

THE HUMANITIES IN THE TWO CULTURES: RELATING AN EXTERNAL TO AN INTERNAL POINT OF VIEW

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To the memory of H. Verbruggen (1933-1996),
great scholar and teacher in the humanities and
things humane.

Resumen

Los intentos para llenar el vacío entre las «dos culturas» han sido el móvil de filosofías tan diversas como el constructivismo social en Filosofía de la Ciencia, los estudios fundacionales centrados en la noción del tiempo y, a veces, la Hermenéutica inspirada en la Fenomenología. El problema que aquí se plantea es si una Filosofía entre la Ciencia y la Cultura, cuando se sitúa en una perspectiva de la Fenomenología —lo cual todavía es digerible hoy día—, no habrá que buscarla adoptando una actitud escéptica hacia tales intentos.

Los objetivos de una auténtica epistemología comparativa deben: 1) buscar y justificar las peculiaridades de estilo e imagen de la Ciencia entre varias disciplinas, y 2) buscar y justificar las particularidades de estilo entre la «imagen científica» por un lado y la «imagen manifiesta» por otro.

De este modo, cuando se diferencian tipos de intencionalidades, uno se ve llevado a mantener las distancias respectivas (i) entre niveles de estilo teórico y práctico en todas o en la mayoría de las disciplinas (Hacking Crombie); (ii) entre un estilo abstracto-teórico y un estilo singularizante dentro de las disciplinas humanas, siendo dominante el primero en las Ciencias Sociales y el segundo en las Humanidades; (iii) entre la construcción de imágenes científicas del mundo y las formas de vida guiadas por cuestiones de *Bedeutsamkeit* (*Blumenberg*). Se analizan dos consecuencias de tal perspectiva. Al parecer, la doctrina husserliana del *Sinnentleerung* necesita ser revisada; y la particular situación de las Humanidades debe verse no únicamente en la intersección de estilos de razonamiento científico divergentes, sino también en la intersección de un particular estilo de razonamiento científico con la esfera de *Bedeutsamkeit* —sin lo cual estaría ausente el contexto obligatorio de relevancia en las Humanidades.

Palabras clave: Epistemología comparativa, imagen científica y manifiesta, humanidades y ciencia, dos culturas en las humanidades, estilos de particularización y teorización en las humanidades, punto de vista interno y externo en las humanidades.

Abstract

Attempts to bridge the gap between the «two cultures» have been the motive for philosophies as diverse as social constructivism in philosophy of science, foundational studies focusing on the notion of time, and, sometimes, phenomenologically inspired hermeneutics. The question posed here is whether a philosophy of the relation between science and culture, when put in the perspective of (what is still digestible today in) phenomenology, is not to be sought in a sceptical

attitude towards a such attempts whatsoever. The objectives of a truly comparative epistemology have to be, (1) to look for and vindicate the peculiarities in style and image of science among various disciplines, and (2) to look for and vindicate the particularities in style among the «scientific image» on the one hand and the «manifest image» on the other.

When differentiating types of intentionality thus, one is led to maintain the respective distances (i) between layers of theoretical and manufacturing style in all or most disciplines (Hacking, Crombie); (ii) between a abstract-theoretical style and particularizing style within the human disciplines, the first being dominant in the social sciences, the second in the humanities; (iii) between the construction of scientific images of the world, and the forms of life guided by questions of *Bedeutsamkeit* (Blumenberg). Two consequences of such a view are discussed. It appears that the husserlian doctrine of *Sinnentleerung* is in need of reconsideration; and the peculiar situation of the humanities has to be seen in the crossing not only of divergent styles of scientific reasoning, but also of one specific style of scientific reasoning with the sphere of *Bedeutsamkeit* (without which the obligatory context of relevance for the humanities would be lacking).

Key words: Comparative epistemology, manifest and scientific image, humanities and science, two cultures in the humanities, particularizing and theorizing styles in the humanities, external and internal point of view in the humanities.

0. Introducing and shifting a problem

The place of the humanities within the sciences on the one hand, the place of the humanities within culture at large on the other: that would be my topic of tonight.¹ Now I have to tell you at once, I *did* change the subject of my talk, although I had some hope—or fear—you might not even notice the change. As a matter of fact, my title got a little shuffled in transit: «the two cultures in the humanities» became «the humanities in the two cultures». An apparently innocuous shift which, I hope, indexically points to a shifting comprehension of the subject; and again, I have to add, hopefully such an eventual last minute shift could in turn be interpreted as a progressive one indeed.

The things I originally intended to present under the former heading of «two cultures in the humanities», looking from somewhat like an aside perspective—which is not to say a biased perspective at the conference theme of «phenomenology and humanities», were more or less the following. 1) Phenomenologically inspired philosophers of today should be as interested in the perspectives and prospects of a «comparative epistemology» as other philosophers of culture and as philosophers of science, if only because of some major concerns of Husserl as well as of Dilthey, Rickert and others, up to phenomenologically oriented hermeneutics. Those were the forerunners, so to say. 2) A comparative epistemology, I would then argue, finds one point of application in the so-called «problem of the two cultures», or rather in

¹ This is an elaboration of the text of a lecture delivered at the International Congress *Fenomenologia y Ciencias Humanas*, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 23-29 Sept. 1996. I want to thank Dra. María Luz Pintos Peñaranda for her stimulating invitation to go on elaborating; and for their kindness making for a splendid week: once again both Mari-Luz and Evaristo, as well as Irene, and also Nel Rodríguez Rial, Javier San Martín Sala, and Arancha.

some of the many readings of the debate concerning the «two cultures». 3) At least one of these readings puts the very nature of the humanities at stake, not just the humanities as they relate to something else, but the humanities as they are in themselves: *i. e.*, as they are divided within themselves. And in particular, it is possible to discern a divergence, if not a Battle of Books, among two cultures more or less hidden *within* the humanities as of today. 4) And finally, I would go on trying to identify in some detail those two major styles or cultures, or ways of practicing the humanities, and I would label them respectively a «particularizing» and a «theorizing» style; which would provide a more or less natural halting point from which to look back on the landscape crossed, or at least, more prosaically, a possibly useful starting point for a discussion. Indeed, the proposed *quaestio disputanda* would have been something like this then: respecting the peculiar character of the particularizing style in the humanities rather than being revisionist about it, don't we have to say that the most sound attitude for philosophers sensitive to hermeneutical and other problems connected with the *Geist* (and its derivational combinations like with —*Wissenschaften*) consists in learning to «live with the gap» among the cultures rather than desperately attempting to bridge it?

Now in the meantime, shifting from «two cultures in the humanities» to «the humanities in two cultures», nothing very much has changed with respect to «those things which had been acquired», to speak with Husserl. But something had to be added. I tried to go just one step beyond the forementioned point of presumed arrival, and add something to the content of that —now penultimate— point. Posed as a question: in what way is the presence of two cultures in the humanities indicative of the position of the humanities in or among the two cultures in that larger of senses, the *Manifest* and the *Scientific Image*? Or, speaking a language even more common to this audience: In what way is the presence of two cultures in the humanities indicative of the latter's peculiar position in or among the Life World on the one hand and Modern —possibly «Galilean», or perhaps even «post-galilean»— Science on the other hand? And continuing in the same direction: is it sufficient to refer to a peculiar style of thinking as it is laid down in products of cognitive *Leistungen* of a certain type, or, is the next step urging itself not to delve into *attitudes or points of view* lurking behind those products? To this question I would try to sketch a beginning of an attempted answer in terms of the notions of an *external and an internal point of view*. (Which is to say, in terms of an opposition present in much of today's philosophizing, but absent in any realization of the project of comparative epistemology known to me). Anyway, here the attempted answer is given in terms of a first sketch at a program rather than in terms of an exercise in philosophical analysis already worked out.

