

Cultural Studies and Anthropology

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In this paper, I will show how the Foucauldian reaction to the singular view of human origin leads to solipsism. This solipsism encourages “cultural studies” theorists like David McNally to seek refuge in pluralism. Though pluralism might seem to be a ready theoretical solution, McNally’s attempt at “originary thinking” is seriously inadequate when it comes to providing a plausible theory of human praxis. In order to resolve this theoretical impasse, I will turn to Gans’s “singular” version of human origin. Gans’s originary hypothesis recognizes the shortcoming of philosophical solipsism while also maintaining an exacting notion of anthropological praxis.

Origins

Michel Foucault’s interpretation of Nietzsche describes a synchronic view of origin, moving backwards in a causal fashion until we reach a “suprahistorical perspective: a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself.”⁽¹⁾ The final reduction of man to his suprahistorical origin marks the goal of the “traditional historian,” according to Foucault, whereby a singular event “dissolve[s] into an ideal continuity . . . a teleological movement or a natural process.” However, Foucault (and through him, Nietzsche) is virulent in his attack on this type of historian, reminding us that “we should avoid thinking of emergence as the final term of an historical development.”⁽²⁾ Instead, he lauds the efforts of the “effective historian” who “affirm[s] knowledge as perspective,”⁽³⁾ insisting that this, in fact, is closer to Nietzsche’s “historical sense” which “acknowledges its [own] system of injustice.”⁽⁴⁾ Not only is telos a stale theoretical holy grail, but so also is any overarching mediating ideal, such as justice. If we liken theorizing to war—that is, the fight against domination—then Foucault tells us that “it would be false to think that total war exhausts itself in its own contradictions and ends by renouncing violence and submitting to civil laws.”⁽⁵⁾ Once again, an overall telos is undermined; instead a subjective view of knowledge is invoked via

generation:

Its [Nietzsche's historical sense] perception is slanted, being a deliberate appraisal, affirmation, or negation; it reaches the lingering and poisonous traces in order to prescribe the best antidote. It is not given to a discreet effacement before the objects it observes and does not submit itself to their processes; nor does it seek laws, since it gives equal weight to its own sight and to its objects. Through this historical sense, knowledge is allowed to create its own genealogy in the act of cognition.⁽⁶⁾ Nevertheless, any genealogy of history requires a "vertical projection of its position."⁽⁷⁾ Thus a generative, formative framework is implied; man's solipsism cannot be overcome by "invoking objectivity, the accuracy of facts."⁽⁸⁾ Any given demagogery (Foucault's term) "must be masked."⁽⁹⁾ Certainly, if this be the case, we must ask ourselves whether we, as metaphysicians, wish to continually articulate, from a suprahistorical perspective, "a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development."⁽¹⁰⁾ Because such an implication is always already "tainted" by perception, seeking to step outside perception is baseless.

Where Foucault/Nietzsche's ontology falls short, however, is in its inability to account for *its own* origin. Rather, the genealogist must resign himself to *Entstehung*, a "miraculous origin,"⁽¹¹⁾ the veracity of which can never be affirmed by perception. Such an ontology then presupposes a linear movement backwards through time, eventually suppressing the temporal for the sake of constructing a "totality fully closed upon itself."⁽¹²⁾ Whether any supra-ontological inquiry whose generative source is a singular, vertically integrative structure can address the origin of man beyond the referential remains to be seen. Foucault himself is skeptical. He sees the work of the genealogist as differing fundamentally from the "traditional historian" in its point of departure: "the historical sense can . . . become a privileged instrument of genealogy if it refuses the certainty of absolutes."⁽¹³⁾ Origin beyond the referential necessarily depends on metaphysical abstractions that can exist in the mind only.⁽¹⁴⁾

Thus, rather than a strict diachronic account of history dependent on metaphysical ideals (or a rather terrifying and finite account of origin based on genealogy), a more useful strategy might be to invoke a synchronic and pluralistic account of the human referential world that integrates with the human mind its partner in crime: the body.

