I. Orientations

1. Steps Away from Moralism[i], Martin Holbraad

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Moralism and Ethnocentrism

In 1995, in an article that in retrospect can only be described as prescient, Roy D'Andrade identified a shift in anthropology from what he called "objective models" to "moral" ones. The discipline at the time, D'Andrade felt, was swept by a "wave of moral righteousness" (1995, 408), such that one could "have a moral career in anthropology […by being] known for what one has denounced" (400). Certainly the rise since then of just the kinds of moralising approaches D'Andrade decried, exemplified by the prominence of anthropologists' concern with what, in a critical review of his own, Joel Robbins has called "the suffering subject," has been palpable in this period. It so happens, however, that the same period has seen the advent of morality cast explicitly as an object of anthropological investigation, giving rise to a body of literature that has come to be tagged as the discipline's "ethical turn" (e.g., Lambek 2010). So it may be reasonable to ask whether this turn to morality and ethics could be interpreted as a dimension—if not also a symptom—of the shift to anthropological moralism. It seems indicative that even prominent contributors to this literature have expressed worries about the extent to which writings associated with the ethical turn succeed in avoiding the trap of "analysing ethnographic data through the lens of our own moral assumptions, traditions and concepts […or] falling into moralizing analysis motivated by the urge, for example, to reveal the injustices uncovered through fieldwork" (Zigon 2014b, 746).

On the face of it, such concerns would seem perverse, as proponents of a turn to ethics in anthropology characteristically put forward the nonmoralising study of moral phenomena as one

of their central aims. For example, presenting the idea of a descriptive rather than prescriptive "moral anthropology" as the common denominator of Durkheim and Weber's legacy to the discipline (the scientific study of "moral facts" and "value judgements," respectively), Didier Fassin is forthright on this point:

> A moral anthropology, in this sense, does not support particular values or promote certain judgements more than political anthropology would favour a given partisan position or recommend a specific public policy. […] It takes […] moral tensions and debates as its object of study and considers seriously the moral positions of all sides.
>
> A moral anthropology has no moralising project. (2012, 2–3).

Other prominent proponents of a renewed anthropological attention to morality and ethics could be cited in support of Fassin's assertion. Particularly telling for our purposes is the way in which Robbins, himself a contributor to the recent debates on ethics, contrasts the ethical turn to the rise of anthropological moralism D'Andrade diagnosed. For Robbins, whatever one might make of its anthropological potential and political contributions, the literature on suffering is "premised on the universality of trauma and the equal right all human beings possess to be free of its effects, [and thus remains] 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" (2013, 456). A complement[ii] to such an approach, suggests Robbins, would be to turn "the good" itself into an object of anthropological study. The point of such an "anthropology of the good," he explains, "is not to define what might universally count as good […but rather] to explore the different ways people organize their personal and collective lives in order to foster what they think of as good, and to study what it is like to live at least some of the time in light of such a project" (2013, 457).

We may take it as read, then, that the ethical turn in anthropology constitutes an attempt to avoid the moralism of passing judgement on the materials we study as anthropologists by measuring them against moral standards we already take for granted. Still, avoiding such deliberate attempts to pass moral judgement hardly settles the question of anthropological moralism. On the one hand, it is perfectly possible to be moralistic by appeal to moral standards *other* than the ones one already takes for granted (e.g., I could undergo any manner of moral conversion and *then* become a born-again zealot). On the other hand, in a sense at least, one can also be moralistic *despite* oneself. Be they familiar or unfamiliar, particular moral standards (e.g., Robbins's "models of the good"), may in one way or other be embedded in and perhaps have an influence over the analytical procedures one brings to bear on the materials one seeks to elucidate. To the extent that they spin the analysis of the materials in question in particular moral directions, such hidden moral presuppositions can end up having a moralising effect, albeit an inadvertent one.[iii]

My feeling is that a lot of the literature associated with the ethical turn in anthropology has vestiges of moralism in either or both of these senses. To show this, I start by pointing out an entirely basic way in which any anthropological attempt to set morality or ethics (for present purposes the distinction is not important) as an object of study is peculiarly *prone* to moralism and particularly to moralism of the inadvertent variety. This is because moralism of this kind is the form that the standard and ever-present pitfall of so-called ethnocentrism needs to take when anthropology sets up morality and ethics as its objects of study.[iv]

