. At the present time anthropologists will recognize this is the re-assertion of a many decade’s long debate with both strong rhetorical and moral order components: the debate begun in the nineteen sixties over the culture of poverty. As is so frequently the case this has long been a debate over victims and perpetrators and a debate over who is to blame for social differentiation and social exclusion. And not surprisingly this *controversia* breaks down into “intercommunicating clusters”: simply put, those whose argument

¹ The awareness of “social exclusion” has become of particularly interest in the nineteen nineties as the flourishing European and American economies became aware of a corresponding increase in income disparity, ghetto-ization and a re-assertion of the problems of poverty and the poor. See the following: M. Roche and R. van Berkel (eds) *European Citizenship and Social Exclusion*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 1997; and W. J. Wilson’s work beginning with *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, The Underclass and Public Policy*. Chicago. 1987. I would call particular attention to the reflective work in Ireland of A. Jamie Saris and his “intercommunicating cluster. Most recently see A. J Saris (et al) “Community Development Organization and the European Union: Social Inclusion Discourses as Ethnographic Problems.” (Ms).

would blame the poor themselves and their cultures or those who would blame the privileged and the political economic structures of society beneficial to their privileges and in which they are complicit? Involved here, of course, are two different visions of moral order and not surprisingly, as the word blame suggests, there is almost inevitably some rhetorical exercising of moral muscle as one or another class or segment of society in the moral order is implicated or absolved in respect to the problem of poverty. Of course, this argument over moral order has deep antecedence and is at least as ancient as Aristotle's discussion of the evolution of the Athenian constitution and its successive treatments of the rich and the poor in Book I of the *Politics*. Much declamation has ensued and many "common places" have been deployed to address this perennial problem of the place of poverty in thinking about Moral Order in society. We should be cautious, however, in supposing that there is anything endlessly or always "new" here. In fact these "topoi," these common topics of our concern, such as antecedent experience, about social dynamics that history brings to our attention over and over again, have always something repetitive about them. 'Plus ca change plus c'est la meme lieu commun.'

Let us begin, in any event, with some intercommunicating clusters and with attempts in anthropology in the late sixties and seventies of the last century to reinvigorate attention in our discipline to matters of rhetoric and poetics and to their relation to moral order. This, at least, was an interest of a group of us expressed in a foundational, for us, session on Metaphor held at the 1971 American Anthropological meetings in San Diego. One of the most attentive members of the audience in that now far off session and sharpest questioners was Victor Turner. Not so long after, in 1974 he published his *Dramas Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, at Cornell Press, while, the ambiguities of clustering being what they are,² the group of

² Turner had requested, in a gesture of clustering as we understood it, that the collection of meeting's papers be submitted to Cornell Press to which he as an advisor and which the editor's of our symposium were quite happy to do. Unfortunately after lingering several years in Cornell's hands the press finally declined to publish the collection just having itself published the Turner volume on Metaphor. Wishing to avoid "*ad hominum* argument" I would simply say that this was regarded by all of us involved in the symposium and its publication as an "unhappy turn of events" with implications of something vaguely venal somewhere at Cornell, something

us who has organized the session had to wait until 1977 to find a publisher and to bring out our papers with Penn Press under the editorship of David Sapir and Christopher Crocker and with the title *“The Social Use of Metaphor: Essays on the Anthropology of Rhetoric. (Penn Press).* The plans for this particular session as I recall were laid with Chris Crocker in the spring of 1969 in discussions at Duke University where I offered a paper on “Metaphor Theory” and perhaps even earlier when David Sapir and I had drinks together at various annual meetings of the mid to late sixties of the American Anthropological Association and talked about the challenge to anthropological interpretation and understanding of “subtle” and “revitalized” words in the communication and “playing out” of culture.³ I don’t want to pretend that these interests sprung whole cloth and pristine from our brows, that we were the only cluster then at work,⁴ or that we were unaffected by other circumstances than the important one of just having returned from the field and struggling with our field notes. I for one had been much affected by Kenneth Burke, by Ogden and Richards in college and by Roman Jacobsen and Levi- Strauss in Graduate school.

rancid in the state of Ithaca! At least it is a testimony to some of the ambiguities of clustering!

³ See JWF "Unbelievably Subtle Words--Representation and Integration in the Sermons of an African Reformativ Cult." *Journal of History of Religions*, Vol. 6, No. 1, August 1966, pp. 43-69. And "Revitalized Words from the Parrot's Egg and the Bull Who Crashes in the Krall." *Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society for 1966*, pp. 53-64.

⁴It should be mentioned that there were then several different groups working on metaphor, and Mead’s term “intercommunicating clusters” would certainly be useful here. There were notably James Fox and the Rosaldos. Renato and Michelle, at Harvard and the Mirandas, Pierre and Elie at UBC. Rather later contributors in the seventies would have to include Keith Basso, then at Arizona and also Brenda Beck at UBC. Clifford Geertz and Paul Friedrich without being identifiable with any specific cluster – like Mead they were multi-clustered colleagues – had over those years of the sixties and seventies made repeated contributions to anthropological thinking about the figurative in communication if not about metaphor itself. It has been a unfortunate tendency in anthropology and probably other social sciences for “Intercommunicating clusters” to cluster together and intercommunicate too tightly among themselves. For myself I have tried to register my debts to these other clusters (Fernandez , 1980, 1991) including that of the cognitive linguists. They, for their part, bathed in the redeeming light of pure science have had minimal or null interest in intercommunicating with the various antecedent clusters that have worked on metaphor and rhetoric in what I take it they feel is the “fuzzy field discipline” of anthropology. A notable exception to this is Gibbs (1994)!

And of course, the late sixties were times were alive with revolutionary and inter-generational accusatory and revitalizing rhetoric. “Any one over thirty had sold out” as it was said! It was a powerful rhetorical accusation for young academics all in their mid or late thirties. In the Vietnam years the establishment Moral Order and its self justifications were very much under question and there were among us a number of groups, inter-communicating clusters, interested in the militant metaphors of the times, and the rash of condemnatory and revitalizing rhetorics of the Vietnam years⁵. The pressures of those under thirty also made us pronouncedly interested in our own postures vis a vis the “moral order.”

⁵ David Sapir’s important theoretical contribution to *The Social Use of Metaphor*, (“The Anatomy of Metaphor”) makes primary use of some of the prevalent tropes present in the then active argument over the Vietnam war. Cf 1977: pgs 28-30..

