⮩ Introduction ⮪

Reflexivity and Selfhood

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Our principal thesis is that reflexivity is a fundamental and defining attribute of humanness itself. Here this thesis has it roots, most basically, in the philosophical anthropology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and his ontology of the betwixt and between. What we have in mind by "reflexivity," then, is not to be confused with or misconstrued for the relatively recent anthropological movement that also centered on a notion or notions of reflexivity, and had its beginnings in the 1970s.[1] Granting its impact, provocation, and appeal over two to three decades, that movement was for the most part a matter of taking reflexivity as a methodology for rethinking anthropological research in light of postcolonialism and other ethical concerns of ethnographic practice. In contrast, we see reflexivity as significantly broader than a social scientific scholarly performance or a prescription to guard against our own cultural givens. In effect, our notion of reflexivity differs critically from that of the thinking behind the previous uses of this concept in anthropology. Given the understanding that our approach neither rests on nor derives from the basic concerns of that movement, the question of how the latter relates to the sense of reflexivity we propound is somewhat academic.

Insofar as we see a connection, it is this: when considered as a defining feature of the being and becoming of the human, reflexivity emerges as a normally unseen, because natural, platform on the basis of which the word "reflexivity" was, in productive but cognitivistically circumscribed ways, understood by that previous anthropology. Regarding the collected chapters in this volume, while we incline to emphasize the respect in which they are basically attuned to our ontological argument about reflexivity, readers, of course, can make of them what they will.

It is crucial to understand, though, that ours is, rather than an exercise in the history of a certain practice in our discipline, an approach to the human condition as tied inexorably to reflexivity.

Humans are always already reflexive, even if they have not made a conscious decision to think about this or that. Naturally capacitated to think, whether or not they are thinking to do so, humans cannot help but think. It is the extraordinary scope of this dynamic capacity that distinguishes *anthropos* from other creatures. This is the case despite our indubitable continuity with the animal world, continuity all too evident in our finitude, not to mention our corporeality and its fundamental contribution to our capacity for thought.

Famously, Descartes grasped the ontological surprise that *is* this distinguishing capacity. At the same time, however, owing to his heated rationalism and its logical commitment to dualism, there was no place in his mind's eye to see that, for all its cognitivist self-presentation, at the end of the day our capacity for thinking has an illimitable continuing basis in our bodily being. In other words, our cognitive reflections always presuppose our reflexive and affective desires and predispositions. As humans there is indeed a mind-boggling, wondrous amount of play in our ties to the ground, but in the end we are all reduced to that ground (even if the play of which we speak can yield, in the form of ideas, acts, and memories, a relative immortality that transcends the individual).

We also emphasize the recognition of a particular fact: namely, the fact of recognition, which invokes *the inherent doubling* of every cognition directed either within (toward the self as a self-different other) or without (toward the other as a simulacral, similarly self-divided self). This basic ambiguity of selfhood bespeaks the ability to think about thinking, thus marking a sense of reflexivity as conscious thought or reflection, a meaningful metausage to be sure (as was made clear in the late anthropological movement about reflexivity), but one that all too often is taken as reflexivity per se. The cloud-like reflexivity on which we dwell, however, provides the platform for that usage and has its roots directly between immanence and the worldly transcendence of cognitivism.

Our objective, then, is to bring into relief reflexivity as an inherent feature of the experience of being human or, what comes to much the same thing, the experience of selfhood. It is obvious that human beings are born with the capacity to develop, over time, a strong sense of self. Once developed, the "self" is necessarily twofold, comprising, within itself, a self to think with and another to think about—both being expressed, as a matter of course, when saying "I." In other words,

developed selfhood describes, paradoxically, the individual as a social or self-other relationship in its own right. However, issuing originally from a self-other relationship in which, by contrast, the other is external to the self, the self-other constitution of the individual presents an inversion whereby the external other is *internalized* as still an*other* self, thus producing the individual self as divided within itself between self and other. In turn, in a continuing dialectic of reflexivity, this fundamentally divided self turns back on the societal relationship from which it originally sprang, thus reconstructing a social order proper, that is, a group "I" comprising more than one individual.

To anticipate, in short, the cosmological meditations soon to follow here, one bright portrayal of the developmental process of reflexivity we have in mind is given in the biblical myth of Adam. Having been created in the image of his maker, the first man was endowed with a feracious seed of selfhood, that is, the life/spirit breathed into him by his creator. Because it remained, in preponderate part, a function of Adam's maker, this selfhood was naïve or innocent in nature, so much so that to realize itself it required enticement. Once aroused by the first woman, however, Adam, in a manner closer to a bodily (serpentine) reflex than a mindful deliberation, "chose" to slacken his ties to his maker (in meaningful measure eclipsing the latter) through an act of disobedience. As a consequence, *his embryonic self was given to appear to itself*, thereby becoming its own sovereign power. Thus, man was born again, this time giving birth to himself—that is, to his *self.* By so doing, he emerged from a veritable garden of innocence, a world in which man's selfhood barely registered, to one in which human selfhood, even if with many different cultural forms and degrees of development, came into its own as a basic descriptor of humankind.

