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3

Animism and a proposal for a post-Cartesian anthropology

Kenneth M. Morrison

“Are they human?” From first contact, this anthropological question has driven the exploration, colonization, religious controversy and social upheaval that paralleled the emergence of Cartesian science, anthropology, technology, politics and finance. In the so-called Age of Discovery, Europeans answered the question in intellectually and religiously confused ways that continue to this day. Explorers and exploiters followed an ethnocentric logic: indigenous peoples lacked culture. They had no religion, no kings, no laws and no money. Such was the institutional, objectivated rationale for both European political and religious anthropology and the colonialism it engendered.

Ironically, the same observers held that “American” indigenous peoples¹ had achieved such a startling social harmony without European-style institutions that they surely lived the life of the Golden Age, when humans and “beast” were one and the same. The problem was to explain how uncivilized, irrational “savages” could also be socially and morally discerning (K. M. Morrison 1984). Utopian dreams constituted a romantic impulse to “spiritualize” both nature and indigenous peoples, and might be dismissed, as animism has been, as unreal fantasy. But, romantic, theological, idealization and Cartesian rationalism are not different things. The concepts are in fact a dualism that holds objectivity and subjectivity as diametrically opposed, when the concepts are actually mutually constituting. In what follows, I call this confusion “categorical slippage” to identify apparently discrete phenomena that cannot be explained only as oppositions (objectivity/subjectivity, for example). I will show that such oppositions must be understood in relation to each other, and as dualisms, which exclude other explanations (the subjectivity of rationality, and the rationality of subjectivity, for example). In focusing on conceptual slippage as one source of ethnological misinterpretation, I highlight how we have misunderstood our own, as well as indigenous, cosmologies.

Native Americans framed a more coherent anthropological answer that creates the paradigmatic shift that organizes how this essay describes, first, the conceptual problem and, second, its hypothetical resolution. Native Americans asked: “Are these newcomers

[Europeans] persons?” and so highlighted the possibility of mutual, ethical engagement. Their answer – “Probably not” – was precise given the violence they experienced in post-contact life; people are known, after all, from their actions. This answer also expressed a confidence that has served the peoples well. European-Americans, the Navajo continue to say, “act as though they have no relatives”. This essay engages this relational answer to critique the interpretive trajectory of American ethnology from the early to the mid-twentieth century. The dissonance between these questions – “What are they?” and “Who are they?” – continues to generate widespread misunderstanding.

The post-Cartesian reappraisal of animism drives the human sciences in new directions because it engages indigenous explanations with a relational epistemology in mind. Much of this literature responds positively to anthropologist Nurit Bird-David’s extension of A. Irving Hallowell’s insights (Hallowell 1960; Bird-David 1999): indigenous life is organized around the existence of persons, human and otherwise, rather than around materiality, functionality and abstraction. Bird-David shows that the dismissal of indigenous intelligence derives from philosopher Rene Descartes and his influence on scientific (objectivist) thought: “I think, therefore I am.” In this anthropological position, Descartes engendered the dualisms that atomize what should be understood as the unified modalities of human life: objectivity/subjectivity, matter/spirit, science/religion (among many others). One reason for the conceptual slippage in these dualisms is that Cartesian science always values the first term of each dualism, and marginalizes the second. I argue that, because they overlap in life, these dualisms are not merely imprecise. They also impede interpretive self-reflexivity.

Extending Hallowell, Bird-David describes alternative, indigenous ways of being and knowing that are relational, rather than simply cognitive or emotional. In her analysis, indigenous peoples respond ontologically to the world by replying: “I relate, therefore I am.” Such an answer provokes the post-Cartesian shift: the cognitive and subjective Cartesian self, bounded at the skin and isolated from others, constitutes a psychology that indigenous people do not share (although even Cartesians have been known to relate). The indigenous answer stresses an interactive self, who Bird-David describes both as an abstract noun, “dividual”, and as a stative verb, “to dividualize”. Indigenous people dividualize identity in interaction, rather than as a matter of abstract thought, role, status, social position and authority: “We relate, and therefore we are.” Bird-David and I follow Hallowell in asserting the primacy of sociality in both indigenous thought and everyday life.

In what follows, I initially survey the conceptual impediments Franz Boas, founder of academic anthropology in the US, faced in engaging American Indian social life. Boas detailed his Cartesian ethnological methodology, and unconsciously imposed theological assumptions on his cultural descriptions. I then show that Hallowell (as a Boasian ethnologist) went beyond Boas to confront psychologically the interpersonal character of indigenous life. Hallowell’s difficult effort leads to understanding why and how social scientists still struggle to assess qualitative differences between objectivist (What?), and intersubjectivist (Who?) ways of being, knowing and valuing. I also contrast Hallowell’s ethnology with Martin Buber’s philosophical anthropology. Buber explains how Cartesians limited the meaning of “social” to their own abstract, impersonal and reified representations, rather than engage how people live their lives. With these discriminations in mind, I then outline hypotheses for a post-Cartesian anthropology.