David McNally, in his book, *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labour, and Liberation*,⁽¹⁵⁾ in fact agrees with Foucault in invoking a similar suppression of the temporal: "The emergence of cultural, language-using, toolmaking primates introduced a new order of temporality, the time of human history. This temporality

does not transcend natural time, it mediates and supplements it, introducing different orders of determination.”⁽¹⁶⁾ Time is not an objective ideal existing beyond the referential world; instead, its passage is necessitated by perception through “different orders of determination,” one of which includes the body. However, rather than a passive vessel, McNally recognizes “an historical body... [as] a body which generates and is shaped by systems of meaning. Meanings are not produced by disembodied and ahistorical signs . . . instead, meanings begin from the body.”⁽¹⁷⁾ Where McNally differs from Foucault is in presupposing not a single abstract beginning (*Entstehung*) but a combination of factors integral to human origin, of both mind and body.

In seeking to include the body in his assessment of human origin, McNally necessarily incorporates biology, for to do otherwise would be to “depict culture as a leap from embodiment which introduces an ‘abyss’ between human and animals.”⁽¹⁸⁾ In order to fill this abyss, McNally “push[es] social theory into contact with these ‘others,’ . . . to materialize the discussion of language.”⁽¹⁹⁾ Thus he dissolves a vertical theoretical position in favour of a synchronic and pluralistic account of origin.

Because language is difficult to isolate from other higher cognitive functions that are also exclusive to humans, McNally sees no good reason to postulate language as the *single* fundamental characteristic separating man from ape. Rather than language creating the social (ideological) apparatus necessary for the emergence of the human mind (*i.e.*, the evolution of the brain—what McNally calls “the organic foundation”⁽²⁰⁾), McNally reverses the dictum to have the social, and perhaps even primitively ideological, apparatuses mediating the birth of language. Man does not suddenly spring from miraculous origins but instead emerges gradually from a community of hominids.

2

The evolutionary shift to bipedalism, for McNally, was the “principal form of locomotion open[ing] up new anatomical and behavioral possibilities.”⁽²¹⁾ Among them, of course, comes a greater facility for gatherer societies to allocate food, particularly through the use of their hands. Coupled with greater mobility, human tribes could now carry “leaves, or shells full of water, seeds, fruit, and berries, children . . . small game . . . containers, sticks (as both weapons and digging tools), and stone tools”⁽²²⁾ over larger geographical distances. The appearance of tools marks a fundamental evolutionary advance for the species.

By the time our human ancestors often known as *homo habilis* appeared, roughly two million years ago, tools seem to have become a systematic part of the hominid

way of life: they show considerable forethought and preparation.⁽²³⁾ However, chimps, who also mirror such human behavior, do not have the cognitive capacity to acknowledge the widespread and long-term benefits of what McNally nominates as the first central economic activity—namely, sharing,⁽²⁴⁾ the importance of which I shall return to below.

A gathering and toolmaking mode of life would have required more intensive and extensive childhood learning, prolonged adult-child bonds, food sharing, and dissemination of technological, environmental and social knowledge, and skills. Not surprisingly, *habilis* had a larger brain than its predecessors.⁽²⁵⁾ All this evolution is based on nothing more than the appearance of tools! In fairness, McNally is constructing an ontology based on available ethnographic data. His reference to an increase in brain size can also be corroborated by field evidence. Thus armed, McNally treads his way towards the origin of language, encompassing along the way, as many facets of the human body as possible:

[I]t is not simply brain size that is the issue here. Perhaps equally important is the increase in brain areas (particularly the neocortex and the prefrontal cortex) devoted to motor skills, memory foresight and communication. Much as certain phenotypic adaptations were crucial—changes in the hand, foot, and pelvis, growth and reorganization of the brain . . . these would not have resulted in the new behavioral-complex of tool-using hominids without the sociocultural changes that made intensified and extended social learning possible. We are talking, then, of a new kind of socio-biological complex characterized by “biocultural feedback”: new behaviors such as food sharing, tool-using, and greater learning of social and technological skills by the young . . . would favor biological changes conducive to these new cultural adaptations. This implies a complex of reinforcing cultural adaptations consisting of tool-making, planned gathering, hunting, food sharing, learning, greater use of memory and foresight, and increased social cooperation and communication.⁽²⁶⁾ Such speculative theorizing, with a minimum of positive data, requires greater precision, especially when one seeks to push forward rather superficial behaviors in hopes of accounting for the generative leaps in human development occurring over millions (not thousands) of years. Tedious repetition aside, McNally finally comes to a rather unconvincing version of human praxis. A mere paragraph later, now talking about *erectus*, McNally writes:

