Method and Morality: how to keep the human in the human sciences

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> To ask questions you see no prospect of answering is the fundamental sin in science, like giving orders you do not think will be obeyed in politics, or praying for what you do not think God will grant in religion.
>
> R G Collingwood

The designation 'human sciences' is a French coinage of the 1940s and serves to mark the point at which the lethal critique of positivism was launched. The Anglophone term 'social sciences', still undisturbed, is, as everyone knows, a continuing token of the doomed determination to make the study of human action as like as possible to the study of non-human phenomena which has been such a success story for four centuries.

In this paper I shall summarise a few of those arguments - some of them in the hands of philosophers of the so-called natural or physical sciences who indignantly repudiated the idea that physics and politics, or microbiology and aesthetics, could possibly use the same methods or possess a common set of purposes. But the simplest way to make my opening premise is to invoke the canonical justification for the practice of any science of human affairs, which is that, unlike the physical sciences, it studies not only how the world *is*, but takes the measure of that by way of how it *ought* to be. Its dominant cast of mind is therefore intrinsically comparative. Charles Taylor - with Alisdair MacIntyre our first and most compelling guide in this argument - says "the aim of understanding should not be to surmount or escape our own point of view in order to 'get inside' another".[1] This is a distorted version of what we believe natural science to be up to, the progress of which depends upon separating ourselves from an individual perspective and capturing the behaviour of phenomena as *im*personally as possible. Only this way will the natural scientist come as close as may be to what Thomas Nagel calls "the view from nowhere".[2]

[1] Charles Taylor, 'Comparison, History, Truth' in *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995, p148.
[2] The title of Nagel's famous study of the impossibility of objectivity in ethics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Of course, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle even puts in question the adequacy of objectivity in physics, but the response of physicists to his discovery was and had to be the successful attempt to measure and control the uncertainty. In the human sciences however, we begin by systematising (often as a condition of teaching others how to perform the task) our understanding of other people, recovering from our often inarticulate and taken-for-granted presuppositions the principles we employ and deploy in order to discover what they mean and what we shall do about it. As Taylor says, "the idea that I should pursue human science by attempting to neutralise this understanding in me [as the natural scientist neutralises the everyday perception that the world is flattish and matter is solid] is obviously crazy".[3] In bringing to consciousness our pre-theoretic presupposition about the conduct of other people, we inescapably check them against what we could have done ourselves. One customary mark, indeed, of non-academic moral maturity is to be able to see that sometimes they did better than we would have done ourselves.

Somewhere in that commonplace recognition is the moral imperative of what I shall call (following Taylor) "comparativism" as a precept of the human sciences. 'Know thyself' - the platonic injunction at the heart of our inquiry - is necessarily reflexive. That knowledge can only be acquired by comparison with others.

This principle holds whatever one's subject of study: into a body of art work; into the misunderstandings and obduracy of school pupils; into the weirdness of other peoples, whether distant historically or geographically; into voting behaviour or investment decisions. It gives rise to my first injunction: abandon completely the objectivity-subjectivity opposition. Speak only of our *intersubjective* understanding and world-making.

That understanding can only be sought in our common languages (a minimum condition of grasping this and thereby of being an adequate practitioner in the human sciences is that one speak and read at least one foreign language - not a condition met by many British people). That being the case should head us off any absurd attempt to find access to the 'inner states' or private feelings and being of other people. We only know what we know about them because of what they say and do (hence the power of James Merrill's phrase used in the excellent movie, *Lost in Translation*).

[3] Taylor (1995) p149.

In making these everyday procedures methodical, we contrive (or are taught) more or less intellectual frameworks and instruments with which to enclose and *comprehend* human conduct. Such frameworks are implicit narratives; they give explicable form not only to the content of history and the passage of institutions, but comprise a hermeneutic (that is an interpretive figure) with which to inform the passions,[4] vehement or otherwise. Doing so, insofar as we are self-aware, requires the identification of value, those little local intensities of meaning, as the inevitable context of factual description.