So, again, these are the keywords of the points to be developed subsequently in these «promissory notes»: 1) *comparative epistemology* —what it is and what it could be; 2) *manifest and scientific image, humanities and*

science; 3) two cultures in the humanities; 4) particularizing and theorizing styles in the humanities; and finally, 5) the humanities in two cultures, or: external and internal point of view in the humanities.

1. The context: a project of a comparative epistemology

Before an audience schooled in the diverse traditions of contemporary philosophizing, including especially the ones rooted in the Latin world, it would be presumptuous to venture introducing Gilles-Gaston Granger and his project of a so-called «comparative epistemology». This state of affairs is fortunate to me, in that I can just restrict my comments, about this topic at least, to a few words. What is fortunate also, but more than a coincidence, is the circumstance that when Granger tried to put to actual use the spirit of the work of his teachers, Jean Cavailles and Gaston Bachelard, he had always the problem of the «status of the humanities» in the back of his mind, or rather, in the front of it, really: to him, the idea of a comparative epistemology was always linked with the question of the possibilities and limits of turning the humanities into sciences in their own right; —including investigating the scope and meaning of formal-structural approaches in their domains.

In fact however, what I try to put to use, in referring here to comparative epistemology, is just a kind of general *framework* offering a natural home to a number of philosophical problems concerning the sciences, and permitting a more natural mode of expression for a certain class of problem formulations and intuitions; more natural, that is, than in other, more standard traditions in the philosophy of science. In what I shall say or offer as comments, however, I will remain noncommittal with respect to Granger's own (or in fact anyone else's) detailed way of filling in the contents of such a comparative epistemology.

What I find attractive in the very idea of a comparative epistemology, is the possibility it offers to pose questions about the nature of science and the «cultural» significance of peculiar scientific enterprises, without thereby immediately leaving the ground of an intrinsic approach to the philosophy of science, i. e., put crudely, without at once becoming a social constructivist of sorts about science. Here is a way of treating the significance of science from a point of view leading to or akin to a philosophy of culture, while at the same time remaining a philosophy of science. A philosopher of science, that is, is looking at science from the point of view of its *specific* nature, what makes science science —or again, the difference science makes. At the same time the difference other cultural practices make with respect to science and knowledge are within scope for a comparative epistemologist: for example, questions as to the meaning of «meaning» can have new readings. Are «epistemic meaning» («meaning» as referred to when speaking in the context of the sphere of cognition) and meaning in the sphere of *Bedeutsamkeit* («mea-

ning-as-relevance») really commensurate magnitudes?² This may lead to comparisons among scientific and literary usages of language; or to comparisons between the ways of scientific and artistic imagination.³

The clue to the combined possibility—the actualization of which had not always seemed evident, to say the least—of commenting science from within and commenting science's cultural content is of course to approach science as it grew in its own right. That is to say, to approach it *historically*, but not reduced to other historical practices; to approach it *stylistically*, but not reduced to esthetics, not by way of softening up the notion of style as derived or transported from other branches of culture. There are genuine styles of *scientific thinking*, that is.

In other words, committing oneself, as a philosopher of science, to an idea of a comparative epistemology, implies at least that one is out to find structural likenesses and differences among various ways of knowing and thinking. Filling out this idea is possible in at least two ways, depending on whether one is interested in philosophy of science as a more or less closed domain of problems with respect to science as such, or rather, one is looking for comparisons between scientific and other thought styles. The point is, keeping in mind the objectives of a philosophy of the humanities, to find a way of combining both ways (as I hope to make clear in sketching my perspective). Let us first take a look at ways to broaden the perspective step by step then, starting from a «closed» conception of philosophy of science, i. e. considering the latter as a more or less closed domain of problems with respect to science.

Even in such a conception, it is possible to set up comparisons among types of disciplines within academic curricula, or else, to discern scientific styles (styles of reasoning, styles of conceptualizing) within a single discipline: remember the famous opposition, analyzed by Granger, of algebraic and projective styles of doing geometry in the seventeenth century, associated respectively with the names of Descartes and Desargues.⁴ Or on the contrary, it is possible to discern styles transgressing borders among disciplines. (For the latter type, one could think of something like a structural

² In Granger's work there is a recurring although not really elaborate opposition between *sens* and *signification*, the former having to do with structure, and with what I call «epistemic meaning», the latter with «meaning-as-relevance». The latter term is revisited mostly negatively, to locate an area escaping the scope of science. But the fact is, that although Granger does not really adventure himself into the vagaries of *signification*, he leaves room for something the hermeneutical philosopher could try to analyze.

³ Granger's own way of broadening comparative epistemology, corresponding, if one may say, to a shift from a «French» to an «Anglophone» understanding of the word «epistemology», dates back at least to the writings surrounding his 1988 book, in which the question is posed, through comparisons of (styles of establishing) various notions of objectivity, in what sense, if any, the products of philosophical activity can be called knowledge. But this broader conception was at least implicit in earlier work of Granger's, as we will see, and certainly connected with his wittgensteinian turn.

⁴ 1968, chapter 3.

style of practising various human sciences —we will come back to the example in a while).

Independently of Granger's own preferences, one could say in general that the two distinguished approaches within a «closed» comparative epistemology can each lead to more or less expected types of analyses (redescribed in a new framework), as well as to less traditional, less expected results. In the former class I could mention reintroducing (or sanctioning) divergencies or convergencies among types of disciplines like economics and historiography. In the latter class I would point to new levels of analyses, revealing or introducing connections among scientific projects otherwise as divergent as could be. In this sense one would have to count studies like Carlo Ginzburg's *Spie* («Tracks»)⁵ among the classics of comparative epistemology, since it brings together things as diverse as medical semiology, criminology and historiography on a common denominator —in this case, the project of «abductive» tracking. But here also A. C. Crombies and Ian Hacking's «styles of reasoning», and certainly the latter's presumed fundamental distinction of the levels of *representation* and of manipulative *intervention* within a lot of scientific disciplines alike, would present classic materials for discussion in a comparative epistemology.

2. Transition: manifest and scientific image; humanities and science

After having thus started broadening the perspective, let us ask ourselves whether we can stop there, especially once we are being asked to focus on two things within a comparative epistemology: one, a field of knowledge, the humanities, and two, a problem people seem to have with this field —or rather, a group of problems— a problem reflected in the so-called two cultures debate.