What can we say about the forms of practical activity in which *erectus* would have engaged? To answer this, we need to resist modern tendencies to separate mind and hand, mental and manual labour. Among other things, one of the most distinctive human characteristics is the large part of our brains devoted to coordinating motor activity associated with the hands. Human practical activity—*praxis*—involves a unique relationship between conscious intelligence and

bodily activity, a relationship whose central feature has to do with the way we direct our bodies according to planned activity. While our hominid predecessors were not fully human in this sense, they had embarked upon a path of biocultural development in which we can see the rudiment of human *praxis*.⁽²⁷⁾ McNally offers us not real world praxis then, but only rudiments of it. Where he differs from traditional conceptions of Darwinism, however, is in his insistence on a multiplicity of social factors (marked by the evolution of the body, in particular, the organic brain) contributing to the emergence of the human. Unlike Foucault and Nietzsche, who favour a retroactive version of direct genealogical descent in addressing origins, McNally obfuscates the linear progression of human development, invoking instead a “package of evolutionary changes.”⁽²⁸⁾ Nietzsche’s *Entstehung*, as an abstract ideal of sorts, divorces the mind from the body. Although McNally manages to rescue the body in his account of human origin, he does so at the expense of causality. The numerous variables he raises no doubt played some part in human emergence; however, none of them can be verified inter-specifically with any type of rigour—theoretical or empirical. They only increase the number of possible points of entry from which one can begin to address human origin. While McNally’s approach is certainly a generative one, its lack of any type of historical telos, suprahistorical or otherwise, makes it essentially unmanageable.

Ecce Homo

Eric Gans’s version of a generative anthropology, rather than looking to empirical data to verify its central claim—that humanity originated in an event—instead poses a *hypothetical* scene of origin, marked by the appearance of language. McNally unsurprisingly muddles the idea of any single scenic event:

[U]nless we advance some kind of creationist explanation, we have to see language as involving new emergent capacities whose roots lay in prelinguistic forms of *praxis* and intelligence . . . fully human language may have made possible new cognitive capacities; nevertheless, it must also have facilitated improved ways of doing things hominids were already doing.⁽²⁹⁾ In articulating his version of human origin, McNally seeks to acknowledge our debt as humans not solely to language but also to the social/economic factors, however primitive, integral to the emergence of the species. Gans’s originary hypothesis, then, is exactly the type of “creationist” explanation McNally disavows. Far from being a creationist though, Gans attributes to religion the discovery of a profound anthropological truth—namely that of an originating event.⁽³⁰⁾

Gans offers us three fundamental reasons as to why a singular scene of origin is necessary to account for the origin of language (and therefore, of man). The first is that “the scene must be *collective* because language, like all forms of

representation, is a phenomenon of human communities rather than isolated individuals.”⁽³¹⁾ McNally would not argue here, noting extensively the communal activities of the protohuman, including those of gathering, hunting, and the communal engagement in ritual feasts. Indeed, he quotes Richard Leakey, saying that “sharing, not hunting or gathering as such, is what made us human.”⁽³²⁾ Thus for both theorists, the long-term evolutionary benefits of sharing were (are) vital to the existence of the species. Nevertheless, the protohuman lacks the cognitive capacity to initiate such foresight. McNally himself concedes that sharing is “unquestionably a unique behavioral adaptation,”⁽³³⁾ asking “why it should have evolved”⁽³⁴⁾ at all? He answers by noting that sharing was not so much a male phenomenon as a female one. Mothers, naturally forced to care for their young over a relatively long period of infant development (in comparison to other species), would have had to initiate the division of any communal feast. Only sustained care would have been beneficial to survival, the kind first practiced by mothers towards their young. Thus McNally attributes “the biological pattern for care . . . overwhelmingly . . . [to] females.”⁽³⁵⁾