Ethnocentrism and Universals

To make our argument, perhaps the best evidence follows from surfacing implicit reflexivities in primary data, such as, in the following case, religioculturally generated cosmologies. Reflexivity embedded and modeled in cosmology would reveal this primary awareness *of* the cosmos included *in* the cosmos. Yet the strongest obstacle against this robust notion of reflexivity as a human universal is that some will understand it as breaking a widespread professional injunction against ethnocentrism in the social sciences. Are the editors, in fact, offering reflexivity as a universal characteristic of the human species, thus committing an ethnocentric projection of a faux universal?

With so many examples of reflexivity exhibited by or implicated in cosmologies, any example will be rather arbitrarily chosen. To exemplify this primary—or primordial—reflexivity, or to illustrate it with a haphazardly chosen instance, inevitably incurs risks and costs that usually counsel caution. It is difficult to make peace with the arbitrariness of selection, for anyone might translate this arbitrariness (itself neither good nor evil) into the idiom of ethnocentrism. Here, then, lies the risk: the following example could make one point in reference to reflexivity while also being unreflexively ethnocentric. True, if one could rigorously designate an absolute cultural and discursive externality, an illustration from some immaculately defined "outside" of any recognizable relation to the traditions of Western scholarship, this pristine example would virtually prove a wider intercultural provenance for some notion of reflexivity.[2]

Perhaps such a pristine comparative item exists, but it is also possible to forestall these critiques by critically examining the very notion of ethnocentrism, and the slippery nature of the prohibition against it. Certainly this prohibition is widespread: perhaps no other appears so self-evident across the various social science disciplines. But this commonality exposes a fault line: If one eschews ethnocentrism, has one thereby achieved objectivity? That is, is objectivity something more than a rejection of the idols of one's tribe and good faith argumentation with evidence, or is objectivity itself an ethnocentric notion that we would do well to discard as a misconstrual of the nature of social scientific understanding? That the same scholars might oppose both ethnocentrism and objectivity marks the site of the epistemological wound that this volume will address with the notion of reflexivity. Perhaps much of what has been taken prima facie as an ethnocentric prohibition could in fact be a call for reflexivity in disguise.

Two Religiocultural Cosmologies

Aristotle's Transcendental Reflexivity and Cognitivism

This intractable tension between antiethnocentrism and objectivity has established a fault line within and between the various disciplines. When transported from the natural to the social sciences, many scholars treat natural scientific objectivity as a given, and others understand it to be an Occidental fiction. Given the multitude of differences between the natural and human or social sciences, the persistent appeal of natural scientific postures of objectivity in the human and social

sciences demands explanation, for the flaws are readily apparent. This volume turns to reflexivity as a solution for the deformations of objectivity that occur when social science researchers actively disengage from others and the human play of mutuality and reflexivity because they are trained to value distance and control more than relation and recognition. But how did the scientistic posture of objectivity become a portable model of immovability? How too did the distance that objectivity requires become an unalloyed good, so that an immunity to affective appeals and a closure against unreasoned influences remains to many an unequivocal advantage to be maintained at any cost? Surely for a pressure so persistent something deeper than a precedent must be at work here; deeper even than a paradigm, it would take nothing less than a world-framing, cosmological model that historically refracts this relation between objectivity and reflexivity.

While there is no single source that can account for the domination of objectivity, a cosmological precedent survives in the "Western" imaginary unrecognized as such because disguised as science, its mythological status denied, its *logos* eclipsing its *muthos*. The preeminent transcultural precedent for a solipsistically cognitivist notion of reflexivity occurs in Aristotle's "Metaphysics," one of the major capstones of classical Greek thought. In the twelfth book Aristotle describes the good life of a divine being whose only adequate and proper activity is to reflect upon itself and think the nature of its own perfection. Aristotle declares that if "God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more." As God's condition is better both quantitatively and qualitatively, Aristotle determines that "the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's essential actuality is life most good and eternal" (XII.7.25). Once anchored in wonder, Aristotle's depiction acknowledges that the "nature of divine thought involves certain problems." For one, Aristotle's divine Mind must take an object if it would not exist in futile isolation, for "if it thinks nothing, what is there here of dignity?" It is not enough for this Mind simply to be; there must be a relation between thought and its object, a relation that reflects well on the Mind as thinker and on thinking in general. At risk of collapsing into either nullity or indignity, to befit its status the Prime Mover "thinks that which is most divine and precious, and it does not change; for change would be change for the worse, and this would be already a movement" (XXI.9.26). With itself alone as its only proper object of thought, Aristotle posits a Mind that relates without movement or mutation through a self-reproducing, autoaffective process. With this cosmological model of

divine self-regard Aristotle devised an image of the good life for the philosopher to emulate that integrates metaphysical postulates with astronomical observations. Although this cosmological model of reflexivity long outlived the cultural values and social conditions of its genesis, in light of this model we can broach the issue animating this introduction: is reflexivity an activity, or is it an aspect—something humans do, or something we are?