That we certainly had the role of rhetoric in culture very much in mind as seen in the subtitle of our collection, though we largely concentrated our attention on the constitutive and persuasive power of the tropes in social action and hardly upon the full panoply of oratorical techniques and training that Europeans inherit from the Ancients; the declamatory disciplines of the classical world, which to a considerable degree constituted one of the dominating and consolidating concerns of mental training for the practice of public culture, applied *bildung* as it were, among the patrician classes and their progeny in the intellectual life of antiquity. That Graeco-Roman Empire wide consolidation of minds by dedication to rhetorical training and rhetorical practice in the use of the topos might well be a consolidation which a major conference like this sponsored by a multi national corporation like Volkswagen should have in mind as well. At this time of building a European identity in place of the ethnocentrism that have been such a torment to Old Europe over so many centuries we cannot forget E.R Curtius's hope, an exercise of both the Intellectual and the Moral Imagination I think we might say, to revitalize the cultural unity of Europe, lost in the Reformation, through the heritage of Graeco Latin rhetoric.⁶ A major European Conference on Rhetoric/Culture may itself be understood as making a rhetorical statement about the cultural identity of Europe. Indeed, as communication or mis-communication is the nexus of all concord or discord and resultant cooperation and collaboration (or their refusal) in the construction and maintenance of culture the understanding of the shaping of that communication whether for persuasive or actionable ends, in the light of the ancient European interest in that understanding, might well, indeed, be a basis, in this time of a new but uncertain common currency (in the various senses of the word to include the *currencies* of talk and writing as well as of monetary exchange) , by which to recapture a more

⁶E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 1990 (German Original 1948). Curtius, an Alsatian, was famous for seeking, in the name of an elite European-wide and classics grounded intellectual tradition, to mediate the destructive antagonisms between France and Germany .. in his years, which encompassed the two World Wars, to replace, that is, German political imperialism with a pan-European Latin-grounded humanism. Curtius is of particular interest to this conference because of his philological orientation and his view that classical rhetoric provided the groundwork of European thought. His systematic study of recurrent *topoi* in European literature since classical times offered, he argued, a vision of the continuity of pan-European culture. Curtius we might say was a notable proponent of Rhetoric/Culture.

coherent European past and make it a palpable present.

But, of course those of us who sought to energize the study of metaphor and revitalize the approach to ritual at the turn of the nineteen seventies had no such ambitious geo-politics of communicative practice in mind. To begin with, and perhaps to end with, we were all fundamentally ethnographers coming off extended field trips of several years duration at least, with abundant field texts describing situations which we had actually witnessed or participated in and where persuasive powers were at work and which we were desirous of understanding better. Secondary ethnocentrism being what it is we felt a strong allegiance, not to say “moral obligation”, to these texts and the people that had generated them. We were committed to more adequate interpretation while at the same time being relative striplings in the discipline we were anxious to find, at once, an Archimedean point by which we might both leverage our careers⁷ and the discipline itself to greater purchase upon our materials and, in the end, more ‘meaningful methods,’⁸ This notion of meaning was not altogether free of the moral implications of studying “others” in ways more meaningful to them. We may not have fully appreciated at that point, I think, the degree to which the arguments we were seeking to make about master metaphors and their supportive and derivative structures were part of a general move to get down from Archimedean postures and to recognize that any point of purchase we might achieve in any act of anthropological understanding was inevitably perspectival and very probably poetic. The point, as it came to be articulated, and it later came to be articulated with particular pungency and learned subtlety, is that one wanted to avoid buying into the exploitation of master narratives and “final vocabularies,” as they came to be called. One wanted to avoid self fulfilling and self-arrogating explanatory schemes. The accompanying loss of “authority” that such hesitancy and caution in the self-sufficiency of our explanations was nailed down smartly by “apologists” for

⁷ As to the leveraging of careers in the proto-post modern period, 1970-1985, see Steven

⁸ JWF with
 ωιτη Μιχηαελ Ηερζφελδ, ΑΟν Μεανινγφυλ Μετηοδσ, @ *Ηανδβοοκ οφ Μετηοδσ ιν Χυλτυ
 ραλ Αντηροπολογυ*, θ. Ρυσσελλ Βερναρδ (εδ), Τηουσανδ Οακσ: Σαγε. Ππ.

our discipline in the eighties. The consequence of this shift in authoritative postures, Archimedean or other wise, didn't make our tropological approaches, or anthropology itself, any less interesting and important to us, of course, just less pretentious. It doesn't make it less important because the rhetorical dynamics by which conviction is gained in social life, other than in anthropology or even within the discipline itself, by the use of language becomes, thereby, the very center of our interest.

To be sure there had been a long history of seeking to substitute an attention to the constituents of effect and affect, that is to say of conviction, in “communicative action” for the declining value of religious conviction in modern thought, to develop, that is, a “moral philosophy” for religious commandment, or perhaps an understanding of the dynamics of conviction and commandment as replacement for the declining luster of the real thing. . This was seen early in Francis Bacon whose own definition of and dedication to “scientific method” carried him beyond the constraints, bound in revelation, in religious conviction to an interest in the convictions themselves, that is to say an interest in “moral philosophy.” This is seen particularly among the Moral Philosophers of the 18th century, Hume, Smith, Ferguson etc. and their inquiry into human nature, its propensities and possibilities, an inquiry that was conceived of under the rubric of moral philosophy, and more particularly as the study of the dynamic of the moral sentiments, the play of feelings of antipathy and sympathy in society. From Bacon on down moral philosophy was pronouncedly interested in the role of rhetoric in exciting or depressing the moral sentiments. I am not sure that in the seventies we would have characterized our interests in the place of metaphor in social rhetoric as being encompassed by the phrase “moral philosophy” although that is what I am suggesting here that it is!

Having now held my listeners feet to the fire –or lingering embers -- of *precedence*, that is, of our past commitments to the study of the figurative facets of rhetoric force, I would now like to take up the topic of the moral sentiments. I do this at some risk because the whole issue of morality and *the moral* has long dwelled under a cloud in the social sciences as at once too philosophical and too reminiscent of the antiquated atmosphere of conviction propagated in

sacred societies from which the Enlightenment had escaped. But we don't have to necessarily espouse a specific morality while being interested in the rhetoric of morality and moral order. In particular I want to address the intertwining of the moral imagination and the moral order.

II. The Moral Imagination and the Moral Order.

Without entering into the vast literature on ethics and moral casuistry let me anchor my argument in just two definitions of the moral which are appealing in their simplicity: the first definition grounds itself in social interaction and derives the word, *moral*, from its classical root, *mos*, a “a way of comporting oneself.” It emphasizes the complexities and contrarities of comportment, that is social interaction, in the world that needs to be “figured out” (in the rhetorical sense of the word “figure or “figure of speech” incidentally) for both the “culture carrier” and the ethnographer alike, as an *aide pensee* or an actual guide to comportment. This “figuring out” is most often done through moral casuistry in the form of moral narratives of various kinds, as, since Aesop at least, we most often tell stories about social interaction, whether in animal guise or not, to make moral points. This is an argument that has surfaced with great frequency in the Bakhtinian era⁹ where so much emphasis has been put upon narrativity in and of the social world.¹⁰ In some quarters ethical deliberation at least, if not much more of life than that, has virtually been redefined as story-telling. So the moral is an apprehension of social interaction bound up in and very much energized by narrative art.

⁹ M..M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* M. Holquist (ed) C. Emerson (Trans) Austin. 1981. Also *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington. 1984.