3

Attributing such a phenomenon to men, however, is somewhat trickier. McNally even goes to the dubious length of invoking “some of the most overt forms of altruism.”⁽³⁶⁾ However, Gans’s second reason for postulating a hypothetical event undercuts any such altruistic behavior, recognizing that “the individual member of the proto-human collectivity is still an animal and can therefore only be moved by appetites.”⁽³⁷⁾ If sharing is indeed what makes us human (and Gans, in fact, would tend to agree⁽³⁸⁾) then its social benefit must carry an immediate appetitive benefit rather than a long term communal one, the consideration of which still remains well beyond the cognitive limits of the protohuman.

Finally, Gans’s third reason for postulating a hypothetical event of language origin is that “the ‘arbitrary’ sign must have its source in appetitive behavior.”⁽³⁹⁾ Thus Gans’s hypothetical origin accounts for the shift from protohuman to human via appetitive desire rather than a commingling of social/economic forces. Monistic rather than pluralistic, Gans’s originary event once again redeems language as the unique and defining quality of man. Let us now look at the specific protocols of the originary event.

Gans has us imagine a community of protohumans surrounding an object of appetitive desire.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Thinking linearly, we can identify the community of protohumans by their propensity to engage in mimetic behavior, which McNally also recognizes as a fundamental characteristic unique to humans.

Apes and monkeys have little capacity to model their own activity on the observed actions of another. Certainly, these primates do not understand the intent behind a pointing gesture when, for example, a person wants to direct another's attention to a specific object, action, or location. Yet human children come to understand the communicative intent of such a gesture at around fourteen months: they quickly learn to follow the gesture or gaze of an adult. The limited abilities of apes and monkeys to learn through imitation may derive from their lack of a sense of another as a distinct agent (a "you") like themselves.[\(41\)](#) It is not so much the mimesis associated with a child's ability to imitate others that Gans is concerned with, but rather, the appetitive mimesis that necessarily infects our hypothetical community.[\(42\)](#) As a collective, our community of protohumans forms a periphery around the central object; our bison is now granted central—though not sacred—status. It draws the appetitive desire of each individual member on the periphery. Nevertheless, the shift in consciousness from protohuman to human comes not through the survival and ultimate resolution of the first mimetic crisis, but through its deferral.[\(43\)](#) Indeed, one can imagine a countless number of similar scenarios occurring throughout the animal kingdom. However, Gans notes that in the case of animals, a hierarchical structure exists to avert such crises, marked by the presence of an alpha-male:

[T]here exists within the [animal] group a dominance hierarchy that normally functions to prevent this kind of conflict [*i.e.*, the simultaneous unleashing of all appetitive desire]. Such hierarchies operate not in relation to the group as a whole, but on a one-on-one basis; an individual may challenge the alpha animal for supremacy, but there is within the group neither collective dominance nor collective violence.[\(44\)](#) No such mechanism exists for our community of protohumans, however. The collective violence that would ensue should any single member make a dash towards the centre necessarily threatens the *entire* collectivity. In this case, the threat of collective violence undermines both collective and/or individual dominance. Indeed, we are "the species for which the central problem of survival is posed by the relations within the species itself rather than those with the external world."[\(45\)](#) The artifice that dissolves any hierarchical structure among the community of protohuman players is one of mimesis.