While discussing whether to consider divine reflection as an act or a capacity, Aristotle presumes that expenditures of labor are onerous. Aristotle's cosmological reflexivity is hermetic and circular, and like the orbits that share this form, perfectly self-reproducing and self-sustaining. This means that the divine Mind's characteristic condition is understood not as an action or laborious effort but as a state of being. He further supposes of the Prime Mover that if what this being exhibits is "not the act of thinking but a capacity, it would be reasonable to suppose that the continuity of its thinking is wearisome" (XII.7.27). As an effortful act, the discontinuous exhibition of a capacity could not be the "actuality of thought" or "life" as such; otherwise the plenitude of God's good life would syncopate to become an intermittent state of being dependent upon expenditures of energy and effort. Ascribing effort to the Prime Mover would render cosmological reflexivity temporal, processual, punctual, and syncopated when it should instead be eternal and continuous. In this way common Greek value preferences for the perfect and the permanent, the closed and the immutable, compromise Aristotle's model and influence received notions of knowledge and objectivity to the present day.

But beyond these broad, framing values, the course of Greek discourse highlights a more specific antecedent. For Aristotle, the divine life of thought remains fully immanent to itself in a transcendence that is not intermittent but enduring, and thus eternally distinct from the movement and mutation that typifies nature as *phusis*. In the way that Aristotle disguises his cosmological speculations as extrapolations from physics, his model depicts metaphysically what had already occurred by the time of Plato's dialogues, for whom preexistent "ideas" were the origin and not the outcome of the social history of knowledge. With Plato the social basis of geometric knowledge in craft technology falls away in favor of an a priori account of true knowledge not as learned but as "remembered" (*anamnesis*) by a soul always already equipped to distinguish truth from opinion.[3] Having gleaned from the crafts their intellectual component, Plato set the stage for Aristotle to leave every residue of manual labor categorically behind. If Plato distinguished the philosophical craft among others

and against a vulgar sense of *tekhne* as unthinkingly acquired skills reducible to mere know-how, in "Metaphysics" Aristotle severs thought from action, while effort as the fact of human labor, whether technical or theoretical, shrivels before the value of divine contemplation. As he ascribes mindful reflexivity to the cosmos, Aristotle sloughs off the matrix of social labor against which Plato distinguished philosophical labor. Aristotle sublimates intellectual activity away from all other types of social labor and redefines effortless thinking (a gerund, an activity) as eternal thought (a perfect and unchanging "substance"), which affirms the philosopher's calling as a quasi-divine state categorically unlike the drudgery of human labor. In this way Aristotle finishes the project of distinguishing, against any other type of labor, thinking understood as the reflexivity peculiar to philosophers and God. The connotations evident in this early instance of reflexivity, connotations of aristocratic leisure and elitist self-regard, remain part of the notion's semantic freight to this day.

Aristotle's model exhibits a form of cosmological reflexivity that appears similar to the ontological hypothesis developed in this volume: if the Prime Mover is reflexive, it is so in its state of being and as its life, and not as a distinct and separable action. With effort, work, and expenditure denigrated, Aristotle's path toward understanding divine self-knowledge rejects any retroactive valorization of this process as labor and elides the activities and expenditures, the risks and costs, of knowledge production. To rehabilitate this model it seems simple enough to revise Greek values and, instead of a state of being or capacity, affirm reflexivity as a form of action or labor.

But when reflexivity is construed strictly as a specific type of action or activity, it still resonates too closely with the objective posture understood as a peculiar, not to say sui generis, form of mental labor. In the wake of Aristotle's model, reflexivity seems trapped between the banal notion of reflexivity as self-awareness or self-monitoring and the display of a rare or specialized kind of mental effort. With this cosmological precedent, reflexivity too often appears trapped between antipodal images of a strenuously detached objectivity and a leisurely solipsism.

Once the Aristotelian cosmological construal of reflexivity as an extreme form of solipsistic objectivity is off the table, perhaps we can begin to discern different aspects of reflexivity than have yet been apparent. Might we shake loose of such governing world images altogether? In this volume, instead of an agenda aimed toward the iconoclastic dismantling of any particular world image of reflexivity, we have sought to pluralize the number of possible models and seek ones that recast reflexivity less as a rare feat than as an ontological reality.

Isaac Luria's Mysticist Reflexivity and Basic Ambiguity

After addressing, if not resolving, these possible objections, we turn now to a "beginning," citing, comparatively, two Western devotional accounts of cosmogenesis, one the scriptural account in the book of Genesis, the other an early modern Jewish mystical account. The idea is to show how one of these two cosmogeneses reflects, in a provocative manner relative to the other (as well as to the Aristotelian transcendental conception), the human experience of reflexivity. The one we feature might be said to deconstruct the other, which, being biblical, happens to be a far more familiar account. This is not to say that the standard biblical Genesis fails to reflect the experience of reflexivity, for in its depiction of how Adam and Eve become self-conscious, the story is emphatically about that experience. But because, unlike the biblical story, the account we choose to highlight does not try to conceal the bodily nature of reflexivity, it serves better to bring out the essential ambiguity between self-consciousness and being or becoming, which is to say, between reflection and, in its nature as an autonomic process, reflexion.