Recognizing that interpersonal give-and-take situates non-theistic religious meaning, I am interested in a dividuating anthropology (K. M. Morrison 2002), rather than a methodology that separates self and other. Dividuating can be seen in those social processes psychologists call introjection and projection. American Indian dividuating includes introjection by attending to and internalizing bodily processes like breathing, drinking, eating, smoking, all modes of being-with other bodies-in-the-world (Classen 1993). Other-oriented, projective activities are equally prominent in indigenous life: dream encounters, greetings, praise songs, give-aways and the relational logic of all ritual. Dividuating also includes normative processes that combine introjection and projection to mediate between the self and other: metamorphosis, vision quests, adoptions, friend-making, religious specialists serving their people, gifting, reincarnation and “animal” dancing. Likewise, dividuating emerges in Native American creation stories in both externalizing and internalizing modes. These stories reveal principled thinking about the challenge of otherness in the everyday world. They expose an individuating existentialism (a dangerous subjectivity) that subverts sociality: the selfishness, isolation, disrespectfulness and rampant sexuality that disrupt the people’s collective life in illness and discord, and addressed by curing. The creation stories also ponder dividuating processes as existential solutions to this cosmic problem of otherness. They reflect on ways to achieve solidarity: cooperation, sharing and self-sacrifice. Cartesian anthropology has described these dividuating phenomena, but has missed their negotiated, intersubjective character.

Post-Cartesians confront categorical slippages in Cartesian rationalism that have subverted observing and explaining these dividuating modes of sociality. First, the objective/subjective paradigm has led anthropologists to see sociality as objective pattern or structure, or as psychologically subjective. Second, Cartesian anthropologists express unconscious metaphysical assumptions that the paradigm does not account for. Post-Cartesian scholars move toward overcoming such assumptions by recognizing alternative modes of ontology, epistemology, axiology and language. To this paradigm shift, I add the need to recognize the conceptual slippage associated with the social-scientific assumption of supernaturalism, an issue that Hallowell, breaking with his own ethnological theism, put on the table in 1958. These two conditions, the largely uninvestigated nature of indigenous social cosmology, and scholars’ unreflexive replication of their own de-socialized and theologized cosmology, impede cross-cultural study.

THE CARTESIAN BLIND SPOT

The scholarly impasse has had a long history. For S. N. Balagangadhara (1994), the problem is that two existential assumptions, among others (see Blackburn 1975), shaped the emerging natural sciences, and later the social sciences. The first postulate holds “religion” as a human universal. The second assumes the universality of a theistic cosmos. Both assumptions turn out to be problematic (K. M. Morrison 2002). Proto-scientists, Balagangadhara holds, self-consciously eliminated Christ as an explanation of natural reality, but retained unconsciously a theistic cosmology: nature, culture and the supernatural as cosmic dimensions. Agreeing with Balagangadhara, I highlight the categorical slippage between these radically different dimensions throughout this essay. I contend

that objectivity as well as theocentrism, itself a form of subjective “belief”, are kissing cousins, rather than alternative ways of thinking about the cosmos.

Franz Boas, who founded American academic anthropology, epitomizes both the Cartesian rationalism and its blind spots about religious life that Balagangadhara examines. Boas sustains Balagangadhara’s thesis that monotheism remained the implicit agenda of both the natural and social sciences. Boas remained adamant about the whatness of the world, and of the human capacity to discipline the mind to fit that objectivity. Boas disdained subjectivity (in which he collapsed both the personal and the interpersonal) as rampant emotionalism. In this commitment, Boas was certainly not alone. Still, his extended essay, *The Mind of Primitive Man* ([1911] 1938), deplored the foundational irrational subjectivity of the human species. While Boas demolished the then current evolutionary scheme that placed humans on a unilinear trajectory from savagery to civilization, he did not critique the doctrine of primitivism that sustained claims of cultural hierarchy, superiority and progress. Boas did not dismiss indigenous intelligence alone. He also condemned the subjective mindlessness of non-Indian women, children and lower-class immigrants. For Boas, indigenous peoples gave unfettered play to emotionality. Boas held that indigenous life participated in emotion gone wild, especially as expressed in mindless mythology, custom and ceremony. Although admirably reflexive about his objective and subjective categories, Boas was entirely unreflexive about the religious categories he attributed to indigenous peoples. The same case can be made for many of his students, and I will use Hallowell’s ethnography to illustrate the interpretive challenge.

Boas did not investigate the alternative rationality of indigenous peoples’ oral traditions, made no attempt to listen to their accounts of the world’s origin, and did not appreciate their understanding of the world as emerging from and between interacting beings. Instead, Boas imposed his own, unconscious, monotheistic ontological assumptions. Although a secular Jew, he assumed that nature, culture and the supernatural constituted universal cosmological categories. He described indigenous peoples’ non-human persons as “deities”, not noticing that supernaturalism failed to fit either their ontological conception or religious practice. Boas’s ontology (including hierarchically differentiated plants, animals, humans and divinity) could not comprehend indigenous life as fundamentally both a *cosmic* and a *social* process. His objectivist/subjectivist paradigm could not encompass both. Emphasizing causal as well as ontological assumptions, he insisted on indigenous servility in their relations with all these entities (particularly, he said, with large and terrifying animals).