A truly comparative epistemology, a phenomenologist would say, should have to flow into a discussion of relations with the *Lebenswelt*. Well, in a more neutral terminology, the debate is long since known also under the heading of the Two Cultures. Now Two Cultures debates have proceeded in terms which remain notoriously vague and ambiguous (and were unreflectively sociologized, mixing up epistemological and sociological considerations). Before all, they have conflated two problems —of course without mentioning the equivocity—, both legitimate in their own right: on the one hand what we called the internal problem of relations among types of sciences (in this case the natural and the social or human), on the other external relations between science and culture at large. (But, mostly, the question of the proper cultural content of science was not mentioned). In fact, then, the

⁵ Ginzburg, 1979.

latter problem goes back of course to the question of relating science to the *Lebenswelt* (the «manifest image» in the formulation found in an alternative tradition in philosophy),⁶ a question anticipated by Dilthey as the problem and sphere of *Bedeutsamkeit* in the modern world, a world dominated by science.⁷ Let us call it the Great two cultures debate. The former problem, on the other hand, is also encountered already in Dilthey, Rickert and Windelband, most notoriously under the heading of *Erklären* and *Verstehen*.⁸ Let us call that the Small two cultures debate. After all the transformations in the map of the sciences and in culture at large in the course of the twentieth century, it is still possible, so one might contend, to update both debates and give them a sense today. Or rather it is impossible not to give them a renewed sense today.⁹

It is clear that the project of a comparative epistemology, even in its narrow interpretation, brings us back to the problem of the two cultures, at least to the Small two cultures debate, since modern science's conquest of new territory did not stop before the fortified gates of the humanities. Under what guises do we have to deal with oppositions like explanation and hermeneutics today, or with new dichotomies in the process of «scientification» of the humanities (if I may use such a barbarism)? But also the Great two cultures debate cannot remain untouched: what is at stake in the question of turning the humanities into a part of the scientific movement, is also the very relation of experience in a scientific sense with experience in other senses, originating in other kinds of cultural practices and traditions outside science. Indeed, esthetic, historical, value-bound etc. types of experience are presupposed as correlates of the very objects the investigation of which is undertaken here, —at least as preable levels of experience. In other words,

⁶ The Angloamerican discussion in its present day shape originates, of course, in Wilfrid Sellars' classic 1963. In the following, I will use the expression «the manifest image» the way it is commonly used, although it might be more advisable to speak of «manifest images» (as forms of life somehow preable to or contrasted with scientific modes of thinking) in the plural (and leaving aside the question how far it is possible then to specify the content of manifest images). Analogous questions have been posed with respect to notions like «the lifeworld».

⁷ Meaning here that it is a world dominated and constituted by science in a sense determining a cultural gap with the premodern world.

⁸ And we all know the importance Husserl attached to the problems of arriving at a well-founded view of the comparative place of the various disciplines, as well as material considerations founding this topography of sciences (considerations known under the heading of «material ontologies»). See for the former *Prolegomena*, last chapter; for the latter *Ideen*.

⁹ Both, however, do also arise in the margin of Granger's project, especially the question of *Verstehen*, although somewhat in disguise: in fact, constantly, since *Pensée formelle et science de l'homme*, there is a marginal theme recurring, almost as a headache one would be inclined to say: at the margins of the human sciences on their painful way of adolescence, there is that recalcitrant discipline called history, which, despite all good declarations of intent and promises, is always rejected on epistemological problems of dealing with the singular (what Windelband called the idiographical), and so on. And *via* historiography, we are thrown back upon history and the life world itself as a limit upon the possible extension of science. Here and now, I will refrain from commenting on the turn Granger's discussion takes before and after, for example, the rise and fall of the *Annales* school.

and more briefly, the question at stake—which clearly cannot be treated here, since that would mean nothing less than solving the Great two cultures debate—is the relative penetrability or impenetrability of the manifest world of human experience for the scientific one and *vice versa*. To become acutely aware of the dilemmatic character of the question, just think of Ernest Gellner's remarks concerning one of those places where the two images (manifest and scientific) are supposed to meet, the emancipating social sciences: integration within the movement of modern science inevitably implies a promotion of abstraction, going hand in hand with a growing distance from the lifeworld.

3. The two cultures in the humanities

And indeed, looking at the history of the two cultures debates in the twentieth century, whether or not carried on under that label, the most obvious change since Dilthey and Rickert and Windelband, is of course the rise of a third culture, somewhere in between the *Naturwissenschaften* and the so-called *Geisteswissenschaften* or *Kulturwissenschaften* of their age. The social sciences have been constituted as a group with a conceptual and theoretical density of their own, not to be *prima facie* identified with either of the poles of the original opposition of some hundred years ago; if only for that reason we cannot just simply carry on the discussion in the same terms (like *Erklären* and *Verstehen*) without further qualifications. Today it has become customary to speak in terms of «the humanities» in a more restricted sense distinguishing them from the «social sciences».

I recall these facts without the slightest suggestion, contrary to the way some have liked to present them,¹⁰ as if this third culture in science would have the bridging function of resolving the tension between the two poles. On the contrary, my only suggestion in this connection is that this evolution has just shifted the problem. This shift consists in a proliferation of admittedly smaller gaps. Today one would have to say, I do suggest, that we have several two cultures debates going on, in a sense different from everything I mentioned up to now. Apart from the «Great Debate» concerning science and culture (or science-as-culture), we have a shifting series of «iteratively nested» debates. And this is not so much a symptom of crisis as it is a reflection of a natural condition or a resistance against being swallowed in the main stream, or so it seems. I explain. An updated two cultures debate not only touches (i) the cohabitation of natural and human science within one idea of a university, it now touches (ii) the human sciences (formerly

¹⁰ People have been arguing that the new types of intelligibility produced in the social sciences as well as new developments in natural science, would bring together (i) science and lifeworld, (ii) science and literary culture, (iii) science of nature and science of history, and (iv) nature and history themselves.

united in their nonexistence, or semi-existence, so to say) in their inner dividedness, as it poses the problem of their cohabitation with each other. In particular, it is not obvious how to integrate social sciences and humanities in the more restricted sense —say, in the sense of the things going on in Letters faculties (and departments elsewhere, confronted with, loosely speaking, types of questions and problem situations analogous to those in the Letters). But having admitted so much, one cannot stop there: an updated two cultures debate is not just going on between the two factions in the sciences of man, there is one going on (iii) within the humanities themselves in that most narrow of senses. Indeed, a practitioner of comparative epistemology would have to say that, within the humanities, a battle of styles or images of practising science is going on, and that the latter are taken in a complex web of relations of convergence and, mainly, mutual divergence and competition.

Now, one can expect the following objection, uttered in an attempt to stop our analysis in the very starting blocks: isn't it a fact that such divergencies are common in every type and even every branch of science, whatever unit of analysis one chooses to take a closer look at? So what's so special about the case of the humanities? But then, a comparative epistemologist who is sensitive to the grand styles, in the sense of major or «fundamental» images of science according to an appropriately chosen unit of analysis (which is to say, rather large, but not necessarily extra-large), can invoke precisely those analogies the objection alludes to. In his particular case under investigation (the case of the humanities), he may have good reasons to stick to his view that we really have a struggle among *two* cultural traditions of practising sciences of culture going on, because on the one hand he discerns a pattern (say, a major divergency) in the case he is investigating and on the other hand he can point to some important precedents elsewhere. For one thing, beneath the chaotic climates of competing research programs and methods (nowadays postmodernism, deconstructionism, feminism, interculturalism...), he discerns something more systematic, the «law» behind the tides. For another, he makes the «ampliative» comparative step: «So let us be a bit less meticulous in our vision, a bit more panoramic, and we will see that, here as well, a struggle analogous to Kuhn's secular battle between 'mathematical and experimental traditions'¹¹ in physics may very well be going on». More subtle distinctions of style (like, in the latter case, the difference between theoretical and mathematical physics)¹² are of course important (and seldom noticed). But they should not blind us for the more sweeping divergencies. In the case of the humanities, one often tries to identify with a label distinguishing the approach advocated from the momentarily recognized rivals in

¹¹ Kuhn, 1977.

¹² «Mathematical physics» then being taken in a more refined sense of that term; see Kuhn, *a. c.*, p. 65; also Suzanne Bachelard, *La conscience de rationalité. Etude phénoménologique sur la physique mathématique*, Paris, PUF, 1958.

the field, so as to fail to notice the common opposition to those that are different in more fundamental ways. In that sense we might need a more detached look in order to notice even the existence of two major cultures in the humanities, surviving beneath the more sophisticated controversies within the programs, and hidden by the latter. That is the idea I would like to introduce as a hypothesis right now, and make plausible in the next section.