On the one hand, according to the familiar Judeo-Christian biblical depiction, starting with absolutely *nothing* the god figure proceeded to create everything that is something: heaven and earth, and all that follows from this binary signification of the emergence of being (spirit and matter, light and darkness, water and land, man and animals, man and woman, etc.). On the other hand, for an ingenious and revealingly contrasting account, one that arrives at creation from neither something nor, in its received meaning as nonexistence, nothing, we can look here to the kabbalistic tradition of Judaism. More particularly, we have in mind Isaac Luria's interpretation of the Hebraic idea of *Tsimtsum*. Whereas this idea originally conveyed the tremendous concentrating of God's creative power into a single, totally inclusive point, Luria interpreted it inversely, to mean God's withdrawal or retreat away from such an all-absorbing presence. Asking himself (in Scholem 1954: 261), "If God is 'all in all,' how can there be things which are not God?" Luria supposed that, by withdrawing from, rather than essentializing, himself, God made room for creation. That is, by limiting or shrinking himself, God allowed for a primordial space-time in which creation could take place and revelation make sense.

It may seem that the conspicuous difference between the two cosmogeneses is academic, since in both the universe is generated by a god figure. But to see it so would overlook a difference that makes a world of difference. Indeed, it might be said that Luria was engaged in

a precocious, mystically driven exercise of deconstruction, detecting a fundamental contradiction in the conventional biblical story (how can there be a creationary world if all there is is God) and then addressing himself to its resolution.

In the conventional biblical account, it is the sheer *will* of God that makes creation, whereas Luria describes the world as a product of something more than will, something capable of contraction, that is, a presence of an incandescently numinous kind, but a *presence* nonetheless. By limiting this presence, this "all in all," God makes room for yet another kind of presence—the world as *we* find it, where being qua being looms large. In effect, in the Lurianic account, although God is grasped as otherwise than being, he is not rendered simply as nothing. As Scholem puts it (1965: 101, 102), by contrast to "the so-called rational theology of late Rabbinism," for the kabbalists "there is no room for the *nihil* in this world [the Kabbalah] of the theological conception." Rather, the figure of God is constituted in terms of basic ambiguity. It is helpful here to appeal to a twentieth-century Jewish philosopher, even though this thinker was no friend to mysticism. Discussing the very word "God," Emmanuel Levinas (1991: 151, emphasis added) also arrived at a picture of "the Infinite"—in kabbalism, the *Ein-Sof* ("without end")—in terms of fundamental "ontological" ambiguity: "[God] is an extraordinary word, the only one that does not extinguish or absorb its saying, but it cannot remain a simple word.… The glory of the Infinite shuts itself up in a word and becomes a being. But it already undoes its dwelling and unsays itself without vanishing into nothingness.… A said unique of its kind, it does not narrowly espouse grammatical categories like a noun… and does not incline exactly to logical rules, like a meaning (*being an excluded middle between being and nothingess*)."

This ambiguity manifests itself primarily as a dynamics (in contradistinction to a statics), wherein God, in his epitomical constitution as being *and* nothingness, *a distinctly Janus-faced figure,* is forever "falling back upon" himself (Scholem 1954: 261) to issue in mirror images that are both identical and reversed or inverted. In effect, at bottom the aspects of being and nothingness appear as ever becoming different from and identical to each other, an endless becoming other. Put another way, in Lurianic kabbalism the word *Ein-Sof* or God may be understood as a name for an *ur-* reflex, the arc of which is cosmological, moving continuously between being and nothingness, the visible and the invisible, life and death, and so on. In this light, the Infinite's autoinversion is plainly reflexive, in the sense of both a reflective or deliberative *and* an autonomic action, at once *both* a willful *and* a corporal reflex that rather than (immediately) denying the gravity of being

gives way to it. In still other words, we have here a description of a quasi-sacrificial act of self-destruction and creation pictured as direct functions of each other.