For Boas, indigenous peoples’ ritual practices expressed supplication and appeasement; but he did not recognize the motivations – needs, desires and expectations – drawing together human and non-human persons. He disdained indigenous healers, reducing their relational theories of illness to unfettered, frenzied and magical ritual. He also reduced respectful behaviours between human and non-human persons to irrational taboos, a concept he used to index fear and anxiety as indigenous peoples propitiated their “deities”. Anthony F. C. Wallace – Boas’s academic grandson – expressed the intellectual contempt that Cartesian anthropology embodied. “[R]eligion”, Wallace opined, “is based on supernaturalistic beliefs about the nature of the world which are not only inconsistent with scientific knowledge but also difficult to relate even to naïve human experience” (1966: vi). Agreeing with Boas, Wallace links supernaturalism and irrational superstition.

THE STRUGGLE WITH CONCEPTUAL SLIPPAGE

Wallace's graduate school mentor, A. Irving Hallowell, eventually questioned the objectivist and theological assumptions that Boasian anthropology unconsciously combined. Hallowell never quite realized the breach he made in Western theology and theologically organized science because his worldview long impeded his contribution to the present, post-Cartesian, moment. He highlighted abstract thought as a Western progressive attainment and as opposed to primitive belief and magic. He also assumed that monotheism was universal. Post-Cartesian anthropologists must move thoughtfully beyond objective reasoning and theological assumption to indigenous understandings of cosmological, social and religious purposes.

Initially, Hallowell accepted Boasian interpretive options. Focusing on circumpolar patterns of bear ceremonialism, Hallowell's 1924 dissertation described a Cartesian choice between "a study of material culture or subjective life" (1924/1926: 1). Unlike Boas, however, Hallowell saw some value in studying "magico-religious beliefs" as constituting "channels of thought which lead [indigenous people] to an interpretation of natural phenomena ..." (*ibid.*: 1-2). Hallowell insisted that such thought "is embellished in their minds with a rich, varied, and, to us, even a fantastic mass of beliefs which are inseparable from it and lead to practices which are curious and even unintelligible without some knowledge of the accompanying philosophy of nature" (*ibid.*: 6). The young Hallowell identified a need to engage an indigenous epistemology that could subvert Western judgments of fantasy, curiosity and unintelligibility. To do so, he would have had to appreciate that the Cartesian construction of the world, as objective "nature" and non-empirical "supernatural", subverted achieving such an alternative.

Hallowell also generalizes about those "philosophical" "beliefs" in ways that reveal the explanatory limits of Cartesian anthropology:

Animals are believed to have essentially the same sort of animating agency which man possesses. They have a language of their own, can understand what human beings say and do, have forms of social or tribal organization, and live a life which is parallel in other respects to that of human societies. Magical or supernatural powers are also at the disposal of certain species; they may metamorphize themselves into other creatures or, upon occasion, into human form; some of them may utilize their powers to aid man in his pursuits; others may be hostile. Dreams may become a specialized means of communication between man and animals, or by the interpretation of the cries or movements of certain creatures, man may be able to guide his destiny for good or ill. Animals may become deities on their own account, or the temporary or permanent abode of "gods" or "spirits," or for other reasons come to assume an especially sacred character. They may also become the messengers of a deity, play the role of "guardian spirits" to man, become culture heroes or a demiurge. On the other hand, a belief in the transmigration of human souls into animal form may prevail. Frequently, too, animals appear in the ancestral tree of man or become the eponyms of social units. (*Ibid.*: 8-9)

These observations define Hallowell's ethnological struggle. He faced the problem of categorical slippage: when Hallowell characterizes indigenous distinctions as

philosophical and as beliefs, he unconsciously relegates thought to subjective irrationality as the Cartesian dualism requires. Hallowell compares “folkloristic” belief (which he says subverts the objectivity of individual observation) against the categories of “rational” thought. Hallowell emphasizes that “magico-religious beliefs” are “rich” and “varied”, and observes that such beliefs seem “fantastic” (Needham 1972). Magic (whatever causal system that might encompass [Styers 2004]) becomes curious and even unintelligible. Moreover, Hallowell has “animals” slipping from nature into both the cultural and the supernatural categories: they also become humans, deities, heroes and demiurges. Not perceiving that slippage, Hallowell assumes that indigenous people recognize the world’s “sacred character”, and so the cosmos elicits “human veneration”.

Equally revealing of this unconscious Boasian theism, Hallowell does not note, as he later would, that his evidence points to a principle I call ontological similarity between humans and “animals”. Ontological similarity means that indigenous peoples do not recognize nature, culture and the supernatural at all, let alone as separate cosmological domains. Even in 1924, Hallowell’s circumpolar evidence shows that both humans and “animals” possess agency, language, understanding, sociality, communication, cooperation (and not), and they are genealogically related. Instead of studying these modes of sociality, Hallowell holds fast to the European Great Chain of Being, hierarchically organized from the least rational, animals, through epistemologically impaired human beings, to the highest being/knowledge in divinity. In this and later work, Hallowell imposed these categories on indigenous peoples, and in ways that he would later discard, though without explaining his interpretive shift. In 1924, he expressed a keen sense of conceptual challenge:

If we are to understand or interpret the *Weltanschauung* of peoples who entertain such notions, therefore, we must rebuild the specific content of these categories upon the foundation of their beliefs, not ours. The truth or falsity of the categories is not at issue but simply the inapplicability of our concepts of them as a point of departure for a comprehension of primitive thought. (1924: 9–10, emphasis added)

Over the years, Hallowell restated these ethnological conditions, yet pursued Cartesian methodologies that prevented real engagement with indigenous thought.