This gives rise to two further injunctions. The first, best and most irrefutably set out by John Searle,[5] is that language of its nature is evaluative, even as it describes the facts. The adjective 'poisonous' for instance conflates a factual designation with the incontestable value of staying unpoisoned. There is therefore no reassuring fact-value distinction in human science. The second injunction, less obvious but implicit, is that all quantitative research is qualitative. The very methods of statistics - correlation coefficients, significance testing, t testing, normal curves of distribution, preference ordination, cardinality - are heavy with value-presumptions about what is worth finding out. What Bourdieu calls "the science of little learning" by which he means questionnaires and opinion polls, are stretched out on these racks of technique; it is then easy to see through them. They may be useful; they are utterly transitory.

Although the sometime new wave of anti-positivist and humanist critique is forty-odd years old, quantitative methods still get the money, and their obedient submission to the monsters of managerialism and its idiot performance targets keep them, in Britain if not in France, in favour with government and the Research Councils.

II

The dissenting church for which I preach has a longer provenance than I have mentioned. There was, as it happened, a home-grown voice in opposition to the advocates of hard realism

[4] Descartes' famous list includes wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy, sadness, but not, strangely, fear. See *The Passions of the Soul*, 1649.

[5] In his *The Construction of Social Reality*, London: Allan Lane, 1995, the title and argument of which deliberately invert Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.

in moral philosophy and historical inquiry. All through the inter-war years, R G Collingwood had, in a prodigious series of books,[6] some only published in fragments after his death, pressed home the necessity of his 'question-and-answer-logic' upon a heedless audience. History was, in his book, queen of the sciences, in the sense that prior experience formed us all and all our social institutions, and that therefore the only way to understand the mess things are in is to discover how they got to be that way in the first place.

Hence question-and-answer logic. Collingwood's historical method was to seek to recover original questions implicit in the answers found in any piece of evidence: a book of political theory, a painting, broken shards found at an archaeological dig, each alike constituted an embodied answer, not necessarily satisfactory, to questions put to experience by the maker. Such a move placed human purposes and intentions, their reasons and motives, at the heart of the science of affairs. The deep puzzle for human beings is to make sense of experience, to turn a meaningless sequence of accidents tumbling out of the future into an action that may be controlled and an event that may be understood.

In his endeavours, Collingwood may be said to be doing no more than systematise the procedures of everyday life. There can hardly be, nonetheless, a happier or more rational justification for a human science. Collingwood had formed his ambition to connect intelligent theory to deranged practices during his duties at the Admiralty between 1914 and 1918, when the lack of any such connection was so decidedly noticeable. But no sooner was that most avoidable, irrational and mortally extravagant of human undertakings over, than philosophers set off again on their madly irrelevant dance to turn humanity into the objects of a natural science which could only be successful in regulating conduct by removing alike both reason and passion.

It seemed to Collingwood and, gradually, to his successors in the business of theorising human fatheadedness, that the best way forward would be to sort into order the commonplace procedures whereby we all try to explain what people (including ourselves) are up to. We regard their actions and listen to their utterances, searching in the contexts of their conduct for the meaning in their minds. By these familiar tokens, individual biography is always

[6] The most succinct of which is, for our purposes, the *Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938). See also of course *The Principles of Art* (1938), *The Idea of History* (1946) and the *Essay on Metaphysics* (1940), all published by Clarendon Press.

relevant but never enough. Settling text into context without allowing explanation to dissolve into circumstantiality is the concern of the circling hermeneutician ,and whatever may be said by the frivolous jesters of postmodernism[7] about the sheer impossibility of recovering other people's intentions, there simply is no other available practice of mind with which to make sense of the world.

No doubt to put things *quite* so plainly and bluntly is a self-deception. There is no set distance at which the hermeneutician is best placed to begin his or her circling. Too near to the human action in question and you are held too tightly in the forcefield of a few individuals; too far and you lose the exhilarating wrestle with human quiddity. Soporific old bromides about the woods and the trees have their pedagogic force, and every inquiry has to settle for its partial and partisan vision.