[A]t the moment of crisis, the strength of the appetitive drive has been increased by appetitive mimesis . . . Hence, in violation of the dominance hierarchy, all hands reach out for the object; but at the same time each is deterred from appropriating it by the sight of all the others reaching in the same direction. The "fearful symmetry" of the situation makes it impossible for any one participant to defy the others and pursue the gesture to its conclusion. The centre of the circle appears to possess a repellent, sacred force that prevents its occupation by the members of the group, that converts the gesture of appropriation into a gesture of designation.[\(46\)](#) Each

individual member of the protohuman community necessarily recognizes the repellent force of the central object. Its status as sacred is now guaranteed, as the protohumans have made the cognitive leap to becoming human in their contemplation of an aborted gesture of appropriation—made referential through the first ostensive sign. Although the repellent force of the sacred object is felt privately by each individual member of the human community, its power is mediated by the individual's conscious recognition that his aborted gesture necessarily exists in an imaginary and public landscape shared by all members of the community. The first ostensive sign is not an arbitrary utterance that acts to preserve the individual but rather one that guarantees the safety of the community at large; as such, it is destined to be recognized, simultaneously and universally, by all members of that community. The first community of human players necessarily finds itself on the periphery.

The pragmatics of the ostensive utterance requires that it possess a preexisting potential significance for its hearer that is in turn dependent on the existence of a virtual community of speakers that can be actualized at any moment. This virtual community extends from the originary community of language users down to our own universe.⁽⁴⁷⁾ There is nothing “inherently” sacred about the central object itself; rather, its preexisting *potential* significance is based solely on its ability to attract the simultaneous appetitive glances of the collective. Sacrality, and the subsequent effectiveness of the first ostensive sign, then, is equally based on the existence of a virtual community of speakers that can be actualized at any moment of utterance—within the scene itself or without. The pragmatics of the first ostensive sign go beyond the simple generation of a referential system. The sign is a constant reminder of the first aborted gesture of appropriation, working perpetually to curb mimetic violence by recalling in the minds of its listeners the originary event.

Gans's originary event is a minimal hypothesis, making the fewest number of assumptions necessary to forward a plausible theory of origin.⁽⁴⁸⁾ As a hypothetical theory, it seeks no real-world verification. Its power is testament to an exacting intellection—an intuitive rather than a positive grasp over human origin. Gans's originary hypothesis is theorizing at its most pristine, intuition at its finest. It is less a theory putting forth a mythic origin than a scenic one. The difference here is subtle but crucial. That is, if originary thinking is indeed “mythic,” then the positivist himself constructs a scene which can be defined “mythic” as well. Gans derides the existence of a “hominid,” that is—“a kind of ape in the process of becoming a man.”⁽⁴⁹⁾ Although the existence of such creatures may be corroborated by positive data, “they are situated within a million-year long transitional period during which the hominid remains an indefinite mediating species, near enough to man for us to understand its acts, yet far enough for this understanding to count as an

explanation.”⁽⁵⁰⁾ Indeed, during such a period, no exact positive link can ever be established marking the shift from animal to human. We are left only with intuition, and the subsequent theories of origin that follow (McNally, et al.) cling only tenuously to existing positive data, the totality of which can never be exhausted. Each theory of origin simply waits to be refined or overturned by the next positive anthropological discovery. Originary thinking, on the other hand, does not deny the value of these discoveries, but neither does it inflate their potential value. Because “nothing must occur,”⁽⁵¹⁾ during the million-year long transitional period of the hominid, a synchronic account of origin is accepted by default. “One of the most important transformations in the history of our planet, not to say the universe, occurs in a mere change of attitude that never *takes place*.”⁽⁵²⁾

4

Generative Anthropology and Ideology

Gans’s originary event does not deny the possibility of cultural discourse (of say, Marxism), but simply removes from it any claim to ontological truth. Indeed, all discourse is a generative runoff from the originary event—the ontology of which can only be guaranteed in the human imagination. The skeptics will cry solipsism, but originary thinking is unique in that it seeks not to overcome intellectual solipsism, but only presents the most plausible theory of origin that can be articulated within it. Gans reminds us (once again undercutting the divine) that “humans would not exist as self-understanding beings if such understanding were not necessary to their existence.”⁽⁵³⁾ Origins need not be miraculous. Originary thinking is the only formal theory of representation that can account for “its own historical emergence,”⁽⁵⁴⁾ but as a monism, it proposes no such closure of history. Indeed, Gans nominates originary thinking as “the anthropological equivalent of Gödel’s theorem, which denies the closure of arithmetic.”⁽⁵⁵⁾

