

Rise and Fall of Essentialist Social Theories: Recapitulation and Critique

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Abstract

This article is a recapitulation and critique of the rise and fall of essentialist social theories from the Antiquities through the modern period; more emphasis will, however, be placed on modern social theories. The article tries to give an overview of discourses that would cumulatively lead to the eventual development of intercultural discourses. It also devotes a section in which it goes back to the Antiquities in order to test for any subjectivist marks that are identifiable with ancient proto-anthropological representations of the cultural other; and this, in order to see if they are said to lend problems for modern day theories of representation. This article also notes both the lowlights and the highlights of the period under consideration through estimates made from the view point of humanism; it hopes to establish a background against which an interpretive attitude would take shape in later periods which would develop hand in hand with the emergence of critical voices that animate twentieth century discourses. Accordingly, while I take as the lowlights of the essentialism of modernity the institutionalization of discourses that promote monologue and alterity, I take as the highlights the beginning of ruptures in modern train of thoughts; a beginning that is especially marked by the decline of idealist metaphysics and the attendant rise of hope owing to the turning up of critical vantages that seek to help concretize the human spirit in the primacy of openness, interpretation, communication, fusion, etc.

Keywords: modernity, anthropology, critique, other, self

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Introduction

By way of a critique of essentialist anthropological theories and their distancing zeal of the cultural other particularly theories of the modern period, this article tries to appreciate the interpretive attitude that took shape in later periods, in the period of post-modernism, in which we have witnessed philosophic hermeneutics and interpretive methodologies beginning to take shape and develop along with several other critical voices that animate twentieth century discourses in the social sciences. The objective is therefore to call for more determined social sciences to go beyond the trap of modernity and to create intercultural basis for the possibility of dialogical encounters. “Intercultural basis” as presented here should mainly be understood as implying a discursive condition which must itself presuppose the givenness of diversity, so that reaching a common understanding between horizons could be realized upon accepting that truth is not one but many, without any enjoying the special privilege of universal validity. “Interculturality” could also be considered a criterion for truth since there is no philosophical meaning that can be brought up and articulated with a fixed universal method; discourse is therefore the viable implement towards this. This article follows a purely qualitative method of analysis; it critically examines established theoretical perspectives in modern social science discourses such as scientism, structuralism, functionalism, and the likes. So, it solely depends on examination of relevant literature.

Has Modernity Failed Yet?

This article argues that the notion of modernity, both as an intellectual approach within which proto-anthropological bifurcations manifest and as a cultural movement presupposes grand metaphysical schemes. Perhaps, modernity has by and large been initiated by the Cartesian grand dichotomy in which reality/truth/meaning is urged to be embraced in its universal validity after the Western model. This is clearly a metaphysical presupposition that, either the cultural other has to submit itself to Western value systems or communication between horizons and value systems is impossible. This paper is not so much about a call for an outright dismissal of modernity, which as a project could be better advanced if it had critical valuations towards itself; the paper is more about critiquing the essentialist postures and claims of modernity as a philosophical project discouraging the possibility for intercultural communications, mutuality, and common understanding between horizons. Critical theories that challenge the modern project push that modernity should avail itself for self-valuations in which case what could have been called for modernity would be reformation and self-sanitation rather than an outright dismissal of the entire project. Some ask if

modernity has failed yet which, I would accept, is a legitimate question. If we said that modernity has failed, it is because of the veracity that several forms of critical social theories and humanistic projects have long taken reflexive turns and become increasingly appealing to the extent that references to grand metaphysical schemes seem outdated and intellectually abnormal. Bernstein, in a very short but very thick summation, notes that “the dominant temper of the age is fallibilistic” (1983: 12). In addition, the claim that modernity has a hegemonic intent is beyond doubt, because critical reading of the modern project exposes intents such as the methodic glorification of Western value systems as if they were universally valid, and modernity also seeks to replace values of the other with values typical of the West. Throughout the twentieth century and beyond, discourses that have gained prominence are those that are having a hermeneutic spirit extolling the primacy of intercultural dialogue towards the possibility of a federation of meanings across human horizons. And, the common vocabularies have become as normatively and practically disposed as nearness, engagement, interpretation, meaning, solidarity, mutual understanding, dialogue, union and so on—vocabularies that stand up against the schematic authority of modernist expressions.

On the other hand, if we said modernity has not failed yet, it should be due to an alarm for legitimate suspicion (in some cases it is even manifest and beyond mere suspicion) that not all critical social discourses are genuinely critical for some are grounded in rhetorically circumventing strategies that seek to tacitly enlarge upon the modernist pattern of thoughts (see, for example, Mudimbe, 1988; Fabian, 1983; Marcus and Fischer, 1999; Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001). Any reference to the claim of the fall of modernity I am making here shall be understood not so much in its daring voice but in its sobriety that social scientific positivism has been challenged, it is being challenged, and will continue to be challenged until thinking returns to fully understanding the true sense of the human, until our discourses are grounded in intercultural bases. Let it be noted therefore that it is with this very assumption according to which I am dealing with the issue of the fall of modernity, especially pertaining to modern anthropological representations of the cultural other.

On the Need to Limit Criticisms

How should modern anthropological representation of the cultural other be estimated or critiqued? Should there be a limit to critique? That is, how long does a critique need to be on exercise and to what extent? By the initial of a not-yet fully developed remark, I would like to comment here that it is intellectually uninformed to slip into a final judgment as if cultural anthropology had always been a Janus-

faced social theory executed to effect distancing between the West and the rest, as if it never exhibited any mark of humanism at all. In other words, as much as it is accused of promoting alterity, there have been anthropological varieties in which the veracity of otherness does not necessarily imply alterity but just *difference* in the sense of plurality. Examples, even if sometimes ambivalent and merely sympathetic, could be proto-anthropological estimations of otherness during the Antiquities, during the Romantic movement of the modern period, theory of cultural diffusionism, the early twentieth century movement of cultural relativism by the lead of Boas, Malinowski and their followers as well as postmodern cultural anthropology.