Thus the historian reconstructs from the primary sources the day-to-day exigencies whereby, let us say, the extremely poor proletariat of nineteenth-century industrialisation made out or went under. Such a book is Eric Hobsbawm's and George Rudé's *Captain Swing*[8] or, more urgently, Friedrich Engels' great classic of 1844, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Another historian, as close as he can get to the immediacies of the daily record of immiseration and revolt, then draws back to the boundary set by a different interpretative rim - one moreover only made accessible by an unplannable coincidence of luck, moral allegiance, good wits and the right, but unpredictable historical distance from the original. At this distance, with these gifts, E P Thompson described[9] not only the daily life of weavers and wool-pickers and loom-makers, he saw in it the coming-to-consciousness-of-itself of a new presence on the stage of history, the English working class. By the time he wrote his great book, that class had come to its maturity as a long-standing political force in the march of the nation, and was in a position to grasp and interpret the significance of its beginnings.

Let us take another example closer to our educational headquarters. In 1962, two sociologists, both with working-class origins and political allegiances, published a study of what it meant for bright children from similar backgrounds to have won places, by virtue of the mildly egalitarian Education Act of 1944, at their local grammar school. These, of

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[7] In particular, Jacques Derrida (1979) *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp123, 125, 127, 131.
[8] Hobsbawm E and Rude G (1969) *Captain Swing*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

course, had been formerly the pretty well exclusive preserve of the respectable middle classes in the neighbourhood - the solicitors, accountants, businessmen, dentists and, indeed, schoolteachers - who regarded the school as their imperium.

Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden[10] set themselves, according to the conventions of social inquiry of the time, to interview (without tape recorder) a number of former grammar school boys and girls, mainly from working-class homes, although a few had middle-class backgrounds, as well as a selection of their parents.

This may be thought of as inquiry of the first order or of biographical actuality. What the two authors recounted was a vivid, sometimes comic tale of the 'symbolic violence' (the phrase belongs to Pierre Bourdieu) wrought by social class ritual and middle-class presumption upon the interlopers who had broken open the class boundary. For the first time outside the English novel (a key resource for social theorists), what Raymond Williams famously conceptualised as "structures of feeling" came into rancorous and unresolved class conflict in the pages of social inquiry. The struggle was fought out over social emancipation, and morally of course the working class wins. But the point of all this for the methodist of inquiry was that the two men couldn't tell a tale without a narrative tension between how the world was and how it ought to have been.

In other words, hypothesis-testing in human affairs is simply impossible. For years it was insisted upon as protocol for unhappy doctoral students, and for years the dissertations rolled in with the conclusion that the hypothesis was partly true and partly wasn't. When the slow shift of the human scientific paradigm began to take place, the contention emerged that the explanation of conduct, however near or far the explicator might be from the subject and object-matter, could only make sense if conduct were to be measured against the goals, the purposes and interactions of the agent.

Such an approach would deploy question-and-answer logic with a vengeance. For while motive or intention (the two not synonymous, motive being antecedent to action and intention embodied in it) may pertain to quite modest activities as well as grand ambitions, a goal is a

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[9] Thompson E P (1968) *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth: Penguin (revised edition).
[10] Jackson B and Marsden D (1966) *Education and the Working Class*. Harmondsworth: Penguin (revised edition).

distinctly more resonant object of aspiration. The answer to questions of experience provided by the attainment of a goal is likely to be a roundly existential affair. One scores one's big life-goals, if one is lucky, in the name of the big commitments to value.

There can only be dispute about the identity of these values. Isaiah Berlin has shown us that, by way of historical and anthropological revelation, specific human values are incompatible just as their very meaning and structure (Gallie's famous claim[11]) may be inherently contestable. Nonetheless, although the lesson is now well learned that values are always disputable, my commonplace argument here will be that all research in the human sciences can only provide explanations by adducing as a comparative framework, a state of affairs in some way morally alternative (or transcendental) to the one under investigation.

