



DEBATE: A/MORAL ANTHROPOLOGY

## Devil's advocate Sketch of an amoral anthropology

Nicolas LANGLITZ, *New School for Social Research*

This essay polemicizes against contemporary anthropology's ubiquitous moralism and its demand for engagement. It does so by trying on the glasses of evolutionary theories of moral behavior. If we take *Homo sapiens* to be a moralistic ape and consider that anthropologists are members of the species they study, their moralizing appears only natural. In the past decade, however, the moral and political landscapes of North America and Europe have changed dramatically, which has provoked a renewed problematization of moral discourse. Like all polemics, this essay proposes an alternative to what it attacks: the possibility of an amoral anthropology, in which the anthropologist plays the role of devil's advocate. The project refurbishes the ivory tower as a high-containment laboratory for ideas, especially dangerous ideas that we might have good reason to sanction in public.

Keywords: morality, ethics, engaged anthropology, critique, second-order observation, relativism, evolutionary anthropology

### Anthropology for recovering moralists

Imagine a philosophically minded anthropology that meticulously observes humans and still accepts them for what they are and what they are about to become. As a recovering moralist I'm looking for ways of writing about humans that do not mobilize the readers' empathy with one group at the expense of their empathy with another group. Is it really necessary for anthropologists to regularly tempt readers already struggling to abstain from self-righteousness? Why dangle in front of them identification with an author who denounces, and thereby elevates his readers above, racists, sexists, capitalists, neoliberals, imperialists, neocolonialists, and scientists whose naturalist worldviews cement an unjust status quo? Even the devil needs an advocate, especially the devil.

Of course, we already have some amoral anthropologies. For instance, evolutionary anthropologists observe our species in a noncritical fashion. As heirs of positivism they exercise interpretive restraint (Langlitz 2020: 102–44). They understand themselves as scientists, not as thinkers whose job it is to reflect on the value and meaning of human life—and to give it new meanings by transvaluing valuations that keep us from flourishing. Unless they engage in such work, evolutionary anthropologists are not philosophically minded. I very

much appreciate evolutionary anthropology for the insights it provides into our primate nature but long for something entirely different: an anthropology derived from humanities-oriented traditions in cultural anthropology, but freed from the project of a critique that tells right from wrong.

This is not to say that critical anthropology was necessarily a bad thing. One of the handful of evolutionary anthropologists who still stray into the annual conference of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) might attend and appreciate panels contesting white supremacy or relations of “dis/possession,” or promoting decolonial feminist activist research. These scholarly events facilitate a sense of communion, as speakers and audience share a tacit understanding that white supremacy and acts of dispossession are bad while the undoing of colonial domination and gender inequality is good. In 2020, the AAA officially institutionalized its members' moral values by prioritizing proposals for executive sessions that promote anti-imperialism, anti-ableism, anti-transphobia, etc. Such scholarship serves an important function in a multicultural world. Moral behavior, including moralist gossip about absent violators of social norms, has enabled *Homo sapiens* to cooperate in and between much larger groups than any other species of ape. At a time and in a place where people of very different origins have to live



and work with each other, a caste of moral critics observing and judging their fellow citizens' words and deeds might be as important as a strong government for civilizing communication, redressing structural inequalities, and fostering a sense of solidarity. Maybe our evolutionary anthropologist will find that late modern populations of *Homo* need critical anthropologists for the purpose of social integration.

But moralism is also a divisive force in pluralist societies that disagree about social norms. It fosters cohesion within a community of like-minded people and sets them in opposition against other communities. Here the moral becomes political. The reignited culture wars that polarize the United States can serve as a case in point. While my polemic very much responds to the United States where I live and teach as a resident alien, similar tendencies are taking hold of other parts of the world as well. In this social conflict, American cultural anthropology firmly sides with progressives, partaking in and fueling a sense of indignation about the immorality of conservatives and reactionaries—who respond in kind. Anthropologists have long seen through the god trick of relativism and have switched to the production of situated knowledges, at the risk of cultivating a chauvinism of their own (Haraway 1988).

This essay lays out a very different vision of anthropology, one that, with a few modifications, could easily be adopted by cognate disciplines. In fact, it takes one of its most important cues from German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1991: 90) who noted that it was the most pressing task of ethics to warn against morality. And the most pressing task of anthropology, as I understand it, is to exercise a sense of possibility, to make available alternative perspectives, and to examine how they inform the conduct of life. Institutionally, a department of anthropology could provide a safe space for exploring the ramifications of these often unsafe ways of thinking and doing. In the face of incessant demands for more engagement, the discipline needs to find a new home in a renovated ivory tower where it can make itself useful, not by promoting the social mores of a moral-political avant-garde, but by restoring a sense of ethical complexity and possibility. And this is what I want to achieve by advocating for the devil.

### Moralism and immorality

A few years ago, I explained the research on academic knowledge cultures that I conduct as an anthropologist

of science to an economist studying cooperative behavior in Africa. “Ah, now that we have stopped looking at the world, we’re looking at ourselves,” she giped. Finally she had encountered one of those crooked souls who loath themselves for their discipline’s complicity with colonialism and who prefer to conduct “anthropology at home” to the “symbolic violence” of representing “the other.”

Her misunderstanding lay in the assumption that only now have anthropologists grown so self-absorbed. If Claude Lévi-Strauss (1976) was right when he declared the eighteenth-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau the founder of his discipline, then anthropologists have always aspired to the examined life by looking at themselves. Rousseau’s *Confessions* complemented his *Discourse on the origin and foundation of inequality among mankind* by presenting, arguably for the very first time, a reckless self-portrait of “a man in all the truth of nature”—the one and only man he knew intimately enough to be able to write authoritatively about the inner life of a human being (Rousseau 1995: 5). Rousseau wanted to tell it all: he had first stolen from his employer and then accused another employee of the theft; he had exposed himself in dark alleys; he had abandoned his own children to the foundling hospital, against the wishes of their mother. Compared to the original, the reflexivity that American cultural anthropologists have cultivated since the 1980s appears tender. And all too often the moral finger does not point at the anthropologist herself but at an older generation or at aspects of her own culture that she rejects. Since the posthumous publication of Malinowski’s field diary no one has confessed to their own sexism or racism (Malinowski 1967). I certainly haven’t. The bigotry we study is always the bigotry of others. Maybe looking at ourselves wouldn’t be such a bad thing for scholars who are human and think nothing human alien to them.

We anthropologists provide a window as good as any on *anthropos* today because we are human, all too human, children of our times. When Friedrich Nietzsche published his book *Human, all too human* in 1878, he hoped that an uncompromising examination of all things human would allow us to make something of ourselves: a higher humanity that warranted the affirmation of life (in the absence of transcendent meaning, for God was dead). Nietzsche (1996: 1–8) wanted humans, at least a few of them, to become “free spirits”: thinkers who had taken possession of themselves, who embarked on spiritual adventures, who tested out contradictory beliefs, who lived experimentally, and who had the courage



to ask everything and the discipline of the heart to disdain nothing. By straying beyond the bounds of their moral community and its distinctions of good and evil, the free spirits Nietzsche dreamed of also strayed beyond the human.