Hypothesis. Within the humanities conceived as academic study of history, literature, art and philology, and within a number of fields of research deploying in a more or less systematic way styles related to those of the four mentioned fields, there is a large divergence among two major styles covering all finer-grained divergencies of programs, methods and the like: and this is due to the persisting presence of a «Geisteswissenschaftliche» layer besides a «social science» layer or style trying to make its own way within the humanities.

Both styles give shape to a more or less implicit project for the humanities (which makes them competitors anyway, whether or not they feel the need of cohabitating). The first is what I would call a *particularizing* style, guided by the idea of reconstruction of the object studied as it presents itself with all its singularity. This style of research refuses to give in to the temptation of embedding the particular reconstruction into a large scale or deep theory (which would reduce the reconstruction itself merely to a surface appearance or instantiation of that theory). The roots of this style lay in the *artes* and the several schools and streams in secular philological traditions as well as, foremost and paradigmatically, in historiography. Historiography, in turn, is here conceived as an argumentative discourse (meaning also that requirements more rigorous than for a *narratio* could be imposable), but not as a systematic theory of anything. This discourse aims at constructing an image of fragments of something lost, the past; in other words, it aims at reconstructing the object of this image. Or rather it is an itself fragmentary recollection of interesting, important and determining fragments of the past according to different scales of description and analysis (but, again, resisting the temptation to see these fragments as the instances of general laws, whether causal or statistical, or otherwise projectible sentences). To state a set of positive features of this style in general seems hazardous; it seems easier to characterize its common traits by pointing to the resistance it offers to another, rival way of practising the humanities.

The second culture in the humanities then is, grossly termed, the attempt to introduce the same types of abstract, general and deep theoretical models in these fields that had proved relatively successful in the social and behavioral sciences in the meantime. Therefore I propose to call it the *theorizing* or structural style. As transported in the humanities, it takes a number of shapes in their traditional domains. Pointing to some samples: (1) in *historiography*, it leads to the idea of a theoretical (if not nomothetical or universal) history, like Braudel's *histoire globale*, to be situated on the other end of a spectrum when compared to the idea of particularizing reconstruc-

tion. (2) In the *history and theory of art* the theoretical style leads to a semiotics and semantics (of pictorial or visual representing) conceived as general framework for iconographical and iconological analysis. (3) In the *literary* departments general text theory and text pragmatics envisage a theory comprising the properly so-called literary theory as just one subspecies. (4) And often, all this is in turn placed in a still more global framework, such as a general rhetorics for all of the humanities.

Now after having introduced the supposedly major styles more or less ostensibly, let us try to give some more detailed description of those styles.

4. Particularizing and theorizing styles

Since the notion of a particularizing style has been introduced primarily in a negative way, *i. e.* by way of opposing it to the notion of a theorizing style, let us try to be more specific about what to understand by a theorizing style for the humanities in the relevant sense. Exactly what kind of notion of «theory» is being resisted in the other, particularizing tradition? First of all, the very word «particularizing» could be misleading, since in paradigmatic scholarly works representative of that tradition, it will become clear that the notion of «theory» resisted in these works is not that of a «global picture» of an object. The picture or image—for the moment, let us call it that way, perhaps naively—achieved in the reconstruction of the object might be very well highly global, and the object the image of which is being constructed might be very global in turn, indeed: just think of Huizinga's *Waning of the Middle Ages* for one convincing example. One could even venture the hypothesis that the «logic» of the humanities practised according to at least one type of research within this style consists in achieving synoptic views of the object, always to be reconstructed in expressions like «the world of x» (taken in a non-trivial and non-eliminable sense).¹³ And perhaps there could be senses of opposing globalizing to singularizing (having a singly

¹³ A trivial and eliminable case of reconstructing the designation of a scientific subject by an expression of the form «the world of x» would be the labelling of a book on atomic theory as «the world of the atom». This would be a case of metaphorisation in a sense different from the sense present in, for example, «the world of the Shining Prince»: the first usage would be supererogative with respect to the theory explained in the book, except for a character of imagery used to evoke, for example, a reaction of vertigo, as in Pascal's «Les deux infinis». In the second example, «the world of...» is used to evoke an essential tension between the global aspect of the reconstructing image (here the synoptic or kaleidoscopic view of the Heian culture) and the singular reality it always eventually refers to (such as the life of people of a certain time and place, including all its idiosyncrasies). A thorough elaboration would be required, of course, in order to make precise the intuitive statement to the effect that reconstructions in such terms as «the world of x» characterizes the monographical culture of the humanities. For instance, one question would be whether a kind of finite regress to something analogous to a Ramsey-sentence of the part of the global picture defining its singular reference, would be required in order to speak of a «world of x» in a non-trivial sense.

delineated subject) subtypes of the particularizing style. Anyway, the main sense of «particular» accounting for the expression «particularizing style» refers not to the extension of the subject matter, but to the character of a work that is being produced, when attempting to picture what it is that makes a subject matter deflect from any other (or anything more general).¹⁴

So if the opposition between the major styles cannot be described by referring to the extension of the subject matter involved, what is it that one style or culture does and another does not want to introduce, when talking about theoretical models, theoretical research in the humanities?

There are several notions of a theory and of theoretical activity which could be involved, and which should be distinguished in order to avoid misunderstandings. Each could be circumscribed by looking at its contrast class. I will distinguish, first, three weak senses of the notion of theory (which are not primarily at stake), and, finally, one strong notion of theory which is really the main issue at stake. So I will need a rather extensive detour to reach the point I want to make; by the way, this detour offers one example of a way my «promissory notes» would have to be filled in point by point.

i) In the first place, there is a traditional sense of theoreticity current in *philosophy*, originating in the older speculative or contemplative ideals of theoretical activity, and prolonged in modern ways of philosophical theorizing. It is not expedient to go into subtleties about this here, since despite all the complicated adventures of the notion of a theoretical ideal or theory type in the history of philosophy (think only of the shifts in metaphysical theoretical ideals), there is somehow a kind of continuous line in the tradition of conceiving of this activity. This accounts for an intuitive recognition of the presence of philosophical theorizing as a peculiar mode rather distinct from other theoretical types present in the modern sciences. (For those interested in one peculiar analysis of this difference, see again the forementioned 1988 book by Granger).

Of course, when looking at things from the vantage point, precisely, of the humanities, there are complications. If one was looking for one striking characteristic of the humanities, especially as they are being practised in a highly «cerebralized» setting and style in the twentieth century, one feature that comes to mind is very the presence of highly philosophical —even if often not «speculative» or «metaphysical»— ideas and programs in research schools and programs of a purely humanistic nature. Of course, this is hardly typical for the twentieth century situation —on the contrary. But what I

¹⁴ It is typical that the making of such images, whether globalizing or not, is operated through works, the significance of which it is impossible to convey by means of text book summaries; in other words, the work cannot be seen as an instance of some more fundamental theory. Although the kind of work realizing this style of research is not a work of art, the idea expressed is up to a high degree inseparable from the mode of expression chosen. (In contradistinction, the ideas in the works actualizing the theoretical style are to a much larger degree independent of the modes of expression; they are apt for paraphrase and summary).

mean is that, contrary to a layman's first impressions, it is far from true that the twentieth century, «*l'âge de la science*», would have somehow purified away theoretical ideals of a predominantly philosophical nature out of the humanities' research types.¹⁵ Theoretical ideals of a typically humanistic or also social science character have developed more or less in juxtaposition to philosophical theory styles, but also more or less still under the influence of the latter. In this respect, nothing much has changed since the much despised Romanticism, with its characteristically «speculative» theories, e. g. theories of the symbol and the symbolizing act. The fact is only that, to stick to the latter example, more contemporary semiotic theories of symbolism mix styles of theorizing in an untransparent way, trying to develop their own procedures of testing hypotheses on the one hand (empirico-theoretical ideal of sorts) while belonging to a «*grande envergure*» theoretical program of *omnisemiosis*¹⁶ on the other hand (philosophical theory component). This compound has not become more extricable lately, when looking at the late research programs or substyles in the humanities: postmodernism, deconstructionism and feminism are, by and large, mostly philosophical or even ideological labels framing all kinds of more concrete research projects and offering them an umbrella (and ways of raising funds). The line of demarcation between philosophy and humanities has always been very unclear, —even when we disregard the question in what sense and in what component parts philosophy itself is just one compartment of the humanities.