Thus the psychologist studies cognitive styles against a criterion of efficient thinking; a historian reviews battles and parliaments in terms of victory or defeat, successfully or fallibly handled power; an anthropologist has in mind, however relatively, a picture of what it is for social ceremony to function well (functionalism), for social structure to match form to ontology fittingly (structuralism), for social intercourse and spectacular display to be carried off convincingly (symbolic action theory); an educationist, whether managerialist, stern inspector or old utopian, tests the school for the way it lives a picture of the good society, courteous, assiduous, equitable, variegated, orderly.

III

The comparative dualism of social-theoretic analysis and its unavoidable evaluations has still, however, an impossible time affirming its sheer necessity against the mammoth continuity of a view of social - or, as I prefer, human - science resting on the old delusions of scientific positivism and physicalism. It should by now be plain as day that the mindless antinomies between quantitative and qualitative research, subjective and objective data and findings, between facts and values themselves, are long since dissolved and superseded.

The qualitative-quantitative opposition is partly a consequence of the divisions of labour and the protection of academic mystery (statistics are difficult to a still innumerate society, even

[11] Gallie W B (1968) *Philosophy and Historical Understanding*, New York: Schocken Books.

in the academies) and partly grounded in the old faith in science and Comtean scientism - the belief that scientific method having brought so much simple benefit by way of surgery, pharmacology, engineering, technological communication and modern weaponry, it ought to be entrusted with doing the same for human organisation. As for the preference for so-called objective observation-and-experiment over subjective participation-and-anguish, that seems to me simply a failure of intelligence. Nothing, by this date, is more fatuous than blindness and deafness to the irreducible nature of intersubjective exchange.

But people *will* still do it, and it is a pedagogic necessity that I rehearse the history and contrivance of the intellectual position it defends: that matching of facts-turned-into-figures against an unproblematic reality which is positivism. By its lights, carefully selected figures (data) translated from linguistically specified attitudes (selected on a five-point scale) may be used to test for the presence or absence of hypothetic values or competences in the society (falsifiability). Thus citizens are judged to have reported on key issues in the polity by the same methods that small children are found to be linguistically incompetent as a consequence of not talking to them carefully enough. What is risible about this state of affairs is that identical methods are applied to entirely unalike circumstances precisely in the name of being scientific.

The privilege of such representations is, as is usual with privilege, first evident in wealth. Research funds flow to those who do research according to the paradigms of normal social science. Moreover, and as a residue from Marxism, even those who repudiate scientism nonetheless style themselves sanctimonious materialists, because its purported opposite of idealism is supposed to characterise liberal-bourgeois social theory and its innate deference to the *status quo*.

To note these status skirmishes is not to launch an attack upon the idea of science. Science will make its advances in its incremental way, and its canons of evidence, disengagement, authority and the rest, for all of their sociability, will continue to win their objective successes. What has been dislodged by the philosophic warrening of the past thirty years has been the privileged representation of reality by the mirror theory of knowledge.

The mirror metaphor is Richard Rorty's and he is field-marshal of the philosophic efforts that have broken it up. The mirror is suggested by the first premise of classical epistemology,

which Rorty summarises thus: "Whenever we make an incorrigible report on a state of ourselves [or of Nature], there must be a property with which we are presented which induces us to make this report".[12] Rorty is genially dismissive of the idea that the world is divided up into only two ways of seeing it, idealism and materialism. For him and for me theoretic understanding is a matter of discovering (and in part *inventing*) a sufficiently truthful narrative with which to frame the facts:

> There are two principal ways in which reflective human beings try, by placing their lives in a larger context, to give sense to those lives. The first is by telling the story of their contribution to a community. This community may be the actual historical one in which they live, or another actual one, distant in time or place, or a quite imaginary one, consisting perhaps of a dozen heroes and heroines selected from history or fiction or both. The second way is to describe themselves as standing in an immediate relation to a non-human reality. This relation is immediate in the sense that it does not derive from a relation between such a reality and their tribe, or their nation, or their imagined band of comrades. I shall say that stories of the former kind exemplify the desire for solidarity, and that stories of the latter kind exemplify the desire for objectivity.[13]

Surprisingly, it is then possible to summon up help from the hardest of the unregenerate physicalists.

