On Aspects of the Status Quaestionis

I began my own scholarly endeavours from a concern to test the validity of some common ideas about the great differences, between different human groups or populations, in the ways in which they reason and make sense of the, or rather their, world. I shall have some remarks to make later on the issue of whether or in what way there is just one world to come to terms with, where I endeavour to clarify what is at stake in the postulate of multiple worlds by invoking the notion of what I call the multidimensionality of the phenomena and exploring the diversity of the possible aims of inquiry that this allows. Lévy-Bruhl (e.g. 1923) had suggested that we should distinguish between quite distinct mentalities, most strikingly between what he called a primitive mentality and a civilised one, the first governed by or obeying a different logic, a logic of participation, distinct from the logic we are generally familiar with.[1] The logic of participation did not, for example, recognise the law of non-contradiction. Lévy-Bruhl's thesis attracted a lot of criticism from the outset and towards the end of his life, in the *Carnets* (1975 [1949]) he himself came to renounce the idea that primitive thought exhibited a pre-logical or irrational mentality. But he never abandoned the concept of mentalities itself.

I devoted much of *Polarity and Analogy* (1966) to a critique of Lévy-Bruhl and I returned to him when I wrote the polemical pamphlet debunking the whole idea of mentalities in the book called *Demystifying Mentalities* (1990). My first objection was that to arrive at a diagnosis of a distinctive mentality in an individual or a group involved massive generalisations and oversimplifications. The idea that some of its proponents were prepared to countenance (Le Goff 1974), namely that a single individual might manifest distinct mentalities, is positively chimerical. But

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[1] In anglophone scholarship the demarcation between science, religion and magic was a recurrent preoccupation of Frazer (1890), Malinowski (1925) and Evans-Pritchard (1937) continuing down to Tambiah (1990). However, with the notable exception of Whitehead (1926), that problem was not generally associated with a postulate of distinct mentalities.

more fundamentally talk of a particular mentality was, at best, a way (and not a very good one) of identifying what needed explaining, and could then be no part of any explanation, since the mentality postulated itself had to be accounted for.

But seeing off any solution by way of the notion of mentalities (as I hoped) still left open the question of whether there are essential differences in the ways in which different people think. There are of course obvious ways in which the thoughts they have, their perceptions and explanations of experience, their conceptions of their place in the world, and of the differences between humans and other beings, all differ. But if the contents of thoughts clearly differ, that does not show that the ways in which we reason themselves do, let alone that the faculty of reason itself varies across humankind. So in *Cognitive Variations* (2007), and again in *The Ambivalences of Rationality* (2018) I explored how it is possible to combine the intuition of the psychic unity of humans with a recognition of the great actual diversity in our thoughts, beliefs and behaviour.

I tackled the hypothesis that there is a major difference, a Great Divide, between different human populations most directly in a book that was written between those two, *The Ideals of Inquiry* (2014). As already noted, this had been a major theme in Lévy-Bruhl, but with or without the notion of mentalities, the Great Divide idea was taken up by many anthropologists and historians of science, in the latter case especially among those who focussed on the so-called scientific revolution. Some postulated a contrast between Wild and Domesticated thought, others one between concrete and abstract, or cold and hot, modes of thought (as in Lévi-Strauss 1966 [1962]). Jack Goody, who was wary of talk of a Great Divide, nevertheless distinguished between different levels and stages of the 'Domestication of the Savage Mind' and had, moreover, an account to give of the transitions between them (Goody 1977). His principal argument was that it was increasing literacy (especially that based on an alphabetic script) that made the key difference, for once texts were readily available, they allowed for 'ruminative reflection', which in turn stimulated criticism and scepticism to develop.

Yet the two major problems with Goody's thesis that I was far from the only person to pinpoint were these. First we should not underestimate the extent to which critical and sceptical opinions are held and expressed even in basically non-literate societies (Lloyd 1979: 18–19). Secondly the existence of written texts could, on occasion, be a factor inhibiting, rather than stimulating, criticism, when, that is, those texts acquire the status of

authoritative canons or even as the sacred repositories of revealed truth (Parry 1985).

   In much of my own work I have shone a critical spotlight on the legacy of ancient Greek thought, so often the origin of key concepts that have played a fundamental role in the debates I have been talking about. Three especially potent ideas that continue to have enormous influence are the concept of nature, the contrast between the literal and the metaphorical and the pursuit of incontrovertibility in demonstration. I shall rehearse the key issues concerning the first two here and come back to discuss the third in Chapter 3. In relation to the first two, then, let me explain briefly how I came to be critical of that influence and where the rejection of those concepts leaves me in relation to the problems they were used to tackle. What, in other words, do I offer to replace them or at least to reformulate those problems?