Nietzsche’s *Entstehung* is based less on divine intervention than an increase in appetitive entropy that accommodates the previous evolutionary and common biological precept of “survival of the fittest.” The effects of worldly praxis on the study of culture do not make the practice obsolete, but requires the refocusing of intellectual energy. Because generative anthropology recognizes that “humanity is the species for which the central problem of survival is posed by the relations within the species itself rather than those with the external world,”⁽⁵⁶⁾ it follows that our ethical responsibilities become paramount not as a result of the ideal existence of some other-worldly morality, but rather because of the pragmatics of human survival. The first ostensive sign does not eliminate the possibility of extinction at the hands of mimesis, but merely defers it. The sign, as representative of the first aborted gesture, leads to originary resentment—that is, the human angst which

necessarily follows the non-fulfilment of originary desire as opposed to appetitive satisfaction.

The birth of the self within the communal context defines it against this context. Even before we can speak of the liberating force of the originary exchange economy, the individual language user has internalized the context of the originary event in a *scene of representation*, a private imaginary space independent of the community. The contrast between the private and public scenes, between imaginary fulfillment and real alienation from the center, gives rise to *originary resentment* that is the first mode of self-consciousness . . . As the originary community includes the first humans, so it alienates them by imposing renunciation not merely from without but from within. To participate in the originary scene is to accept alienation from the object of one's desire as the defining moment of self-consciousness.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Cultural critique is less an action requiring the definitive version of Hegel's original master-slave thesis than a means of asking ourselves whether a given cultural/political/social/economic system works to quell this resentment sufficiently. The role of culture is to constantly appease such resentment via the ongoing generation of ritual, through ideology and/or appropriate market mechanisms. The truth-value of any ideology can then only be measured in terms of how well it dissipates originary resentment. Indeed, Gans challenges the logical necessity of the law of excluded middle when he says

From a pragmatic standpoint, this first ostensive designation, anterior to the category of "truth-value," is more indubitably true than any succeeding utterance, which could no longer be made to bear the burden of permitting humanity's very existence.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Extending such logic to the realm of ideology then, we can, in good conscience, embrace Terry Eagleton's otherwise contradictory remarks on ideology:

Those who oppose the idea of ideology as false consciousness are right to see that ideology is no baseless illusion but a solid reality, an active material force which must have at least enough cognitive content to help organize the practical lives of human beings. It does not consist primarily in a set of propositions about the world; and many of the propositions it does advance are actually true. None of this, however, need be denied by those who hold that ideology often or typically involves falsity, distortion and mystification. Even if ideology is largely a matter of 'lived relations', those relations, at least in certain social conditions, would often seem to involve claims and beliefs which are untrue.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Looking at the 'lived relations' that allow people to get on with their day to day lives, we can ascertain their truth value in terms of how well they allow people to do so. Metaphysical ontology has little to do with buying bread; whether the sun rotates around the earth or vice versa makes little ideological difference in regards to such relations. Nevertheless, an anthropology that refuses closure out of respect for the generativity of cultural

origin is sympathetic to the impossibility that “whole masses of human beings would hold over some extensive historical period ideas and beliefs which were simply nonsensical.”⁽⁶⁰⁾ There is always some truth inherent to any ideological system, which, however, cannot be verified empirically. Rather than positive verification, our beliefs now require a certain measure of intuitive affirmation.

Certain artifices of intellection, such as Derridean deconstruction, or even the Cartesian *tabula rasa*, undermine generation in seeking to divorce human intellection from the anthropological truths that preceded it—simply because they lack empirical verification. Regardless, we can trust a generative framework if we believe, as Eagleton does, that “most people feel uncomfortable at the thought of belonging to a seriously unjust form of life.”⁽⁶¹⁾ We can extend this dictum to include the “untrue.” Eagleton recognizes that no ideological system can last unless its citizens believe that the injustices (or, in this case, the falsities) are “*en route* to being amended, or that they are counterbalanced by greater benefits, or that they are inevitable or that they are not really injustices [falsities] at all.”⁽⁶²⁾ Ideology is less about empirical verification than deferral. Foucault, talking about a system of rules that guarantees domination, puts it so:

The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them; controlling this complex mechanism, they will make it function so as to overcome the rulers through their own rules.⁽⁶³⁾ However, such nihilistic cynicism need not be the driving force behind human culture. The rules, as Foucault puts it, are continually overcome because no system can definitively overcome resentment. Which is to say that no ethical system is static; culture is not immortal. Rather, generation (via resentment) guarantees a perpetual cycle of cultural destruction/reconstruction which ensures the survival of the species.