While Hallowell sometimes questioned anthropological assumptions, Cartesian science remained theoretically central to his ethnology. He treated Saulteaux/Ojibwa/Anishnaabe religiosity as epistemologically grounded in empirical observation (1934), and so could be said to have begun the post-Cartesian perspective that indigenous “beliefs” are rooted in an everyday, relational epistemology. Nevertheless, nature, culture and the supernatural remained his interpretive tropes until he tersely repudiated them in the late 1950s. Before then, his work explored Cartesian reifications, rather than indigenous epistemologies. Hallowell addressed ethnological issues (oral tradition, illness and curing, fear and anxiety, sexuality, ritual performance) only in ways that tested and extended anthropological categories (using objectivist techniques like the Rorschach protocol, and applying Freudian and other Cartesian theory). These disciplinary commitments actually undercut Hallowell’s ability to understand indigenous peoples’ rationality by relegating their mindfulness to an unconscious rationale. Throughout those years, Hallowell ascribed “religion” to spiritualism, magic and emotionality, characterizing Saulteaux relations with “superhumans” or “supernaturals” as subservient supplication. Reification and theism constitute the warp

and woof of Hallowell's scientism. Space does not permit even an outline of Hallowell's Cartesian objectivist and theistic commitments, or how they undercut his own desired intent to prioritize actual indigenous realities. A chronological extraction of his emerging insights can, nevertheless, identify the conceptual slippage with which he struggled.

As early as 1934, Hallowell articulated interpretive goals that might guide a post-Cartesian ethnology. He wrote:

What I wish to do is to present the religious philosophy of the Pigeon Indians [Ojibwa] as a living reality, as a relatively coherent and self-contained system of beliefs and customs and particularly to indicate what measure the knowledge and personal experiences of individuals reared in this cultural milieu lend rational support to their religious beliefs and practices. (1934: 389)

Significantly, Hallowell slips beyond the objectivist/subjectivist paradigm when he describes religion as “religious philosophy”, “a living reality” and “rational”.

Eight years later, Hallowell tersely expressed another stance useful to post-Cartesian anthropology: “No one is more aware than the ethnologist that human beings always live in a meaningful universe, not in a world of bare physical objects and events” ([1942] 1971: 1). Apparently, Hallowell recognized that an existential dimension needs investigation, a dimension he glimpsed as social. Hallowell states that a “socialization process” (that we can now understand as ethical processes of dividuating interactions) provides the individual a cultural frame. In this way, Hallowell seems to identify a sociality that highlights the interpersonal as teaching, learning, engaging and negotiating meaning. At the time, however, Hallowell saw socialization only as an act of objectivation, a cognitive framing device. In the same work, Hallowell strikes a note that would emerge again in 1958 and 1960. He observed that science, the world of meaning of “educated men”, constituted a biased provincialism. Anthropological comprehension, he insisted, “remains on the intellectual level. We never learn to feel and act as they [indigenous people] do. Consequently we never fully penetrate their behavioral world. We never wear their culturally tinted spectacles; the best we can do is to try them on” (*ibid.*: 3, original emphasis). In 1947, Hallowell again expressed the advantage of considering “the attitude of the people themselves” over “more ‘objective’ classifications” (*ibid.*: 547).

By 1954, Hallowell's reflections critiqued Cartesian reification:

The traditional approach of cultural anthropology, having as one of its primary goals a reliable account of differential modes of life found among the peoples of the world, has not been directly concerned with the behavior of individuals. It has been culture-centered, rather than behavior-centered.

As a result, he observes, anthropological analysis presents only:

the standpoint of an outside observer ... The language of a people, as objectively described and analyzed in terms of its formal categories, is not the language that exists for the individual who uses it as a means of communication, in reflective thought, or as a mode of verbal self-expression ... It [language] is neither “objective” nor “subjective””. (1955: 88)

This paradigm-shifting conclusion radically departs from his earlier interpretation, derived from Ernst Cassirer, that language essentially constitutes objectifying or symbolizing (1947: 550). Hallowell still does not engage the difference between communication, on the one hand, and objective thought and subjective self-expression, on the other. For sure, Hallowell's terms highlight the epistemology of psychological agency – in modes of experiencing, thinking, motivating and satisfying. But Hallowell also identifies agency's ethical and socially purposeful trajectory: communication, reflection and self-expression.