In a world of peer review, tenure letters, and a highly competitive job market, such freedom is difficult to attain. And maybe that's a good thing, considering what a success story the disciplinary organization of academic knowledge production has been since its inception in the nineteenth century. Instead of swimming against the tide, trying to breed scholars into free spirits, the modern university exploits the all-too-human desire to conform with established norms, both moral and epistemic, enabling large-scale cooperation and cumulative knowledge production. The sciences have done so even more effectively than the humanities—and it has not been to their detriment. In the academic jungle, it is also the fittest who survive and reproduce: those who are a good fit institutionally, who study fit research subjects, in a word, the well-adapted. Immoralists and iconoclasts rarely fit that bill.

Nietzsche's contemporary Charles Darwin (1981: 165) already surmised that morality, understood as the behavioral disposition "to do good unto others—to do unto others as ye would they should do unto you," was as much a product of natural selection as sharp canines and poison glands. He first posed a puzzle that would preoccupy evolutionary theorists to this day: How could the survival of the fittest favor the sympathetic and benevolent, given that it appeared extremely questionable whether they would be able to rear more offspring than selfish and treacherous parents in the same group? Darwin's own answer anticipated what later authors, most prominently English zoologist Vero Copner Wynne-Edwards and American David Sloane Wilson, called group or multilevel selection (Borrello 2005; Wilson and Sober 1994; Wynne-Edwards 1962). "There can be no doubt," Darwin wrote (1981: 166), "that a tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes, and this would be natural selection."

Among the numerous late twentieth-century scientists who sought to resolve the tension between the benefits of selfishness and the benefits of living in a moral community was the American anthropologist Christo-

pher Boehm. He had grown especially interested in free riders who abused their fellow group members' commitment to the common good. In his framework, bullies appeared as a special type of free rider who extorted an undue share of the group's resources. To keep them in check, Boehm argued (1999: viii), the rank and file invented moralizing. He also maintained that an underlying egalitarian impulse distinguished humans from chimpanzees. Boehm had studied both species in the field: in the 1960s, he examined how Serbian groups in Montenegro managed social conflicts; in the 1980s, he observed how Jane Goodall's chimpanzees in Gombe, Tanzania, dealt with the same problem. Subsequently, he built an extensive database of the moral and social behavior of modern hunter-gatherer societies as a model of early human forms of life. Whereas chimpanzee groups lived in violently negotiated hierarchies, contemporary hunter-gatherers—if not the female gatherers, at least the male hunters among them—resisted such domination, and not just in select places but in very different environments ranging from tropical rainforests to the Arctic. Boehm (1999: 30) concluded that a desire for equality was no local socio-ecological adaptation to particular environments: it appeared to be an unchanging aspect of human nature.

It should be noted, though, that Boehm had eliminated about half of all extant forager societies from his database because their ways of life did not appear representative of how humans had lived in the late Pleistocene. For example, although early anthropologists had documented the Kwakiutl forager way of life, Boehm (2012: 79) excluded these inhabitants of British Columbia because they owned slaves. Hierarchical social structures served as one of the key exclusion criteria. Many of the modern hunter-gatherers that found their way into the ethnographic archive had lived in vertically stratified societies—and among nonforager societies, today the vast majority, hierarchies prevail. Even proclaimed egalitarian communist states of the twentieth century were hardly free of status differences and while late modern democracies largely grant their adult citizens equal voting rights, they subject them to centralized government and accept severe and growing economic inequality. Today, the bulk of humankind does not live under egalitarian conditions. Is this evidence of how alienated we moderns are from human nature, or does it call into question Boehm's key contention that *Homo sapiens* evolved as a moralist ape that likes to hold everyone to the same standards?



Boehm (1999: 30) fully recognized how prone humans are to hierarchical living. Chimpanzee alpha males paled by comparison with human despots, he observed. And even among the hunter-gatherers that he considered “Late Pleistocene-appropriate,” human egalitarianism never appeared as relaxed as that of squirrel monkeys (Boehm 1999: 252; 2012: 79). *Homo sapiens* was equally as eager to escape domination as to dominate, Boehm noticed. Hence, human egalitarianism always remained fragile. Where it could be maintained, it was not based on an absence of hierarchy but on the creation of anti-hierarchy: the weak joined forces to collectively dominate the strong (Boehm 1999: 3, 9). They defended their autonomy by keeping upstarts in check, first by way of ridicule, then gossip and disobedience, finally ostracism and even assassination (Boehm 1999: 90–124). Moral discourse had originally evolved as a key component of the egalitarian toolkit to sanction any pretension to power, Boehm claimed (1999: 252–53). It helped to establish a near tyranny of the moral majority over individuals thereby driven to conform. Boehm interpreted the fact that the ethnographic archive doesn’t know of a single human group that didn’t moralize as indicative of the immense ethological pressure on the human will to escape domination, only to subject that will to a different kind of domination: a Darwinian genealogy of morality as a cultural universal.

In hunter-gatherer societies where, at least in Boehm’s ideal-typical depiction, even and especially the successful hunter would downplay his success in a self-effacing manner, there would have been no place for an author like Nietzsche (2005a: 74–142) who openly expressed his contempt for moralizing and boasted to his readers “why I am so wise,” “why I am so clever,” and “why I write such excellent books” (see Boehm 1999: 33). Of course, during his sentient lifetime, none of those excellent books sold more than a few hundred copies (Schacht 1996: xii). Nietzsche had given up his university professorship and had become an academic outcast. In the intellectual field of his time, he was hardly competitive. But then again, Nietzsche refused to look at life predominantly as a struggle for existence. He conceived of it as a “struggle for power” that didn’t aim at the survival of individual organisms but at a tropical luxuriance, even if this “jungle-like growth and upward striving” entailed an “immense destruction and self-destruction” (Nietzsche 2002: 159 [§262]). He fashioned himself as the simultaneously creative, destructive, and self-destructive “Anti-Darwin” (opposed to a Darwin supposedly committed to progressive evolution

from lower to higher and from weaker to stronger forms of life). He wrote: “Assuming this struggle [for existence] exists (and it does in fact happen), it is unfortunately the opposite of what Darwin’s school would want, and perhaps what we might want too: namely to the disadvantage of the strong, the privileged, the fortunate exceptions” (Nietzsche 2005b: 199 [§14]). Nietzsche (2002: 160 [§262]) imagined a moral philosopher facing this creative destruction, who would soon come to realize that only the ordinary had prospects for surviving and propagating. “Be like them!” the moral philosopher would preach, “be mediocre!” Nietzsche (2006: 10 [§10]) understood all too well how laughable his dream of a human beyond the all too human would appear. Even more ridiculous would have been an untimely thinker expecting book sales and honors from his contemporaries. Despite some of his later readers on the right who reconstructed Nietzsche as an intellectual pioneer of their intimidation and persecution of people they had identified as vulnerable, the immoralism of this despondent elitist did not make him a bully but a jester.

Both Nietzsche and Darwin realized that moralizing serves a nonmoral purpose, be it power, survival, or something else. They posed the question of when and whether it’s good to be good. What Nietzsche’s challenge to morality as such continues to have over Boehm’s Darwinian naturalization of morality is the insight that moralism as a protection against bullies comes at a price. Moralizing holds everybody in check: it demands conformity. Where ostracizing individual dissenters fails to restore group cohesion, moral discourse pits different factions against each other—factions that demand adherence to their own orthodoxies. Of course, this is only a problem if you value people who go their own way over those who go with others.