The idea is simple. Say that, broadly speaking, the danger of ethnocentrism resides in allowing one's own "cultural" assumptions (however one chooses to define that idea) to skew one's understanding of one's ethnography. And let's say also that this danger is ever-present because the very terms we use to describe—let alone analyse—our ethnography are always liable

to be laden with such assumptions. What kinds of assumptions may be at issue in each case will depend partly on what we take to be the nature of the ethnographic materials in question. For example, if the ethnographic material concerns what we might describe as cosmological classifications (e.g., for Buddhists in Asia, the Buddha has divine qualities), then our description runs the danger of being "cosmologically" ethnocentric (e.g., is our notion of the "divine" appropriate to the Buddha, or is this just a projection of our own theistic theology? cf. Durkheim 1995, 28–31)? Or if, say, the ethnography concerns what we might describe as social or political organization (e.g., Indian society is socially stratified according to caste affiliation), then our description runs the risk of being sociopolitically ethnocentric (e.g., is our notion of social stratification appropriate to the study of caste in India, or is this just a projection of our own ideology of individualism (cf. Dumont 1980, 3–4)?

Note that such forms of ethnocentrism do not imply a moralising stance ipso facto, although they may do so more indirectly (e.g., both believe in a higher being, and a commitment to egalitarian individualism could be treated as moral dicta, and thus their projection onto diverse ethnographic materials could come to acquire a moral dimension). But when it comes to ethnographic situations that pertain to dimensions of life that are deliberately treated as moral or ethical, as they are so programmatically by authors associated with the ethical turn, the danger is indeed that of "moral" or "ethical" ethnocentrism, and that, I would suggest, is tantamount to the danger of inadvertent moralism. Even the very broad quotation I provided from Robbins's manner of framing his anthropology of the good can be used to illustrate the problem. Such a study, Robbins says, explores how people live in the light of "what they think of as good." As we saw, the "what they think of as" part of the phrase is meant to assuage the suspicion that an anthropology of the good would seek to export what *we* (anthropologists) think of as good to the people we

study—that being an overtly and inadmissibly moralizing project *sensu* Fassin. But the term *good* in itself does, of course, carry within it assumptions that are informed by just that, namely what *we* think of as "good" (how could it not?). So avoiding ethnocentrism, in this case, must involve somehow neutralising or otherwise bypassing those assumptions in order to allow what *the people we study* take to be "good" to emerge—including what such a word might even mean. But note the moral qualities that this standard anthropological problem comes to acquire in this case. Unlike the cases of Buddhism and divinity or caste and social stratification, a failure to neutralise our assumptions on this score would land the anthropologist, ipso facto (though, of course, inadvertently), in a moralizing stance because the assumptions at issue here *are moral ones*—they are assumptions, after all, about *what the good is*. Failure to avoid ethnocentrism, in other words, would land us with projecting our own "models of the good" on the people we study, which is exactly what we have defined as the danger of moralism.

Although I cannot review here the diverse and increasingly voluminous literature on the ethical turn, I want roughly and indicatively to use this way of setting up the problem of ethnocentrism in moral anthropology to distinguish three strategies that could be adopted to avoid the moralism to which it can give rise. Each of them turns on the possibility of what I shall call *analytical displacement*, which involves finding different ways to bypass standard assumptions about what morality and ethics look like in order to allow alternative moral possibilities found in different ethnographic situations to be expressed. Mapping these three strategies roughly onto some representative examples from the literature, I want to suggest that the vestiges of moralism one feels when one reads these works can be understood according to the manner and degree to which their strategies of displacement fail. I shall then close by suggesting a fourth strategy, which

I brand as *analytical reversal*, and that I think has the anthropological virtue of being constitutively nonmoralising.

Three Steps Away from Moralism

If moralism, as we have defined it here, consists in (ethnocentrically) reading ethnographic materials through the prism of our own moral and ethical assumptions, then strategies of analytical displacement can be understood as attempts to avoid that by shifting the standpoint from which those materials are viewed. One way of doing this, as I have already suggested, is to replace our standing moral and ethical assumptions with new ones. Sticking with the spatial metaphor, we can think of this as a *sideways* displacement: one set of moral and ethical assumptions is put to the side in order to be replaced by another one that is presumably better suited as a starting point for understanding the moral and ethical dimensions of the ethnographic materials in question.