To round off this point: «theory» in any of the senses in use for describing results of typically philosophical activity has always been more or less present (even when unrecognized as such) within the humanities (as in other scientific fields, and even, I would add, more than elsewhere). This is especially the case in those *topoi* of disciplines and programs where the transition from theory to (epistemological) metatheory is smooth. Small wonder: just so the transition is smooth from the very objects studied (artistic and literary creations) in large parts of the humanities, to the sphere of reflective intellectual standpoints: often enough, esthetic products do contain a manifesto, or, more modestly, their own moment of self-reflective commentary. So the border is vague and mobile. Nevertheless there are a few observations to be made here.

¹⁵ Again, one could ask whether complications due to a mixed presence of scientific and philosophical theoretical types do not arise in each and any type of science. And it is certainly the case that theoretical physics and foundations of physics, to take one example, do shift more or less continuously into each other from a certain point on. (This is particularly true in the case of speculative cosmology and philosophy of nature). One could multiply examples, also when thinking of the biomedical sciences, for instance. But a detailed comparative analysis would be required in order to judge the relative roles and nature of the intervention of philosophical ideas in the sciences, heuristically and otherwise. When analyzing the role of philosophy in the humanities of today, the point is however, that it seems problematic to relegate philosophical ideas to «mere heuristics» (as separable from the very ideas and results that constitute the science).

¹⁶ To use Eco's expression in 1990.

1) The humanities, insofar as they belong to the sphere of scientific disciplines, should manage and to a certain extent do manage, just as other scientific fields, to withdraw their discussion at least in part from the endless conversation on foundations. They do so by making up their own procedures of validation (testing), and making them (as) independent of the ideas to be tested (as possible), provisory as these procedures and the results of their application may always remain. (This can be interpreted as a point reminding of more orthodox ideas about testability, but equally well as a point reminding of Kuhn's distinction between *Schulenkampf* and paradigm-guided science, or of Hacking's ideas about styles of reasoning.)

2) Much as research projects may depend on large scale programs of a more or less philosophical nature, it is to be noticed, especially in the case of the humanities, that *works* of really great standing (even when in line with specific disciplinary traditions and «matrices») always have shown a large degree of independence with respect to any philosophical or otherwise theoretical *vogue*. However much natural the wish to equip the humanities with a New Project (especially in periods when they seem to lack one) defining their «sense and value», the greater value of their work lies in the quality of the greater *works* themselves it manages to produce.

This should suffice to locate the particularizing style in the humanities over and against one «philosophical» notion of theoreticity: it is not obvious to what extent humanities scholarship is or should be «theoretical» in this sense. On the other hand the complications rehearsed must have made clear by now that *this* rather weak notion of theoreticity is *not* the one the anti-theory opposition is seriously addressing.

ii) When «theoretical» is understood as antagonistic to «practical» or «applied» and the like, one would certainly be inclined to say that the humanities, as most of the sciences, are first and foremost «theoretical». But in how far and in what sense could the scheme «fundamental science vs. applied» be applicable to the humanities? If any form of science is «fundamental» in the humanities, the particularists would probably reply, here it is the concrete studies upon which the more abstract ones are to be based; which would only bring us back to the starting point of the discussion. Although the second sense of «theory» distinguished is clearly no more than the first the relevant sense dividing protagonists and antagonists of «more theory» in the humanities, complications also do arise already arise when taking this second sense. Indeed, when «practical» also has the connotation of «evaluative» or «normative», a connected question comes to the fore: is it possible, theoretical as the humanities may be in this second, still rather weak sense, to conceive of the unmistakably practical, moral and value-bound characteristics the object of research (a culture, the past of our own traditions) so often carries along with it, as eliminable from the study made of that object? But this would bring us back to an aspect of the first sense distinguished as philosophical theorizing.

iii) There is a third sense of «theory» which could not really be at stake

in the discussion between theorizers and nontheorizers either. The notion of a theoretical knowledge is sometimes understood in the further weak sense of pointing to the *conceptual* character of the knowledge obtainable and obtained in the humanities, just as in other fields. The very addition «as in other fields» shows the triviality of the point, since only naïve fact-mongers could possibly have the tenacity to stick to a *scientia de individuis* in a sense exclusive of concepts, at least when the latter are considered as instruments of knowledge. Nevertheless, a less trivial issue arises in one stronger reading of the role of concepts. That reading concerns the concept not as an instrument but as object and goal, as truly knowledge *about* concepts: here the roads might already clearly diverge. In fact, the interesting question to pose here is: what kind of concepts is one interested in (and is being obtained) when producing knowledge-through-concepts and (possibly) knowledge-of-concepts within the typical fields of the humanities? Do these concepts possess distinctive characteristics, when compared to the typically behavioral science concepts (such as the concept of a learning process), or when compared to natural and biomedical concepts, or when compared to common sense (or even to concepts at work in esthetics and arts)? Rather than taking up the dull discussion about *Erklären* and *Verstehen* all over again in the Hempel/Dray context of formal conditions of knowledge, it would be worthwhile to pursue the subject of comparative stylistics of concept formation in this context. What, if any, are the distinctive styles of conceptualizing characteristic for the *geisteswissenschaftliche* layer of the humanities (literary and art history, iconography, for example)? Up to now, the few attempts of Mink and Walsh in this direction (the latter with his notion of «colligatory concepts»), and also analyses of the role of typically indexical elements in humanistic discourse, did not get the attention and degree of elaboration they deserve.¹⁷ And what are the typical styles for other, social science concepts at work in the other layer, for example in developing the more theoretical modelling labour in social and economic historiography?

(iv) This question of types of concepts brings us finally to a stronger and more relevant sense of «theoretical knowledge» which is really at stake in the discussion about the nature of the knowledge to be had in the humanities. This is the sense of an *abstract* yet empirically controlled *model construction* attempting to reduce phenomena to hypothetical, explanatory depth structures —«theoretical» in Bas van Fraassen's sense of unobservable structures,¹⁸ or somewhat less strongly, in a current structuralist sense of theoretical models and concepts being only indirectly connected to the phenomena to be explained (and/or controlling their postulation). «Structuralist» is not a

¹⁷ W. H. Walsh, 1974; L. O. Mink, 1973.