In his 'Two dogmas of empiricism',[14] William Quine attacks the foundation dogmas of normal social science and leaves it bereft of its central quantity, what Rorty calls its "glassy essence" ("glassy essence" being the reflection of reality caught in the mental mirror polished with its language by the mind).

Quine first dissolves Kant's classical distinction between analytic propositions (those which we know 'incorrigibly' as matters of observed or introspective fact) and synthetic propositions (where statements are true 'tautologically' as a result of the definition of their terms: a triangle is a three-sided figure). Secondly, he challenges the empirical dogma that every statement is a construction from direct experience.

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[12] Rorty R (1981) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Oxford: Blackwell, p100.
[13] Rorty R (1985) Solidarity or objectivity? In: J Rachman and C West (eds) *Post-analytic Philosophy*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp3-19.

He contends that all inquiry is intrinsically holistic; it works within a *set* of propositions not down an agenda. Each proposition is no more than an element in a system, and as such is always correctable, may indeed have to be abandoned completely (as constantly happens not just to explanations but to facts in science). So much for analytic truth. But, relatedly, synthetic truths cannot be *proved* tautologically, because no definition nor synonym can be shown to be a perfect translation of the first term. Translation or synonymity is too slippery a criterion with which to fix perfect synthetic propositions. Thus the second dogma perishes.[15]

This is to represent much-disputed conclusions in rather a sharp-shooting way. Rorty uses Quine in order to reject flat-footed materialists who want to say that all human activity may be explained without remainder as the product of neural processes, and then asks sarcastically, "What is this mental-physical contrast anyway? Whoever said that anything one mentioned had to fall into one or other of two (or half-a-dozen) ontological realms?[16]

Rorty, it should be said, is the most forceful representative of that radical tendency in thought to call doubt on all our systems of representation in thought. However, it would be quite wrong to classify a man of his ilk as deconstructionist, where that term designates the calculated subversion of intentional meaning by the discovery of unintendedly contrary or subversive meanings. Instead, Rorty enlists Wilfred Sellars to profess a view of knowledge and truth as (in Dewey's phrase) "warranted assertability", and the business of justification of either truth or knowledge is not a special and privileged court of appeal at which all the rest of the conversation is cross-examined and sentenced.

Sellars aims to finish with "the myth of the given".[17] If we want to know something about a person's internal states (e.g. whether they are in pain) only a philosopher would be suspicious about asking the person and believing the answer. But the authority of philosophy is such that we worry about the status of such replies as soon as we start doing a human science. There need be nothing 'lying behind' any such reply because the convention of trustworthy replying is constituted by the common meaningfulness and conversational understanding of being in pain.

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[14] Quine W V O (1980) Two dogmas of empiricism, in *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press (revised edition) pp37-46.
[15] The synonymity paradox is developed in Quine W V O (1960), On the indeterminacy of translation, in *Word and Object*, Boston MA: MIT Press. See also Dunn J (1978) Practising social science on realist assumptions, in *Political Obligations in its Historical Context*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[16] Rorty, *op cit*, note 11, pp122-3.
[17] Sellars W (1963) *Science, Perception and Reality*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Such report - 'ow, that hurts' - are, in the jargon, 'incorrigible' because there is (so far) no better method of determining what is the case than to believe what someone says.

All this may seem very heavy weather to make of what everybody knows - what is, in the excellent phrase, common knowledge. But that is Rorty's great point, and the means whereby he wants *all* the sciences to swing from an epistemological perch to a hermeneutic one. Sellars recommends that we free ourselves from always sternly insisting that our consciousness (whatever *that* is), our sense-impressions, our cognitions and concepts (whatever *they* are) have to find some foundation outside language and society before we can say anything definite about them. By implication, therefore, Sellars endorses not historicism - the belief that history is on the march to somewhere - but historicality as our real foundation. Our consciousness and our concepts are folded upon us by the slow accumulations of time. We can trace this process of the formation of mind and its modes of perception historically, and when we have done so, in Sellars's view, there is no remainder called the grounding-of-knowledge-in-reality still to be accounted for.