   Both 'nature' and 'metaphor' have histories that start in ancient Greece. Initially the ancient Greeks themselves had no overarching concept of nature, but that was introduced by philosophers and medical writers in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE to identify a domain of inquiry over which they purported to be the experts. There was no need, they argued, to appeal to gods, divinities, *daimones*, to explain striking or even ordinary phenomena, from earthquakes and lightning and thunder to diseases. All those phenomena had natural causes. The actual explanations that were put forward by the *phusikoi* or *phusiologoi* ('naturalists'), as they were known, were often wildly speculative. This was true especially in the medical context, where the medical writers were often all at sea, and certainly in disagreement with one another, in trying to identify the causes of diseases. Yet the fundamental point was the *claim* that the 'sacred disease', as it was called, for example, was not 'sacred' (or rather no more sacred than any other) but had its nature, *phusis*, and its cause. According to one view in the fifth-century BCE Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease* it was phlegm blocking the vessels in the brain that caused the disease. Indeed the claim in that work was that it, like every other disease, could be cured, by making adjustments to regimen (diet and exercise), provided the condition was caught early enough. One might say that this alternative set of ideas involved almost as much pure guesswork as the identification of the work of different supernatural beings – though to be sure the speculations now took a different form, in terms of 'natural' causes.

   This certainly marked a major shift in the attitudes some took towards certain phenomena, but from the outset the concept of nature was fraught with difficulties. To start with it was not just a descriptive concept but

a normative one. Nature identified not just how things are, but how they should be. Although Aristotle recognised that humans do not always live in communities that have much in common with Greek city-states or *poleis*, he nevertheless claimed that humans are by nature, *phusei*, political, that is social, animals. Secondly, there was a major controversy over how to interpret the contrast between *phusis* and its principal antonym, *nomos*, law, custom, convention. Were issues of right and wrong matters simply of convention? Did they have an objective, natural, basis? The answers given to this fundamental question were many and varied and in the process the contrast between Nature and Culture themselves came to be construed differently.

I focus on the ancient Greek materials since they throw light on the contexts in which the controversies arose and the manner of the debates that they gave rise to. But that focus needs some justification or explanation. Our continued modern use of the concept of nature, not just in what we call the natural sciences, but also in the contrasts between nature and nurture, and nature and convention, might tempt one to see its invention by the Greeks as a major breakthrough, even the triumph of Greek rationality, an item that could justify talk of some Greek 'miracle'. Such a reaction would be disastrously wrong in this case, and as I shall show in Chapter 3, in others also.

Now it is the case that other ancient civilisations and most of the living indigenous peoples studied by anthropologists do not have an explicit notion of 'nature' that corresponds to Greek *phusis* or our 'nature'. That does not mean of course that they do not recognise the regularities in physical phenomena, but even if regularities may be a necessary condition for nature, they are not a sufficient one, since many regularities belong to the domain of the social or cultural. But lacking an explicit concept of nature, so far from being a symptom of primitiveness, carried certain advantages, if we recall the ambiguities, ambivalences and possible confusions that go with invoking such a concept. Without such a concept there was less temptation to run together quite different problems and issues relating to different aspects of lived experience.

So the reaction I have to my own historical analyses of where the concept came from is not to congratulate the ancient Greeks on a breakthrough, but to take seriously the question of how different societies got on without any such explicit notion. The ancient Chinese provide much evidence on the point. They did not have any such single overarching concept. But as I documented in Lloyd 1996a, they have plenty of ideas about the order of the cosmos, about the place of humans in it, including about what makes

humans human, about the processes at work in the cycle of the seasons, about what happens spontaneously, without human intervention and so 'naturally' in that sense, and on many other matters. The Chinese usual focus on processes contrasts with the dominant Greek concentration on stable substances, although as we shall see later (Chapter 8 at note 3) there are plenty of exceptions to that Greek rule. But it is not a case of deciding between those two competing ontologies, a process-based and a substance-based one, but rather of appreciating what can be said in favour of each. Modern physics indeed, one might say, faces many analogous problems in the need to reconcile the discrete and the continuous, in other contexts the digital and the analogue.