### De-moralizing the ethics of anthropology

As far as anthropology is concerned, what’s the purpose of the thick moralizing threads woven into so many ethnographies today? How did telling good from bad become such a pervasive practice in a knowledge culture? Shouldn’t anthropologists be primarily concerned with telling true from false? Of course, publicly committing to a primacy of the ethical remains a radical position, even in a field that values radical thought. Although Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995: 409) claimed that “anthropology, if it is to be worth anything at all, must be ethically grounded,” few of her colleagues have proved



militant enough to simply apply their own moral standards when surveying the ethical terrain of others. And yet quite a few anthropologists have moved from cultural critique to activist research: instead of deconstructing dominant forms of power/knowledge for an academic audience, they put their work in the service of organized groups in struggles against domination (Hale 2006). Among both activist-scholars and cultural critics it has become customary to orient ethnographic work toward moral-political goals, often authorized by the distressing conditions that the people described have to endure (Rabinow and Stavrianakis 2018: 165, 173).

Anthropological knowledge has always served as an instrument of moral improvement, usually with the assumption that the epistemological values fundamental to the study of society could easily be reconciled with the moral values necessary to reform it (and the Good and the True did indeed coincide as long as it didn't occur to anyone to study the oppressors as empathetically as the oppressed; Stoczkowski 2008). Joel Robbins (2013) traced the currently prevalent form of moralism back to the 1990s when the discipline shifted its focus from an exploration of cultural difference (now dismissed as "othering") to witnessing the misery that humans (usually those in power, the privileged) bring upon other humans (the victims of marginalization and abuse). But the eclipsed interest in "the savage slot" (Trouillot 2003) and more generally in other cultures had not only, and probably not even primarily, been driven by the desire to dominate and exploit, something many readers of the seminal volume *Writing culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) came to believe. Apart from being lackeys of colonial administrators and CIA informants, anthropologists had also been dreamers who studied other ways of life because they hoped to find livable alternatives to their own societies. They went to the field to undo the cultural self they had inherited (e.g., Lévi-Strauss 1974; Mead 1928). Bracketing their moral convictions was not just an epistemological practice to understand the so-called native's point of view unencumbered by ethnocentric bias, it was also a work on the self that aimed not at ethical fortification but at transformation. Since the late twentieth century, this ethical project has lost traction. The shift from the savage slot to the suffering slot has been accompanied by the rise of a new moralism: "Premised on the universality of trauma and the equal right all human beings possess to be free of its effects, suffering slot ethnography is secure in its knowledge of good and evil and works toward achieving progress in the

direction of its already widely accepted models of the good," notes Robbins (2013: 456). As witnesses of the world's most arresting ills, anthropologists must call out whoever or whatever is to blame. Of course, these knights in shining armor will repentantly recognize their own complicity with the structures of oppression, demand that we move beyond these structures, and come out morally elevated above those thought to sustain them.

Some of the critical responses to the hegemony of a "dark anthropology" that focuses exclusively on power, domination, inequality, poverty, oppression, exclusion, violence, illness, and suffering have emphasized its one-sidedness: it ignores the bright sides of human life such as acts of solidarity, honesty, or happiness, as well as the historical progress in reduction of absolute poverty, child malnutrition, strengthening of minority rights, etc. (Kelly 2013; Laidlaw 2016; Ortner 2016). Various "anthropologies of the good" seek to complement or challenge the darkness that has settled on anthropology by taking seriously the imaginative and life-changing power of people's ideals and ethical projects (Laidlaw 2014; Robbins 2013). Since the 2000s, quite a few anthropologists have begun to study the nature of human ethics and the possibilities opened up by different ethical projects without taking for granted their own moral code (e.g., Fassin 2008; Faubion 2011; Laidlaw 2014; Lambek 2010; Zigon 2008). My goal here is not to contribute another variant to this exuberant anthropology of ethics but to demoralize the ethics of anthropology.

If cultural anthropologists did what they used to do and compared cultures, and if they compared their own epistemic culture with those of the sciences, even just with that of their next-door neighbors in evolutionary anthropology, they would notice that other styles of thinking and doing are possible. To be sure, each comes with its own conventionality. A discipline of free spirits is clearly an oxymoron. And, if Boehm was right, the natural history of human thinking is hardly a natural history of freethinking. Could anthropologists, of all people, seriously expect of themselves to be anything but human? Make me a decent reflexive anthropologist and I will make you a gift of the free spirit.

### Changing landscapes

Critiques of moral discourse are a perennial feature of philosophy. While only a minority of philosophers have called into question morality per se, challenges to the



prevalent morality have been a staple in a tradition that promises “the examined life.” Every time and place has had its antimoralism, from the sophists’ calling into doubt the conventional morality of ancient Greece, to challenges to the Christian moral order by the French Enlightenment *philosophes*, and to philosophical anthropologist Arnold Gehlen’s attack on the “hypermorality” of the German student movement in the late 1960s (Blom 2010; Gehlen 2004). In the 2010s, we witnessed yet another profound transformation of the moral landscape—and in response a new generation of antimoralists appeared on the scene.

Diagnoses of the current situation abound. They all revolve around a changing sense of social justice and what critics dismiss as political correctness. Just as in the 1960s, university campuses have played a seminal role in this development—and, just like then, it’s hardly confined to the world of higher education. In 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement protested economic inequality. In response to racial inequality, the Black Lives Matter movement stood up against the US criminal justice system as well as police killings of African Americans. In 2017, the #MeToo movement gained international prominence after famous actresses began to tweet about sexual assaults by a Hollywood film producer, encouraging large numbers of women to make public that they too had been abused by men. The following year, students who had barely escaped a school shooting led demonstrations that called on legislators to prevent gun violence in the United States. In 2019, global school strikes demanded action to limit global warming and climate change. The mid-2010s were also the time when student activists called on university administrators to turn campuses into safe spaces that protect vulnerable students against distressing readings and speakers whose positions might remind them of traumatic experiences. And museums were asked to remove from display and even to destroy works of art which critics denounced as immoral. Is there anything new about these struggles against capitalism, racism, misogyny, and environmental destruction?

The sociologists Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning (2014, 2018) identify a common pattern in these seemingly unrelated moral events of the 2010s: people mobilize third-party support in social conflicts by claiming the moral status of victimhood. Leftist Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller (2017) describes the burgeoning of political correctness as an ideological cover-up of a pervasive brutalization of society: as more and more European and North American citizens slip into poverty,

fall victim to mass incarceration, or are deployed in so-called humanitarian wars, new elites assure them that they will enforce a more sensitive use of language that will symbolically recognize diversity instead of granting equality. American literary theorist Stanley Fish (2019) defends the freedom to live a disengaged *vita contemplativa* against a growing pressure to politicize the university and against his colleagues’ “unbearable academic virtue mongering.” German art critic Hanno Rauterberg examines prominent cases of so-called censorship from below and diagnoses a crisis of liberalism, which has not only come under pressure from a populist right but also from liberals and leftists who have lost faith in art as a progressive force of permanent transgression. After all, its autonomy has only served a privileged majority. Hence, these disillusioned progressives repurpose art as an “emissary of demarcating self-assurance” that seeks to exclude deviations instead of making them an integral part of the aesthetic realm (Rauterberg 2018: 13). Art historian Wolfgang Ullrich (2017: 61–67, 87) interprets the spread of ethical consumerism as the rise of a “value aristocracy,” which has the financial and cultural capital to elevate itself above a “moral proletariat.” He predicts an upheaval analogous to the Reformation, fueled as it was by Protestant outrage about the Catholic selling of indulgences. And conservative German philosopher and publicist Alexander Grau (2017a) notes an increasing moralization of human activities, from shopping to scholarship, that were previously valued in nonmoral ways. He pleads for the cultivation of a nonconformist ethos in the face of this supposedly reigning ideology, which he dubs *hypermorality*.