This article therefore acknowledges the above referred truth and, indeed, any critique of essentialist social theories should not escape to taking note of this truth as well. My recapitulation and critique of the rise of modern anthropology does not therefore betray justice where it is due. This admitted, positive treatment of it will, however, be done only in briefer space; because I do not also miss an evident veracity that anthropology has mainly been more negative than affirmative vis-à-vis its other. That is, even when sympathetic discourses such as the above are set up, they ended up being more ambivalent and lacking in the edge of clarity; thus, undermining confidence and alarming the suspicion of amplification through rhetorical mutation. Accordingly, if my recapitulation of the rise of modern anthropology seemed to dwell longer on the negatives than on the affirmatives, then it is because this work principally seeks to be critical than accepting in its general purpose.

It is dubitable at no point that modern social theories in general and, in particular, anthropological representation of the other as well as the discourse of alterity it executed have attracted expressions of dissatisfaction, critical voices, and alternative approaches to the problem of studying the meaning of human life and social phenomena. Indeed, it is much to the dismay of the excess of modernity (and its debasement of humanity) that the great reflexive turns have taken initiation across the twentieth century; and this development validates the claim that modernity has had the mood to exercise total influence at our discourses. Such is why Fabian argued that the pathologies of modernity must therefore “be met by a total response, [though this does not mean] to say that the critical work can be accomplished in one fell swoop” (1983: 152). And this is, I believe, what could offer reason for the question why this article dwells longer at the negatives and shorter at the positives of anthropological representation, though it also admits that too much of criticism against whatever problems of modernity is not what we need the most if it failed to suggest humanely revitalizing alternatives.

If this last remark might signal that I am, tacitly or not, insisting upon the need to limit the edge of criticism against anthropological representation of the other (because, at times, I might appear to remark that anthropology has not always been essentialist and criticism against its modern bias should not therefore go unlimited), then it is because as much as I underline the merit of critiquing essentialism for the purpose of drawing upon it alternative humanistic discourses such as hermeneutics, I am cognizant that too much of criticism (prolonged criticism) against modernity may also prove fruitless than constructive as it foils the critique within a longevity of un reflection and forgetfulness. This is what I have noted especially with the manner of orientation African social science studies in general have been presented for much of its age. Indeed, many such scholars as Fanon, Cabral, Mudimbe, Serequeberhan, Mesay, Okere and others have noted the same when they, for example, complemented that African Philosophy should go beyond the fence of unyielding debates. Their critique particularly focused on the unnecessarily lengthy debates between ethnophilosophy and professional philosophy which, as they commented, is only thwarting and unreflective toward the making of an African meaning and the revitalization of its manhood.

Delineating Manhood: What Is Man?

If the rise of the discourse on alterity; that is, the eternal exotification (Said, 1978, Deloria Jr., 1970), the temporal distancing or freezing (Fabian, 1983), and the repeated defamiliarization through rhetorical mutation (Mudimbe, 1988; Marcus and Fischer, 1999; Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001) of the cultural other is traceable to the rise of modern social theories, the closest to identify its main source is with cultural anthropology; that is, the *science* of human beings and their institutions. Modern anthropology indulges the humanness of the cultural other as a given data whose meaning can be penetrated through the revealing power of methodic and controlling study programs such as modern natural sciences and scientific social theories. But the question is whether the human being is such a fixed sanctuary preserved for objective manipulation to effectuate the ambitions of blatantly generalizing or absolutely reducing formal scientific studies. Is not the human being rather ambiguous that presents uncertainty, that, the human being is knowable as much as unknowable and mysterious, inferable and non-inferable into a general order as much as he/she is reducible and irreducible into a simple effect--thus a possibility all along? In this regard Wittgenstein remarks:

We . . . say of some people that they are transparent to us. It is; however, important as regards this observation that one human

being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language. We do not understand the people (quoted in Geertz, 1973: 13).

Following this reasoning, if humans were such ambiguous possibilities all along, enlightenment about humans (and about their institutions) can only be gained through open, dynamic and interpretive analyses of their phenomenological presence within a particular space-time dimension. Again, human being as possibilities, any hasty generalization or reduction of anything human into macrocosmic or microcosmic configuration is worthless as betraying that neither absolute universalism nor radical relativism does prove to be a destined guide toward proper enlightenment about the phenomena of the human being. What more? These have been the designs that modern cultural anthropologists, dwelling in either school of the Cartesian Either/Or and driven by the controlling spirit of modern science, have formulated to justify inferences that briskly slip from local data to general conclusions or from general schemes to local truths. Refusing to acknowledge the merit of these two essentialist models, the Either and the Or, Geertz (1973: 3-30) argues that virtuous enlightenment about humans and their culture is possible only through the process of “thick description,” that is, description of social events, institutions and behaviors based on the intelligibility of contexts. In other words, penetration into human culture or analysis of culture delivers proper meaning when it is essentially semiotic, interpretive, dynamic, dialogical and open (also see Gadamer, 1975; Winch, 1958; Rorty, 1979; Geertz, 1983).

Briefly pointed here above are anticipatory issues on the difficulty to delineate, let alone to scientifically control or determine, the essence of man, unlike what modern anthropology claims to. Now, to better present the full picture of the rise of modernist anthropological subjectivism, I shall take a brief leave to go back to and examine the norms of the Antiquities and classical Greece where we can locate proto-anthropological representations of otherness (though they still bear marks of ambivalence) that might be said to have supplied stereotypes for Modernist social theories.