¹⁰ Just to take several early examples of the range of work influenced by Bakhtinian studies of the narrative dynamics of the “dialogic imagination” that embodies the “moral (or social) imagination” in story telling: Keith Basso, “Stalking with Stories: Names, places and moral narratives”, in E.M. Bruner, (ed) -*Text, Play and Story: the Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society*, Washington: AES. 1984:19-55; F. Jameson, *The Political unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca (1981) And more recently the cognitivists have taken pointed interest in both the moral imagination and the narratives in which it is embodied: Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of cognitiv science for ethics*, Chicago:1993..

The second definition focuses on “well being,” of self and more especially of others as being the central concern of moral meditation and deliberation. It begins with the most elementary experiential dimensions of “being in the world” rather than the ongoing existential vectors of interacting in the world. We have in this orientational division of labor the enduring Durkheimian debate in the social sciences between an individual, psychologically if not virtually physiologically oriented and a society oriented ontology, which brings along with it quite different epistemological palpations of the elephant. Where, primarily, do we look for the reality of human life, within the individual himself or herself or outward to the always and already social, political and economic structures of the cultures which we are constantly telling stories about and within which all individuals must take up available roles in operative interaction. Of course, to state this enduring debate in too stark and dichotomous a way misses the many intermediating and syncretising positions that characterize the Hegelian movement towards truth and the ultimate manifestation of the spirit of reason on this problem in history.

But taking the trope of that forward movement of reason for granted I would like, in respect to tropology, which is to say in respect to that method of understanding which focuses on the figuration of thought and its relation to action, to very briefly take two exemplars of the treatment of the moral imagination in these two different ways: the work of the anthropologist-ethnographer Thomas Beidelman’ in his ethnography *Moral Imagination in Kaguru Modes of Thought*, and the work of the cognitive linguist George Lakoff in he and his colleague’s work over several decades and particularly in his *More Than Cool Reason* and in his more recent *Philosophy in the Flesh*.

A. Figuring Out an Ethnography of Moral Order In a Myriad and Contradictory Social Reality:

There are few anthropologist’s who have compiled as extensive an ethnographic work in many, many articles and monographs as Beidelman among the Kaguru, particularly in the nineteen sixties and seventies. *Kaguru Modes of Thought* first appearing in the late eighties is

his first book length treatment of his culture.¹¹ The author describes it as the product of more “seasoned judgement” and thus a “less youthful” treatment of his subject than his earlier work, more seriously and fully aware of the “essential pathos and ambiguity of social life” that all cultures contain and which they seek to face through the moral imagination.” ((1986 ,xi). His main argument, conditioned by that mature judgement, is that “it is in the realm of the imagination that a people confront these disparate and conflicting features of their thought and experience.” (Ibid: 5) In so far as the Kaguru and many other African peoples are concerned this imaginative confrontation takes place mainly in the various forms of folklore and folk narrative: proverbs, maxims, folktales, legends and myths.

Beidelman takes as his task that of teasing apart the complexities of these narratives and the way they confront the dilemmas, contradictions and ambiguities of social life so as to aid people in their comportment. Of course that aid is itself most often set out in quite ambiguous terms. That is to say while these folk narratives provide characters with whose thoughts and actions the audience can empathize, sympathize or reject just as often the thoughts and actions of the heroes, villains or fools portrayed offer no easy polar or oppositional choices and, in fact and in part, excite the moral imagination by subverting any direct and ready application of moral principle. They thus cultivate a sense of the challenging ambiguity of everyday life. Indeed, one

¹¹ This book has appeared in a second but not revised edition with an insightful Foreward by Ivan Karp, *Moral imagination in Kaguru modes of thought*, with a new foreword by Ivan Karp.. Washington: Smithsonian. 1993.

might argue (Karp in Beidelman: 1993: ii) that Beidelman's work focuses not on successful moral practice but on subversion and failure and blight. In respect to the straightforwardness of moral conduct the narratives and statements of belief he has elicited focus on the "pathos" as the author says and not upon the "ethos" of everyday life. Focusing on these materials, the author seeks to reveal the real challenge to the moral imagination.

In any event it is in this narrated lore that the anthropologist has most direct access to the images by which cosmologies are both constructed and criticized. They are a prime if not the best material and means by which an anthropologist's own imagination can be guided in his or her interpretations. For it is a part of the maturity of Beidelman's judgement that the anthropologist's own interpretations, confronted by the ultimately unresolvable contradictions of social life, are also an exercise of the moral imagination! (Ibid: Chapter 1). In respect to the "Moral Space" of the House and the bodily etiquette appropriate to it, Chapter 4, "Moral Space: the House, Settlements and Body Etiquette," the author points up the tensions between the conduct appropriate to the private intimacies of the house and public obligations. At the same time he points up the importance and challenge of these private conducts to the individuals' and families' sense of its public moral identity. In Chapters 10. ("Speculation about the Social Order: Stories and Society") and 11. ("Humans and Animals: Stories and Subversion") Beidelman focuses on story telling not as charters for right action but as explorations of the problems of right conduct ... explorations usually provoked by subversive behavior in which, for example, sexual etiquette and morally respectful relations between generations, siblings, and brothers and sisters is violated. For in the end Kaguru life, like life in any culture, has many puzzling features not susceptible to an easy moral casuistry. For Kaguru, particularly, it is "the puzzle of matrilineality" where children must learn to love and respect their mother's brother more than the father that engendered them. And the father himself finds his love for his offspring subverted by the claims upon them of his brother-in-law.

There are two methodological, which is to say analytic, issues that Beidelman confronts: 1. the evocation of the emotions through the moral imagination and 2. the interlinkage of

elements within the imagination to the terrain of social action. There is almost always an emotional charge as the proverbial wisdom of lore and story is brought forth into social life for meditation and comment. Proverbs, themselves, for example, are often introduced during heightened moments of argument and contribute, thus to the agonizing even agonistic atmosphere of these moments. And tales myths and legends heighten awareness in their presentation of a panoply of characters which are provocative of sympathy and antipathy..in any case empathy positive or negative. The emotions aroused by these presentations of imagined comportments and meditations upon them are influential, one deduces, in conditioning if not directing actual comportment in the extent social world. They are effective in stimulating thought about the moral order if not commitment to just the right behaviors that can instantiate that order!

Very central to the power of these narratives is the fusing of different domains of experience accomplished by metaphor, their most central rhetorical device. Though Beidelman does not, to any great degree, enter into an analysis of the systematicity of these linkages he seems to posit in the notion of “evocation” and, with virtually a nuclear reaction model in mind, a release of affect and feeling from the very act of linkage itself.¹² But an analytic systematics of narrative or of tropological analysis is not a dominant or even an especially salient concern of this ethnographer and his ethnography whose focus is on the details of ethnographic interpretation itself, which is to say, on the challenge of understanding how informants in their folklore activate often by subversion and make use of the moral imagination in making their way through, for the ethnographer, the obvious puzzling complexities of the social order.¹³ Powerful simplicities of interpretation, if any simplicities are to be found beyond these complexities, are inevitably strained by the very fine and very thick filter of social life and social

¹² For a discussion of the emotional release attendant upon the realization of domain linkage see Fernandez 1974, “The Mission of Metaphor” and 1986, “The Argument of Images and the Experience of Returning to the Whole.”