Grau’s book *Hypermorality* references Arnold Gehlen’s *Morality and hypermorality*, and marks both a historical recurrence and the time that passed between the two polemics, published in 1969 and 2017. History appears to repeat itself in that we have again reached a point at which moralizing by parts of the left provokes other parts of the left, as well as liberals and conservatives, to claim that it has become excessive. During the Third Reich and the early years of the Federal Republic of Germany, Gehlen emerged as one of the most prominent representatives of philosophical anthropology, a school of thought that sought to articulate a unified philosophical conception of the human in the face of, and in conversation with, the increasingly specialized human sciences. Gehlen, a rightist intellectual, became an important interlocutor and an antipode for leftist colleagues like Theodor W. Adorno. While the title of Gehlen’s book seems to suggest that morality could be measured along a one-dimensional



scale which determined whether there was too much, too little, or just the right amount of it, its subtitle *A pluralist ethic* better captured the essence of his moral philosophy. For Gehlen (2004: viii, 4, 20) distinguished four irreconcilable *ethoi*, each deeply rooted in human nature: (1) the demand for reciprocity; (2) the eudemonic quest for well-being and happiness; (3) a family ethics of protecting children, avoiding suffering, and fostering emotional connectedness, and (4) the conservation and strengthening of institutions, especially the state. In ordinary times, contradictions between these orientations remained latent, concealed by compromises, turn-taking, and excuses. But in extreme situations, their antagonism would come into the open and lead to a disruptive polarization of increasingly radical ethical positions, within a society or even within one person torn between these conflicting promptings of conscience (Gehlen 2004: 173, 182). By 2017, not just Western democracies but the whole heating planet had entered into such an extreme situation again.

Of course, Gehlen's philosophy was very much a child of its time and place. In his eyes, the 1960s student movement was a symptom of a compromised and weak German state which, after 1945, could no longer command respect or inspire patriotism—and consequently the newly founded Federal Republic failed to check the moralizing aggression of civil society (a situation that will feel familiar to those of us who lived through the 2010s in the United States) (Gehlen 2004: 75, 184). This conflict culminated in the student movement of 1968, which radicalized the Enlightenment project of emancipating human beings from their institutions (Gehlen 2004: 98). The now domineering ethos had universalized family ethics in the form of an outsized humanitarian morality and married it to a consumerist remake of eudemonia. It left no space for the other *ethoi*.

Gehlen's worldview was tragic: when competing ethical orientations clashed, as in Sophocles' play *Antigone*, which staged the conflict between the heroine's love of her brother and King Creon's *raison d'état*, there could be no compromise. Hypermorality described an attitude that failed to acknowledge the legitimacy of any ethos other than the ethical obligation of an indiscriminate love of humankind (Gehlen 2004: 75).

In response, Gehlen did not call for moderation. His pluralism was not relativist. Instead he responded with a fierce polemic, trying to pry open again a supposedly foreclosed ethical possibility. He pleaded people to cut the ethic of love back from humanity and return it to the family and he encouraged politicians to cultivate the vir-

tues of power again—to rebuild the self-respecting state, which Hitler's infernal phantasmagoria had destroyed.

When Grau revisited Gehlen's work in 2017, the conflict between humanitarian reason and national interest hadn't lost any of its pungency. Much to Grau's chagrin, Chancellor Angela Merkel had thrown Germany into a deep political crisis when, in 2015, she opened the state's borders to more than one million refugees, most of whom had fled from the civil war in Syria (Grau 2017b). In the United States, President Donald Trump did not exactly bolster the state's institutions, but his decision to enforce and tighten anti-immigration laws, even at the expense of separating young children from their families, asserted the state's prerogative to control its borders in the face of a humanitarian outcry. Moral indignation led many of my colleagues and students at The New School to demand that our university declare itself a sanctuary university that would use its resources to support undocumented students. Since the administration did not consider such moral action to be in the interest of the institution, the university's leadership became the target of the kind of moralizing aggression that Gehlen had despised in others. When I turned on the news or went to work in the late 2010s, it had become impossible to escape this battle over a quickly changing ethical landscape.

Of course, it was no longer the landscape of the late 1960s. For example, the original counterculture had defined itself through a challenge to the technocratic state and its alliance with scientific experts (Roszak 1968). Half a century later, my New Jersey neighbors put up signs in their front yards that listed the contemporary liberal mantras—"Black Lives Matter," "No Human Is Illegal," "Love Is Love," "Women's Rights Are Human Rights"—and added to this litany that "Science Is Real." Instead of continuing to call into question the authority of those who claimed to know what was good for us because they knew the facts, the cultural left had come to the defense of the institutions of science against a new rightist counterculture that had taken power in the United States while also dramatically disrupting the ways of the political establishment in Europe. This populist uprising emphasized the political nature of scientific knowledge, countered facts with so-called alternative facts, and sought to lift politics out of a technocratic swamp in which expert knowledge determined how we should live our lives to save humanity from itself.

Whether or not science studies scholars had served as rearguard theorists of the countercultural rebellion against technocracy or as avant-garde theorists of climate



skepticism, the right's dismissal of climate science as a political enterprise led many scholars to reconsider their positions (Latour 2004). As one of the founders of the field, Bruno Latour (2013: 1–23) came to emphasize the importance of trusting institutions again, especially the institutions of science. If nothing else connected the French anthropologist of science to the German philosophical anthropologist Arnold Gehlen, it was this newfound love of institutions. And as the post-truth debate hit the social studies of science, epistemic populist Steve Fuller (2016a, 2016b) caused an uproar when he urged his colleagues to take credit for the democratization of science, instead of performing a volte-face just because their intellectual project had become so successful that it had been adopted by a “basket of deplorables” for their own purposes. After decades of undermining the positivist demarcation of science from nonscience, now science studies scholars emphasized the difference between the robust construction of facts and the flimsy spinning of alternative facts. They proposed to study how consensus-building in the sciences differed from building consensus around politically opportune truth claims (Collins, Evans, and Weinel 2017; Sismondo 2017).

One impromptu observation might be that populist truth claims won support by being cast in a moral register. For instance, the denial of climate change recognized the concerns of otherwise forgotten commuters who couldn't afford higher gas prices and of coal miners who would lose their jobs to the curbing of carbon dioxide emissions. The new culture of victimhood was hardly confined to minorities and women subjected to racism and sexism, but was also embraced by the victims of self-enriching economic elites who had opened the borders to free trade and who profited from the cheap labor of migrant workers. Victimhood culture was also the culture of those deplorables who felt disrespected by cultural elites (even US President Trump has lamented publicly that no president had been treated as badly as he had,<sup>1</sup> although the assassinated presidents Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, and Kennedy were obviously close contenders). Across the political spectrum, an aggressive new moralism reigned supreme and legitimated the populist assault on institutions.

1. See, for one example, among many, his interview with George Stephanopoulos on ABC News, June 16, 2019: <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/transcript-abc-news-george-stephanopoulos-exclusive-interview-president/story?id=63749144>

As populist governments in the United States and Great Britain discredited and defied other branches of government, the courts, and even their own intelligence and law enforcement agencies, their opponents extended the defense of the crumbling institutional order far beyond that of science. Gehlen had a point when he doggedly maintained the importance of strong institutions and an ethos that served their indifferent logic of operations to safeguard the peaceful but not entirely free co-existence of human beings.