In 1958, Hallowell moved beyond his Cartesian paradigm, though haltingly, given his essay's title: "Ojibwa Metaphysics of *Being* and the Perception of Persons". He states the conceptual shift tersely: "The concept 'social,' like the concept 'person,' needs reformulation when considered in the context of different behavioral environments" (1958: 64). Hallowell here stresses that behaviour has a social meaning that must be engaged. He also retains his theistic assumption that "religion" refers to the non-empirical (the meta), rather than the everyday empiricism he had long since emphasized. As in his famous essay "Ojibwa Ontology" (1960), which republished the ethnographic core of "Ojibwa Metaphysics of Being", Hallowell mustered data in 1958 that subverted Cartesian science. The animate/inanimate linguistic distinction "leaves a door open that on dogmatic grounds our naturalistic orientations keeps shut tight" (1958: 65). An ethnology of mutual engagement, rather than belief, might emerge from that open door, but for Hallowell remained only a matter of "thinking, observation, and behavior" (*ibid.*: 66). Similarly, he found that the animate beings of "mythology" move beyond "fiction" (see Hallowell 1947), to the status of "living entities", although he also said that some of them were "purely conceptualized reifications", a categorical slippage from life to concept that he repeated in "Ojibwa Ontology" (1960). Upon this reified reading of living, communicative orality, Hallowell repudiates the "natural" and "supernatural" categories of Cartesian cosmology, and with them the psychological dismissal of cosmic life as projective personification (1958: 68) and human servility. Hallowell rejects anthropomorphism as a "naturalistic" (*ibid.*: 69, 79) explanation of the Ojibwa's orientations to other-than-human persons (*ibid.*: 68–72), even while he calls these entities "spiritual" (*ibid.*: 76). Aware that other-than-human persons embody power (and are causally central), Hallowell also acknowledges that some human beings are "elevated to the same level of power" (*ibid.*: 76, emphasis added), an elevation that, in effect, confounds the Cartesian separation between culture and the supernatural.

"Ojibwa Metaphysics" concludes with a section, "Psychological Theory and Anthropological Data", in which Hallowell argues that social psychology displaces impersonal, objectivist/subjectivist causal explanations. Tellingly, he connects social psychology and Ojibwa principles of causation:

In the Ojibwa material there are others facets of their cognitive orientation I have not dealt with here ... Their concept of person, for instance is directly related to their notions of causation. They make no essential use of any concept of impersonal forces as determinants of events. There is a "set" which directs the reasoning of the individual toward explanations of events in "personalistic" terms. *Who* did it, *who* is responsible, is always the central question to be answered.

(*ibid.*: 80, original emphasis)

“Ojibwa Ontology” (1960) deletes this theoretical section connecting social psychology with Ojibwa epistemology. Instead, it substitutes an equally provocative section that might be taken as a post-Cartesian challenge to understand the relation between social ontology and ethics, namely the Ojibwa concept *pimadaziwin*. “Ojibwa Ontology” consolidates hard-won conclusions but without fanfare: Ojibwa life must be understood as a “unified cognitive outlook”: their worldview has perceptual, cognitive, behavioural (tentatively read as social) and ethical coherence.

AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF ENGAGEMENT

Hallowell was not alone in struggling against the categorical commitments of Cartesian ethnology. Our reification “animism” resisted explanation because anthropologists have been poorly positioned to understand sociality in either indigenous or Western lives. Throughout the twentieth century, philosophers recognized this problem, but described sociality in the unfortunate phrase “concrete life”, a phrase that constitutes another form of conceptual slippage. Unfortunately, “concrete” evokes the substantial, the static, the fixed and the enduring. In these senses, “concrete” is an objectivist trope and stresses an essentialist, rather than an emergent, understanding of reality. “Concrete” highlights something real about life, but does not define what that something might be. This imprecision is telling. Life may be lived in both objectivist and subjectivist modes, but neither mode can account for social phenomena unless objectivity and subjectivity are themselves understood intersubjectively.

Martin Buber’s philosophical anthropology achieves such a paradigm-shifting understanding ([1923] 1958). Buber explores a metalinguistic theory of human nature that gives technical precision to Hallowell’s call to attend to the meaning of “social”, and an understanding that all life, including its objectivist and subjectivist forms in the West, is intersubjectively emergent. At the outset, Buber hardwires human beings with two attitudes that people express in what Buber calls “primary words”. I italicize words to emphasize Buber’s insistence that primary words are not necessarily units of sound/symbol/meaning, though they may be expressed in speech. Unlike Cartesian science – a pre-ecological concern for objects on their own, individual terms (and so producing hyphenated, slippery concepts such as Hallowell’s magio-religious, and psycho-social) – Buber defines an intersubjective language. Primary words are *socially* existential in Buber’s thought because they are *combined words*.

Combined words link speakers, objects and subjects. Whether they achieve intimacy, communication, solidarity (or not), combined words are relational, emergent, self-revealing (or not), mutually engaging (or not), negotiations of meaning (or not). Primary words are *combined* words because they link the person to (a) objects, I–It modes of intersubjectivity, and (b) to persons as persons, I–Thou modes of intersubjectivity, (c) to other persons as objects, and (d) to objects and socially objectivated persons, where both are fetishes pretending to be, or treated as, persons (Hornborg 2006a). Buber rejects any focus upon things and persons in and of themselves (one of his critiques of science), and he intersubjectively redefines both sides of the objective/subjective dualism as social phenomena. Buber insists that relations are linguistically neither representative (objective) nor symbolic (subjective), but are rather acts of being that constitute interactive qualities,

one interpersonal, and the other impersonal (he dismisses emotional subjectivity “as fluttering soul birds”). Because Buber identifies primary, combined words as modalities of being, I–It and I–Thou relations comparatively, he raises a theoretical and interpretive challenge to post-Cartesian anthropologists. Hallowell faced the same challenge.