¹³ Beidelman focuses on the complexities of his own moral imagination in the Concluding Chapter 12. And he meditates on its role in his understanding of the Kaguru moral order and moral imagination.

experience. They run up against a moral imagination challenged by the subversiveness of that life evoked if not celebrated in local lore and narrative.

B. The Power and the Perplexity of Parsimony:

An ethnography of the Kaguru kind which seeks to be true to its subject matter is caught up almost from the first moment in the complexity of lived interaction both that observed and testified to by informants and that experienced, day in and day out by the ethnographer. The second approach which focuses on the *experiential gestalt*, as it is called by the cognitivists, of “being in the world” by virtue of that focus much more readily discovers the simplicities upon which the “moral imagination” or preferentially in their parlance, the Moral Metaphor System, is grounded. Or at least Lakoff and Johnson in their discussion of Morality (1999: Chapter 14) up front and from the first moment tell us that “the range of metaphors that define our moral concepts is fairly restricted (probably not more than two dozen basic metaphors) and that there are substantial constraints on the range of possible metaphors.” (Ibid: 290) These constraints and limitations arise because the set of metaphors are all grounded in the experience of “well being” and particularly physical well being in our diurnal, annual, life cycle gravitational world of ups and downs, light and dark, health and disease, cleanliness and impurity, prosperity and impoverishment etc. in short the physical-ecological states that most directly constitute well-being and ill-being for the living and adapting organism.

I can not enter into here the cognitivists working out of the moral metaphor system and their argument for the metaphorical nature of moral understanding except to indicate 1. that they believe that what is revealed is a “widespread if not universal folk theory of what well being in physical terms is” although in the same breath they recognize that this theory has not really been tested cross-culturally (Ibid: Pgs 311-312, 325, 332) and, 2. that the system is not perfectly self consistent with itself. The system not only itself envisions contrarities and dilemmas that such a system of understanding generates but that itself as system inevitably has moral choices to make, advertently or inadvertently. In respect to point 1, of course, it is just here, as regards cross cultural implications that tropologists in anthropology have been most uncomfortable with

the theory (Quinn 1992). For example, one of the most important metaphors for moral well being and moral judgement turns out to be the wealth and accounting metaphor. Moral bookkeeping and moral judgement as book balancing and the paying of moral debts may be, as it is, a convincing and resonant set of metaphors in Western Culture, to be sure, and with the creation of a world marketplace and the globalization of acquisitive and market minded mentalities it may approach universality among certain classes. But it is harder to argue that it is a universal in culture, and, as an aside, with the contemporary scandals among accounting firms, in mind, the negative valences of accounting itself as a trope could well come to the fore as predominant, making it a trope of falsification or of dubious or ironic use in moral calculation.. The culture-centric nature of the limited set of metaphors identified in the moral metaphor system is one thing, and in any case the theory is recognized by the cognitivists to be in need of cross cultural testing, but the content and self consistency of the system proposed is altogether more challenging.

Here we have an interesting issue which brings the cognitivist approach into more direct comparison with the ethnographic. Now the cognitivists theory recognizes and works out the details, in a particularly clear way, of the kinds of dilemmas that moral systems anchored or grounded in metaphor get themselves into and the consequent choices posed for moral casuistry. For the metaphors themselves are never perfectly compatible. One is obliged by a rule of retribution to pay or repay moral debts, for example, while, by the rule of “absolute goodness” one is obliged to forgive debts. One has to make a choice and the cognitivists approach to the moral system is particularly valuable in pointing out just what some of these choices are and, indeed, their argument, recurrently points up such challenging contrary situations: the many different metaphorical models for distributive justice, for example, with “no overarching neutral conception of fairness available to resolve the conflict (Ibid: 297); moral authority as dominance (a la Moses) or moral authority as submission (ala Christ or St. Francis) (Ibid pg 301); moral character as an essential (ascribed) or as an acquired condition (pg 307); absolute empathy as against egocentric empathy (309-311); . So this metaphor based system of understanding morality and moral judgement does not obviate choices it works rather to point then up.

But the question arises whether it itself has made some choices that are less clearly recognized and which are subject to anthropological appraisal. For example, the metaphor (other than the wealth and accounting trope) which overall ties together the moral system of the metaphors of Western culture is the “Family” or “Family of Man” metaphor which grounds moral behavior and moral casuistry in family experience, and more particularly the disciplinary atmosphere of the family whether one of strictness and unquestioned authority or one of nurturant openness... the “Strict Father” vs “Nurturant Parent” models which Lakoff finds primary and pervasive in moral reasoning in the home but also especially in politics.¹⁴ Here there is a clear choice and for the cognitivists the choice seems clearly in favor of a moral guidance in parenting and politics, and in the conduct of human relationships generally, based on greater openness and nurturance, based, that is, on the parental nurturance model although not, as they insist, to the point of pathological permissiveness.

¹⁴ On the eve of the American National Elections of 1996 Lakoff published a book opportune for its moment in which the basic moral values of American Politics were identified as reposing in a family model of either Strict Father or Nurturant Parent moralities. What the Republicans understood was the appeal of Strict Father morality to the electorate though Lakoff sought to demonstrate the inadequacy if not repugnance of that model as a “patron” for life in a democratic social order.

Now the cognitivists in discussing the metaphor of moral order do not hesitate to express moral repugnance for that order based on the strict father model even to the point of finding the idea of moral order itself unacceptable especially insofar as it is identified with the natural order of things and thereby rendered absolute and free of careful casuistry.¹⁵ But it is quite unclear if there is an alternative to that metaphor insofar as considerable time is also spent in the argument in pointing out the mappings in the physical sphere --- the primordial gestalt of uprightness, stability and strength, that is to say the logic of physical top-down dominance out of which the idea of Moral Order is constructed. Hierarchy may be morally repugnant but is it avoidable? The ambiguity of argument on this issue is such as to suggest that what we are being offered is a platitude of repugnance along with a attitude of complicity with the “fixedness in nature of hierarchy” from which emanate many of the naturalizing judgements which support existing power relations in cultures.