Considering the state of our societies in 2020, I maintain that not only anthropologists but all social researchers and humanities scholars can learn from Gehlen's insistence that human flourishing depends on a well-fortified institutional order. And yet I must confess to being one of those intellectuals whom the philosophical anthropologist loathed for desiring freedom from their institutions, one of those wannabe free spirits who rejoice that they are living in a large-scale liberal society rather than a tight-knit forager community and who imagine their life would be even better outside of any academic discipline. Gehlen foresaw the possibility of such perplexity. It arises from the uneasiness we experience in institutions that we continue to depend on. When push comes to shove, should we adopt an institutional ethos or one of the competing ethical orientations?

Gehlen astutely noticed that, under the drumfire of moral convictions, people have to choose between ambiguity and taking a position. Gehlen took a position. The disillusioned one-time Nazi lamented the debasement of German professors by student activists and a “spiritual genocide” of the German people through American reeducation. In making the latter point, the devil even quoted scripture, or really the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Gehlen 2004: 178, 187). Attempts at elevating one's moral status by framing oneself as a victim was certainly not just a phenomenon of the 2010s. Gehlen sought to score moral points as a militarily and culturally defeated German. What distinguished the victimhood culture of his generation of German rightists from the current one is that it wouldn't have occurred to Gehlen to appeal to a third party such as the United Nations where sympathies for German self-pity might have been limited anyways.

Most of my colleagues in anthropology have also taken a position, one diametrically opposed to Gehlen's. If they were to read *Moral und Hypermoral* they would recognize themselves well enough to understand that the book



was written against critical intellectuals like them. Yet taking a position is not the only option.

As a reader of novels of James Joyce, Franz Kafka, and Robert Musil, Gehlen recognized that their heroes—or really antiheroes—had responded differently. Exposed to extreme moral conflict, they did not take firm positions but appeared puzzled and, in an attempt to resolve their predicament, they revolved around themselves (in the jargon of the social sciences, we would say: they became reflexive). It seems as if Gehlen's angry commitment to one of his four *ethoi* served as a defense against the development of such a "pluralist personality" (Gehlen 2004: 159). I could say the same about anthropologists who use every opportunity to denounce some ethnographically documented instance of dehumanization, colonial exploitation, or social inequality and thereby assert their own moral position. Perhaps the antidote to hypermorality is not to rail against the moralizing aggression of student activists, anthropology professors, or archconservative philosophers but to step back and look at the world and at oneself from a distance—like those antiheroes of modernist fiction.

### The dharma of second-order observation

The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann developed one such practice of detachment. First-order observers observe the world; second-order observers observe observers. While first-order observers ask *what* is and maybe what should be the case, second-order observers want to know *how* these determinations are made. They recognize the contingency and the blind spots that both enable and delimit competing points of view. Yet their position is not privileged: it does not provide a view from nowhere and from everywhere, but comes with its own blind spots. Second-order observers can see "less and other things," as Luhmann put it (1997: 1119), than the observed observers. While observing how other observers observe they cannot see what the others can see, but they do recognize that what appears natural and necessary to first-order observers is contingent on their perspective. They loosen the seemingly tight coupling of observation and reality (Luhmann 2001: 264). The goal is not to promote a single account of nature or one camp's political agenda but to do justice to life in pluralist and highly differentiated societies. What Luhmann (1970b) called "sociological Enlightenment" employs second-order observations to paint the world in an almost cubist manner.

At first glance, Luhmann's theory of second-order observation looks like an epistemology for social scientists. But the realization that every perspective depends on a particular observational scheme also engendered a whole ethos that can be traced back to the time before Luhmann became a controversial systems theorist, the term by which he is known today. In the 1950s, he worked as a lawyer at the Higher Administrative Court in Lüneburg and in the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs of Lower Saxony, where he processed restitution payments to victims of the Nazi regime. After the breakdown of the Third Reich in 1945, the Federal Republic of Germany sought to rebuild and fundamentally reform its administrative apparatus (Jeserich, Pohl, and Unruh 1987: 1096–1100). From Luhmann's first publication in the journal *Verwaltungsarchiv* to his commission work in the late 1960s and early 1970s on how to restructure the civil service, he provided policy advice on how to reform the administrative system's capacity for reforms (Luhmann 1958). Looking back on that period in an interview, Luhmann provided the example of how he had analyzed the promotion policies of his ministry. Instead of recommending a particular course of action, he adopted what he would later call the position of second-order observer: "My thought does not aim at declaring one model or the other to be absolutely right, but at thinking through different alternatives and their preconditions and consequences. This form of thought also determines my whole scientific program" (Luhmann 1987: 151; for a more detailed discussion, see Langlitz 2007).

Luhmann (1987: 125–55) never missed an opportunity to style himself as the dispassionate administrative officer among German intellectuals—a man without qualities who diligently filed away every thought in a meticulously organized slip box (containing index cards) and who only interrupted work on his theory of society to walk his dachshund in the suburbs of Bielefeld. He was a provocateur whose "moral hypothermia" was meant to infuriate critical theorists, especially his lifelong adversary Jürgen Habermas (Luhmann 1987: 118). Luhmann dismissed any critique that "proceeds all too hastily with the assumption that we could if we only wanted to" and refused to tolerate "the posture of priggishness" and "the rod of moral admonition" (1998: 108; 1997: 1115). He embodied a very different kind of thinker: "I don't feel at all like a schoolmaster for society or someone who knows better where things should be going, but at most as someone who observes changes and notices deficiencies, for example, theoretical deficiencies" (Luhmann 1987: 187).



The most pressing task of ethics, Luhmann contended (1991: 90), was to warn against morality. Distinguishing between good and bad was not necessarily good. Nor was it always bad. Everything could be looked at in moral terms, nothing had to be. More often than not it was better to adopt a different perspective and ask whether a business deal was profitable or unprofitable, if a contract was legal or illegal, and if a scientific finding was true or false. Moralizing such issues meant to signal approval or disapproval of people. In contrast to Darwin's and Boehm's functionalist accounts, Luhmann believed that moralism rarely solved any problems but provoked conflict, even violence, and made all future communication more difficult. Second-order observation allowed one to step back and consider how others conceived of an issue and what alternative frameworks might be available. Luhmann wanted to conserve perspectival differences and was deeply suspicious of any kind of radical thought that sought to uproot the evils of modern society: "It's not a matter of simply eliminating the other half and putting oneself in its place" (Luhmann 1987: 104). Of course, this included the preservation of moral discourse itself, which could not be replaced by social theory (Luhmann 1991: 89). But second-order observation could lower the temperature and moderate otherwise explosive conflicts in pluralist societies.

As a moralist tone became more prevalent in the social sciences, Luhmann took a position which Peter Sloterdijk (2017) described as that of devil's advocate. In using that term, the philosopher situated Luhmann's efforts to deculpabilize human life in religious history. Originally, the *advocatus diaboli* had been a functionary in the Vatican's process of declaring a dead person a saint: his job was to test how robust the *advocatus Dei*'s arguments in favor of the candidate's canonization were by challenging them, even if he actually agreed with the nomination. But Luhmann had no intention to press charges. Quite the opposite. He frequently defended the maligned sides of distinctions. When it became popular to protect the environment and rage against "the system," Luhmann (1997: 792) reminded conservationists that "dying" forests weren't concerned about themselves—"the environment is the way it is." Only within the system could the activists' irritation arise. When critics of capitalism lamented the corrupting effects of money, he pointed out that it also mitigated conflicts. When scientific research was denounced as unethical, Luhmann (1990: 293, 593–94; 1991: 89) conceded that scientists could be judged good or bad, but emphasized

that their truth claims had to be proven true or false. He wanted to leave behind the Christian assumption of a fundamental guilt of the human being. And old European humanism continued to understand the human as a hiding spot for the inhuman. When Luhmann played devil's advocate, Sloterdijk argued (2017: 54), he really provided legal counsel to humankind.