¹⁸ But without necessarily implying an epistemic commitment of belief in the existence of those unobservable structures and processes; so without implying that model builders are realists in the sense of Van Fraassen's definition: they could very well have only pragmatic commitments or agnostic attitudes with respect to the existence of those structures they deploy or discover.

purely gratuitous qualification here. In fact, the historically best known realization in the humanities of such an idea of deep theoretical models introduced as tool and object and aim of knowledge, is of course the famous structuralist movement of some thirty years ago. When seen with hindsight, epistemologically it consisted in expanding the domain of the great structural modelling paradigms by imitating the style of those that had produced considerable theoretical successes in the behavioral and social sciences over the three previous decades (social choice and game theory plus decision theory in economics, sociology and psychology; measurement theory and cognitive psychology¹⁹ —not to mention the procession of preceding candidates for expandable models [theoretical grammars, semiotics, cybernetics,...].)

In this connection, it seems to me that the morals of the story of that Great Leibnizian Dream are, that the dream is over. At least this is so when evaluating the expansionist movement guided by the projected conquest of the humanities in the more narrow sense. The illusion the humanities could have nearly succumbed to, was nothing else than the idea that their whole epistemic project could be integrated within one grand science of man or one general theoretical science of culture, a science starting from basic principles and/or concepts all within the scope of a «*mathesis* of quality». And the same morals have transpired for the separate disciplines constituting the humanities: none of them is to be internally unified under the aegis of a theoretical kernel relegating the provinces of particular studies and subject matters to the periphery or to the status of applications of a so-called central idea. Historiography will never be reduced to an instance of a theoretical history, be it a universal or just a global or more locally causal history. Literary studies will never be an illustrated general theory of *the* literary text considered as semiotic object, let alone of text theory as such (while thus leaving the determination of literariness and literacy as a complementary problem to language sociologists). And a theory of art historic interpretation, conceived as a *general* theory of meaning of *the* pictorial or visual representation, betrays its overly totalizing character wherever its eminently illuminating comments on the production of one period (take Panofsky's Renaissance) lose their power and get diluted in attempts to extend the analysis to the whole history of, *e. g.*, painting. Deepening by way of extending the domain is the hallmark of mathematical or mathematized knowledge.

I conclude: recognizing the presence of deep theory types, the discussion about the «scientificity» or «scientification» of the humanities is no longer merely a question of *Verstehen* over and above *Erklären*. Nor is it primarily a dispute, at this level, about the limits of science. It is a dispute about the

¹⁹ When updating the set of options among theoretical high-tech branches in the social sciences today, one would have to add: cognitive science as a superdisciplinary program —whether «computational» or «connectionist»—; artificial intelligence and new logics in parts of linguistics; catastrophe theory (already out of date...), self organizing systems and chaos theory (deterministic or not), etc.

limits of a specific and exclusive theoretical ideal of science. What it's all about, is whether a very determinate ideal of intelligibility (the search for abstract structures and models) is at all able to do justice to important and principled aspects of enterprises such as historiography, the study of literary and other texts, the history and interpretation of art works, the study of aspects of ethnographically described cultural practices... It is significant that the theoretical style envisages also the integration of humanistic disciplines with other types of disciplines, in this case of course first of all with the social sciences (but in some respects also, directly or indirectly, with much more naturalized research programs: think of the relation between cognitive science and mind/brain naturalism). This is typical because in this way a double agenda is pursued: to «lift» the humanities, in so doing, to the level of those disciplines where tough theoretical approaches did gain at least some successes, and at the same time to strive for the realization of the dream of the bridgebuilders among the scientific cultures (while, in so doing, giving the shining example of the unity of culture under the guidance of the unity of science?). For its adherents as well as for its adversaries, a completion of the very Enlightenment ideal —either dream or nightmare— is here at stake.

It is clear enough then —as clear as the implied normative implications of this description sketch would be— what the so-called traditional particularizing *artes*-ideal of the identity of the humanities can have to win or lose. It is in fact not so much a traditionalist defense as an anti-reductionist movement affirmatively standing up for its own epistemology, refusing the image of the stay-behind having to catch up in the Course of History by emulating the success story of other scientific enterprises. The humanities do possess styles of their own as much as other fields.

5. The external and the internal point of view

A considerable number of years ago, Bernard Williams, in his book on Descartes (1978), spoke of an «absolute conception of reality» and of the «project of pure enquiry» introduced by the birth of modern science. More recently, a great debate was launched in Angloamerican philosophy by Thomas Nagel's phrase on «the view from nowhere», meant to design an attitude and a point of view typical for naturalistic thought in general. Nagel thus meant to denounce an attitude in a philosophy and in a science claiming to build the framework for in principle answering all legitimate and meaningful questions about the mental and ultimately about the phenomenon of consciousness. The naturalist attitude, according to Nagel himself, is in principle unable to even come near to something like an account of the phenomenon of conscious experience, since conscious experience, and everything related to it, is inaccessible in principle for the naturalist's objectifying point of view. A number of variations on the theme of such a radically distant point of

view (and on the question whether and how it would be implied by any real attitude of the scientist) followed suit: Putnam criticized the possibility of taking a «God's eye point of view», presupposed, according to him, by metaphysical realism, and was criticized in turn for supposing realists did suppose so. John McDowell's very recent work, *Mind and World*, goes on discussing these topics with renewed vigour.

Now whether or not such a specific «attitude» one could generally label as «the external point of view», is really to be attributed (even in principle) to anyone (and in particular to the idealized representative of the naturalist scientific attitude) is one question. Whether and how it is essentially related to other debates flourishing today, such as, mainly, the scientific and/or metaphysical realism debate in the philosophy of science and of mind, is a second question. These questions will not distract me now.

Here I will just take the notion of an external point of view as a potentially useful notion, a heuristic prepared and supplied in contemporary debates such as the ones mentioned, to explore topics in the comparative epistemology of the sciences and, especially, the epistemology of the sciences of culture. Even if such a notion would turn out to be satisfiable (in the logician's sense) only in an approximative and gradual way, this would suffice for my purpose, viz. to throw light on the point I do want to pursue concerning the identity of the humanities.

Now, Putnam (just as older American pragmatists, and just as Husserl by the way) never tires of reminding us that the scientific image was, is, and remains rooted in the manifest image. Even if this dependency can be made visible only indirectly due to the centuries of immersion in the scientific image, it is real nonetheless, he says, —as we must remember when reflecting on, for example, the prescientific roots and connotations of the fundamental methodological virtues (like simplicity, fruitfulness, unificatory and even explanatory power) we invoke to judge scientific claims (context of theory appraisal, theory choice). And that is only one example of the continuity between science and common sense, when we take the pains to read the continuity thesis in the direction opposite to Quine's naturalistic argument for the *privilege* of the scientific image: if it's working in Quine's direction, the converse must hold good as well —and then the manifest image is vindicated too.

So far, so good. But this continuity should not blind us for the significance of the rise of modern science as something special and unique indeed in the cognitive history of man, and in the history of culture *tout court*. The decisive point is that one could very well describe the rise of modern science as the rise of an «external» or detached point of view. Much as this description may obscure the relative character of every distinction between objective and subjective stances with respect to the objects of discourse, it remains important to possess a characterization permitting to capture the fundamental anthropological as well as epistemological significance of the «gap» installed by modern science: the difference made, that is to say, by the reaching of

something like a point of view from which to a great extent the web of usual involvements with the world inhabited are left behind. Gradual as the difference may be and may have emerged, the intellectual asceticism, constitutive of modern science, reduces the world, and *all* of the world, at least in the respect defined by this endeavour, to a set of domains of objects to be known.²⁰ This is the rise of a limitless universe recognizing no sphere of objects of knowledge withdrawing in principle from the detached view as operationalized in any of a large class of methods.