Some Ambivalent Stereotypes of the Antiquities and of Classical Greece that Served the Modern Attitude

Granted, several intellectual problems cut across a variety of social science disciplines. For instance, one such problem that lingers in the background of discourses especially pertaining to issues of rationality, culture, truth, and society is the philosophical dilemma of universalism versus relativism. This dilemma gets life particularly with the dialogical encounters between Socrates, believer of universal principles, and the Sophists especially Protagoras for whom “man is the measure of all things” and for whom truth is relative to culture and experience. The same philosophical brainteaser also lends to the discipline of anthropology an ever existing problem about how to define the relation between sameness and otherness; that is, whether the tension between sameness and otherness is total or only relative. In correspondence to this point Eriksen and Nielsen, historians of anthropology, have for example commented that it is easily discernible that discourses have perennially “vacillated between a universalistic and a relativistic stance, and that central figures [...] are often said to lean either towards one position or the other” (2001: 3).

So if by anthropology we mean the study of customs of peoples beyond ones horizon, then it is an interest as old as the Antiquities. People have always had the nosiness and undue interest in the affairs of others as well as the curiosity for distance; they set up discourses, formulated stories, and represented peoples far away in space and time. For example, the Greeks used to address “the other” by the pejorative “barbarians” which means peoples of remote lands or “foreigners” with whom the Greeks could not communicate in language that, when the barbarians make speech acts they mean nothing for the Greek ears beyond the merely unintelligible hocus-pocus of “bar-bar, bar-bar” (Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001: 3).

Herodotus, the great historian of the Antiquities, produces (in addition to his historical accounts of other peoples) ethnographic descriptions by which he either disdains or acknowledges difference. Claimed here is the point that in terms of signification anthropological accounts of the Antiquities are not clearly presentable as linear or one-dimensional in order to slot them either to the thesis of alterity or to that of mere cultural difference; descriptions are mostly on the fence marked by the ambivalence of attitudes towards what difference amounts to. Herodotus for example is as detailed (in his treatment of patterns such as environment, society, custom, and institutions) as vague in content of his descriptions of otherness. While on the one hand he presumes, much to the disdain of otherness, that the country beyond the Tritonian Lake--his geographic referent--is dominated by the

ubiquity of deviant creatures who are either “headless peoples”, or when they exhibit heads they appear only “dog-headed humans” (see in Mudimbe, 1988: 70), on the other hand Herodotus also recognizes the validity of otherness saying “different people have different values because they live under different circumstances, not because they are morally deficient” (Eriksen and Nielsen, *ibid*: 2).

Similar ambivalent attitude is also identifiable in Pliny’s treatment of otherness. On the one hand he estimates the normativity of otherness based, simply, on “the presence or absence of Romans” that, where Romans are there is norm of humanity, where Romans are not there is deviation; on the other hand, antithetic to his Roman subjectivism Pliny also acknowledges the part-civilization of peoples beyond the geographic limit of the Roman Empire, for example: old-Ethiopians (Mudimbe, *ibid*: 70-71). Such are therefore among the ambivalences that offer reasons to doubt the genesis of the discourse of alterity far beyond the era of modern Europe where the “discovered” have been essentially altered to complement the self-exalted subjective freedom of Europe. No matter what this ambivalent is up to, it is otherwise evident that anthropological accounts of the Antiquities have lent, to later-day anthropology, stereotypes towards the other. In this connection, Mudimbe notes how lively Herodotus is in the sixteenth century philosophical or rather unphilosophical and merely conjectural works of John Locke who accounts west Africans as “people without heads, having their eyes and mouths in their breasts” (Mudimbe, *ibid*: 71).

Building upon these received stereotypes, modernists have institutionalized the essential otherness of the Other. Now, in the dawn of European modern period, like never before, Europe gets pioneering personnel to navigate the space-time totality of the globe and to get the data of Otherness. Moreover, Europe also has the intellectuals as well as the schools to sedentarily fuse available (or merely imaginable) data with theories forward to a double utility: the reification of the Other and the service of the self-affirmation of the Same. It is in such a concerto of data, theory and representation; that is, in the complementary push of travelogues, anthropological representations and philosophical theories (in the forms of Cartesian subjectivism, Enlightenment rationalism, social evolutionism, structuralism, functionalism, and structural-functionalism) that the discourse of alterity finally comes to effect. In this regard Mudimbe notes that the complementarity of speech genres through fusion of data, theory, and representation from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth is what supplies the common need of ascertaining the “unity of Western consciousness” while it also leads to the attendant invention of the alterity of the Other (*ibid*: 69).

The objective here is not to defend, or otherwise, that Greeks and Romans of the Antiquities and the Classical period are not (or, are) as essentialist as modernists, but to trace proto-anthropological genres that would lend to later-day development of discourses pertaining especially to issues of subjectivism, otherness or sameness, rationality, truth and meaning—issues that directly or indirectly have grounding ramifications to the critical discourses that take formation in the twentieth century leading toward the possibility of a new constellation of dialogical communities.

When we come to classical Greece the dominant figures we find are Plato (Socrates) and Aristotle whose works surely have some anthropological implications to serve our purpose here. Perhaps, not much may be said about the merit of Plato's accounts of Socratic dialogues for anthropology because nearly all of the issues Socrates deals with are philosophical than anthropological (this should not imply as if to mean there is little between the two disciplines, indeed they have many things in common). Socrates primarily deals with problems as varied as knowledge, virtue, beauty, justice and the likes. Though anthropologically translatable, the mannerisms these issues are treated in the Dialogues point more in the direction of metaphysics, epistemology, morality, and aesthetics than anthropology or ethnography. However, it is also true that many of his dialogues were conducted under multi-cultural landscapes that, Socrates converses not only with peoples from Athens but also with non-Athenians whom he comes across in the vibrancy of the life in the small city states (see for example in Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001: 3). But, if Plato's works; that is, Socratic Dialogues, might not prove sufficient to help trace proto-anthropological elements, Aristotle's works will surely do.