Perhaps the most prominent example of this approach in the recent debate about ethics in anthropology is the return to the "virtue ethics" of Ancient Greece and Rome. Influenced by Foucault's classically inspired late writings on ethical self-formation as well as the twentieth-century revival in moral philosophy of Aristotelian concepts of virtue (explored particularly by English-speaking philosophers as an alternative to the standard dilemma between Kantian deontology and utilitarianism), a number of anthropologists have in recent years posited classical notions of virtuous conduct as a compelling framework for understanding the moral and ethical stakes of the modes of living in which they are interested ethnographically. As Cheryl Mattingly points out in an astute commentary on these writings (2012), virtue ethics has seemed appealing to anthropologists keen to avoid, on the one hand, simply conflating morality and ethics with all that is social (and particularly the notion, associated with Durkheim, that morality is a matter of

unreflectively following rules; cf. Laidlaw 2002) and, on the other, imagining ethics as the prerogative of autonomous individuals able to stand above their otherwise contingent historical and sociocultural circumstances so as to freely choose their own moral destiny(this being the moral view from nowhere, as Mattingly calls it (2012, 163), that both Kantian categorical imperatives and utilitarian happiness-calculi arguably presuppose). Very much in line also with the practice of ethnographic research, Mattingly suggests, virtue ethics is "in broad sympathy with anthropological critiques of universal reason." According to this view,

> [a] moral decision or action cannot be determined through some universal set of rules, procedures or reasoning processes […] Rather, the moral is always historical, always shaped by social context. […T]he moral in any society is dependent upon the cultivation of virtues that are developed in and through social practices. The moral is centrally bound up with practices of self-care and self-cultivation […] It is an integral and pervasive aspect of social life […] a communal enterprise; there are no persons here who are independent of the practical communities which shape the technologies of virtue and the aspirations about the good life to which individuals ascribe. (Mattingly 2012, 164)

It is clear that this move back to the ancients is not *intended* to be moralizing, as it deliberately avoids investing "the moral" with any particular content, as it would—for example, if it were to recommend some virtues over others. Nevertheless, if the move is partly an attempt to avoid ethnocentrism and particularly the problem of taking for granted the quintessentially modern idea of a rational individual as the universal agent of moral judgement, then it is worth noting that it

does so only by inviting us to adopt as our analytical starting point a set of assumptions about morality that are just as contingent. Virtue ethicists' emphasis on social practice may indeed be more in line with anthropological concerns than more abstracted ideas of reasoning or calculating individuals as free moral agents. But they are no less historically and socioculturally contingent on that and, therefore, no less liable to skew analysis of potentially divergent ethnographic materials—only now in a classical rather than a "modern" direction. Although the image of the self-forming person may have become hegemonic in anthropology due to the influence of Foucault, it is hardly any more neutral as a premise for what—or who—it is to be a moral subject than the image of the reasoning/calculating individual. The dangers of a modern ethnocentrism are swapped for those of a classical one. And because morality is at issue, as per my argument above, the spectre of moralism persists.

A standard strategy for overcoming this kind of problem in anthropology is to add, if you like, a vertical dimension to the analytical displacement by ascending from historically and/or socioculturally particular analytical points of departure to universal ones. In the context of the aforementioned philosophical debates about the definition of morality, we may note in passing that if Kant himself—the arch-universalist of Western philosophy—has been found wanting in this respect, then improving on his attempt to formulate universal criteria for identifying what counts as a "moral judgment"—and, indeed, for exercising it—must surely be a tall order. Be that as it may, it is in principle conceivable that one could transcend the contingencies of particular moral and ethical traditions (be they the ordinary assumptions embedded in our own or any other peoples' moral judgements or behaviour or the more explicit moral frameworks articulated by philosophers, whether modern or Ancient) in order to formulate a framework that would be capacious (that is to say, neutral) enough to allow us to identify and analyse the moral and ethical dimensions of diverse

ethnographic materials without skewing them in one moral direction or another. Sticking with the spatial metaphor, we may call *upward* this venerable strategy of analytical displacement (some would view it as the holy grail of anthropology, others as an ill-advised and, in any case, impossible dream).