In Buber’s discriminations of impersonal, subjective and interpersonal modes of sociality, life must be appreciated either as active, intentional, engaged, dynamic, immediate, mutual and reciprocal, or not. Social life becomes a matter of facedness, or not, and life presents purposefulness as an opportunity to respond, a turning about-face that ethically aims toward trust between persons, or not. Buber thus defines an intersubjective theory of cosmogony and ritual (V. Turner [1969] 1977). Buber reveals that the conceptual history of animism (primitivism as rampant emotionality, fear and anxiety, the irrationality of tradition, the supernatural, superstition, magic and mysticism) has had an incestuous relationship with the Cartesian failure to understand sociality. Anthropologists have not grasped either that the “social” constitutes a paradigmatic alternative to objectivity/subjectivity, or that both sides of the dualism are socially constituted. Buber insists that both I–It and I–Thou relations are acts of being. Intersubjectivity constitutes all reality-engendering stances in the world. Further, anthropologists have not comprehended that social encounter situates two emergent meanings, one impersonal and the other interpersonal.

In addition to his premise that I–It and I–Thou combined words must be understood as existentially generative modes of being, Buber’s theory of history identifies a relational trajectory that post-Cartesian anthropology must acknowledge. Buber turns self-congratulatory, objectivist history on its teleological head. Buber insists that an incremental process constitutes history: the cultural world of I–It relations becomes augmented (i.e. objectivated in scientific categories). Stated in this way, Buber’s history seems commonsensical; civilizational history celebrates modes of technological, economic and political progress. Because he appreciates that technique, exchange and negotiation are modes of impersonal being, however, Buber identifies history so conceptualized as a process of alienation. The larger the world of I–It relations, he contends, the less able are persons to be, to know, to value and to speak in interpersonal terms. For Buber, cultural progress impedes relational realization and communal life.

The following working hypotheses build a conceptual bridge between the objective and the subjective location of the “social” in Cartesian science and Buber’s intersubjectivism. We need to account for Hallowell’s proto-relational theory of indigenous life as well as his conceptual slippage, which confounds both (a) subjective belief with philosophical and behavioural integrity, and (b) non-empirical spirituality with empirical experience. We also need Buber’s metalinguistic and rigorously relational anthropology. Buber captures what eluded Hallowell: the qualities of the interpersonal, and the intersubjectivity of both objectivity and subjectivity. Together, Hallowell and Buber suggest the hypothetical principles of a comparative, non-relativistic, post-Cartesian anthropology. The hypotheses are of two kinds. The first kind (inscribed as A and B) compares large- and small-scale socialities. The second kind (identified as C) draws interpretive inferences from the A and B comparisons. Both types highlight the need for a revised approach to ethnographic and ethnological investigation, rather than final conclusions.

THE COMPARATIVE HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1A: theistic ontology

Scholars have misinterpreted indigenous life because Cartesian and monotheistic ontological assumptions have structured their descriptive strategies and interpretative schemes. These assumptions are categorical commitments to understanding comparative cultures in theistic, hierarchical and their objectivated/subjectivated, ontological terms. The categories include God (gods, goddesses, deities – both theism and polytheism), “natural forces”, plants, insects, animals, humans, spirits, ceremonial and celestial “objects”, on a scale from irrationality to rationality, from profane to the sacred, from matter to spirit.

Hypothesis 1B: non-theistic ontology

Although indigenous peoples differentiate beings in terms of bodily appearance, intelligence and purposefulness (and so gloss relative power and responsibility), they also incorporate all forms of being within the ontological category person – that is, entities with rational faculties, will, voice, desire, sometimes physical form, and interdependent, existential needs: hunger, thirst and sociability. For them, ontology, epistemology and axiology form an undifferentiated relational field.

Hypothesis 2A: Cartesian causal tropes (power)

Scholars misinterpret indigenous understandings of power because they assume that causality refers either to assumptions about natural and social law (impersonal tropes about nature, i.e. biological “forces”, and/or natural forms of causation [geologic, chemical, electrical, mechanical, psychological and social functionalism]), or to the assumption that humans project meaning imaginatively upon the world (as belief and faith, qualities expressed as art, aesthetics, ideology, symbolism, magic, mysticism, spiritualism, supernaturalism). These assumptions play out along two apparently opposed, but actually related, slippery axes: (a) objectivism as progressive rationality (naturalism, materialism, empiricism, quantification) and social-scientific reification (causality attributed to culture and its abstract parts: the family, the economy, politics), and (b) romanticism or idealism (positions that ideology, belief, aesthetics, values have a discernible effect on behaviour). This second axis variously stresses subjective factors: individualism, self-interest, personal autonomy, emotionality, the isolated body, and religion as fear, belief, hope and faith.

The conceptually slippery interaction of these two axes plays out in dualistic ways of thinking about causality: progress/tradition, sacred/profane, mind/body, rational/irrational, male/female, civilized/primitive, ethical/superstitious, among many others.

Hypothesis 2B: indigenous causal principles (power)

Indigenous understandings of causality cannot be described within the objectivist/subjectivist paradigm. Theirs are knowledge systems (not belief systems) that stress the intentional, relational and interpersonal character of reality as both locally grounded and

socially emergent. Indigenous peoples sidestep objective and subjective causal assumptions in intersubjective ways. They stress *who* is dividual, and therefore collectively, acting, rather than *what* causes. They emphasize interdependence, influence, mutuality, responsibility and respect (or not). Embodied power is, therefore, causal because it expresses the peoples' conscious and collective moral choice.