Aristotle speculates about the natural states of humanity by which humans are essentially distinguished from animals and he asserts that humans by nature are fundamentally social and they possess the natural capacity for good judgment as well as for logical, rational, and analytic thought. From this, it can be claimed that Aristotle is pioneering a thought that advocates the universality of human nature; that is, humans by nature are social, logical, and moral (see Aristotle, 1971). Somehow similar universalist idea as Aristotle's is also found animating the humanist thoughts of twentieth-century philosophers such as Heidegger, Gadamer, Rorty, Habermas, Arendt, Bernstein, Winch and others who claim there is a sense of solidarity or community that anchors humanity irrespective of cultural diversities. In other words, these thinkers, one way or another, directly or indirectly, endorse that the possibility of communication and mutual understanding between different human horizons unavoidably presupposes the universality of

human solidarity without which intercultural communication would be impossible (see, for example, in Bernstein, 1983).

In view of this, it may be argued that Aristotle is therefore precursor to later-day thesis for the universality of human solidarity. Acknowledging this about Aristotle, Eriksen and Nielsen have for example noted that “such a universalistic style of thought, which seeks to establish similarities rather than differences between groups of people, plays a prominent role to this day” (2001: 3). However, this positive reading of Aristotle is not always univocal. For instance, Ram Adhar Mall is rather reproachful that the syndrome of Europe’s modern day cultural monopoly and its Universalist zeal are traceable not only to the old distinction between the Greeks and the barbarians, but also to Aristotle’s own universalism (2000: 116). These are opposed readings of Aristotle’s universalism that point to one more evidence for the ambivalence of proto-anthropology of the Antiquities.

Now, having tried to trace thought styles of ancient Greek thinkers that, in a limited sense, can be seen as precursor to later-day anthropological subjectivism, I shall indulge to the modern period. Indeed, in the mean periods, that is between the Antiquities and the Modern period of Europe, there had been little to consider, anthropologically speaking. Either Europe had itself been marginal to the new forces from the East: Arabs and Persians, or there had only been “a few European writings which may be considered precursors to later-day anthropology” (Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001: 4. Also see in Ram, 2000). Now, having said enough already by way of general background notes, I must focus on the rise and fall of modern social theories, especially anthropological ones.

Rise of Anthropological Subjectivism and Reification of the Other: The Great “Discoveries” and the Legacies Initiated

It has been noted that elements of anthropological significations in proto sense can be traced back to the Antiquities in which we have identified problems related to the status of relationships with peoples of distant horizons; problems that, however, are at times ambivalent as to be clearly judged to carry the full-spirit of modern day essentialism. On the other hand, limiting ourselves to anthropology as we know it in its modern face, it is therefore pursuable in the historical unfolding of modern Europe when political, economic, scientific, religious and other conditions helped propel its development. For example, the emergence of capitalism is one such historical force to have unleashed a string of momentous exploratory sea voyages that in turn inaugurated new interest in the cultural other. In this connection, Fabian notes:

Among the historical conditions under which our discipline [anthropology] emerged and which affected its growth and differentiation were the rise of capitalism and its colonialist-imperialist expansion into the very societies which became the target of our inquires (1983: 143-144. Also, see in Mesay Kebede, 2004: 9-10).

Captured by pioneering explorers such as Henry the Navigator, Columbus, Magellan and others, Europe is now put on a grand mission to ferret out and bring to light the mystery of Distance. Destinations are not void; the voyagers indeed herald the news about the discovery of tangibles far beyond the familiar European space-time. Moreover, because circumvented are not only spatial distances between the Same and the Other but also temporal remoteness, navigators earned a name for eternity when they are also called “time-voyagers” which, according to Fabian, is a standard characterization “as long as one keeps in mind that fascination with Time was a prerequisite as much as a result of travels in space” (Fabian, 1983: 146. Also see in Eiseley, 1961).

No matter which lands and peoples are “discovered,” whether they are great discoveries or not could be either vindicated or convicted according to the panorama of history, both retroactive and prospective. In this connection Ram Adhar Mall remarks that history is essentially mutli-perspectival that, a particular event could be either fortunate or ill-fated depending on the analysis of the benefits gained and the costs incurred. George Lichtenberg insightfully alludes that, while Columbus’s discovery of America was fortunate for Europe from the point of view of future gains, the Indian who first encountered Columbus was surely making a damn discovery (see in Ram, 2000: 8 and 110).

Self-Validating Subjectivity: Critique

If the greatness of the new “discoveries” is dubitable normatively, the function they would serve for modern day production of Western social scientific knowledge is beyond doubt. As messengers of emerging civilization voyagers have played a part like Hermes, though only in a narrow sense, that they brought messages from the strange back to the familiar and served the curiosity of European audiences through the delivery of declamation and write-ups about the “new-found” peoples and lands. Synchronic to these developments also proliferate anthropological motifs with a more distancing zeal than were proto-anthropological propositions of the Antiquities. Descriptions of the other have now begun to take pride at the total function of social scientific subjectivism leading

towards the production of supposedly objective knowledge in which a more or less categorical opposition, in terms of everything human, is drawn between the orders of the same and the other.

The worst of subjectivist estimations of the other germinates in the exotica curiosities of Michel de Montaigne, the great teacher of Rene Descartes at La Fleche (see Gilson, 1937: 125-51), and the man who brings into currency the derogative *le bon sauvage* (the noble savage) which, from then onwards, has come to denote several things. For example, this term has been used as a household genre in essentialist discourses and as an untroubled substitute for the cultural other. Moreover, the same derogative term has served as grounding premise for Europe's new found subjective freedom. In his *Of Cannibals* Montaigne unflatteringly judges that "if he had been born and raised in [the life-world of the other], he would in all likelihood himself have eaten human flesh" (see Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001: 6).