In Quine's famous formulation for sceptics, all theories are underdetermined by the facts, and the best that we can do to fix both is to talk about our whole way of talking about the world. Human science, conceived at its grandest, is therefore the study of the conversation of humankind (Oakeshott's great phrase), in particular that part of the conversation which creates and ratifies the form and content of official knowledge, the protocols of inquiry, and the formal values of the society which permits the conversation in the first place.

IV

This formulation conjoins the two preoccupations of this Institute: official educational practice and cultural endeavour. Like a literature, a legislature, a military or the life of a social class, educational practice and cultural achievements are, in Clifford Geertz's phrase, "constellations of enshrined ideas".[18] The assiduous researcher, who must needs be, at the same time, a social and intellectual critic of that society, is working to map that constellation, discover its shrines and criticise its ideas. He or she can only do so by projecting a not-very-

[18] Geertz C (1981) *Negara: the theatre-state in 19th century Bali*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, p135.

distant future in which the best ideas and values as imagined on behalf of the present may have some chance of coming-to-fulfilment in the lives of the successor generation.

Such research - let us say, such humanly necessary self-aware self-criticism - is historicist insofar as it understands present circumstances as product of past stupidity or intelligence, and futurist according to historical Enlightenment principles, and insofar as it attaches policy to politics by way of trying for a just and trustworthy emancipation of its optimistic youth.

This then is the interplay of how the world is and how it ought to be. The researcher must hear, ringing in her ears, Leavis's fearful questions, "how shall we live? *What for* - what ultimately do we live for?" Our collaborative study of how human beings answer these questions by what they do can only take place under the irreducible sign of human intersubjectivity. That is the main text of this essay and it is, in origin, Wittgenstein's. Wittgenstein put away the sentimentalists of sacredly personal experience in a simple homily:

> The temptation to say 'I see it like *this*', pointing to the same thing for 'it' and 'this'. Always get rid of the idea of a private object in this way: assume that it constantly changes, but that you do not notice the change because your memory constantly deceives you.[19]

So much for the subjectivists. But Wittgenstein goes on,[20]

> If language is to be a means of communication, there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this sounds) in judgements. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so.

Wittgenstein's contention is that only in the shared and public usages of language and its historically constituted meanings can we find out what people are up to; my corollary is that, once they are interpreted, we can only then criticise their actions in terms of the best those agents could have thought and said for themselves.

Wittgenstein has, however, one further admonition to make to us about our understanding of others' actions. It is one which not only - to my mind - disables almost all academic

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[19] Wittgenstein L (1953) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell, Part II, p207.
[20] Wittgenstein, *op cit*, note 20, para 242.

psychology, but also and more widely provides a touchstone for the methodological argument commended here:

> try not to think of understanding as a 'mental process' at all - for that is the expression which confused you. But ask yourself: in what sort of case, in what kind of circumstances do we say, 'Now I know how to go on', when, that is, the formula *has* occurred to me? In the sense in which there are processes (including mental processes) which are characteristic of understanding, understanding is not a mental process.[21]

We know how to go on with a calculation when we recall the formula we need. We know what people are doing when an interpretative framework fits the action. In addition, we sometimes may calculate, or we may interpret in a hitherto unthinkable way; when we do so, we fetch out through our *inventive* powers, the combinations of convention and novelty, potentiality and custom, concentration and expansion, which have been hitherto unperceived and which, once made visible, provide the grounds for human and social betterment in the future.

The method of research is therefore the study of its 'language-games', in Wittgenstein's famous phrase. We start with the enormous field upon which the games are played and study them to determine what the rules are, and - in another powerful phrase of his - what "forms of life" they shape and inform.

The main help I aim to win from this formula is that in ordering research inquiry we do not have to invoke or speculate about 'inner states', any more than we must profess an inhuman objectivity. The public arrangement of language into texts is all our concern, and if this peculiar attentiveness puts the psychoanalytical school of textual study out of business, then about time, too.