Sloterdijk contended, further, that overcoming the desire to cultivate indignation and pass judgment represented a work on the self that placed the former administrative court lawyer in the tradition of letting-be associated with mystics like Meister Eckhart: "The overcoming of *ressentiment* is a cultural project that, in its logical and psychological scope, demands hardly less effort than the Buddhist Dharma, the greatest effort at mental hygiene ever yet attempted" (Sloterdijk 2017: 86). He interpreted Luhmann's alienation of anthropological themes through second-order observations as a renewed *Lebensphilosophie*, and presented the systems-theoretical way of thinking, which knew itself dependent on the protective climate of the academic preserve, as a spiritual exercise that aimed at a "second-order existentialism," maybe even a "second-order love of wisdom" (Sloterdijk 2017: 87).

### A refurbished ivory tower

Today, nobody wants to live in an academic preserve. The fantastically expensive building materials of an ivory tower smell of privilege (not to speak of the blood of poached elephants). This metaphorical architecture's interior design lacks radical chic. Its seclusion promises a distinguished retirement. And considering that tides of shit are beating at its walls, as Gustave Flaubert put it (quoted in Shapin 2012:5), retreating to the ivory tower appears outright immoral. We had better wade out there.

This consensual dismissal of the *vita contemplativa* has been in the works for more than a century, as historian of science Steven Shapin has shown. In 1937, the American Writers' Congress met at my university, the New School for Social Research, and ridiculed the ivory tower as a safe place for writers who really had a political, moral, and artistic obligation to get out and fight fascism through their work. Yet this ivory tower-bashing followed in the footsteps of the very fascists the Writer's Congress opposed: Mussolini's regime also wanted artists to descend from the ivory tower to connect with the people and become an integral part of national activity (Shapin 2012: 8–9). After the war, the focus shifted from



the arts to the sciences, but left and right continued to agree that this was no time for self-referential disengagement. Scientists had to help build better atom bombs—or prevent a nuclear Armageddon. In the late twentieth century, the focus shifted yet again from serving political goals to making oneself useful on the market—although advocates of community engagement continued to contribute to the demolition of the ivory tower from a political angle. In the ancient religious and secular debate over the active and the contemplative life, people had expressed preferences for one or the other, Shapin observed, but they had always acknowledged that both engagement and disengagement were necessary moments in human life and in the making of knowledge. By the early twenty-first century, however, “the finely poised classical conversation has turned into a monologue, even a rant” (Shapin 2012: 26).

I can attest that, when The New School decided to brand its vision of academic life as one of “engagement,” nobody spoke up in defense of the ivory tower as a place to gain distance, put things in perspective, and resist and modify prevalent views—including the view that ivory towers are socially irresponsible relics of a now untenable academic or artistic self-indulgence. This roaring silence is hardly surprising for a university that has long understood itself as promoting progressive thought and fostering a cosmopolitan spirit by providing refuge to persecuted scholars. And market research confirmed that it was in the best interest of a tuition-driven institution to promise to prospective students engagement rather than life in the ivory tower. Despite Gehlen, an institutional ethos doesn't have to be at odds with the pursuit of what he would have described as the attempt to make the world a more humanitarian place.

Anthropology has much to offer to the project of engaged scholarship. Its signature method, ethnographic fieldwork, requires thinkers to get out of the armchair and learn about the world from direct observation and participation. Susan Sontag (1961) noted that the anthropologist frequently figures as the hero of his ethnographic narrative, which recounts his inquiry as both adventure and therapy from the cultural afflictions of his own society.

However, the therapeutic quality of fieldwork opens up a different possibility: the anthropologist could also fashion himself as an antihero, maybe in the image of Musil's man without qualities, Ulrich. After three failed attempts at becoming a great man (first as an army officer, then as an engineer, and eventually as a mathema-

tician), Ulrich decides to take one year as a “holiday from life” (Musil 2019: 359). Concerned about his son's idling career, Ulrich's father uses his connections in the Vienna of 1913 to find him a job as secretary of a commission charged with preparing the seventieth jubilee of Emperor Franz Josef's ascension. Instead of using this opportunity to finally advance his social status, Ulrich becomes a flaneur and participant observer who paints an extensive tableau of Austrian elites at the brink of the First World War. As a specimen of Gehlen's pluralist personality, he finds the shard of a broken mirror in each of the other characters. They all articulate and embody aspects of truth, but as soon as they voice an idea that Ulrich himself had previously entertained, he is immediately driven to challenge it because he sees two sides to everything and thus cannot accept the pretension of any one side as ultimate (Bernstein 2005). If Ulrich's mode of observation were to serve as a model for ethnography, it would require the cultivation of both empathy and alienation.

Among the tasks assigned to Ulrich is to collect, sift, and archive innumerable petitions that propose to use the jubilee to advance a motley of good causes, either restoring the Austro-Hungarian Empire's past glory or facilitating progress toward a better future. As secretary, he expresses his amazement that half of the petitioners seek salvation in the future and the other half in the past, while everybody appears to perceive the present as unbearable. The point of this ironization of all forms of idealism is not that Ulrich is content with the current state of affairs, but in the present he relishes the limbo of unrealized possibilities. He remains without qualities because he cannot summon up a sense of reality even in relation to himself. He wants to live hypothetically: turning into a philosophy of life the positivist scientist's guarded attitude toward always preliminary facts, he understands himself as someone open to everything that may enrich him inwardly, even if it should be morally or intellectually taboo. And he does imagine himself as basically capable of every virtue and every baseness. Ulrich is not interested in how things should be but in how they might be.

Seeing himself through the eyes of his moralist interlocutors, he recognizes the adolescent quality of his penchant for taking the world's part and playing devil's advocate. However, eventually his ethic of indeterminacy reveals its gentle and forgiving side: “Man is not good, but he is always good,” Ulrich quips as his former lover asks him to use his new position to help a sex killer who has been sentenced to death. “A human being can really



do no wrong; what is wrong can only be an effect of something he does” (Musil 2019: 368). Yet he remains passionately calm and, despite his claim that the murderer did nothing wrong, he makes no effort to save the man.

Ulrich’s amoral provocations are an expression of what his sister calls a “holiday mood,” in which nonvacation life appears not all that important. As everybody is pursuing their social, pecuniary, or carnal interests while fighting over high-minded ideals, Ulrich observes the folly of the world. And so his materialism takes a distinctly mystical quality (see Langlitz 2012: 204–41). On the far side of the moral concerns of real life, this good-for-nothing conjures up the possibility of an existence beyond good and evil: “Mysticism [. . .] would be connected with the intention of going on vacation permanently” (Musil 2019: 1062).