Thus, by contrast to the Judeo-Christian scriptural account, in which it is God's will alone that creates the world, Isaac Luria's representation of genesis may be seen to picture a uniquely reflexive event. It is unique because, while will or volition is at the very least an implied feature of this event, the reflexive nature of the god figure's inward collapse or withdrawal and this figure's subsequent creation of what is other to itself have the feel of a physiological phenomenon: it is just as if, having been somehow stimulated, a muscle contraction is followed by an expansion of palpable magnitude and duration in the very same muscle. What, then, is the stimulus that produces this amazing double response? It seems a fair presumption that in Luria's account God wishes to create life, as we humans know it, and is willing to sacrifice (shrink) himself in order to achieve this. In which case the generating stimulus is, as in the second and third chapters of the traditional Genesis, God's autonomous will. At the same time, however, there is in Luria's account an element of heteronomy as well as self-determination about God's act, making it hard to distinguish will from reflex, which is also to say, will from desire, inasmuch as desire is a matter of stimulus. The contraction and creation convey a quasi-autonomic character that suggests bodily necessity, as if they were advanced by need in addition to will. It will be objected that God, being omnipotent, can scarcely have needs or desires. But inasmuch as being, as well as nothingness, enters Luria's picture of God, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that there is something needful about this creative process, an element of self-concern in a conative sense. It is as if the "life" of God depended on the creation of beings that depend on him. When Scholem writes (1965: 104) that "the God who can be apprehended by man is himself the First Man [*Adam Kadmon*]," it would seem as if Luria's God needed to create reflexive beings who can recognize their creator in their own reflection.[4]

The heteronomous and needful character of Luria's god figure is expressed in yet another, more direct, register, namely, the erotic. Kabbalism had no penchant for sexual asceticism. Scholem puts it this way (1954: 227): "The mystery of sex, as it appears to the Kabbalist, has a terribly deep significance." Indeed, in this mystical tradition, even the relationship between God and himself is pictured as a "sacred union" between "He and His Shekhinah," the *Shekhinah* (the feminine principle or, literally, "dwelling place") being one manifestation or face (*partsuf*) of God (Scholem 1954: 227, 1965: 104–5). In other words, the singular figure of God is cast in terms of a self-reflexion, the two poles

of which—the self and the self-as-other-to-itself—are the phallic on the one side and the vulvate on the other. Scholem argued (1954: 225) that while kabbalism held fast to monotheism, the androgynous characterization of the god figure threw a wrench into this theological belief.

While agreeing with Scholem about the critical importance of gender dimorphism in the Kabbalah (specifically in the text known as the *Bahir*), another student of Jewish mysticism, Elliot Wolfson (2006: 145), by seeing the feminine element as hierarchically (in the Dumontian sense of the term) subsumed by the male element, makes oneness out of the androgyne. More inclined to understand the hermaphroditic nature of the god figure as a hitch in the kabbalistic theosophy, Scholem sees in this nature an unintended pantheism (1954: 252–53). In respect of this conjecture, even though he agrees there is no question but that the kabbalists saw themselves as holding to a dualism of spirit and matter, Scholem suggests that (1954: 269) they nonetheless entertained "the conception of man as a *micro-cosmos* and of the living God as a *macro-anthropos*." Wolfson's position is based on the kabbalistic grasp of the rite of circumcision as a feminizing (a withdrawing) of the phallus, thus dimorphically transforming the head of the phallic god figure. He (1994: 357ff.) explicates his position as follows:

> [I]t may be said that the crowning of the kabbalists is a ritual reenactment of circumcision, whereby the corona of the penis is disclosed.… [I]n the complex gender symbolism of theosophic kabbalah the corona of the penis corresponds to the feminine aspect of the Godhead, the *Shekhinah,* and hence the act of crowning must be viewed as a feminization.… One should speak, therefore, of an androgynous phallus.… [W]e have here another example of a one-sex theory: the feminine (specifically the clitoris) is but an extension of the masculine (the penis).… [T]he contextualization of the female in the male organ allows the kabbalists to envision the penis as the locus of the union of both genders.… The act of uncovering the corona is mystically transformed into an occasion for the revelation of the divine diadem; indeed, circumcision is understood in kabbalistic literature as a rite of symbolic androgynization as a result of which the feminine attribute of God appears through the semiological opening that is inscribed upon the penis.

Thus, Wolfson saves kabbalism for both monotheism and patriarchalism. Inasmuch, though, as Wolfson's position is an account of the kabbalists' own received conception of the matter, there is no reason to conclude that Scholem's construal of this godly androgyny as troublesome to the kabbalists' adherence to monotheism is necessarily erroneous. Indeed, in light of Wolfson's erudite account of the symbolism, in which the Jewish rite of circumcision appears to be an erotic representation of the Lurianic *Tsimtsum,* it is eminently inviting to speculate that

this autocontraction of the god figure amounts to a tacit introduction of the feminine principle as the buried source of Creation.[5]

"Luria is driven to something very much like a mythos of God giving birth to Himself," writes Scholem (1965: 271), who goes on to venture that this logically essential conundrum of reflexivity is the "focal point" of Luria's "rather obscure and inconsistent" cosmogenesis. Obscure and inconsistent indeed. Luria's image of God implicates an ambiguous nature, a *presence* that is nonetheless *not there,* an in-itself that yet remains discorporate and utterly indeterminate. In an apparently selfless act, this figure of the in-between, this infinite Self, contracts, thus occasioning what is other to itself, its complementary image—the Finite. But because it does so solely as a function of "its own self," it sustains and, in a sense, even completes itself at the same time. Although theologically scandalous, this conclusion must be the case inasmuch as the figure of the deity is defined in terms of its capacity to create, that is, as the Creator. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to think of "God" as one name for a veritable creational dynamics. What Luria's genesis account captures is that, for one thing, if God is infinite, if all there is is God, the only way it can effect difference, that is to say, the Creation, is by limiting or sacrificing itself; and, for another, precisely because it is the Infinite, the result of this act of self-sacrifice can only be what seems otherwise than God, that is, finitude. Put another way, in effect the figure of God amounts to an ambivalently sacrificial reflex arc, an open paralogical and dialectical relation in which what there is remains what it is by becoming, in perpetuity, something else. Just so, desire and self-interest are respectively squared with will and other-regard, in a never-ending process of creation.