Such a formula, in spite of the best efforts of the dottier exponents of postmodernism, cannot ignore or discount what people purposed or intended in what they said or wrote. It has been the second great discovery about language made by philosophers and students of literature alike that words are *not*, as it were, lenses which may be ground so finely we can see the world through them with such clarity that what we see is what is really there. Language is a

[21] Wittgenstein, *op cit*, note 20, paras 150-6.

set of instruments with which to do things and when, writing at the same time as Wittgenstein, John Austin wrote *How to Do Things with Words*, the force of that "do" was what he wanted to bring out.

Alongside the rules of the games, therefore, the point of the games, or an answer to the question, "What are people doing when they say that?" Austin coined the neologism "performatives"[22] to cover this aspect of language, or rather, these forces in the linguistic field. Thus, when I say "I promise" or "I surrender" I am not making a true or false proposition about the world, I am *doing* something. The three forces of language Austin distinguished were its locutionary force (lexical meaning, or what the words *tell*); its illocutionary force (performative meaning, or what the words *do*); its perlocutionary force (persuasive meaning, or what the words *effect*).

We begin, I hope, to see the outlines of that model of language which also provides us with a methodological sequence. We learn the rules and with them we also learn how to play the game well: how to do things.

But these actions have a history. People have not always done things with words that way. The rules themselves have changed from time to time. The history of our language is the history of our human constitution, but that is not to say that we are each constituted by the sheer weight of linguistic sedimentation. Sentences conserve meaning; they also radicalise meaning. We use words and concepts (the two terms not being the same thing) in such a way as to separate an old from a newer meaning. Inquiry into the worlds people make in virtue of the words they speak must include insight into their common history.

Rules; performance; history; values. This last is the fourth realm of my model of inquiry; it gathers up all the others.

By values I indicate those concentrations of meaning whereby language makes its "distinctions of worth" (Charles Taylor's phrase). We live on ground marked out by such distinctions; we are constituted by them; and given that they are made in language, then by our prior arguments, these distinctions cannot be private or merely subjective, still less may

they be abstract realities. Our values live in the language of the day. They are texts to be read, and read intersubjectively; disputed intersubjectively also no doubt, but disputed in terms of common human meanings. Valuing, then, is not a mental or emotional process, it is a symbolic action and, as Clifford Geertz says:

> The confinement of interpretive analysis ... to the supposedly more 'symbolic' aspect of culture is a mere prejudice, born out of the notion, also a gift of the 19th century, that 'symbolic' opposes to 'real' as fanciful to sober, figurative to liberal, obscure to plain, aesthetic to practical, mystical to mundane, and decorative to substantial.[23]

We trace our values - which are no more and no less than the meanings of life - through our linguistic, that is, our symbolic texts. The best way of gathering the whole enormous venture under one heading is to say that we study that "ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves",[24] which simply *is* culture, and study it with a view to our deciding which stories are good for us and which bad, and what the new stories we create for ourselves may do for either end.

Intellectual method cannot promise genius, but it should at least forestall stupidity. Insofar as it is successful, it should also be beautiful, which for our purposes means that educational inquiry be a branch of literature. If we read John Dewey or even Pierre Bourdieu at his most serenely difficult, they match such a standard. The sheer laughability of applying it to the usual run of the subject brings out the occasion for my lecture. Our common pursuit is no less than to find, and in finding, to invent a sufficiently truthful *recit de nos jours*. The *grands recits* are, as we know, over. We are in a period similar to other such historical periods (the Reformation for instance) which measures a marked acceleration in the obsolescence of narratives. The grand task, one quite enough to make one's heart swell and blood run quick, is to help contrive out of the facts of the matter an everyday story about our corner of the intellectual field which will help all such scholars alike to do right and live well.

FRED INGLIS

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[22] See J L Austin (1961) 'Performative utterances', in *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. The theory is developed more fully by John Searle (1969) in *Speech Acts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[23] Geertz, *op cit*, note 18, p136.
[24] Geertz's definition in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1975), London: Hutchinson, p445.