Of course, a detailed analysis is required, historical as well as conceptual, in order to justify such a notion and to reconstruct its emergence from the premodern view including medieval science; and, mainly, also in order to be more specific about its content and bearing. Here just citing Max Weber's expression (as adopted by Gellner) about modern science as the *Disenchantment of the world* will do: it points to the «project of pure enquiry» as an attempt, ideally, to dissociate the ideal of knowledge from esthetic, ethical, religious and, in general, traditional considerations. (The esthetic that remains within the ideal under the guise of criteria for theory appraisal, is an esthetic of knowledge, only indirectly connected, by and through analogies, to already independently existing notions of esthetic experience).²¹ And enchanting as the scientific experience by itself may become for its creative practitioners, as a qualification of the cultural content of science since modernity, Weber's label is highly adapted, I think; and irreversibly so, *pace* the adherents of irreversible physical processes in Prigogine's and Michel Serres' vein who use time's arrow... to set the clock of modernity back. Indeed, they and their followers see the alleged creative role of time in nature as sufficient ground to declare that the distance between science and lifeworld has at least in principle been overcome (either already now or else in a coming new Age). So they become preachers of what Gellner calls a «Reenchantment Industry». The same qualifications and comments apply to their views concerning science and humanities, the two poles in the Small debate, allegedly reunited by the presumed historicity of self-organizing systems. Interesting (as well as controversial) as their views in fundamental regions of science may be, in the two cultures debate they are fuelling the illusion that a thus humanised supplement to the Enlightenment would give us a way out of what they experience as the moral alienation and mental «prison» of Classical Science.

Far from identifying the reenchanters' form of holism with the one advocated by pragmaticists like Putnam (inspired by Dewey) and by some phe-

²⁰ A formula which may be shorthand for different fillings in; for example, in a neokantian vein, like Granger's, for something like: «... a set of domains of objects to be constructed as objects of knowledge».

²¹ The remnants of «custom and example» within the scientific enterprise remain very real on the other hand (*pace* Descartes); but they remain real as factors to be neutralized out in the processes of reconstruction and justification, be it after the fact: at the very least, they can never be conceived as authoritative in their capacity, precisely, of elements of a tradition.

nomenologists, one is well advised nevertheless to be careful here as well. Softening up all distinctions, like between objectivity and subjectivity, between fact and value, can lead to a neglect of the specific difference made by the fact that culture itself (and not philosophy in the first place) has historically —by the historical power of its example— defined scientific knowledge as the taking of an external point of view. Taking that point of view and that difference in their relative senses, this is the way I want to use the very notions of external and internal points of view in order to say something about the status of the humanities.

Indeed, a characterization of the identity of the humanities solely in the above terms of theoretical versus particularizing styles would have to remain insufficient, even if only a characterization in the grossest of terms is envisaged. The epistemology of the humanities as a field to be highlighted with characteristics distinguishing them from other fields of research,²² cannot rely on so small a basis as the one provided for in terms of the stance taken towards *theories* alone.²³ Such insufficiency is due to at least two factors: the richness (and possibly, the chaotic character) of the debates in question, and also —announcing finally the topic of the remainder of my talk— *the very peculiar position of the humanities among science and culture*.

With respect to the first point, it is to be expected that debates concerning the humanities will not be simpler than debates concerning the other sciences. And in the latter debates someone who tried to reduce all major epistemological points of debate to one axis or dimension such as the attitude towards theory would hardly be taken seriously.

Concerning the second point, is it not to be expected that, *if* there is a special ambiguity in the humanities' position among science and culture, this ambiguity should be reflected in any statement on the identity of the humanities? The remainder of my argument will be concerned with trying to specify two things: what this special position is, and what its supposed reflection upon the epistemology of the humanities consists in. And, whatever the ambiguity, it will be only very partially covered by the reference to

²² Or rather, focusing less on the domains and more on epistemic content, we are here speaking about the humanities as a «geisteswissenschaftliche» layer of research. And this layer might very well be present in various degrees in fields of research outside the traditionally so-called arts faculties as well.

²³ Crucial as that trait might be, it is certainly not sufficient, even if it offers a framework of analysis —as I believe it does— preparing finer-grained distinctions within the combinatorics of positions with respect to several notions of theory. (One could say, by way of example of such refinements, that the narrativist comes close to one end of the spectrum —closer than a believer in a generalized rhetorics for the humanities in any case, and that a structuralist comes close to the other end of the spectrum, closer than a proponent of a semiotic framework, etc.).

There can be no doubt that even such a type of analysis will not manage to pinpoint all or even all the major differences the antagonists are differing about. Just compare the attitude of deconstructionists with that of philologically based *ad litteram* commentators: how to capture their divergence merely or primarily in terms of a difference with respect to the role of theory, since they both proclaim scepticism about unifying or deep theories?

the diverse attitudes towards theory. It will be captured instead by means of the relation between external and internal point of view.

What is really the epistemic stance the humanities take as a field of research with respect to their objects, the objects studied in historiography, art history, literary studies and philology, and to some extent also in law and ethnography?

The humanities are part of the set of cultural traditions we live in, just as other fields of research are. But what can we say about the fields of the humanities and of the other sciences, in comparative terms, when looking at their respective (i) purposes and (ii) objects, with respect to the cultural traditions they belong to?

(i) The purely epistemic purpose of the humanities is, in general terms, just part of the huge knowledge enterprise commonly called science, modern science. As a knowledge enterprise they belong to the same intellectual epoch, more or less, as their fellow disciplines in the great endeavour of epistemic enterprises; in principle, that is, they belong to the project of pure enquiry («sine ira et studio»). This inclusion has to be taken into account, by the way, in determining the appropriate extension and intension of the notion of cultural traditions constituting «science». So by their purpose —by at least one of their purposes— the humanities belong to the scientific traditions. And by the same token, they share the obligation to deal with their objects by investigating them in a detached way (reflected in the requirement to validate or refute claims by appealing to criteria independent of those claims).

(ii) When taking into account those *objects* studied in the humanities however, the former is not sufficient to deal with their repercussions on the epistemic ideal. One has to go further in describing the way the ideal is deflected by characterizing *them*. One could be tempted to say: as belonging to the sphere of human interests reaching beyond epistemic interests, the objects of the humanities belong to a world which is not, for the major part, itself part of the *scientific* traditions. But this is hardly distinctive: much less does natural science study itself in any obvious sense. So what is distinctive? More simply and more traditionally, that the objects studied in one case do not belong to nature in some sense or other? But what is that supposed to mean: that something is either within or without «Nature»? There is another characterization of the special intentional relation the humanities entertain with their objects, however. It starts, precisely, from the observation that the *objects of sciences* are rarely themselves part of cultural traditions at all: they are not, in the case of physics, chemistry, biology, and most parts of medicine and engineering, symbolic systems charged with historically grown meanings. Does this in any way contradict the previous observation that the *sciences* themselves are part of the cultural traditions? No, it is just that, now, a second question has been rendered precise: the sciences are part of those traditions, of course —but do they themselves study thematically the very notion of being— part of cultural traditions? And the answer seems to be: Not in the cases just mentioned.

Yet these properties of being part of their own object are exactly the ones defining the predicament of the humanities. This holds in the double sense mentioned: their objects are part of culture (and thus charged with symbolic meaning); and they themselves are not only part of culture: they have the very notion of partaking in a culture as one crucial object of enquiry. And this, indeed, seems to be also implied, and paradoxically so, by the forementioned major epistemic purpose of enquiry; implied because of the requirement to make it *all* an object of enquiry (everything is, within the project defining modern science); paradoxically, because the notion of pure enquiry with its detachment gets polluted with an object one is irremediably immersed in. The question is whether the special sort of reflexivity, the self-reference implied in the situation, is vicious —or natural, perhaps more natural than anything.