What else would a disengaged anthropology be but a permanent vacation? Maybe a science? No evolutionary anthropologist or primatologist would center their endeavor on the question of the right way to live, as Ulrich does, and they certainly wouldn’t describe their trips to the tropics as holidays. But their observational attitude is actually not that different from the refusal of Musil’s antihero to pass moral judgment and intervene in the name of the good. Based on my own ethnography of chimpanzee ethnographers I can say this: As conservationists, primatologists certainly take action in the human world to protect their research subjects against poaching or deforestation, but it does not occur to them to chastise chimpanzee males for systematically killing members of neighboring groups, beating females into submission, or playing an orphaned mangabey baby to death, even though it is thought the animals are not just following a genetic program. Nor would it ever occur to primatologists to take sides in a conflict, even if an inferior individual turned to them to solicit support (see Langlitz 2020: 116; Strum 1987: 37). From the primates’ point of view, primatologists must appear like flâneurs who look at their existential struggles in a holiday mood. Perhaps cultural anthropologists would come to understand human life more accurately if they renounced critique and activist research, adopted a contemplative attitude, and attended to *Homo sapiens*’ not always pretty behavior from a nonjudgmental angle instead. As an ethnographer it is not good to be good.

Such an amoral economy of science might be asking a lot of anthropologists. After all, we are human and have evolved as moralists, and not to think about the human condition in a quasi-mystical space where partial per-

spectives of finite beings come together. Yet reading Musil’s *Man without qualities* might provide inspiration not to sink into a complacent naturalism but to understand anthropological fieldwork as a spiritual exercise—a comprehensive work on the self, which includes training as devil’s advocate.

In this spirit, a refurbished ivory tower could educate possibilists. The literary theorist Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2004: 13–32) proposed that the humanities abandon the goal of moral betterment (as if their faculty could claim moral superiority over people in other walks of life) and serve what Luhmann (1970a: 235, 247) had described as the function of academic research: increasing complexity through second-order observations that open up alternative points of view. Such complexification confronts students and colleagues with facts that are inconvenient for their party opinion, as Max Weber put it (1958: 147; see Langlitz 2019). This vision of science and scholarship as a vocation does not aim at providing moral orientation, but an opportunity to experiment with heterodox views.

There may be good reasons why these views have been tabooed. In the current moral landscape, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and many other prominent French intellectuals would be severely sanctioned for publicly petitioning parliament to decriminalize pedophilia, as they did in 1977 (Althusser et al. 1977; Foucault 1988). In 1980s Germany, parts of the Green Party even espoused the legalization of consensual sex between adults and children (Walter, Klecha, and Hensel 2015). Of course, contemporary anthropologists like John Borneman have advocated for the devil by casting an ethnographic eye on pedophiles, revealing the humanity of their subjects who have often been victims of abuse themselves. Fortunately, anthropology continues to produce moral complexity of this sort. However, showing that the world isn’t black and white but comes in many shades of gray does not fundamentally challenge our moral compass. Borneman’s humanization of the “child molester as the epitome of evil” has little in common with the French intellectuals’ support for people like author Gabriel Matzneff who openly promoted his appetite for minors as an emancipatory cause (Borneman 2015: 55; Matzneff 1974). Borneman’s ethnography of child molesters does not reconstruct the pedophile’s point of view to make us rethink the ethics of our own relationships with children. The kind of question that spurs my curiosity is why, at a time when I was a child myself, so many important European thinkers and



even politicians considered pederasty not one of the most repulsive social evils but an ethical project to be seriously weighed against other possible ways of life.

If the goal is engagement, if we seek to break down the barriers between science (or scholarship) and society, then it might be right to censor academic discourse not just on epistemic but also on moral and political grounds. Alternatively, we could conceive of the academy as a high-containment laboratory for ideas, even perilous ideas, which might enable us to understand and reevaluate conceptions of human life that are so strange to us that they appear immoral. Isn't that what you would expect of anthropologists to whom nothing human is alien?

In today's moral hyperthermia, the project of overcoming a sense of self-righteousness appears to be among the most important ethical projects. Anthropologists could contribute to it by withdrawing from the heat of the culture wars to a place where we can safely try out alternatives. This essay sketches one such possibility of an amoral anthropology. Its place is not outside but amid a widely institutionalized moralism. After all, the *advocatus diaboli* was a Vatican official. No canonization can even be considered unless someone represents the devil pro bono. Ditto for a saintly science of the human.

## References

- Althusser, Louis, Jean-Paul Aron, Claude Bardos, Roland Barthes, André Baudry, Simone de Beauvoir, G. Bernet Pasteur, et al. 1977. "Lettre ouverte à la commission de révision du code pénal pour la révision de certains textes régissant les rapports entre adultes et mineurs." <http://www.dolto.fr/fd-code-penal-crp.html>.
- Bernstein, Michael André. 2005. "Robert Musil: Precision and soul." In *Robert Musil's "The man without qualities,"* edited by Harold Bloom, 123–46. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.
- Blom, Philipp. 2010. *A wicked company: Holbach's salon and the forgotten radicalism of the European Enlightenment*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- Boehm, Christopher. 1999. *Hierarchy in the forest: The evolution of egalitarian behavior*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2012. *Moral origins: The evolution of virtue, altruism, and shame*. New York: Basic Books.
- Borneman, John. 2015. *Cruel attachments: The ritual rehab of child molesters in Germany*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Borrello, Mark E. 2005. "The rise, fall and resurrection of group selection." *Endeavour* 29 (1): 43–47.
- Campbell, Bradley, and Jason Manning. 2014. "Microaggression and moral cultures." *Comparative Sociology* 13 (6): 692–726.
- . 2018. *The rise of victimhood culture: Microaggression, safe spaces, and the new culture wars*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave.
- Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Collins, Harry, Robert Evans, and Martin Weinel. 2017. "STS as science or politics?" *Social Studies of Science* 47 (4): 580–86.
- Darwin, Charles. 1981 [1871]. *The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fassin, Didier. 2008. "Beyond good and evil?: Questioning the anthropological discomfort with morals." *Anthropological Theory* 8 (4): 333–44.
- Faubion, James D. 2011. *An anthropology of ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fish, Stanley. 2019. "The unbearable virtue mongering of academics (Interview by Len Gutkin)." *The Chronicle Review*, December 4, 2019. <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20191204-Gutkin>.
- Foucault, Michel. 1988. "Sexuality, morality, and the law." In *Michel Foucault: Politics, philosophy, culture: Interviews and other writings, 1977–1984*, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman, 271–85. New York: Routledge.
- Fuller, Steve. 2016a. "Science has always been a bit 'post-truth.'" *The Guardian*, December 15, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2016/dec/15/science-has-always-been-a-bit-post-truth>.
- . 2016b. "Embrace the inner fox: Post-truth as the STS symmetry principle universalized." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, December. <http://wp.me/p1Bfg0-3nx>.
- Gehlen, Arnold. 2004 [1969]. *Moral und Hypermoral: Eine pluralistische Ethik*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann.
- Grau, Alexander. 2017a. *Hypermoral: Die neue Lust an der Empörung*. München: Claudius Verlag.
- . 2017b. "Die Erfindung der Willkommenskultur." *Cicero*, July 24, 2017. <https://www.cicero.de/kultur/medien-und-fluechtlinge-die-erfindung-der-willkommenskultur>.
- Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. 2004. "The task of the humanities, today." In *The object of the study in the humanities. Proceedings from the seminar at the University of Copenhagen*,