Similarly in the case of the extraordinary variety of beliefs and practices revealed by modern ethnography we have no need to frame our inquiry in terms of how the peoples in question viewed 'nature' on the one hand, 'culture' on the other. Indeed we would be better off not doing so, as a group of anthropologists has been arguing with some force for some time now. Drawing on her fieldwork in Papua New Guinea Marilyn Strathern for one wrote a pioneering article entitled 'No Nature, no Culture: the Hagen case' way back in 1980. Descola's magnum opus (2013 [2005]) had as its title *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Viveiros de Castro (1998) has contrasted the assumption of a combination of mononaturalism with multiculturalism (which he associates with modernity) with the reverse, a combination of multinaturalism and monoculturalism – which is the operative assumption in indigenous perspectivism (cf. also Viveiros de Castro 2004, 2014, 2015).

To be sure, liberating oneself from a preoccupation with the nature/culture binary is both difficult and disconcerting (Wagner 2016). Even among some of the critics of the binary whom I have just mentioned there is something of a residual tendency to continue to employ the conceptual framework it implies even in the process of deconstructing it. That may be all but inevitable, given that in the West at least we are all now to some extent the heirs of the ancient Greek legacy. Yet being critical of that legacy seems a necessary first step in doing justice to the enormous variety in humans' ways of being in the world. True, that raises the thorny issue I mentioned before of whether it is the same world that all humans inhabit, where some clarifications are needed, not least because of the variety of ways in which possibly divergent 'ontologies' have been discussed, especially recently in anthropology (e.g. Severi 2013, Salmond 2014, Pina-Cabral 2017, Holbraad and Pedersen 2017, Laidlaw 2017). So a short digression is in order to clear the air.

In the original acceptance of the term an 'ontology' is an account of what there is, the *onta* as the Greeks put it. But such accounts vary not just in content: they come in very different forms. Some are equipped with fully developed philosophical arguments and a carefully elaborated epistemology, as when in the fifth century BCE Parmenides for instance supported his view that Being is Unchanging with a series of arguments and a rejection of any reliance on perception or ordinary experience. Others are packages of mainly implicit assumptions. Often it is the interpreter, the anthropologist or the historian, who is responsible for describing what is involved, which may be a matter not so much of the theories of the people studied or the explanations they offer, as one of their practices, their engagement with one another and with their environment, their values, anything that contributes to their way of being in the – their – world.

When we use the term 'world' to cover everything in the universe, then by definition there is not a plurality of such, even though that leaves open what that term 'everything' itself comprises. But that should not lead us to suppose that reality constitutes just a single problem to which there is but one correct solution. Most ancient Chinese inhabited a world of processes, many ancient Greeks one of substances, as we said. In that sense we should recognise that the worlds in question themselves differ. In that case and in many others it is not a matter of attempting to adjudicate between rival accounts as if they were all directed at the same phenomena. Rather, we should acknowledge the diversity in the phenomena targeted and in that sense the divergences in the worlds that constitute the explananda, in other words what I call the multidimensionality of reality (e.g. Lloyd 2012).

But if we go that far to acknowledge multiplicity, the question that immediately arises is how far it is possible to make sense of that variety, where 'making sense' does not mean judging which is correct as if there was a unique solution to a, the, problem, but rather first of all appreciating that the problems themselves may differ. This raises a new complex of issues about understanding *across* conceptual schemata that will eventually lead me back to my second main item from the Greek legacy, namely metaphor. The notion that different systems of belief are incommensurable surfaces, once again, in both social anthropology and history of science. When we encounter the radically other or some major shift in scientific paradigms how can we begin to understand them? If we use our modern categories is that not bound to distort them? Yet how can we fail to use those categories, since they are the only ones we have?

The way out of that dilemma is to insist that although we clearly have to start with the conceptual apparatus we have, that is not set in stone, but

eminently revisable, not least in the light of what we learn as we study what is radically other. To claim that two scientific paradigms are incommensurable is to highlight the differences in the concepts at work in each and to emphasise that there is no totally neutral vocabulary in which they can be discussed. But that does not mean that we cannot make sense of each. Kuhn, after all, the arch incommensurabilist, did a pretty good job of interpreting both Ptolemy and Copernicus, both Aristotle and Galileo, both Newton and Einstein. Incommensurability so far from precluding comparison may even be said to presuppose comparability.

Similarly when faced with the unfamiliar statements and practices that took centre stage in the debates concerning 'apparently irrational beliefs' in the sixties and seventies, we should not conclude that we can, strictly speaking, understand nothing of what is going on – at least not before we have pursued every avenue in attempting to do so. What we call 'magic' poses a particular problem, to be sure, but once again some consideration of its origins can provide some help (Mauss 1972 [1904]). Once again the ancient Greeks were primarily responsible, particularly those naturalists I mentioned before who dismissed the magical practices of the 'purifiers' whom they attacked as superstition (their term for that is *deisidaimonia*). We cannot now reconstruct what those purifiers might have said in their own defence, but we can see that one of the assumptions the naturalists made may be open to question. Do magical rituals always aim to be causally effective? Sometimes no doubt they do. But as Tambiah (1968, 1973) for one insisted, sometimes the goal is not efficacy but appropriateness or felicity.