Conclusion

Gans differs from Foucault in that his version of human origin seeks no real-world verification. Rather than subsequently denying the veracity of generation, Gans refocuses its utility. Cultural generation is less about establishing any sort of real world ontology than of curbing originary resentment. Any cultural inquiry is fundamentally an inquiry into the nature of the sign itself. The nature of language, being both referential and generative, presupposes no real-world ideological truth. Generative anthropology is armed with the both the theoretical rigour and sensitivity to accommodate all means of inquiry by default. No all-prevailing hegemonic structure can exist. This does not reduce the credibility of generative anthropology, but merely shifts the locale in which any sort of theoretical

verification can occur—from an empirical to an intuitive one. The Gordian knot, in which the strands of pluralism intertwine with those of a cultural singularity, has been slashed.

5

Critics like David McNally, rather than invoking a linear and diachronic view of human origin, have instead placed their faith in a synchronic and pluralistic view. While such a strategy can certainly never be disproved, neither can it ever hope to be verified. The originary event, as a minimal hypothesis, takes as its point of departure an intuitive rather than positive theoretical leap. Thus it can only be disproved should its intellectual minimalism prove incompatible with any future anthropological definition of man.[\(64\)](#) As it stands thus far, the reasonableness of man as distinct because of his language-using capability far outweighs the unreasonableness of such an assumption, while allowing us to state a plausible theory of origin. We need not abandon causality because of solipsism, nor are we restricted in addressing our origins because of it. Generation, as is the case with Nietzsche, need not necessarily limit us merely to a genealogical inquiry “tainted” by perception. Culture cannot be deemed ineffective simply because it fails to purport the “ontological truths” surrounding its origin. Rather, every culture is a runoff of a single, originary event, each one equally valid until its central tenets prove incompatible with human survival.

Notes

1. See Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 152.[\(back\)](#)
2. Foucault, 148. [\(back\)](#)
3. Ibid., 156. [\(back\)](#)
4. Ibid., 157. [\(back\)](#)
5. Ibid., 151. [\(back\)](#)
6. Ibid., 157. [\(back\)](#)
7. Ibid. [\(back\)](#)
8. Ibid., 158. [\(back\)](#)

9. Ibid. [\(back\)](#)
10. Ibid., 152. [\(back\)](#)
11. Ibid., 140. [\(back\)](#)
12. Ibid., 152.. [\(back\)](#)
13. Ibid., 153. [\(back\)](#)
14. Foucault uses the examples of Plato's ideals and Socrates' notion of immortality (Foucault, 159-60). [\(back\)](#)
15. See David McNally, *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labour, and Liberation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001). [\(back\)](#)
16. McNally, 8. [\(back\)](#)
17. Ibid., 9. [\(back\)](#)
18. Ibid., 85. [\(back\)](#)
19. Specifically, the 'others' he is referring to are evolutionary biology, paleontology and anthropology; Ibid., 80. [\(back\)](#)
20. Ibid., 87. [\(back\)](#)
21. Ibid. [\(back\)](#)
22. Ibid., 87-88. [\(back\)](#)
23. Ibid., 92. [\(back\)](#)
24. Ibid., 88. [\(back\)](#)
25. Ibid., 92. [\(back\)](#)
26. Ibid. [\(back\)](#)
27. Ibid., 93. [\(back\)](#)
28. Ibid., 86. [\(back\)](#)
29. Ibid., 95. [\(back\)](#)