We encounter this same problem where Lakoff and Turner in in an earlier work, *More*

¹⁵ “The Moral Order metaphor does not merely legitimize power relations and establish lines of authority. It also generates a hierarchy of moral responsibility in which those in authority at a given level have responsibilities towards those over whom they have that authority...The consequences of the metaphor of Moral order are sweeping, momentous and we believe *morally repugnant*. (Emphasis mine) The metaphor legitimates a certain class of existing power relations as being natural and thwerefore moral.” (1999: 303-304)

Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor (1989) We find it in an otherwise quite useful and creative discussion of the Great Chain of Being metaphor (Ibid: Chapter 4). Though usually taught as a guide to Western Thinking from Plato to Pope it is, the author's argue, in fact a still current cultural model so "widespread, largely unconscious and so fundamental and indispensable to our thinking that we hardly notice it." Indeed, as it turns out, it is indispensable to our understanding of ourselves, our world and our language"(Ibid:167-169) It's indispensability lies in the fact that it embodies a basic dynamic of understanding by which 1. the experience of beings is arranged on a hierarchical scale of greater complexity and power ranging from inanimate being on the lowest rung with animate being above themselves arranged according to their sentient complexity and power with self conscious human beings and their superior divine beings on the very highest rungs. It is indispensable 2. because, using the cognitivists scale in basic metaphoric operations, we are able to understand some of the attributes of being of higher level complexity and power by predicating lower level and more understandable attributes upon them. In the simplest (anthropomorphic or zoomorphic) case this would mean predicating animal like, pig-like or lion-like, attributes upon humans, or vice versa human like attributes upon animals. The authors use this model to give insightful explanations of Generic-Specific predications involved in proverbial wisdom. As it turns out the Great Chain is a crucial model for understanding the logic of metaphor itself as a predicative process operating up and down on such a hierarchical scale. The Great Chain is, therefore, more than a metaphor, or as the authors say (Ibid 172) "not strictly a metaphor" or "not just a metaphor" but rather a recurring conceptual complex made up of a metaphor, a common sense theory and a communicative principle. It is a thus a fundamental cognitive tool of great power and scope.

Of course, this tool has its downside which the authors examine in the closing pages of the chapter when they discuss the "Social and Political Consequences of the Great Chain of Being" and its hierarchies of domination of lower forms by higher forms.. And here the ambiguity we have pointed up re-asserts itself. Particularly as this Great Chain has been "elaborated"¹⁶ in the west it has had profound social and political consequences in that it teaches

¹⁶ The authors make a distinction, apparently, between elaborated and unelaborated

both what the hierarchies should be and as these hierarchies are laws of nature that it would be not only wrong but unnatural to try and subvert them. This has, as the authors indicate, profound implications in justifying class and caste systems, domineering race and gender relations, the exploitative relations of man over nature and authoritarianisms of many other kinds. These uses provoke the authors moral reaction and rejection although it is not clear that since the Great Chain is, as they say, “more than a metaphor” but is actually built into the conceptual logic by which metaphor operates that the moral imagination can do anything about that except sigh in despair. A concluding paragraph captures that ambiguity.

“For whatever reason, perhaps because in our early cognitive development we *inevitably* (author’s emphasis) form the model of the basic Great Chain as we interact with the world it seems that the Great Chain is widespread and has strong natural appeal. This is frightening. It implies that those social, political and ecological evils induced by the Great Chain will not disappear quickly or easily of their own accord.” (Ibid: 213)

Great Chains reserving their criticism primarily for the latter although it is difficult to see that the great Chain in any form would be more or less free of feelings of domination and subordination.

It is of interest in respect to the apparent moral energy of this argument coupled with an underlying ambiguity about “inevitability” as to whether because of its lodging in cognitive process we have the option to find some other metaphor more suitable to our moral imagination, to consider a recent critique by Emily Martin¹⁷ of the definitive turn towards neural structures of the brain for foundational explanation as seen in the recent work of the cognitive linguists, particularly apparent in the work of Lakoff and Johnson we consider here (*Philosophy in the Flesh: Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*). For somehow, despite the manifest exercise of their moral imaginations concerning the hierarchical implications of the ‘Strict Father Model’ and the Great Chain of Being” metaphor the reader feels an underlying, perhaps unconscious, sense of the inescapable realities of neural structuring of conceptualization which is inevitably hierarchical in nature. Beyond or behind the moral imagination, in other words, whose workings, incidentally, are illuminatingly teased apart by Johnson, Lakoff and Turner. is the greater reality and the “inevitabilities” of the neuro-computational machinery. Under this paradigm tropological science, the study of the “play of tropes in society” necessarily gives way to neuroscience., the study of the determinative neuromechanisms. The complexities not to say contrarities in the cognitivists ethical cum biological narrative here would surely be grist for Beidelman’s view of the “inevitable” pathos present when cultures wrestling with a self-consistent ethos.

C. An Overarching Moral principle: “A Necessary Unity”?:

¹⁷ Emily Martin, “Mind-Body Problems,” *American Ethnologist* 27 (3):569-590. 2000.

Emily Martin, as always in her papers, is interested, as we should all be, in “the ideological work” done by certain choices of tropes, say the choice of the neural mechanism as the explanatory engine of all behavior, and the relationship of such choices to, 1. the current cultural context in which they may be strategic and adaptive and to, 2. anthropology’s enduring task to focus ethnographically not only on the complexity of social behavior in its actual cultural context, but on the socially self serving nature of apparently foundational arguments in culture.¹⁸

In this case she finds the reduction of human social life to the structures of reason embodied in the neuromechanism as a compensatory turn to interior stability amidst the manic irrational energy of our present exterior world of an ultimately uncontrollable and unpredictable marketplace, entrepreneurial to the point of self indulgent irresponsibility. (All this was written before the collapse of the dot-com bubble and the scandal of the Enron Corporation, two manic enterprises, victims of illusory expectations and/or the depredations of the energy robber barons¹⁹ maniacally engaged in creating offshore empires hidden from a reasoned accounting practice.) In a moral economy, she points out that increasingly removes from the individual the

¹⁸ In her recent work this involves the study of social interactions in medical mileaus, biological laboratories and health care cultures.

¹⁹ I would suppose a good measure of “robber baron” ethics to be exemplified in the ratio between upper echelon executive salaries and ordinary worker salaries in American coporations. This has grown in America over the last twenty years from some 45 times as much executive compensation in the early eighties to some 450 times as much at the end of the booming nineties. Such self regarding greed has rarely been seen in the modern world, since the 19th century at least, even among such famously elitist economies as Brazil and Mexico. Cf . P. Krugman, “Enemies of reform,” NYT. Op Ed. May 21, 2002.

former governmental and institutional protections of his long term well being, removes, that is, social safety nets of every kind, leaving him or her like a miniature corporation, every boat on its own bottom, to sail on very uncertain seas, a turn to the certainties and logic lodged in the neural mechanism has clear compensatory benefits.

Martin compares the present social context and its compensatory thought about human nature with the 18th century and the compensatory thought of the Moral Philosophers. They too were faced with a time of insecurity, the collapse of the Ancien Regime with all its securities of religion and aristocratic right and rank. They too turned to philosophize about the interiority of human nature discovering there the universality of “enlightened reason” and an apparatus of sentiments that, freed from the superstitions privileges and other constraints of the past would, if understood properly enable self rule and social order. Not so long ago of course we heard in the halls of congress the argument that if the burden of government controls were only lifted from the backs of business, financial acumen, the present manifestation of universal reason in human nature, coupled with the age old discipline of self-interested competition, Darwinian in nature, would bring unparalleled prosperity and brilliance to our polity!! It remains to be seen. It certainly brought prosperity to a managerial elite!