On my reading, James Laidlaw's book-long (2014) attempt to formulate an anthropology of ethics centred on the idea of "reflective freedom" (147) is the most compelling example of such an approach. Critically interrogating a vast array of moral philosophers—and not least Foucault, Aristotle, and the Anglo-Saxon virtue ethicists—Laidlaw suggests that a capacity to ""step back" from and evaluate our own thoughts and desires and decide reflectively which desires we wish to have and to move us to action"**<<AU: Should an opening quotation mark be placed somewhere in this sentence to accompany this closing quote mark, or should this be deleted?>>** is "intrinsic to the very idea of ethics" (ibid., 148–149). Much as with classical ideas of virtue and *phronesis*, on which Laidlaw builds, such a conception of freedom is thoroughly compatible with anthropological intuitions about the historical and sociocultural constitution of action. Crediting Foucault with making this most explicit, Laidlaw emphasises that "the forms reflectivity takes, constituted as they are through socially instituted practices and power relations, are historically and culturally various. And therefore various also are the ethical agents so constituted" (2014, 149). Accordingly, a great deal of Laidlaw's book is devoted to dissecting analytically diverse ethnographic treatments of moral and ethical comportment in different parts of the world so as to show that they can be understood as historically and socioculturally variable realizations of people's exercise of reflective freedom, giving rise to equally variable processes of ethical self-constitution.

Laidlaw's synthesis is incisive, leaving one thoroughly persuaded that freedom and reflectivity are indeed at the heart of the dimensions of life one would want to call ethical and that attending to their varied realizations in different ethnographic contexts can serve, as he puts it, to "expand one's moral horizon" through the exercise of "ethnographic imagination" (2014, 216). This is an activity that, as Laidlaw points out at the very end of his book, is itself a "mode of reflective self-formation" (2014, 224) and hence an ethical exercise in its own right. Indeed, for the sake of our argument here, we may accept Laidlaw's thesis that reflective freedom is inherent to all the otherwise varied phenomena we would want to describe as ethical.[v] It follows that reading reflective freedom onto diverse ethnographic materials, as he does, is not ethnocentric because, as we have accepted *ex hypothesi*, such freedom is inherent within them.

Still, from the point of view of our question regarding moralism, I would suggest that a slightly different problem—one that is in a sense equivalent to ethnocentrism—remains. Even if we do accept that freedom is a common denominator of otherwise diverse ethnographic instances of ethical comportment, it would perhaps be uncontroversial to accept that such phenomena would quite naturally include a host of *other* dimensions, some of which may also be relevant to their ethical nature. To avoid having to exercise one's ethnographic imagination too much here, one can simply refer to all the other features in which anthropologists dealing with such materials have at different times and in different contexts been interested: normativity, rule following, virtues, values, judgements, compulsion, social respect, human dignity, good and evil, or what have you. Productive as it may be, bringing phenomena as diverse as these to analytical heel with reference to the idea of freedom necessarily involves presenting them in a particular light. Phenomena, that is, that can be assumed to be "bigger" than *just* the question of freedom are analytically *slanted*,

say (rather than "skewed," which would convey the stronger distortion implied by the charge of ethnocentrism), as varied expressions of human freedom.

But then the moral character of the very concept of freedom renders the approach moralistic in the same sense and for the same reasons I presented in relation to the sideways displacement of the virtue-ethicists: here too ethnographic materials are read through the prism of a particular set of assumptions about what counts as ethical in the first place. And again, because those assumptions—in this case the idea of freedom—are themselves ethical in nature, their adoption lends a particular moral spin to the material in question as well as to its analysis. In fact, I suspect that Laidlaw would have little trouble accepting that his approach is moralising in this admittedly restricted—though, in my view, no less significant—sense. Throughout the book, after all, he is open with his admiration for liberal philosophers and the values of freedom they have propounded, and one suspects he would be happy to acknowledge that his anthropology of ethics and freedom can be read as a distinctively anthropological contribution to lines of thinking originating in the liberal tradition of social and political philosophy.

However one might feel about these commitments, from an anthropological point of view, one cannot help but ask how far the slant towards a particular moral-cum-political direction might amount, after all, to a restriction of the ethnographic imagination (see also Robbins 2007). How far can an anthropology of ethics settled on the question of freedom allow the contingencies of particular ethnographic materials to suggest alternative ways of imagining what might be at stake in moral and ethical conduct? Again, even if we were to agree that all such conduct involves an element of freedom (and the point would hold for any other concept one might choose to put at the heart of one's definition of ethics), we could still wonder whether all the *other* elements involved in any given ethnographic case could not, in their contingency, suggest alternative ways of

imagining what ethics might be and how it might operate. Indeed, the point can be generalized. Whether one seeks to displace one's initial moral/ethical intuitions sideways or upwards, as we have seen, the problem is that whatever (new) starting point one chooses will put its own moral/ethical spin on the ethnography. And this is because the new starting point—classical ideas of virtue, liberal ideas of freedom, or whatever other framework one chooses—is itself moral/ethical in character so inevitably ends up colouring in such terms the ethnography on which it is brought to bear and, in this sense, "moralises" it.