30. Gans puts it thus: “The recent offensive of ‘creation science’ against the teaching of the theory of evolution has generally been dismissed in academic circles as a side-effect of the conservative trend of the Reagan era. But although ‘creation science’ in itself is of little intellectual interest, its emergence reveals a fundamental point of conflict between science and religion that is of more than topical significance. This conflict concerns the origin and nature of man. In contrast to the embarrassing attempts of religion to muddy the waters of the natural sciences, the debate between science and religion on the subject of human origins is a true *dialogue de sourds*: neither side is capable of assimilating even the most fundamental contributions of the other.” See Preface to Eric Gans’s *Science and Faith: An Anthropology of Revelation* (Los Angeles: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1990), vii. [\(back\)](#)

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31. His emphasis; Ibid., 3. [\(back\)](#)

32. Leakey quoted in McNally, 89. [\(back\)](#)

33. McNally, 89. [\(back\)](#)

34. Ibid. [\(back\)](#)

35. Ibid., 90. [\(back\)](#)

36. Ibid., 88. [\(back\)](#)

37. Gans, *Science & Faith*, 4. [\(back\)](#)

38. For a complete discussion on the ethical ramifications of originary thinking, see Chapter 4 of *Originary Thinking* entitled, “Morality and Ethics,” 45-61. [\(back\)](#)

39. Gans, *Science & Faith*, 4. [\(back\)](#)

40. Gans uses the example of the body of a large animal, say, a bison. See Eric Gans’ *Originary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993), 8. [\(back\)](#)

41. McNally, 102. [\(back\)](#)

42. The mimesis Gans invokes, is, in fact, a Girardian one, whereby desire does not exist in a simple dualistic fashion between sacred object and desiring subject; rather, desire is always mediated by the presence of a second subject, whose rush to the centre (i.e. sacred object) is necessarily imitated, leading to what Girard calls “the first mimetic crisis.” See René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: John

Hopkins UP, 1972). [\(back\)](#)

43. Gans, *Originary Thinking*, 8-9. [\(back\)](#)

44. Ibid., 8. [\(back\)](#)

45. Ibid. [\(back\)](#)

46. Ibid., 8-9. [\(back\)](#)

47. Ibid., 65. [\(back\)](#)

48. Gans states that his hypothesis “makes no claim to be definitive . . . [and is] constructed according to the primordial rule of scientific discourse that requires the *minimality of the hypothesis*, a rule often formulated in terms of ‘Ockham’s razor’—that mental entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity.” See *Science & Faith*, 3. [\(back\)](#)

49. Ibid., 8. [\(back\)](#)

50. Ibid., 9-10. [\(back\)](#)

51. Ibid., 10. [\(back\)](#)

52. His emphasis; Ibid. [\(back\)](#)

53. Gans, *Originary Thinking*, 1. [\(back\)](#)

54. Ibid., viii. [\(back\)](#)

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55. Ibid; more thoroughly: “The lesson to be learned is that truly originary thinking does not equate its own emergence with the end of history. In the context of a worldwide exchange system creating ever more degrees of freedom, no theory can predict its own success or failure in the marketplace. Our anthropology, in affirming the ultimate necessity of the market, predicts, not its own triumph, but its own undecidability. It is this prediction alone that is the test of its (undemonstratable) truth, the truth of a theory that denies historical closure.” [\(back\)](#)

56. Ibid., 2. [\(back\)](#)

57. His emphasis; Ibid., 18-19. [\(back\)](#)

58. Ibid., 87. [\(back\)](#)

59. See Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: an Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 26. [\(back\)](#)

60. Ibid., 12. [\(back\)](#)

61. Ibid., 27. [\(back\)](#)

62. Ibid. [\(back\)](#)

63. Foucault., 151. [\(back\)](#)

64. Although Gans is open to the possibility of change, he does set out the following parameter: “Originary analysis is essentially narrative; we understand a human phenomenon by attempting to tell the story of its emergence. This does not mean that all history is contained in the originary scene in a kind of universal preformation. But for any category to be considered an essential attribute of the human, it must be conceived as present at the outset, since otherwise human beings were able to exist without it. The list of these essential categories need not be fixed once and for all; but when we decide to change it, we are changing our theory of the human, our anthropology.” See *Originary Thinking*, 10. [\(back\)](#)