Without wishing to overstretch the comparison of the Enlightenment and Universal Reason of the Moral Philosophers with the “enlightened argument” of our contemporary Money Managers , that is to say the neo-liberal free market argument of the present day business gurus anxious to be given the green light to social betterment through self-improvement, nevertheless we may wish to now pick up on Martin’s argument, which is to say her own Moral Philosophy about anthropology’s task and do so by brief reference to another, not unrelated Moral Philosophy, which is rhetorically very much part of our times and which is also of inevitable interest to anthropology. I refer to the human ecology movement and its particular efforts to relate nature to culture and Darwinian views of human evolution to an ethical commitment to a wholistic view of nature and mutual respect for quality of life –*consilience* Wilson calls it²⁰ -- in

²⁰ Wilson, Edward Osborne, *Consilience : the unity of knowledge* New York : Knopf :

all life forms. Their arguments constitute an unusually salient instance of the Moral Imagination in action.

Of course that particular effort of the moral imagination to relate to Darwinian evolutionism to the ethics of social interaction and interaction with the environment is nothing new. There was something of that sensibility in Darwin himself. It was most certainly present in the great paleontologist, Darwin's bulldog, T.H. Huxley whose final efforts was a collection of essays labeled "Evolution and Ethics."²¹ Indeed, there is much evidence of this continuing struggle to relate evolution to ethics and, as it were, return to some wholeness of perspective²² to a human condition otherwise tending to fall into the Hobbesian, not to say Darwinian part-ness where every man's hand is set against every other. In mid last Century at least it was, as we recall, the Jesuit paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin, much admired by Huxley's grandson Julian Huxley,²³ who sought to create a more wholistic 'evolutionary humanism' by relating the canons of Darwinism to an exceptionalism in humans derived from our 'cephalization', which is to say our consciousness of self, or self-awareness. The appearance of mind in this sense, he

²¹Huxley, T.H. (1894) *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* (London)

²² For comment on the dynamic of 'returning to the whole' in human thought and action see Fernandez (1986b).

²³ Julian Huxley provides an admiring Introduction to the English translation of *The Phenomenon of Man*. (1961).

argued, was an entirely new element in evolution and instead of the evolutionary radiation of species, in humans we have increasing convergence and complexification of social interrelationships suggesting the possibilities -- congenial to his professional Christianity -- of increasing perfection and unity of communicative interaction in this round world where what 'goes around eventually comes around'.²⁴

²⁴ Teilhard, a Jesuit, was criticised and brought under pressure by his own church for a too great optimism in this matter and for his neglect of ever-present evil and human imperfection. He rather belatedly, apologetically (and very briefly, three pages only and as an Appendix at the end of *The Phenomenon of Man*) takes up the question of 'The Place and Part of Evil in a World in Evolution'. He discusses four evils: disorder and failure, decomposition, solitude and anxiety, and growth. These are all seen, to be sure, not from the perspective of the Ten Commandments but from the perspective of optimizing the expected evolution of increasing intensity and convergence of human interrelationships.

At the present moment where globalization is everywhere an issue it should not be forgotten that Teilhard foresaw that a round rather than a flat world would inevitably, in a communicative and self-aware species produce convergence and complexification on a global level rather than speciation. It would produce an ever more optimal involution rather than divergent and ever more separated evolution. One might question the beneficial consequences of involution and convergent complexification for the creation of more perfect human relationships. It could as easily suggest, of course, obscurantism and self-serving obfuscation as it is often enough argued in respect to the intellectual life at the present time in the academy.²⁵ However that issue is to be decided, Teilhard is another notable instance, taking the Huxleys grandfather and grandson as “points de repere” in this matter, of a person fundamentally committed to evolutionary science who, like the two Huxley’s seeks to relate it to moral matters and to the spiritual, not to say teleological, commitments involved in ‘becoming more human’.

Subsequently, of course we have seen other notable efforts to make whole whether in hermeneutic or scientific circle, the difficult if not opposed relationship of natural selection **with** spiritual self awareness, and competition and issues of survival with ethical intention. We see this in the recent very large idea of unitary co-evolution associated with the work of Gregory Bateson, for example, or in the Gaia Hypothesis of James Lovelock.²⁶ These

²⁵ See for example “Profscam” as just one among a host of indictments of Academic obscurantisms essentially all instances of what might earlier have been called by Goldenweiser “cultural involution”. Charles J. Sykes, *Prof Scam: professors and the Demise of Higher Education*. Regnery: 1988.

²⁶ G. Bateson, (1972) *Steps Towards an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays* ; (1980)

symbiotic or unitary arguments in search of what Bateson calls the “necessary unity” of mind and nature, are surely exercises in the ‘moral imagination’ under the aegis of one of the grandest tropes of all, Gaia, that is to say, Mother Earth! They are each attempts like Huxley’s much earlier attempt to ‘interconnect’ the bio-physical and mental worlds and to see in that connection a systematic self-adjusting or self-correcting relation, the kind of self-regulation that is life’s most essential characteristic.

Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity. James Lovelock, (1988) *The Ages of Gaia; A Biography of our Living Earth* ; and James Lovelock and Lynn Margolis (eds.) (1997) *Slanted Truths: Essays on Gaia, Symbiosis and Evolution.*

All these imaginations were and are in one way another in struggle with the moral, or perhaps better said, the amoral implications, of the Darwinian message. They are, therefore, among other things exercises, in presence or in absence, of the moral imagination. No one would doubt, though we have only glancingly considered Marx, the energizing power of his moral imagination, an imagination whose concentrated ‘consciousness raising’ about the involuted and self serving excesses of capital and the exploitations of class became, to say the least, a dominant leitmotif of the social imagination of the last century and a half.²⁷ And surely Marx has important and quite moral things to say about the evolution of political economy! We do not have time to offer in this lecture evidence of the connections between Huxley’s argument and all these latter day inquiries into the very general topic of ‘Evolution and Ethics’. But before concluding it “the moral imagination.”

III. Do we Need a Moral Imagination:

It is too simple to argue that the moral imagination is an exclusively positive faculty, ‘eunomic’, to use an old Radcliffe-Brown term for positive function, in its contributions to the ‘moral sentiments’ and the ‘moral order’. But, in fact, I think we must continue to examine its usefulness not as a descriptive label so much as a play of mind or ‘play of tropes’ that leads us into deeper understanding of, among other things, the ‘dynamic of the categorical’ insofar as the assignment and acceptance of types, classes and categories of belonging is in large measure

²⁷ Reference is made here to this author’s subdivision, in his teaching on this issue, of the moral imagination into sub types: the social imagination, the religious imagination, the cultural imagination, the psychic imagination and the corporeal imagination.

what the moral imagination is use for or exercised about.