Hypothesis 3A: Cartesian ethics

Within the binary system of objectivism/subjectivism, ethics plays out as (a) situational pragmatism, efficiency and technique and as (b) self-interest, autonomy, self-worth. Both sides of this ethical system stress the value of progress and profit.

Hypothesis 3B: indigenous ethics

Within the interpersonal epistemology of indigenous ethics, morality plays out *positively* in kinship, interpersonal and communal ways that bridge the dividual and others, and *negatively* in individualistic, antisocial ways that isolate the individual from the group, and make the individual a threat to the group.

Hypothesis 4A: Cartesian assumptions about language

Cartesians act intellectually, socially and religiously out of a mostly unconscious and therefore largely unexamined assumption that language is representative. In other words, they assume that the world exists objectively, and that language (more or less successfully) represents, symbolizes, stands for and mirrors a reality that is independent of human agency, except in terms of use value (Ong 1977).

Hypothesis 4B: indigenous assumptions about language

Indigenous people act intellectually and socially out of a mostly unconscious and therefore largely unexamined assumption that language is generative. In other words, they assume that the world emerges from human and other-than-human intentionality and interaction, because expression engages and mediates personal distance, and is thus potentially dangerous and socially disruptive. All that exists not only reveals prior human and other-than-human agency, but also constitutes a latent intentionality in the world which might still become active (Witherspoon 1977).

Hypothesis 5A: theological and objectivist assumptions about "religion"

Cartesians understand "religion" as theistic dominance and natural and cultural dependence, especially as expressed in notions of prayer, sacrifice, offering, propitiation, appeasement and worship. They assume that religion has to do with faith in God's purposefulness (appearing alike in God's word, and the laws of nature and culture). In these instances, religion has an objective institutional focus, sacred texts and creeds, and humans must submit to divine, churchly and scientific authority. As opposed to the worldly instrumentality of rationalism, Cartesian religion traffics in miracles and magic.

Hypothesis 5B: indigenous emphasis on the “religious”

Indigenous peoples have no abstract concept for “religion”, and often use the English code word “respect” to express the engaged ethical challenge of everyday life. On the one hand, indigenous peoples do not recognize theistic centrality, sin, guilt or salvation. On the other, they contend that constructive religiousness emerges from divduating and collective responsibility, and they orient to the needs, desires and purposes of non-human persons with whom they are reciprocally interdependent. In their motivated interactions, human and other-than-human persons divduate a cosmic reality.

TYPE II: INTERPRETIVE INFERENCES**Hypothesis 6C: cosmogonic sources of reality assumptions**

The existential and normative postulates of human cultures (hypotheses 1–5) are established in cosmogonic traditions. As Buber puts it: “In the beginning is [either It or Thou] relation.”

Hypothesis 7C: comparative social principles

The foundational hypothesis is that all human worldviews are organized in terms of ontological, epistemological, axiological and linguistic principles that are holistically organized either in impersonal/subjective and/or interpersonal terms. Cartesian rationality (“I think”) stresses the separation of these principles (though in slippery ways); indigenous thought (“I/we relate”) insists upon the principles’ combined effects in shaping social interaction and communal well-being.

Hypothesis 8C: religious history

These cosmic and cultural principles work themselves out in the internal, divduating and/or individuating histories of particular groups, and in those groups’ encounters with carriers of similar or different ontological, epistemological, axiological and linguistic principles.

Hypothesis 9C: a social continuum of worldviews

All cultures exist on a social continuum (interpersonal [dividual], personal [individual], impersonal [non-intentional, except as objectivated modes of use value and reifications that attribute agency to abstractions]) that can be isolated and compared.²

A POST-CARTESIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

These hypotheses respond to two concerns that Hallowell expressed, but never engaged. He realized (without recognizing the cognitive effects of the Cartesian *homo sapiens*) that anthropology lacked a (conscious) definition of human and personal nature. Hallowell also expressed dissatisfaction with cultural relativism, suspecting that a personal universalism existed behind cultural differences. These background concerns explain why

Hallowell's cardinal insights are so significant. He came to see, after years of emphasizing individualistic psychology, that identity is, rather, a social phenomenon. In recognizing that the Ojibwa category of person embraces other-than-human entities (disregarding natural, cultural and supernatural dimensions), Hallowell also extended the meaning of sociality to include cosmic interactions. As a result, he came to admit that Cartesian notions of impersonal and reified causality (the objective world and objectified/subjectified thought/value about the world) ignore the interpersonal causality of all life. Hallowell came to understand that indigenous ontological and epistemological integrity emerged from its ethical character: interpersonal relations matter.