This brings us to a third strategy of analytical displacement, which seeks to bypass just this problem by avoiding moral and ethical frameworks altogether as the starting point for the anthropological study of moral and ethical comportment. According to this approach, if the problem of moralism arises because anthropologists assume that to study morality and ethics you must first provide a suitable definition of what might count as such by using moral and/or ethical concepts in particular ways, then the way to avoid moralism must be to frame one's analysis in a manner that avoids moral and ethical concepts altogether. To complete the spatial image, I visualise this manner of displacement as moving *downwards*, inasmuch as the idea is to go underneath moral and ethical concerns to find a deeper level of inquiry at which such phenomena can be framed in terms that are not themselves moral or ethical. (Note that this blurs my metaphor: if the upward displacement was a move towards the universal, one would expect the downward one to drill into the particular. Nevertheless, here I mean downward as "deeper" or "underlying" rather than in some sense more "specific" or "contingent.")

The most steadfast proponent of such an approach in the ethics literature in anthropology is Jarrett Zigon. In a series of publications (e.g., 2014a, 2014b) he has been arguing that, in building their analytical frameworks around ethical concepts such as virtue, freedom, dignity, good and

evil, or right and wrong, anthropologists have willy-nilly tended to foreclose the question of what might constitute morality or ethics in any given ethnographic context. Explicitly distancing himself from neo-Aristotelian and Foucauldian approaches, for example, Zigon argues that reliance on such ethical philosophical frameworks "restricts our research and analysis because it limits what we might recognize as moral experience beforehand" (2014a, 16)—this being the nub of the problem of moralism as I have defined it here. "[T]o counter such a limitation", Zigon continues, "we are best served with a broad and open framework that allows us to discern the diverse and oftentimes wide-ranging moral claims, acts, and dispositions we may find in the world" (2014a.).

To this end, much of Zigon's work has been oriented towards developing an analytical framework built not on ethical concepts such as virtue or freedom but rather on the more primordially ontological dynamics that, according to Zigon, underlie people's diverse moral and ethical comportments. In particular, he draws on such Heideggerian ideas as Dasein, dwelling, and being-in-the-world as well as on Deleuzian conceptions of relation and assemblage to suggest that moral and ethical life is best framed as a matter of what he calls "attunement" to the relational assemblages in which people are necessarily entangled. Such relational entanglements, Zigon suggests, come to constitute a life trajectory with which the subject is by definition concerned and to which s/he is committed in different ways—whether positive, neutral, or negative—thus maintaining a stance Zigon brands as "fidelity." The upshot of this is a distinction between comfort in and anxiety about one's relations: "I am advocating an approach that posits moral ways of being-in-the-world that have as their primary concern dwelling comfortably in a world one has found oneself in and reducing the anxiety one feels when the relations that constitute this world become problematic" (2014a, 27).

Without going into the detail of Zigon's ontologically minded framework, here I want only to draw attention to the strategy he adopts to develop it, which proceeds in three steps. First, in a critical spirit, Zigon points out that each of the available ethical frameworks that anthropologists of morality have adopted is underwritten by particular ontological commitments, pertaining most obviously to the kinds of beings that can be given the role of moral actors. For example, just as deontological approaches presuppose the existence of a law-following rational being and consequentialist ones assume the existence of a calculative one, so Foucauldian approaches are premised on the existence of a "transformative being that is able to enact […] transformation through its own work on and care for the self" (2014a, 20). From this critical observation follows Zigon's second move, which is to suggest that to avoid trapping one's analysis of moral and ethical comportment in the terms of these established moral and ethical frameworks, one must revise the ontological commitments that underpin them. Hence, Heidegger's conception of being-in-the-world is adopted as the deepest touchstone on which an alternative set of ontological commitments could be developed—Da-sein, dwelling, relational being, and other such conceptions being some of the building blocks. And this sets the (ontological) premises for the third and final step, which is to draw out consequences for human comportment that, as Zigon seeks to show, can provide an alternative framework for studying moral and ethical dimensions of life—one that, in Nietzsche's sense, goes "beyond good and evil" (2014a, 25). Attunement, fidelity, comfort, anxiety, and so on become the new terms through which moral and ethical life is anthropologically conceived.