We have, however, to admit that, whatever its analytical utility and possible theoretical status in our concerns there are reasons for hesitation in evoking the ‘moral imagination’ in social science explanation. Quite beside the fact that in a secular, constitutionally non-religious society like the American one it is felt that moral principles should be mainly left to the individual or the group and that they are not the pragmatic or political issues of ‘governmentality, (whatever moral or ethical meaning that word may have had to Foucault who invented it,²⁸) on which one can dispute fruitfully. There is feeling, as far as social science is concerned, that morality talk conceals much more than it reveals, however one tries to make it revelatory. We see that concealment most obviously in political movements such as ‘Moral Rearmament’ or the ‘Moral Majority’, and other faith based organizations such as the Salvation Army. However they seek to Do Good, they Do Well by ultimately ignoring the reigning political economy of privilege and prejudice that is a severely inhibiting force in the lives of those they, in one way or another, seek also to serve. The judgmentalisms that arise from moral principle tends too easily to ignore or override matters of prevailing hegemonic power and privilege. In the United States we may recall that accusation of obviated attention in the extensive debate over the ‘Culture of Poverty,’²⁹ which in the end was a concept that seemed to

²⁸. Cf. “Politics and Ethics: An Interview” in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader*. New York. 1984. Also G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Chicago. 1991.

²⁹ This debate has had extensive participation. It was Oscar Lewis (1959) who first articulated and then under criticism(1966) defended the idea. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1963)

assign so much to morals, values and ingrained behaviors as to ignore the delimiting structures of racism and the perpetuation of class privilege that sustained minority poverty and explained dysfunctional, from the majority point of view, behaviors. Morality as an explanation for behavior, it has often been argued with justice, mystifies more than it clarifies, and privileges more than it explains..

The answer to this well founded misgiving is simply that one does not seek to explain anything as complexly over determined as human behavior by simple and direct reference to the causal force of morality and moral principle itself. That would be the mistake of moral revitalization movements. But rather one seeks to elucidate how by the play of the imagination difficult moral issues are grappled with, moral principles are energised and, as we say, how they come to capture the imagination. As should be clear from the argument made here I do repose considerable explanatory value in the imaginations role in those choices that provide a basis for, confirm or lead to human action. But I also assume that these choices insofar as we can be aware of them in a conscious way pose problems of distributive justice and well being. Darwinism for example poses these problems to the moral imagination for any anthropologist and it is of interest therefore to have seen how eminent predecessors, whether T.H. Huxley or Tielhard de Chardin or Gregory Bateson, grappled with them.

Just as interesting or even more so is attentiveness to how anthropology's interlocutors

perpetuated a version of it with his analysis of the dysfunctional, matriarchal black family. Charles Valentine (1968) gave one of the trenchant early critiques of the thesis. There have been many critiques since!

in other cultures grapple with them. No more than Beldelman have I ever worked in any culture in which I do not find evidence of the struggles of the moral imagination which. Paid attention to, are unproductive of insight into local dilemmas that trouble local understanding of the human condition! But quite beside that investigative value is the usefulness of the term in speaking to our enduring social science interests in cohesion and coherence in society, and, at the least, since Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, what that cohesion and coherence has to do with the moral order of society as this is created and maintained in the imagination.

One can ask of course : Is there not a better formulation? On Marx's example we might just as well, or better, have referred to the Victorian ideology, or the ideology of Social Darwinism when speaking of Darwin and Huxley. I do not wish to deny the importance of that concept in the last several centuries nor its productiveness in the investigations into political economy, and into the interface between society, particularly, political economy and the language issues we have been interested in. Indeed it could well be argued that the prevalent and preferred term in the treatment of role of figurative language in society and rhetoric in culture, which in the end is our subject matter, *is* ideology.³⁰

³⁰ For example, see its varied use in the collection edited by Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity, *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, 1998. Especially important and clarifying is the 'Introduction' by Woolard (1998:3-47) in which she reviews the quite varied usages (four groupings) to which 'ideology' as been put in the social science literature, most often negative. By pointing up that most usages have to do with the relation of social and political position to language she argues for creating a space (such as the collection she introduces) in which the various understandings of that 'responsive' relationship can be explored thus 'opening up a

bridge' between 'linguistic and social theory'. See also the pioneering consideration of this issue, influential in Woolard's review, by Paul Friedrich, 'Language, Ideology and Political Economy,'(1989)

Several things, then, can be said in favor and several against the idea of ‘the moral imagination’ as an analytic category in relation to ‘ideology’. First as the dictionary tells us the word ideology carries a negative weight as ‘a prescriptive doctrine not supported by rational argument’. This is certainly the case in the best known use of the term, Marx and Engels, The German Ideology (1989) Special precautions must be taken to prevent these negative associations from prejudicing inquiry. If we do not take care the term ideology will tend to privilege he or she who employs it in their study over against those, he or she studies, that is the individuals, groups, classes, who are identified with such a ‘unsupported’ scheme of ideas as a guide to his or her conduct in the world. There is correspondingly the tendency in studying ideology of studying the other without implicating the self who is doing the studying, producing invidious analysis of the kind “I have well supported beliefs, while you have an ideology.” The study of the moral imagination, more readily implicates, one may argue, the investigator as observer for who would want to deny that they themselves were such automata, such creatures of culture, as to be without moral imagination, or that their (that is the observer’s) moral imagination is in some kind of dynamic relation with that of the observed.. Of course, by that very fact of *implication* the worry arises that objectivity will be lost, insofar as one in late modern times may still hold to the possibility of an objective posture of inquiry.³¹ The investigator interested in the moral imagination, it may be felt, will find himself more directly embroiled in the strong currents, which is to say the rhetoric, of moral judgmentalism and revivalism so ever-present in dynamic societies particular those of the secularized modern world, a world, ironically, so cast off from canonical moral anchorage.

In any event that awareness of the different tropes and different weighting of tropes that animate the imagination, and the insights obtained into the commitments or lack of commitment

³¹ See, in this respect, Renato Rosaldo’s argument in *Culture and Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis* (1989), that the post modern bringing into question of the possibility of objectivity ‘creates a space for ethical concerns in a territory once regarded as value-free. It enables the social analyst to become a social critic,’ (1989:181) a phrasing. “To become a social critic” which we would put rather as ‘to employ his moral imagination’.

generated, is part of the value, I believe, of maintaining the ‘moral imagination’ as a useful concept in our inquiry into the other; an inquiry into the other which takes them as beings themselves animated by the moral imagination.

But quite beside this question of methodological posture and engagement or distancing from the other already well treated in the anthropological literature of post-modernism³² the argument is to be made that by giving interpretive credence to the role of the imagination and the images it both generates and is stimulated by we are provided with insight into visions of orderly and disorderly worlds, of comfort or discomfort levels or, if one prefers of our easy and/or ‘dis-easy’, vital or moribund interactions with selves and others in these worlds. That is to say that we are given insight into ‘relationships’, the basic subject matter, in the end, of any envisioned social science, as true of the moral philosophers of the 18th century as of as of the contemporary thinkers considered in this paper, whether Darwin or Huxley, Teilhard de Chardin, Bateson or Lockyard, the cognitivist linguists or Emily Martin For the moral imagination has above all to do with visions of the perfection or imperfection, of the well-being and ill being of human relationships in the world and of the obligations, account-abilities or liabilities these visions carry. Above all the moral imagination has to do with what we are calling the ‘dynamic of the categorical’, a dynamic surely of the most enduring interest to anthropology.