Such declamations would give to European social scientists a subjective illusion of the objective superiority of the Same over the reified primitive Other. This in turn would venerate total contempt for otherness and the fervor of essentialism that modern social sciences, especially anthropology, have come to exalt. Tracing the genesis of the invention of Africa's alterity with the synchronic rise of European mercantilism and modern anthropology which together validated European subjectivism through the materiality of conquest and subjugation, Mudimbe says reification of the "primitive" accounts for essential difference between the Same and the Other not just in faculty, but in destiny (theological, biological, and anthropological) according to which humans are therefore put into a slot of natural capacity and social purpose (Mudimbe, *ibid*: 17). Serequeberhan also notes it was necessary that the other be harshly misrepresented so that Europe's gratuitous self-validation could be soul-assuring (1994: 62).

Amplifying Montaigne's, late nineteenth and early twentieth-century derogations of the cultural Other come in the shapes of James G. Frazer, a Victorian evolutionist and author of *The Golden Bough* (1890), and Lucien Levy-Bruhl, a Durkheim inspired functionalist and author of *Primitive Mentality* (1978). While Frazer advances the idea that primitive people are barred from the capacity for logical reasoning and function according to a thoroughly flawed discernment of nature, in a very similar spirit Levy-Bruhl advances that the head of the Other is as pre-logical as a Western child's and diametrically opposed to free and logical Europe—theses so stubbornly close-minded that Eriksen and Nielsen have commented the following about the two figures that, while "with a few notable exceptions, modern anthropologists rarely refer to Frazer as anything but an

historical figure (2001: 25-26), [...Levy-Bruhl's] work is now largely known as a laughable example of the incorrect views of bygone ages" (*ibid*: 50). Messay Kebede also annotates such kind of self-aggrandizing validation and world-closing subjectivism as nothing but lazy myth and illusive self-consciousness exalted only by such intellectually bankrupt, rationally unaccented and mystified white-manhood dwelling in the inner soul of Levy-Bruhl (2004: 1-12). In much the same way as Mesay's, Bergson also comes to exorcise the excess of blinding subjectivism exhibit in Levy-Bruhl's thesis, by implication in James Frazer's and others of the same strip, and sensibly defends the logicity of primitive people that, if they were devoid of rationality and had a totally flawed understanding of nature, it would amount little to expect the primitive man to "rely on the current of the river to carry his canoe, [...] on the bending of his bow to shoot his arrow, on his hatchet to cut into the trunk, on his teeth to bite, on his legs to walk" (1986: 144).

Anthropology and the Temporal Cavity ("Allochronism"): Critique

I suppose quite enough critiques have been already made to document that methodically modern anthropology has been such a crazy social scientific positivism dissolving the modality of equivalence, spatial as well as temporal, between the studied object (the other of anthropology) and the studying subject (the anthropologist). In regard particularly to the denial of the modality of temporal equivalence, it is worthwhile to consider one more powerful critique that comes in the form of a total rounder of allochronic subjectivism that denies the experience of inter-subjective Time (shared-Time) between the anthropologist and the anthropologized, which Fabian calls "the denial of coevalness," also calling the discourse promoting it "allochronism" (1983).

Fabian argues that the very use of terms as savage, kinship, primitive, pre-logical, traditional and so on in modern social scientific discourses such as, for example, theories of social evolutionism, structural-functionalism and various philosophical and anthropological theories, has a temporal distancing effect because, he comments, the terms denote a stage of humanity at a threshold (1983: 75). These critiques by Fabian, particularly of the theory and practice of modern scientific anthropology, go beyond diagnosing manifest pathologies. He is calling for the praxis of coevalness, the recovery of cotemporality, or the dialogical bridging of the temporal ditch established between the Same and the Other.

Denial could be two-fold. One is so bold as the pride of scientism that draws, after Descartes, a nearly axiomatic ditch between "us--the active subjects" and

“them--the passive objects” by which the latter objector category² is left at a threshold and straight away excluded from the normative space-time plane within which only the European Self unfolds. This is like what is entertained by the charge of Levy-Bruhl’s *primitive mentality* and Evans-Pritchard’s (before his acrobatic turn³) *the Nuer* that considered the studied peoples as nothing but temporal fossil. Denial could also be instituted through “acknowledged” temporal equality when, for example, it is said that WE are all humans of the same century, synchronic, who can effect meaning through communication, and yet the materiality of this equality is circumvented through the power of rhetoric, or as Foucault (1973) would say, through the exercise of already situated power relations such as, for example, the act of organizing knowledge on an already presumed and unequal order of discourse and table of exchange that in effect let continue the same pattern of Subject-Object relations⁴.

Fabian remarks that *if* anthropology envisions itself to be productive; thus, restoring equivalence between *subjects*, then it is crucial that it discontinues being a game of un-equals between the wolf--the anthropologist who is upstream in the

² Fabian claims that the concept *primitive* being essentially temporal, it is not merely an object but a fixed category of Western subjectivity (1983: 18).

³ If there were acrobatic turns by individual scholars that amount to defecting upon oneself, then one of the best examples would surely be Evans-Pritchard’s repudiation of structural-functionalism, a school of thought in which he had made a great name for himself, and his shift to a new realm of thought: search for Meaning. In other words, he turns apostate from function to meaning when “in his Marett lecture on ‘History and social anthropology’ in 1951, he claimed...that...in terms of method, social anthropology had more in common with history than with natural sciences.” This is almost suicidal to his previous works such as *The Nuer* that embraced the spirit of natural science as it searched for natural laws of the Nuer society. But now with the new shift, he abandons the scientific method of searching for natural laws of society—a leading principle of structural-functionalism, “and attempts to understand the meaning of particular social institutions. His second Nuer book, *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer* (1951b), was much more descriptive and less theoretically ambitious than *The Nuer*.” The acrobatic turn was a rare one as it became “headline news” (Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001: 96-98).