Commenting on the *Ein-Sof,* here is how Wolfson (2006: 107) intimates the sexual imagery as well as the multilayered reflexive logic of creation in the Kabbalah:

> Time is precisely the measure of this "narrative space" arising from the infinite withdrawing into the sheltering-open of its hidden disclosure.… From a kabbalistic vantage point we can speak of the overcoming of time but only in the timelessness of time's perseverance.… There is no eternity over and against time, but rather the timeless time of temporal eternity measured against the timelessness of eternal temporality… the halo of silence enveloping the periphery of the verbal, the haze of invisibility permeating the showground of the visible.

In this subtle but provocatively telling description of the Infinite, Wolfson discerns in the kabbalist cosmology a narrative that defines what there is as that which is beyond definition. From the point of view of logic as such, this *whatever* presents the paralogical phenomenon of

self-causation. As the "infinite withdrawing into the sheltering-open of its hidden disclosure," space-time comes to nothing but ongoing creation or reproduction. Its sameness or permanency—which is to say, its identity—is, then, enigmatically, a matter of ever becoming itself by becoming other to itself. Consequently, its sole measure is itself, continuously turning back on itself, thus *repro*ducing itself by *pro*ducing what is other to itself. What we have, then, is a picture of what there "is" as a cosmological or primordial reflexive relationship obtaining between what the is "is" and what it is not: the verbal determined by silence, the invisible by the visible, space by time, and time by eternity. It is a depiction of what there is as betweenness, a virtual middle, but one that is always already broken, always already changing while all the while remaining the same, a whole no less open than closed, a picture of infinition as reflexivity.

From a strictly anthropological (as opposed to theological) perspective, it is unremarkable that this picture of the *Ein-Sof* can be shown thus to reflect—in the way of a definitively radical refraction—selfhood as we know and experience it in this world. This goes back at least as far as one of the preorigins of modern social science, the most materialist of the German idealists, Feuerbach, who posited that theology is indeed best understood as a form of anthropology. This helped build the bridges between what otherwise appears to be only distantly related, the philological scrutiny of scriptures and anthropological fieldwork, that scholars since W. Robertson Smith have explored.[6] What is more, that divinity and humanity are mutually implicated and reciprocally regarding seems perhaps the only point of agreement among all who would interpret religious claims such as these, scholars, clergy, and laity alike. In other words, to play on the theme of reflexivity and as against Genesis 1:27 ("And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him"), man has made the other and otherness the mirror of himself, that is, his *self*. How could it be otherwise, even if it stands to reason that selfhood issues ultimately from otherness?[7] That is, how could man imagine (in the sense of "circumscribe") the figure of god or gods except by self-reference (cf. Deleuze 1994: 136ff.)?

Reflexivity as the Being and Becoming of the Human

Nondualism and the Absolute Individual

In modern anthropology the direct and emphatic study of the self may be traced especially to Mauss's precocious essay (1985) on "person"

(*personne*) and "self" (*moi*) and to the intensive comparative writings on the "individual" by Mauss's eminent student, Louis Dumont. Naturally, these studies owe inspiration especially to Durkheim's theoretically pivotal and axiologically asymmetrical distinction between society and the individual. Seeking to attenuate Kant's dualism of reason and the senses (*Homo noumenon* and *Homo phenomenon*), Durkheim (1960: 325–340) identified reason with the social order, thus affording what he regarded as moral primacy to the collective rather than the individual self. As is well-known, according to him, the collective, creating ideals that transcend the individual as such are experienced as an impersonal, external power. But, listing in the direction of nondualism (without formally embracing it), he held that if these ideals are to captivate the individual, they have to lodge themselves in the world of the senses, such that things of material reality come to symbolize this transcendent power. Even so, the tension between, and dialectic of, the individual and society by no means disappear; to the contrary, with considerable prescience, Durkheim thought (1960: 339) it probable that the struggle between reason and the senses—for him society and the individual or, respectively, the sacred and the profane—was bound "to increase with the growth of civilization."