There is something basically attractive about Zigon's revision of moral and ethical intuitions—it reads as nothing short of an alternative ethical theory with an integrity of its own. But from the point of view of our argument here, that's exactly the problem. Although articulating alternative ontological premises for one's understanding of ethical comportment may indeed

provide new ways of appreciating the moral and ethical dimensions of diverse ethnographic materials, it hardly removes the problem of skewing or slanting those materials in very particular ways. To be sure, as Zigon insists, the alternative ontological starting point he articulates, in terms of being-in-the-world, relationality, dwelling and so on, may not be as explicitly moral or ethical in nature as the notions of virtue, freedom, or good and evil that it seeks to displace "downwards" (although it is worth noting that Zigon does not provide a clear criterion for identifying what concepts may or may not be taken to count as moral/ethical—e.g., why exactly are virtue or freedom to be taken as ethical concepts while dwelling or attunement are not?). But the analytical framework that Zigon goes on to elaborate on the basis of these ontological commitments most certainly has a moral/ethical hue of its own. Just as, say, Foucault propounds an image of self-cultivating, caring, and, indeed, free (*sensu* Laidlaw) selves, so Zigon proposes the notion of subjects who care about the relationships into which they are thrown, seek attunement to and, thus, comfort in them, and so on. And this ethics, as he calls it too (2014b), provides the starting point for Zigon's analysis of ethnography just as much as the ethics of virtue or freedom do for others. So, surely, the problem of moralism persists: particular moral and ethical conceptions spin the analysis of otherwise diverse ethnographic materials in a way that, with respect to these basic (albeit novel) analytical-cum-ontological commitments, remains uniform. Ethnography, again, formatted to the analyst's chosen moral and ethical presuppositions or, at least, as per Zigon's downward displacement, to the ontological commitments that undergird them.

An Amoral Volte Face

It may be clear at this point that all three of the strategies of analytical displacement that we have reviewed—sideways, upward, and downward—are basically similar in their structure. To see this,

it is helpful to imagine the problem with which all three of them are designed to deal—namely the problem of ethnocentrism and the risk of moralism that rides on it—as a sort of confrontation between two sides. On the one hand, we have ethnography (and particularly those dimensions of it we would want to thematise as moral or ethical), and on the other, we have the analytical concepts and procedures that the anthropologist brings to bear on it. The problem of ethnocentrism (and moralism), then, consists in the danger of the latter spinning the former in a particular moral or ethical direction. We may note, then, that all three strategies for assuaging this problem involve displacing potentially problematic (viz. moral spin inducing) analytical assumptions by introducing a third player in this confrontation—a mediating one that can diffuse it. Classical ideas of virtue, universal conceptions of freedom, or Heideggerian concerns with dwelling all do the same thing in the structure of these arguments: they provide an analytical starting point that is considered, for different reasons in each case, better equipped to reveal the moral and ethical dimensions of the ethnography.

Still, if none of the three approaches fully avoids the problem of moralism—the problem of reading particular moral and ethical conceptions onto otherwise diverse and potentially divergent ethnographic materials—that is because of a basic premise they all share: namely, the idea that the analytical decisions as to what might count as "moral" or "ethical" at all, and how these dimensions are to be identified (let alone analysed) in any given ethnographic situation must be made *before* the analytical encounter with the ethnographic materials takes place. The strategy, in other words, is first to build up an analytical framework (drawing centrally, as we have seen, on various moral philosophers—Heidegger, Deleuze, or whomever) and then to "run" it on different ethnographic materials, showing how the framework allows us to get a handle on moral and ethical dimensions inherent within them. Admittedly, as Laidlaw in particular makes clear, the

ethnographic materials, in all of their diversity, can have a reciprocal effect on the analytical framework, expanding or otherwise modifying our understanding of morality and ethics in the process of its ethnographically driven analysis—this being the power of the "ethnographic stance." as Laidlaw calls it (following Bernard Williams), to expand our moral imagination. But note how this way of imagining the reciprocity between analysis and ethnography confirms the basic idea that the former's power resides in its capacity to frame—or, in a Dumontian, hierarchical sense, "encompass" (1980)—the latter. Although the specificities of any given ethnographic situation might serve to expand or otherwise modify the coordinates of our chosen analytical framework, they are by no means meant to exceed or undermine them, let alone contradict or negate them. Reverting to our spatial metaphor, we could say that the basic strategic assumption here is that analysis must move—or even march—*forward*: having decided on one's basic analytical framework, one then goes ahead and *ratifies* it by showing all the ways in which it can shed light on different ethnographic situations, even as those situations invite one to further develop, expand, deepen or otherwise modify the framework itself. Find the best analytical starting point, then go forth and conquer the ethnography with it, and remember: what doesn't break you makes you stronger!