⁴ Even if this, Foucault, much like Levi-Strauss, is himself not granted amnesties by Mudimbe when the later gets censorious at the former of not being released from the subtlety of amplification through mutation (see Mudimbe, 1988. For more comments on the rhetorical circumvention of discourses, readers are also referred to Marcus and Fischer, 1999; Fabian, 1983; and Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001).

temporal slope, and the sheep--the other of anthropology who is downstream the temporal slope (Fabian, 1983: 103). Fabian is fearful that the multiplicity of critical voices leading to the era of “postmodernism” and beyond have not been radical enough to succeed in healing the pathology of essentialism in anthropology, that, little more than mere diagnosis, anthropology has not been turned on its feet yet. He is quoted at length:

Anthropology as the study of cultural difference can be productive only if difference is drawn into the arena of dialectical contradiction. In order to claim that primitive societies (or whatever replaces them now as the object of anthropology) are the reality and our conceptualizations the theory, one must keep anthropology standing on its head. If we can show that our theories of their societies are our praxis—the way in which we produce and reproduce knowledge of the Other for our societies—we may put anthropology back on its feet. Renewed interest in the history of our discipline and disciplined inquiry into the history of confrontation between anthropology and its Other are therefore not escapes from empiry [i.e., escapes from charges of subtle implications⁵]; they are practical and realistic. They are ways to meet the Other on the same ground, in the same Time [that is, in intersubjective spatio-temporality] (ibid: 164-65).

When co-temporality is restored one sees the Other as a partner in a live dialogical set up rather than freeze him with the address of a static present tense where one, for example, says “the Nuer *were* matrilineal” rather than “the Nuer *are* matrilineal” as if they are static and have never undergone any change whatsoever (Fabian, *ibid*: 81). Various scholars have also commented that if it ever were defensible to make any effortless dichotomy between us and them and to ground social science studies on the premises of scientism, it surely has now become

⁵Regarding this point, Fabian comments that “...holistic social science fails to provide a theory of praxis: it commits anthropology forever to imputing (if not outright imposing) motives, meanings, and functions to the societies it studies from a perspective outside and above. Moral compliance, aesthetic conformity, or systemic integration are, as bad substitutes for dialectic conceptions of process, projected onto other societies” (Fabian, *ibid*: 156-57).

difficult to defend because, not only is it true that those called *primitives* “are perfectly capable of identifying themselves, and are increasingly [becoming] hostile to [rhetorical] attempts to dictate who they ‘really’ are” (Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001: 161), but it is also evident that despite the perennial distinctions as modern versus traditional, all cultures are purely token constructions possessing intrinsic capacity for change, transformation, and continuity (see, for example in Roy Wagner, 1975).

It follows from the above critiques that, the scientific premises of modern philosophico-anthropological theories such as structuralism, functionalism, structural-functionalism, and social evolutionism that defend the temporal ditch not only exhibit little scholarship, but they also lack the power of rational persuasion when they depict “the other” with the conundrum of dead-alive status. Dead, because the cultural other is presented with a still life being referred to, for example, as “the Nuer” rather than, say, “the Nuer of the spatio-temporality of 1940”, the year Evans-Pritchard’s research on the Nuer got published. And alive, because the life of a Nuer is recognized as it is acted upon through the deterministic workings of a structural-whole (for example kinship) from which he gets the breath of life⁶.

From the tonality of the critiques considered so far, it is evident that modern anthropology’s orientation of the cultural other is rationally unaccented. It sets an extremely deep temporal gap between human horizons and makes it appear absolutely naïve to hope for any possibility of inter-cultural, inter-textual, or horizontal dialogues; leave alone to look forward to the fusion of human horizons; that is, the dialogical federation of diverse human possibilities to form unity in attended-diversity. What is primarily promoted by modernism is closure rather than openness, deterministic fixation rather than interpretation, subjectivist monologue rather than dialogue. In this regard, Ram Adhar Mall remarks that beginning from the time when Europe declared to have discovered the other, or even beyond, “the dialogue among cultures was, in fact [...] a European monologue” and whereas the European discovery of the other is simply physical and controlling, the non-European discovery of Europe is normative and critical of the rhetorical edifice that has taken form since the rise of modernism (2000: 110).

⁶ For more on this point, see the critical works of Ardener, 1989; Eriksen and Nielsen, *ibid*: 142-145. Readers are also advised to refer to the works of the Africanists Senghor, Tempels as well as Durkheim, Evans-Pritchard and Levi-Bruhls all of which, one way or another, directly or indirectly, point to the same thesis as the one we have just critiqued here above—the whole-culture thesis.

The hermeneutic turn and in fact most critical theories that have taken this turn are based upon the conviction that the hopes that were blurred in the theory and practice of modern social sciences should be recovered so as to prepare the way toward newer and greater human possibilities. Moreover, it is also within sight of the hermeneutic turn that through the dynamics of communication the depth of the space-time divide between horizons gets increasingly fused or *schengened*⁷ so that, hopes could turn into fruition as humanity recovers its meaning and vitality.