Hallowell's ethnographic struggle emerges from the existential character of modernity: social marginalization in individualistic and impersonal modalities of objectivated identity; gender, race, labour, class, ethnicity, religion, and so on. As many have noted, Cartesian science has had its social consequences both in the objectivated and the subjectivated character of Western life (Berger 1967/1969; Poteat 1990). Cartesian anthropology has followed three trajectories that have undercut the interpersonal meaning of the term "social" in the disciplinary claims (and technical jargon) of the "social sciences". First, Cartesian science has made objectivity the be-all and end-all of research; this claim is conceptually slippery because objectivity enshrines impersonality, and ignores the fact that social life is, at least sometimes, interpersonal. Second, Cartesian science contends that any aspect of life that cannot be quantified, made subject to mathematical, empirical and replicable test, exists in a non-empirical, subjective and spiritualized place within human consciousness; if animism is an everyday, empirical and inter-species heritage, this contention is not true. Third, sociality emerged in Cartesian thought only as reifications of intentional human activities: kinship and social organization (the patterns, but not the motivations of social life), oral tradition as merely imaginative and symbolic projections of meaning (as opposed to objective history), ceremonial organizations and the patterns of ritual activities (but not their everyday communicative rationale and efficacy). And, the meaning of being wife, mother, sister, grandmother, aunt, daughter, niece, cousin, the purposeful and enlivening character of stories, and the responsibility expressed in ritual performances – all these have been discussed obliquely, at least until recently (Csordas 1994).

The distinction between abstract representation and the interpersonal event that reification purports to describe – "being-in-the-world" – explains the conceptual dismay that animistic life and thought creates for Cartesians (what we now call the post-modern crisis of representation). I have highlighted Buber's concern to distinguish the objectivated impersonality of "modern" life and thought, and his stance that the interpersonal defies science. I-It and I-Thou socialities constitute, respectively, the intersubjective objectivist/subjectivist impediments to, and the interpersonal conditions of, genuine life (Bachelard 1964/1969; Marcel 1964, [1952] 1967; Ellul 1967). Unlike those who describe animism as an imputation, a projective, personifying anthropomorphism, Hallowell (obliquely) and Buber (precisely) insist that, while some modes of being are projective, life may also be engaging. In highlighting the "interhuman", Buber does not confront the inter-species problems animism raises. Indeed, Buber's first sentence in *I and Thou* must be edited to account for inter-species sociality. Buber writes: "For man the world is twofold in accordance with his twofold attitude" ([1923] 1958: 1). When that sentence is modified as animism requires – for persons the world is twofold – then Hallowell's concern for behavioural analysis might proceed.³

Because being-in-the-world has always required attention, Buber affirms Alf Hornborg's concern for modern modes of conceptual slippage. Hornborg writes: "it may not so much be an incapacity to relate as such that distinguishes us from the animists, as the incapacity to exercise such 'relatedness' within the dimensions and technical constraints of the professional subcultures which organize *the most significant share of our social agency*" (2006a: 24, emphasis added). For Hornborg as for Buber, Westerners compartmentalize their instrumental relations with objects and functions on the one hand, and their engagement with their gardens and dogs on the other. For both Buber and Hornborg, economic, political and technological complexity displaces those qualities – listening, hearing, empathizing, meeting, valuing – that engage people as *persons* (or not). Unlike Buber, who retains nature, culture and the supernatural, Hornborg insists on erasing the boundaries between them. As a result, Hornborg concludes that "it is incumbent ... to ask why pre-modern, modern, and post-modern people will tend to deal with subject-object relations in such different ways" (*ibid.*: 27). The hypotheses presented above orient toward cross-cultural similarities (the who-ness of the world) and differences (the what-ness of the world), and so aim to take up Hornborg's challenge. Animism compels us to recognize impersonal, subjective *and* interpersonal meanings, and thus the slippery hybridities that/who emerge from cross-cultural encounters (K. M. Morrison 2002; Treat 2003; Cruikshank 2005; Christen 2009; Shorter 2009; Vilaça & Wright 2009; Lokensgard 2010). Scholars have primitivized indigenous peoples because they have depersonalized "nature", have unwittingly spiritualized social realities, and have overlooked worlds of engaged being, relational ways of knowing and other-oriented valuing.

EDITORIAL NOTE

Ken Morrison passed away unexpectedly on 7 January 2012, just months after submitting this essay for the collection. His long-time advisee, Dr David Shorter, completed the final revisions of this chapter and added a few editorial footnotes. Morrison had drafted the original essay in close conversation with Shorter and one of his last doctoral advisees, Alex Ginsburg (whom Shorter also consulted during the final revision). This essay embodies the core lessons that many of Morrison's students learned over three decades of his teaching, first at the University of California Los Angeles (History) and then at Arizona State University (Religious Studies). Although the arguments contained in this essay were a part of his teaching since 1990, the broader academic community never had an opportunity to benefit from his critique. This essay is truly his life's work: Ken Morrison lays out here the theoretical and methodological claims that many of his students have gone on to explore in our respective lives and works.

NOTES

1. Morrison knowingly used the term "indigenous people" regardless of its oversimplification and generalization. He is mostly speaking of indigenous peoples of the Americas, his particular research geography, though we can see his theories work out across the globe.
2. This final hypothetical inference might best be read as a capstone to the larger set. Here, Morrison both postulates that sociality exists on a continuum across cultures and suggests that a post-Cartesian anthropology is the comparative study of sociality.
3. "Persons", according to Hallowell's linguistic category for Ojibwa perceptions of animism, includes agency, will and intention shared between us humans and the other-than-human beings available for relationships. "Persons", then, is a term inclusive of more than simply the term "human".