³² And particularly in respect to the distancing from common occupancy of time and space with the informant (participatory co-evality) the well known essay of Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, (1982).

IV. Conclusion: The Moral Order, The Moral Imagination and the Anthropological Task:.

Now the conception of the universe as a moral order is not confined to primitive peoples...It is I think a universal element in human culture. With the question of why this should be so I cannot now attempt to deal. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'The Sociological Theory of Totemism'.

Espousing inquiry into the exercise of the moral imagination in the moral order as a social activity fruitful to our anthropological interest may seem a little like espousing something outmoded, even 18th century, like structural functionalism, although, to be sure, structural functionalism whatever its equilibrium model had intensely to do with social interaction and social relationships in community. Indeed, Radcliffe-Brown, like Durkheim, had a recurrent interest in how society indeed the universe came to appear a moral order, a compelling larger whole, to which men and women felt sentiments of obligation and solidarity which was energised and maintained by various institutions and rituals. This is evident in many of his essays.³³ These interests of his are all interests that are surely compatible with the interests of

³³In 'The Sociological Theory of Totemism,' (1952:131) this institution and its attendant beliefs and rituals, for example, created the sense of a larger whole and thus provided a representation of the universe as a moral order. And in 'Religion and Society' (1952: 176) in his attempt to find morality in primitive man's magic and religion, in contrast to Tylor's attempt to exclude it, he discussed the ritualization of the sense of dependence in religion and magic and the morality in the sense of social cohesion that arose from it.. And in his Andamanese ethnography the burden of argument in his final Chapters (1922: V. and VI.) on 'The Interpretation of Andamanese Customs and Beliefs' was to show how the power of society acting through these customs and beliefs created moral obligation in the individual.

the 18th Century Moral Philosophers. But are they really so alien to us today.

So let me again in conclusion, having evoked for better or for worse the *manes* and interests in moral order of R-B, recapitulate an argument that insofar as it is itself rhetorical -- we do not escape the rhetorical in discussing rhetoric -- seeks to speak persuasively across generations of “the ethnographic task.” Insofar as the moral order is embodied in narrative and the moral imagination is expressed through narrative I have argued for an ethnography that, always attuned to narrative, is written with narrative in mind. This argument makes of Beidelman (and his works), among the large cast of current anthropologists, a character of particular emulation – he comes to possess a particular protagonism in our story. The cognitive linguists, on the other hand, no doubt very worthy in their own right and without question producers of valuable theory as well as being public intellectuals of note, take on a certain antagonism in our argument. They are adversaries to our ethnographic task because in their parsimonious passions, and particularly in their proclivity for the explanatory power of the neuromechanism, they shift or subvert our ethnographic attention away from the dynamic sociality of the human condition, the particular ongoing struggles over orderliness, usually perceived as moral orderliness, in social relations in particular times and particular places. It is these struggles which give our social life in culture its special quality and its special tension as “common places”, we might say, confront” particular places”.

Though we have given the cognitivists a particular antagonism to our ethnographic interests, and even gone so far as find in them contradictory commitments when they exercise their moral imagination, we wouldn't go so far, as has Martin, in seeing in them enemies to our interests. When it come to tropological theory they are far too clever to be demonized in any way. &

Part of the task of ethnography is to be true to its times and to reflect accurately the moral economy of its times. Times change and rhetorical times change as well as the moral order and the moral economy changes. That is why we took some time at the beginning to speak of former

times -- those unsettled times of the Vietnam years in which we first began to see an interest in tropology rise to the surface in anthropology. Our interest in rhetoric at that time was undoubtedly influenced by the strong rhetorical currents and the protagonisms and and antagonisms characteristic of that period of contested moral order.³⁴ 9As an aside I might say that we are still too early into The War Against Terrorism (that rhetorical word) and too much under the away of patriotic compulsions to see rhetorical positions clearly emerge.)

In any event the rhetorical times now at the turn of the millenia are much different than the late sixties. I suggested that Europeanization is presently a theme to inspire the moral imagination and indeed with Curtius in mind our very subject matter and theme, rhetoric itself, is a consolidating theme in this respect. But beyond that coincidence the major theme of our time about which our moral imagination can weave its stories is the challenge to moral order that lies in the quantification and commodification of the world as marketplace, in this entrepreneurial era of manic activity endlessly focused on the bottom line. We have turned to Emily Martin as our Ciceronian critic here and to share protagonism with Thomas Beidelman. And she is masterful in pointing up and denouncing the over-determined reductionism and commitment to the neuro-mechanism of the cognitivists who pretend to find a permanent safe harbor compensatory for the oceanic presence of the endlessly changing, endlessly obsolescent, endlessly individualized, perpetually manic marketplace. Martin argues forcefully for returned attention in the end to the enduring requirements of the social contract. She argues against that neuro-reductionism that ignores or makes disappear the social context of experience precisely the dimension explored by ethnography and which, I would argue it seeks to grasp imaginatively and to present imaginatively very often with attention to rhetoric of human relations. Indeed she sees ethnography as a “technology of sociality” and compares it to the 18th Century Essays of the Moral Philosophers which draw the reader into engagement or participation or identification with the dynamics of the social contract itself so rendering individuals thinkable only as social beings constantly negotiating relationship (Ibid:584-585) constantly, we would add here,

³⁴ For an example see David Sapiro’s discussion of the “quality space” of metaphoric argument set in terms of the commonplace terms of opprobrium of the Vietnam debate: hawk, dove, chicken etc.

exercising the “moral imagination” in favor of or against extant “moral order.”

In any event it seems to me that if there is anything we have learned in the last half century is that “time is of the essence” in our ethnographic task and that all ethnography is in fact ethnographic history in one form or another. We should recall that previous to this realization we were all mesmerized by the “ethnographic present” and obligated to eternalize our cultural objects into a permanent moral order. This was still an appealing formula of ethnographic presentation in the late sixties. But of course it is the unsettlement and uncertainty of any moral order that is the constant challenge to the moral imagination. Any tropology that would seek to avert our gaze from this challenge of changeability is selling out our birthright for a mess of pottage to employ an ancient commonplace familiar to the classical rhetorician.

By taking once again seriously the interests in ‘moral order’ and the ‘moral sentiments’ of the 18th century and adding to these a focus on the dynamics of the ‘moral imagination’ we are putting at the center of ethnography the dynamic of human conviction about the social order, a conviction very often resting on rhetorical devices that if they do not act to convince us about where our “well being” is best served, and where our contractual obligations lie enable us at the least to make our way through the myriad and often contradictory claims of our life in society. Of course the neuromechanism is involved in all this “figuring out” of our obligations and our or our temporizing of them but it is a gross reduction of the reality and complexity of the moral choices that endlessly confront to shift our attention away from the rhetorical realities of the moral order that is endlessly, and in large measure rhetorically, constructed and re-constructed in everyday life.