As Implied by the Critiques Considered: The Meeting of Principle and Application

I believe that the points raised so far would not be insufficient to locate a serious pathological condition in the way modern anthropological subjectivism has been meant not just pertaining to the problem of how Europe is related to its other, but also how Europe is related to itself, to its very being.⁸

Martin Heidegger is the man whom the karma of philosophy has groomed to take upon a role very much like an astute physician's vis-a-vis a patient. Heidegger has located a swamp in Western philosophy from which are born reflexive ailments that manifest in several characteristic symptoms as determinism, idealism, methodism, formalism, absolutism, homelessness and other overbearing prides that have cumulatively led philosophy to suffer from a total disease of "the forgetfulness of being"—dwarfism in fundamental reflexivity that has long

⁷ I borrow the word from "the Schengen Agreement" between members of the European Union for loose border control so that people can move freely without needing to show their passports. I have adopted the word and used it to refer to a communicative blurring of human distancing boundaries. Through the praxes of openness and communication human horizons can reach mutual understanding, which again leads to the possibility of the *schengenning* of boundaries en route to achieving a federalist fusion of horizons

⁸ Of course, this makes sense only if we treat Europe as a singular, which, Ram Adhar Mall refutes commenting that in reality Europe has never been the same; its supposed homogeneity is merely presumptuous. Arguing against a claim by Husserl for the uniformity of European humanity, Ram Adhar Mall stresses that there is basic difference between the outwardly look alike technological uniformity of Europe and its internal dynamics that, internally Europe has always been tensionally divided between different paradigms of life such as religion (Jerusalem), philosophy (Athens) and law (Rome) (2000: 110).

concealed the ultimate ground of *being* and, thereby, thwarting the possibilities for man's greater enlightenment. The openness, the state of awakening and deeper-reflexivity that Heidegger (and others in the hermeneutic turn) has called upon are what were fundamentally missing in the entire orientation of modern philosophy.

From the presentations made so far it is also evident, so I claim, that in addition to the pathology of "forgetfulness," the *Same-Subject* of European modernism has also suffered from other important impairments especially in its hearing and visualizing capacities. For instance, it has failed to properly visualize the *Other-Subject* on its own terms of otherness; for example, the Nuer on the fundamental historicity of his Nuer-ness rather than, say, in terms of a Levi-Strauss French-European cultural subjectivity. Observation of this amounts to argue that the *Same-Subject* therefore carries the defect of color-blindness failing to see the veracity of the historical plurality of rationality as well as of reality, the analysis of which should demand interpretive dialogue and communication than the fixation of subjectivist method and scientific determinism. In connection to the charge of color-blindness, I find it worthwhile to invoke a comment by Etienne Gilson which he made against the Cartesian pride of mathematicism. Descartes claimed to have discovered mathematics as the universal method to explain reality. He also claimed as if he alone, as the sole discoverer of *the* method, held the key to a rational explanation of reality. Accordingly, reality is reduced into a fixed and formal element that can be universally determined as if it was not rather historically and existentially plural. Also, reduced is the possibility of meaning-making into the monologue of Cartesian subjectivity as if meaning-making was non-dialogical. Thus, by questioning both the claimed universality of Cartesian mathematicism and Cartesian subjectivism as the only key to explain reality, Gilson comments that such a method is but only a universal dissemination of "a color-less flood over the manifold of reality" (1937: 138).

Moreover, the *Same-Subject* of European modernism has also failed to attend the voice of the Other; because, by blatant scientific reduction or generalization, the otherness of the Other has been essentially reified to the end of making him deserve the de-merit of objective manipulation rather than the merit of dialogue and communication. That is to say, the other has been treated as a passive object who must be spoken *for* rather than being heard. In relation to this point, it is helpful to learn from an insightful commentary by Clifford Geertz according to whom, genuine enlightenment about "the other" as well as self-enlightenment should call upon a practical wisdom by which we

[seek], in the widened sense of the term in which it encompasses very much more than talk, to converse with [the Other], a matter a great deal more difficult, and not only with strangers, than is commonly recognized (1973: 13). Stanley Cavell also remarks that:

*If speaking for someone else seems to be a mysterious process, that may be because speaking to [communicating with] someone else does not seem mysterious enough (quoted in Geertz, *ibid*).*

The issues considered here above contain more than sufficient light to reveal a truth that the Self of modern Europe has been much like a subject foiled within a deceptive self-seeing and self-hearing horizon that enhances closure over openness, monologue over dialogue, speaking over listening, subjectivist-uniformity over plurality. It is a Self that is poor and bankrupt, a lost Dasien, deprived of sight over the panorama of meaning, reality, and value that could be visualized through the act of openness to see wider than the bound of one's subjectivity. Also poor is the *Same-Self* deprived of the willingness to attend the existential claims of the other, their voices; thus, missing the possibility of meaningful enlightenment that could be attained through the dynamism of communication proceeding from the praxis of openness—the openness to hear the other than to merely speak *for* the other.

What more? In addition to forfeiting the possibility of learning from the other, the act of subjectivist disclosure also betrays the distinctive quality of human beings as social and communicative, human beings as themselves language. Having relevance to the matter at hand is a valuable comment by Fabian, who is quoted here saying:

Man does not “need” language; man, in the dialectical, transitive understanding of to be, is language. [...]. Consciousness, realized by the producing meaningful sound, is self-conscious. The Self, however, is constituted fully as a speaking and hearing Self. Awareness, if we may thus designate the first stirrings of knowledge beyond the registering of tactile impressions, is fundamentally based on hearing meaningful sounds produced by self and others. If there needs to be a contest for man's noblest sense [...] it should be hearing, not sight that wins. Not solitary perception, but [intercultural] communication is the starting point for [anthropology of praxis and meaning making], provided

that we keep in mind that man does not “need” language as a means of communication, or by extension, society as a means of survival. Man is communication and society (1983: 162, emphases in the original).

In such condition of modernism where the enlightenment merit of cross-cultural communication is not yet recalled, ignored are not only the being of the other (the spoken *for*) and the being of the Same (the speaking subject or the spoken *to*), but ignored at large is also the being of the Human (the unspoken, the un-reflected, the forgotten or the concealed). This condition of modernism is therefore the pathology that hermeneuticists have diagnosed through fundamental interpretive turn-- a turn that has been kept in active motion by the project of hermeneutic philosophy and by the variant approaches such as, existentialism, phenomenology, pragmatism, and similar discourses that recognize the possibility of progressive merits in the acts of openness, interpretation, understanding, communication, and application.

