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PERSPECTIVAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE METHOD OF CONTROLLED EQUIVOCATION

[1] Tropical Americanism has proven to be one of the most dynamic and creative areas of contemporary anthropology, exerting a growing influence on the wider conceptual agenda. Yet despite this flourishing, and although the fundamental work of Lévi-Strauss—within which Amerindian thought is given pride of place—has already been in circulation for more than half a century, the radical originality of the contribution of the continent’s peoples to humanity’s intellectual heritage has yet to be fully absorbed by anthropology. More particularly, some of the implications of this contribution for anthropological theory itself are still waiting to be drawn. This is what I intend to begin to do here by suggesting some further thoughts on Amerindian perspectivism, a theme with which I have been occupied (or perhaps obsessed) over the last few years.

[...]

PERSPECTIVISM

[2] I use “perspectivism” as a label for a set of ideas and practices found throughout indigenous America and to which I shall refer, for simplicity’s sake, as though it were a cosmology. This cosmology imagines a universe peopled by different types of subjective agencies, human as well as nonhuman, each endowed with the same generic type of soul, that is, the same set of cognitive and volitional capacities. The possession of a similar soul implies the possession of similar concepts, which determine that all subjects see things in the same way. In particular, individuals of the same species see each other (and each other only) as humans see themselves, that is, as beings endowed with human figure and habits, seeing their bodily and behavioral aspects in the form of human culture. What changes when passing from one species of subject to another is the “objective correlative,” the referent of these concepts: what jaguars see as “manioc beer” (the proper drink of people, jaguar-type or otherwise), humans see as “blood.” Where we see a muddy salt-lick on a river bank, tapirs see their big ceremonial house, and so on. Such difference of perspective—not a plurality of views of a single world, but a single view of different worlds—cannot derive from the soul, since the latter is the common original ground of being. Rather, such difference is located in the bodily differences between species, for the body and its affections (in Spinoza’s sense, the body’s capacities to affect and be affected by other bodies) is the site and instrument of ontological differentiation and referential disjunction.

[3] Hence, where our modern, anthropological multiculturalist ontology is founded on the mutual implication of the unity of nature and the plurality of cultures, the Amerindian conception would suppose a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity—or, in other words, one “culture,” multiple “natures.” In this sense, perspectivism is not relativism as we know it—a subjective or cultural relativism—but an objective or natural relativism—a multinaturalism. Cultural relativism imagines a diversity of subjective and partial representations (cultures) referring to an objective and universal nature, exterior to representation. Amerindians, on the other hand, propose a representative or phenomenological unity that is purely pronominal in kind applied to a real radical diversity. (Any species of subject perceives itself and its world in the same way we perceive ourselves and our world. “Culture” is what one sees of oneself when one says “I.”)

[4] The problem for indigenous perspectivism is not therefore one of discovering the common referent (say, the planet Venus) to two different representations (say, “Morning Star” and “Evening Star”). On the contrary, it is one of making explicit the equivocation implied in imagining that when the jaguar says

“manioc beer” he is referring to the same thing as us (i.e., a tasty, nutritious and heady brew). In other words, perspectivism supposes a constant epistemology and variable ontologies, the same representations and other objects, a single meaning and multiple referents. Therefore, the aim of perspectivist translation—translation being one of shamanism’s principal tasks, as we know (Carneiro da Cunha 1998)—is not that of finding a “synonym” (a co-referential representation) in our human conceptual language for the representations that other species of subject use to speak about one and the same thing. Rather, the aim is to avoid losing sight of the difference concealed within equivocal “homonyms” between our language and that of other species, since we and they are never talking about the same things.

[5] This idea may at first sound slightly counterintuitive, for when we start thinking about it, it seems to collapse into its opposite. Here is how Gerald Weiss, for instance, described the Campa world:

It is a world of relative semblances, where different kinds of beings see the same things differently; thus human eyes can normally see good spirits only in the form of lightning flashes or birds whereas they see themselves in their true human form, and similarly in the eyes of jaguars human beings look like peccaries to be hunted (1972:170).

Now, the manner in which Weiss “sees things” is not an error but is more precisely an equivocation. The fact that different kinds of beings see the same things differently is but a *consequence* of the fact that different kinds of beings see different things in the same way. The phantasm of the thing-in-itself haunts Weiss’s formulation, which actually expresses an inversion of the problem posed by perspectivism—a typically anthropological inversion.

[6] Perspectivism includes a theory of its own description by anthropology—since it is an anthropology. Amerindian ontologies are inherently comparative: they presuppose a comparison between the ways different kinds of bodies “naturally” experience the world as an affectual multiplicity. They are, thus, a kind of inverted anthropology, for the latter proceeds by way of an explicit comparison between the ways different types of mentality “culturally” represent the world, seen as the unitary origin or virtual focus of its different conceptual versions. Hence, a culturalist (anthropological) account of perspectivism necessarily implies the negation or delegitimization of its object, its “retroprojection” (Latour 1996) as a primitive and fetishized kind of anthropological reasoning.

[...]

RESPONDA DE ACORDO COM O TEXTO. AS RESPOSTAS DEVEM SER EM PORTUGUÊS.

1) **Considere o parágrafo [1].** O autor apresenta o principal objetivo deste artigo. Qual é esse objetivo e como ele pretende alcançá-lo? (2,0)

O principal objetivo é traçar as principais [implicações das] contribuições dos povos ameríndios para a teoria antropológica. Ele pretende alcançar esse objetivo sugerindo pensamentos mais profundos a respeito do perspectivismo ameríndio.

2) **Considere o parágrafo [2].** O autor explica o perspectivismo como uma cosmologia, que imagina o universo habitado por humanos e não-humanos dotados de um mesmo tipo genérico de alma. Quais as implicações dessa noção cosmológica? Ilustre sua resposta com um exemplo retirado do texto. (2,5)

Por possuírem uma alma semelhante, os seres possuem conceitos semelhantes, o que significa que todos os sujeitos enxergam as coisas da mesma maneira.

Exemplos podem variar:

- Seres não-humanos se enxergam como dotados de figura e hábitos humanos;
- O que um humano enxerga como sangue, um jaguar pode enxergar como uma bebida;
- O que um humano enxerga como lamaçal na beira de um rio, uma anta pode enxergar como um lugar de cerimônia.

3) **Considere o parágrafo [4].** Qual o objetivo principal da tradução sob a ótica do perspectivismo? (1,5)

O objetivo é evitar perder de vista as diferenças ocultas nos “homônimos” incertos entre a nossa língua e as de outras espécies, já que nunca estão tratando das mesmas coisas.

4) Considere o parágrafo [5]. O autor, partindo de um conceito perspectivista, considera equivocada a visão que Weiss tem a respeito do mundo dos Campa. Qual a principal diferença entre a visão de Weiss e a visão perspectivista? (2,0)

Enquanto Weiss afirma que os diferentes seres veem as mesmas coisas de maneiras diferentes, a visão perspectivista diz que os diferentes seres veem coisas diferentes de maneira semelhante.

5) Considere o parágrafo [6]. Qual a razão pela qual as ontologias ameríndias são consideradas um tipo de antropologia invertida? (2,0)

Elas pressupõem uma comparação de modos de se experimentar o mundo, fazendo uma comparação explícita entre os modos pelos quais os diferentes tipos de mentalidade representam culturalmente o mundo.