Of the chapters collected here, nearly all raise to critical question, either explicitly or implicitly, the ontoepistemologically deep-rooted presumption of both dualism and the Western sense of self in terms of individual autonomy. They do this by virtue of the very idea of reflexivity, whereby selfhood, whether individual or collective, necessarily defines a relationship between self and other. In our view, the intellectual problematic of selfhood springs from the inexorable experience of oneself as both two and one at the same time: mind/inside *and* body/outside as well as mind/inside *as* body/outside. In addition to the legacy of Aristotle discussed above, another critical backdrop to these anthropological discussions on selfhood and individualism is the abiding question of the relation between mind and body, modern answers to which tend to exhibit the provocation of Descartes's dualism. It seems as if modern scholars have been condemned to wobble through every paradox generated by Descartes's irremediable ontological scission. By ontologically elevating the experiential element of mutual exclusion rather than that of the intertwining characterizing this paradoxical phenomenon of selfhood, Descartes constructed a seeming logical resolution to the felt contradiction. This is his famous cogito, which defines the self transcendentally, in terms of reason alone, that is, as "thinking stuff" (*res cogitans*). During the latter part of the twentieth century, especially with the rise of so-called postmodern thought, the

Cartesian cogito, in its role as a pillar of the Western ideal of the sovereign, individual self, has come under strong, elemental criticism, as has the ontoepistemological dualism accentuated by this luminous French philosopher.

Selfhood entails self-consciousness, and, to reiterate, self-consciousness involves at least two selves, one to think with and one to think about—in which case, one is always other to oneself, a truth that characterizes the collective self-identity as well. Freud's psychological concept of the unconscious, which dovetails with his thesis of the self as divided against itself, captures this. But the Freudian "unconscious" suffers from a certain limitedness of psychologism. We must grasp, with Wittgenstein, that even were one to invent a language that one keeps, hermetically, to oneself, such a language would still not be private in essence. This is because, since its very construction could not but presuppose language as an inherently social phenomenon, it would remain necessarily open to understanding by others (as, indeed, is presumed by ethnographic practice). What is ultimately at stake, then, even with the psychological notion of the unconscious, is a relationship between self and other, in which case it must follow that the unconscious obtains no less between individuals than within them.[8] In other words, for all its intimation of absolute identity, selfhood, like language, is fundamentally a social phenomenon.

Ethics and Human Nature

By the same token, namely, reflexivity or the ambiguous constitution of selfhood, most, if not all, of the various chapters making up this collection disclose, either explicitly or implicitly, the essentially ethical nature of social science and human life. If selfhood, in itself, describes a reflexive relationship between self and other, then it necessarily also describes the essential condition of ethics: the emergent, evolutionary property of responsibility in being. Insofar as humans *conduct* themselves, in the sense of determining their own ends, to that extent they can be held to answer for their actions, at least in significant part, and even if, in any particular case, responsibility can be sensibly distributed equally or unequally as between men. In other words, conduct, as we use this term, is, whatever else it is, always and essentially a question of ethics. This remains true despite the consideration that all human actions follow from reflections that are many times removed from the immediate actors, to the point where we might speak of these reflections as preconceived. In this light, for all its rhetorical power and seeming common sense, Nietzsche's famous analogy (1967: first essay, sec. 13)

between archetypically "strong" men (*übermenschen* or overmen) and birds of prey is misleading. While raptors cannot be held responsible for their rapacious behavior, as if they were under an *obligation* to leave little lambs be, humans can. When it comes to human beings, Western politicoeconomic presumption (and its actualization) notwithstanding, it is no more "natural" to prey on their fellows than to refrain from doing so, since human nature is signally second nature. If in being self-responsible the self is ever other to itself, then, logically, by virtue of its very constitution, the self is necessarily responsible to and for others and otherness (other creatures and the environment) in general.

Scientism and Basic Ambiguity

Also running throughout the chapters collected here is a strong tendency to, at the very least, throw open to question scientism and its related notions, such as objectivity, facticity, positivism, materialism, determinism, and the like. This is because, keyed to reflexivity—that is, to an understanding of self-consciousness as a dynamic *relationship* between a person and him- or herself, or a sociocultural order and itself—the chapters are logically constrained to reconsider the received acceptation of self, other, mind, body, subject, and object, which is to say, the ontological acceptation of absolute identity. Unhappily, one result of this reconsideration has been a disciplinary propensity to gloss reflexivity as simply a matter of subjectivity, in this way reproducing the dualism implied by objectivism. It is crucial, though, to bear in mind that the model of reflexivity *most basically* advanced here is not a subject seeing a reflection of herself in the looking glass. Rather, the model is a reflex arc as found, not in biological science or even Gestalt psychology, but in a paradoxical figure of self-negation, a figure that, in its endlessly creative dynamism, holds directly between will and desire. Put another way, the figure limns a zone of relative but fundamental ambiguity between mind and body, and therefore, between subjectivity and objectivity, or, indeed, subject/self and object/other.