Moreover, materializing the hope we may foresee such as, for example, the hope for the federation of meanings (or the fusion of horizons) through dialogical overstepping of cavities and fusion of boundaries must call upon the *acts* of equality, inter-subjectivity, or solidarity (just beyond mere postulation of them as theoretical principles) between different historical horizons. It is only upon this dimension where postulation and praxis, means and purpose, principle and existential application are kept in tensional play that the possibilities of horizontal communication and mutual understanding get a fit birth. In other words, let me say, unlike a value-utilitarian who may not always need the necessity of a good beginning toward a good end, the possibility of inter-cultural communication demands that we *act* upon the principle of equality or inter-subjectivity as we hope for the eventuality of mutual understanding. In the project of hermeneutics which is fundamentally humanistic than merely utilitarian, there is no good end without good beginning, no fusion of meaning is attainable if it was not originally acted upon the principle of equality, solidarity, or inter-subjectivity as much as we do not also suspend the workings of particular forces of history such as cultural prejudice and subjectivity. Nor is a beginning any good if it does not inspire hope and optimism--the hope that humanity will get better and attain greater revitalization through the coming into dialogical federation of meanings, or through the attainment of unity in tensional diversity, or as Heidegger would say, through “world-formation” resulting from the interplay of man’s worldliness, finitude, and solitude (see Heidegger, 1995).

As we have noted already, Fabian suggests that if the very possibility of dialogue is to be thought of at all, we not only need to postulate the principle of coevalness, we also need to make sense of its relation with the actual praxis of it. To elaborate on this point let me comment that the principle of coevalness being just a principle (a postulate), the materiality of it must require praxis beyond anything of the sort in the following *either/or* that, either it may be assumed primordially as to allow for the possibility of dialogue and inter-subjectivity (as a “may be” its materialization is therefore mere chance; there is no guarantee that it is actually acted upon when discourses are initiated); or, it may still be allochronically denied (while humanity so requires it must not be denied at all) thus blocking dialogue and allowing the imposition of one’s subjectivity upon the other. As far as I can see, the real value in the principle of coevalness, equality, solidarity, commonness, or whatever name is given to it, is not in the postulation of it as a mere theoretical symbol of the possibility of dialogue, but more importantly in the actuality of the praxis we put forward to it, as we *act* upon it, or through its historical transformation. Postulation must require the simultaneity of praxis here-and-now, there-and-then.

The purpose of communicative praxis should remain unisolated from the means, from the principle; that is to say, there needs to be a good sense of tensional play and unceasing causality between an original principle of order and the possibility of its existential expressions. Thus, very much like the Kantian requirement of the principle of morality, I argue, in this case also the goodness in purpose of an action (for example, the praxis of dialogue) cannot come out of a means that is itself bad. Because no dialogical fusion is attainable upon an already unequal and distorted beginning, there shall be no lack of play between theory and practice, between principle and application, or there shall be space neither for outright allochronism (denial of equality) nor for any subtle rhetorical circumventions that only name principles without, however, acting upon them.

Concluding Remarks

It needs to be noted here, once again, that I am not claiming subjectivism as an intellectual problem has got birth just synchronic to the emergence and development of modern social theories. Indeed as a general philosophical problem, subjectivism is traceable back to ancient Greece, particularly with the dialogical encounters between Socrates and the Sophists. After all, as this article tried to show, it could even be argued by going further back to the Antiquities that the geographic referents of Herodotus’ “Tritonian Lake”, Pliny’s “the absence or presence of Romans” as well as the Greek reference of “barbarian” sound much

like precursor subjectivist stereotypes that lend spirit to modern-day revival of the problem. Be this as it may, it has been also noted that there was never a higher tick of time than the time from seventeenth through the nineteenth-centuries and beyond when subjectivism, having been newly wedded to Cartesian subject versus object bifurcation and taking on the anthropological coat and cravat, begins to unfold the red-carpet of essentialism for European expansionist ideologies. Indeed from that period on Europe gets fired up into the “other” and it proves, be it by sheer technological superiority or by rhetoric, the utility of the scientism that animates Cartesian subject-object dichotomy, the grand Either/Or, which becomes a point of departure for essentialist discourses in philosophy, anthropology and other disciplines in the social sciences. From Hegel’s methodological collectivism, Kant’s methodological individualism through other theories as structural-functionalism of Durkheim, Levi-Strauss, Levi-Bruhl and the relativist cultural theories of Boas, Malinowski and others in the twentieth century, we almost always find the Cartesian Either/Or hovering in the background.

However, with the turn of the twentieth century the force of the Cartesian Either/Or was becoming less appealing. Theories with Cartesian spirit were either too inclusive or too exclusive and none being any judicious option, it led to intellectual dissatisfactions and skepticism against the determinacy of Method, Science (and idealist Metaphysics) upon social phenomena. In other words, despite the long held dream of Methodism to offer objective results pertaining to the study of man and his institutions such as culture and society; on the contrary there was a growing feeling that, beyond failure to yield the success of fruition, the scientific method of studying social phenomena was rather debasing the humanity of the human. This dissatisfaction is what has inspired critical thinking from great minds across the twentieth century such as, for example, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Gadamer, Foucault, Habermas, Rorty, and others. The combined critical efforts of these figures have led to what is called “the hermeneutic turn.” The power of questioning as well as the depth of analysis and understanding these figures put forward have made any straightforward reference to a scientific conception of man, society, and culture become unlikely and general approaches of studying social phenomena become more encountering, asymmetrical, nonstandard, pluralistic and interpretive rather than detouring, linear, formal, objective, methodical, predictable and deterministic (see, for example, Geertz, 1983: 3-16). In short, this is the general development that highlights the beginning of the fall of modernism upon which critical vantages gain ground; thus, gradually or synchronically leading to the emergence and unfolding of what finally becomes the project of hermeneutic

philosophy (also, see Heidegger, 1995; Gadamer, 1975; Bernstein, 1983; Rorty, 1979).

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