But then we may conclude that the problem of moralism as we have articulated is a direct concomitant of this basic and entirely commonplace assumption about how anthropological analysis must operate. If one assumes that developing an anthropological approach to the study of morality and ethics must involve first deciding on what may count as such, then one effectively builds the danger of moralism into the very infrastructure of the whole endeavour. After all, the problem of moralism always comes down to the tendency in one way or other to make certain basic decisions in advance as to what morality and ethics are going to end up looking like in one's

ethnography (self-formation, freedom, relational comfort, or whatever). But this, it turns out, is merely an endorsement of a particular view of what it is to do anthropological analysis at all.

It follows that at least one way of freeing the anthropology of morality from the problem of moralism would involve imagining an altogether different way of doing anthropological analysis. In particular, it would involve *reversing* the relationship between analysis and ethnography so as to give the latter logical priority over the former (see also Holbraad 2012, 2013; Holbraad and Pedersen 2016). The whole point of anthropological analysis would in this way be turned around: rather than settling on a framework for the analysis of morality and ethics in order then to go on to shed light on diverse ethnographic materials, the idea would be to use the diversity of these materials to *unsettle* the analytical framework in question—which is to say, to be prepared not just to expand or modify it but rather, if and when the ethnographic exigencies so require, to critically alter, negate, and even replace it wholesale. The power of analysis, on this understanding, would reside not in ratifying one's initial point of departure but in articulating the many ways in which it may come up short when exposed to the contingencies of different ethnographic situations. Each of these encounters with ethnographic contingency would have the potential to *produce* a new analytical framework because such frameworks, on this image, are conceived as an *outcome of* rather than a *premise for* analysis. There could therefore be as many analytical frameworks as there are ethnographic encounters with which to challenge any one of them.

The basic reversal of this way of thinking, in short, can be imagined as a way of moving *backwards* from our initial suppositions, being prepared to see the encounter with ethnographic specificities as an occasion to conceive new ways of what morality and ethics might be and how they may operate. The upshot would be an anthropology of morality that, rather than trying to encompass ethnographic diversity within a single set of analytical coordinates, would be prepared

to use this diversity as a lever for multiplying the number of possible moral and ethical frameworks. The contingency of different ethnographic situations, then, could, in principle, be transmuted as a contingency of analytical models of morality and ethics. And this would be a manner of expanding the moral imagination in the most open way possible, rendering inherently unstable the very ideas of the moral and the ethical in the process. Moralism, on this account, could scarcely get off the ground, for the question of what "the moral" or "the ethical" might even be would be left deliberately open and ready to be answered in different and potentially unforeseeable ways according to the ethnographic circumstances and their diverse analytical exigencies.

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address fully in my revisions. Writing has been possible thanks to an ERC Consolidator grant (ERC-2013-CoG, 617970, CARP) for a project on revolutionary personhood.

[ii] One senses that Robbins could have just as well called it an antidote, and this is what Veena Das and colleagues [STET: it was Das – not sure what colleagues are being referred to here or why this is added], in a recent riposte (2015), takes him to have meant.

[iii] To be sure, the charge of moralism in such a case may be considerably weaker and also somewhat mischievous, as part of the sting of calling someone moralistic is that the charge pertains to his or her intentions. So if inadvertent moralism is moralism despite one's intentions, the charge admittedly has something unfair about it. Still, one can feel that someone is moralising even when s/he does not mean to be.

[iv] The term ethnocentrism is itself far from unproblematic, though I use it here to tag a set of problems immediately familiar to anthropologists, however they may feel about the best way to conceptualize them.

[v] Still, we may fairly wonder to what degree and under what conditions this claim could be falsified: Would Laidlaw entertain the possibility of an ethnographic instance that *both* counted as an example of ethical comportment *and* was shown, nevertheless, not to involve the exercise of reflective freedom, or would such a lack of freedom be enough to rule it out as an example of ethical comportment by fiat?