Ontology and Reflexivity

Luria's cosmology has shown how different "our" fundamental assumptions might be. Genesis and Luria together demonstrate reflexivity in a radiant way, Luria's account being a transformative reflexion of the biblical Genesis. The latter too, as a narrative of the development of moral consciousness, is in its own right fundamentally about reflexivity. Luria's rewrite, although still within the "same" religious tradition,

amounts to a reflexive kind of de- and reconstruction of Genesis, one that in effect throws into question such received notions as monotheism and, given the outright mysticism of the Lurianic story, religious positivism, making Luria an epigone of Maimonides and a harbinger of Kant and Hegel. Indeed, this pair of narratives, the biblical and the mystical, offers inverted cosmogenic recounts constructed by radicalizing divine postulation or denegation, the *via positiva* and the *via negativa*. Such a pairing exhibits what is at stake when one shifts from one embedded cosmology or ontology to the next.

Perhaps one other consequence of this pairing is to associate reflexivity with epistemological modesty, as opposed to the unreflexive hunting for unreflexive moments in others. Instead of abiding by any single prohibition or evaluating a work's lacks and absences against the plenitude of a criterion, perhaps reflexivity allows scholars to assess one another's work along a positive gradient, one that threads the needle between the positively nonethnocentric and the critically antiethnocentric. Different issues raised by reflexivity place the scholar at the limits of once avant-garde but now mainstream notions such as paradigms, epistemes, or *mentalites,* for each of these notions invokes a closed figure, a delineated object with relatively unambiguous demarcations. By contrast, reflexivity is peculiar among this postparadigmatic set. Is reflexivity something subjective and exhibited or discursive and contested, a psychological state or an objective datum in the world? Being a posited topic of uncertain ontological status—at times the quality or effect of a text, the capacity of a subject, or even the being of the human—this apparent shortcoming is in fact its value. Context-sensitive and semiotically ambiguous, reflexivity, despite the ink spilled in its name, remains an open, even paradoxical term of scholarly art. Nevertheless, reflexivity's role as marking the being of the human, that is, the developed and dynamic capacities of exceptional, if still relative, self-consciousness and reflection, ultimately makes possible its semantic flexibility. This is the case even though, *at bottom,* these capacities are more fundamentally perceptual, that is to say, matters of the senses, than they are conceptual or transcendental.

The Contributions

As we turn to the collected chapters, what is crucial to understand is that, however varied and rich they are, they all take for granted the fundamental *indistinction* between reflexivity and both the being and becoming of the human. That is, however disparate the questions and

approaches found in the chapters, this volume addresses reflexivity as a horizontal, orienting fact that provides the platform for being human as such, not a recurrent topic periodically rediscovered, and certainly not an epistemological breakthrough to be credited to this or that historical figure. Put another way, it is as if we, in our humanity, exist in a cloud of reflexive particles, a cloud that, because we are literally *of it,* remains *fundamentally* concealed from us, such that when we overtly choose to employ "reflexivity," we understand it as conscious thought. But rather than sheer cognition, the cloud itself holds between body and mind, such that our sensibility and our thought partake of each other, describing a basic ambiguity that is logically irreducible.

The following chapters do not fall cleanly into distinct categories. The fact of the matter is that many of these contributions address reflexivity directly, while others approach it more obliquely. What is more, the meanings attributed to the notion of reflexivity may vary from one chapter to another, as well as within any one chapter (as was also the case with the late anthropological movement that centered on reflexivity). Nonetheless, it proved useful to organize the chapters into four separate sections on the basis of, where possible, a few prominent commonalities. Of course, according to his or her interests, the reader is bound to find still other pertinent connections and differences.

Notes

1. See, e.g., Clifford and Marcus (1986); Marcus and Fischer (1986); Rosaldo (1989); and Tyler (1984). For a strong critique of this movement, see Handelman (1994).
2. A possible example, in terms of alterity and significance, could be one portrait of cosmogenesis found in the *Rg Veda*. See Handelman and Shulman (1997: 45ff.), in which "play" is seen as the springboard of the creation story in this sacred text of Hinduism.
3. In section 9 of *The Crisis of European Science,* Husserl describes the process by which the ancient Greeks gradually separated mathematics and geometry from the social conditions of their emergence in craft technology. In a process that Husserl calls "sense-emptying" (*Sinnentleerung*), even as practical developments facilitated an approach toward ever more ideal shapes in production, the sense or awareness of this craft knowledge basis "emptied" while the ideal, a priori status of mathematical knowledge came to appear more robust and, eventually, independent. The cultural drift of *Sinnentleerung* became explicit in Plato's texts but took place over centuries and across cultures, wherever the influence of Hellenism extended.
4. In this respect, it would appear that Luria's god figure stands as a precursory account of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. One might also think here

of Nietzsche's declaration of the "death of God," by which he meant man's ceasing to believe in such a heavenly figure.

5. For a deconstructive account in which it is argued that the story of Adam and Eve in the biblical Genesis was set out by its redactors so as to put out of sight an implicit subsuming primacy of the female over the male principle, see Evens (1997).

6. For two current examples, see Handelman and Shulman (1997, 2004).

7. We have in mind here, for instance, George Herbert Mead's work (1962: part 3) and, more recently, the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (e.g., 1991).

8. Cf. Kenneth Burke's essay (1968: part 1, chap. 4), written with Freud in mind, on the linguistic varieties of the "unconscious."

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