- September 2001, edited by Julio Hans Casado Jensen, 13–32. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Hale, Charles R. 2006. “Activist research v. cultural critique: Indigenous land rights and the contradictions of politically engaged anthropology.” *Cultural Anthropology* 21 (1): 96–120.
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. “Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective.” *Feminist Studies* 14 (3): 575–99.
- Jeserich, Kurt, Hans Pohl, and Georg-Christoph von Unruh. 1987. *Deutsche Verwaltungsgeschichte*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt.
- Kelly, Tobias. 2013. “A life less miserable?” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3 (1): 213–16.
- Laidlaw, James. 2014. *The subject of virtue: An anthropology of ethics and freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2016. “Through a glass, darkly.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (2): 17–24.
- Lambek, Michael. 2010. *Ordinary ethics: Anthropology, language, and action*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Langlitz, Nicolas. 2007. “What first-order observers can learn from second-order observations: ARC Concept Note 3.” 2007. <http://anthropos-lab.net/wp/publications/2007/08/conceptnoteno3.pdf>.
- . 2012. *Neuropsychedelica: The revival of hallucinogen research since the decade of the brain*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2019. “Psychedelic science as cosmic play, psychedelic humanities as perennial polemics? Or why we are still fighting over Max Weber’s science as a vocation.” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 19 (3): 275–89.
- . 2020. *Chimpanzee culture wars: Rethinking human nature alongside Japanese, European, and American cultural primatologists*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2004. “Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern.” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2): 225–48.
- . 2013. *An inquiry into modes of existence: An anthropology of the moderns*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1974. *Tristes tropiques*. New York: Atheneum.
- . 1976. “Jean-Jacques Rousseau, founder of the sciences of man.” In *Structural anthropology, Volume II*, 33–43. New York: Basic Books.
- Luhmann, Niklas. 1958. “Der Funktionsbegriff in der Verwaltungswissenschaft.” *Verwaltungsarchiv* 49: 97–105.
- . 1970a. “Selbststeuerung der Wissenschaft.” In *Soziologische Aufklärung 1: Aufsätze zur Theorie sozialer Systeme*, 252. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- . 1970b. “Soziologische Aufklärung.” In *Soziologische Aufklärung 1. Aufsätze zur Theorie sozialer Systeme*, 66–91. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- . 1987. *Archimedes und wir. Interviews*. Berlin: Merve Verlag.
- . 1990. *Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- . 1991. “Paradigm lost: On the ethical reflection of morality. Speech on the occasion of the award of the Hegel Prize 1988.” *Thesis Eleven* 29 (1): 82–94.
- . 1997. *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft. Volume 2*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- . 1998. *Observations on modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- . 2001. “Dekonstruktion als Beobachtung zweiter Ordnung.” In *Niklas Luhmann. Aufsätze und Reden*, edited by Oliver Jahraus, 262–296. Stuttgart: Reclam.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1967 [1922]. *A diary in the strict sense of the term*. London: Routledge.
- Matzkeff, Gabriel. 1974. *Les moins de seize ans*. Paris: Julliard.
- Mead, Margaret. 1928. *Coming of age in Samoa. A psychological study of primitive youth for Western civilisation*. New York: Morrow.
- Musil, Robert. 2019 [1930–1943]. *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Köln: Anaconda.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1996 [1878]. *Human, all too human: A book for free spirits*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2002 [1886]. *Beyond good and evil: Prelude to a philosophy of the future*. Edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2005a [1888]. “Ecce homo.” In *The anti-Christ, Ecce homo, Twilight of the idols, and other writings*, edited by Aaron Ridley, translated by Judith Norman, 69–152. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2005b [1889]. “Twilight of the idols.” In *The anti-Christ, Ecce homo, Twilight of the idols, and other writings*, edited by Aaron Ridley, translated by Judith Norman, 153–230. New York: Cambridge University Press.



- . 2006 [1885]. *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. Edited by Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ortner, Sherry B. 2016. "Dark anthropology and its others: Theory since the eighties." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (1): 47–73.
- Pfaller, Robert. 2017. *Erwachsenensprache: Über ihr Verschwinden aus Politik und Kultur*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.
- Rabinow, Paul, and Anthony Stavrianakis. 2018. *Inquiry after modernism*. Oakland, CA: Wilsted & Taylor.
- Rauterberg, Hanno. 2018. *Wie frei ist die Kunst?: Der neue Kulturkampf und die Krise des Liberalismus*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Robbins, Joel. 2013. "Beyond the suffering subject: Toward an anthropology of the good." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (3): 447–62.
- Roszak, Theodore. 1968. *The making of a counter culture: Reflections on the technocratic society and its youthful opposition*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1995 [1782]. *The confessions and correspondence, including the letters to Malesherbes*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Schacht, Richard. 1996. "Introduction." In *Nietzsche: Human, all too human: A book for free spirits*, vii–xxiii. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 1995. "The primacy of the ethical: Propositions for a militant anthropology." *Current Anthropology* 36 (3): 409–40.
- Shapin, Steven. 2012. "The ivory tower: The history of a figure of speech and its cultural uses." *The British Journal for the History of Science* 45 (1): 1–27.
- Sismondo, Sergio. 2017. "Post-truth?" *Social Studies of Science* 47 (1): 3–6.
- Sloterdijk, Peter. 2017. "Luhmann, devil's advocate: Of original sin, the egotism of systems, and the new ironies." In *Not saved: Essays after Heidegger*, 49–88. Cambridge: Polity.
- Sontag, Susan. 1961. "The anthropologist as hero." In *Against interpretation and other essays*, 69–81. New York: Anchor Books.
- Stoczkowski, Wiktor. 2008. "The 'fourth aim' of anthropology: Between knowledge and ethics." *Anthropological Theory* 8 (4): 345–56.
- Strum, Shirley C. 1987. *Almost human: A journey into the world of baboons*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 2003. "Anthropology and the savage slot: The poetics and politics of otherness." In *Global transformations: Anthropology and the modern world*, 7–28. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ullrich, Wolfgang. 2017. *Wahre Meisterwerke: Stilkritik einer neuen Bekenntniskultur*. Berlin: Wagenbach.
- Walter, Franz, Stephan Klecha, and Alexander Hensel, eds. 2015. *Die Grünen und die Pädosexualität: Eine bundesdeutsche Geschichte*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Weber, Max. 1958 [1919]. "Science as a vocation." In *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology*, edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 129–56. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, David Sloan, and Elliott Sober. 1994. "Reintroducing group selection to the human behavioral sciences." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 17 (4): 585–608.
- Wynne-Edwards, Vero Copner. 1962. *Animal dispersion in relation to social behaviour*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd.
- Zigon, Jarrett. 2008. *Morality: An anthropological perspective*. Oxford: Berg.





Nicolas LANGLITZ is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology at The New School for Social Research in New York. He is the author of *Chimpanzee culture wars: Rethinking human nature alongside Japanese, European, and American cultural primatologists* (Princeton University Press, 2020), *Neuropsychedelia: The revival of hallucinogen research since the decade of the brain* (University of California Press, 2012), and *Die Zeit der Psychoanalyse: Lacan und das Problem der Sitzungsdauer* (Suhrkamp, 2005). At present, he studies behavioral sciences that examine moral behavior and works on a book of microessays and aphorisms on the psychedelic experience.

*Nicolas Langlitz*  
*Department of Anthropology*  
*New School for Social Research*  
*6 East 16<sup>th</sup> Street, #931*  
*New York, NY 10003*  
*USA*  
*langlitn@newschool.edu*