Of course, this situation of immersion in the object the humanities share more or less with the social sciences: their objects are (parts or aspects of) cultural traditions as well, and thus themselves charged with meanings. Apparently however, it belongs to this century's intellectual experience and achievements to have proved the possibility of abstracting to a large degree from these meanings in their original and intuitive shapes, so to say (from their *signification*, in Granger's terms): this was the birthmark of social and behavioral science. To be more precise, this procedure seemed to work in certain areas of meaningful behavior. In other areas —or should we say other «layers» of experience—, such an abstracting procedure apparently causes the object, or at least whatever in it that qualifies as the very object of our interest (as historians, as literary scholars...), to evaporate. Whatever it is we desire to grasp in it, vanishes, —the very moment we want to exercise our most powerful methods of grasping. It vanishes, just the way the frescos in Fellini's *Roma* vanished, in the very minute they were laid bare by force.

Pending an independent characterization of the former and the latter areas, or layers, one has to describe the situation as follows. Where these layers of meaning-as-relevance —I called them «*geisteswissenschaftliche*» layers throughout my text— are still the very objects studied, rather than being abstracted from, we are in the humanities as such.

So the humanities belong in the field of cultural traditions themselves as far as their object is concerned. And the cultural traditions intended here are not (or not primarily) the scientific cultural traditions, the existence of such relatively special fields as historiography of science notwithstanding. On the other hand, all this means that the very notion of epistemic purpose, pure as it appeared in its primary shape, is subject to a complicating deformation due to the intrusion of an object to be designated as «the partaking in a cultural tradition», to be studied while one is immersed in it at the same time.

All in all, the humanities, by their very nature as (i) an epistemically purposeful «object» and activity, and as (ii) an activity and object concerned with objects themselves symbolically charged by meaning-as-relevance, are

part and parcel of two worlds, two cultures: the scientific form of life by their idealized epistemic purpose, the world of everyday forms of life by their object and attached purpose deflecting the ideal. Being an object of a specific epistemic nature concerned with objects themselves symbolical, but not primarily epistemic in nature, the humanities do have to be amphibious beings. Having one foot in science, one foot in culture understood as manifest life, they are to be expected to present a Janus-like face, as Dilthey, immersed in history as well as in physiological psychology, already realized.

The way I would want to adapt the relative notions of external and internal points of view to the situation of the humanities in the framework of a comparative epistemology is the following then. There must be an element of the external point of view in the humanities as a knowledge enterprise. Otherwise there is no knowledge of the object, but absorption in and by the object (whether or not we invent nice labels for that process, such as «empathy» or «commitment»). On the other hand, the external and detached stance cannot be the stance giving the humanities a grip on the symbolical systems as sources of relevance they have to deal with in the first place. The fact of being part of the very sphere of objects they have to study, makes for the necessity of an internal point of view. Otherwise there is no relevance requirement commanding the study of those selected topics we do study in the humanities, and the humanities accordingly lose their meaning, when meaning is to be understood also, at least in part, as relevance. It is the belonging to the conversation of meanings, commensurable as well as incommensurable, nearby or far-off from the world of one's proper and particular interests, that makes for the inevitable hermeneutical participation in the object prealable to any kind of distancing. Here, abstracting from *signification* in order to concentrate on structural *sens* will not do.

But it is not the purpose of the scholar to share the fate of the ethnologist «going native». Being part of the object studied may lead one to being drowned in or absorbed by the object. More modestly one may be drawn into deviant expression of fascination by the object; but then one has been led to poetry, or religion. Tempting as such perspectives may be, taking or restoring an external point of view is a limitation upon absolute versions of hermeneuticism. Without such limits, practising *ars poetica* studies would be nothing but the writing of a parasitary kind of poetry, practising historiography the production of (mostly bad) novelism, and studying art would become the same as being an *apprenti-sorcier* of art classes (such as in «creative writing» and the like).

If the temptation to exceed the limits would not have been real on the other hand, partaking in ritual would have been irrelevant to the study of ritual (and it would not be the case that a number of ethnological projects ended in migration projects). And if the temptation would have been avoidable, so would the necessary enchantment by the object defining the humanist's starting point be. This is why such masterpieces as *The Waning of the Middle Ages* have verged on (and over) the borders of literary form.

Indeed, they have had to submit to self-censure rigorously in order not to be drawn into literature irrevocably.

Let me end by pointing out that, as Gellner suggests, there is a link between the overwhelming importance of the theoretical stance and the necessity of the external point of view, as both are characteristic for the project of modern science. It is a conceptual link between abstraction and detachment: being led by an external attitude towards the lifeworld in order to finally come to *know* it, implies that one is prepared to leave behind a lot of impediments to mathematizing abstraction once we apply the latter to the realm of meanings and qualities. So «points of view» as intentional types really seem to offer a basis for corresponding «styles» as their products. But the connection is not straightforward: taking the external point of view in the particularizing mode is also one stylistic possibility realized in the humanities. Think of the incredible growth of historical knowledge based on particularizing reconstruction, whether or not it ends in global synoptic images of the reconstructed. The two axes of distinctions (styles and points of view) do not link up with each other seamlessly.

All this is only to indicate the degree of complexity of the epistemological study «laying open as an infinite field of research before us» as the Master would have said. For the humanities, it would include a typology of combinations between external/internal attitudes and particular/theorizing styles.²⁴ But the main task, I take it, would still be a characterization of a kind of general combination between internal and external points of view typical for the scholar. And all I can offer here, as a prelude to further research, starting from the things said so far about the necessary interplay between enchantment and disenchantment *vis-à-vis* the object in the humanities, is a suggestion. The epistemology of the humanities depends on two things: the possibility of being fascinated by the object precisely in its quality of transcending the epistemic interest, suspending disbelief as in the reading of a novel, and the possibility of achieving something like an *external second-order* point of view with respect to the *internal first-order* view of the

²⁴ To give some idea, very briefly: purely apriori (speaking in terms of idealized types of course) four possibilities are open, and I will add a few more or less representative examples: 1) particular/internal (I. Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince*); 2) theoretical/internal (a rare combination indeed when taking our strict definition of theory; but see Mukarovsky); 3) particular/external (most aspects of *ad litteram* commentaries of texts; see e. g. Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse*, or, in a different vein, M. Gardner, *The Annotated Alice* —externalizing as a combination of earnest and pose); 4) theoretical/external (structural analyses in cultural anthropology; mathematical esthetics or information-theoretical literary theory).

Refining the analysis only one step, one comes to such combinations as particular+globalizing/internal (*The Waning of the Middle Ages*); particular+singular/internal (philological-etymological chapter of *Homo Ludens*); particular+singular/external (H. Verbruggen, *Le Zeus Crétois*, Les Belles Lettres, 1981), etc.

Going two steps beyond the grossest of typologies, one comes to localized shifts from external to internal and *vice versa* (see once more *The World of the Shining Prince*), second-order points of view, etc.

object thus achieved. It is a paradoxical dissociation between these attitudes—an internalizing understanding of the object, combined with an externalizing act towards one's own internalizing—which defines the scholar's predicament. Without strongly internalizing the object viewed, one would find oneself not in the humanities, but in science—period. And again, without strongly suspending one's suspension of disbelief, just going on *internalizing* one's own internalized view, one would find oneself, to end with, not in the humanities, but—in love.

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