My favourite example to illustrate the point uses a custom or ritual from our own culture. When in a Christian wedding ceremony the bride and groom are showered with confetti (as used to be de rigueur) there may be many participants who would deny that they do this in order to ensure the pair's fertility (which may have been at the origin of the practice, when rice rather than confetti was thrown). The confetti-throwing is not imagined as furthering such a result. Nevertheless the feeling may be that without the confetti the wedding is somehow not a proper wedding. The goal is felicity, then, not efficacy. The extent to which similar considerations help to explain other practices labelled magical is, of course, an open question. But the example serves to undermine the old idea according to which magic is botched science or rather botched technology, aiming to produce concrete effects but failing to do so.

This leads us to the problem of the indeterminacy of sense and reference which Quine (1960: 29ff.) made much of when he fantasised about an

anthropologist in the field confronted by a native who says 'gavagai' when a rabbit scurries by, whereupon the 'linguist notes down the sentence "Rabbit" (or, "Lo, a rabbit") as tentative translation, subject to testing in further cases'. Quine was no doubt right to point out that equating 'gavagai' with 'rabbit' is not necessarily correct and to emphasise the difficulty of verifying what exactly that term meant. 'Gavagai' might be a word not for the animal, but for its appearance or way of behaving: and indeed it might have nothing to do with 'rabbits' at all. Yet in his initial presentation Quine has stripped the encounter of the anthropologist and the native of all the context that we would normally draw on to make sense of their exchange. Concentrating in his thought experiment on just the one isolated exclamation, he leaves us at a loss to resolve the puzzle. But of course neither anthropologists in the field nor modern commentators sitting in their studies are limited to isolated statements. We learn a foreign language by slowly building up a competence in its use. We learn our own first mother tongue in the same way. We make mistakes, to be sure, but with or without help from others we can often correct them.

These jejune remarks serve to remind us of how we acquire some skill in using a language or several and in understanding others, but they are not meant to resolve the many tricky problems we face. But they are intended as an antidote to a premature despair about the very possibility of *any* understanding.

No well-trained anthropologist is likely to find it very difficult to work out the native terms for the main flora and fauna in their environment. It is not identifying leopards, that is matching the creature with the local name, that is the big problem. Rather it is when the Dorze, for example, are reported as holding that the leopard is a Christian animal, that the problems of interpretation get to be severe (Sperber 1985, 1996). That was a prime example in the controversy over 'apparently irrational beliefs' that I mentioned, where the battle lines were drawn up between those who claimed that such statements were not intended literally, but only symbolically or metaphorically, and those on the other side who insisted that that was not the case, that they were intended literally and in all seriousness as statements of fact (cf. e.g. Wilson 1970, Horton and Finnegan 1973, Skorupski 1976, Hollis and Lukes 1982).

Yet that dispute in interpretation depended on the applicability of yet another binary that stems from the ancient Greeks. There was plenty of discussion of the use of images and analogies before Aristotle, notably in Plato, but it was Aristotle himself who first defined metaphor as the transferred use of a term. The contrast was with the strict, literal, *kurios*,

use of terms. Metaphor was to be banned from proper scientific discourse since it destroyed the transitivity of entailment and therefore ruined the demonstrations that such a discourse should aim for. Yet in practice his own study of animals, we should say, is steeped in the use not just of analogies but also of what he would have had to call metaphors, as indeed was his own theoretical discussion of the nature of metaphor in the *Rhetoric*, as I showed in *Aristotelian Explorations* (1996b). My own way of drawing the teeth of the contrast between the literal and metaphorical is not to say that metaphor is everywhere, for that still runs the risk of being taken to imply deviance, but rather to point out that every term is capable of what I call semantic stretch. Meaning is not a matter of a central strict sense cordoned off from figurative ones: the notion of semantic stretch implies rather a spectrum along which no firm boundary, indeed no boundary, is to be marked between proper and derivative uses. The search for a vocabulary that is immune to that is once again a chimera, not just in poetry, but in philosophy and science.

If we pay due attention to the polemical context in which this concept of the metaphorical was developed in ancient Greece, we have to be wary of assuming that every society at every period will have such a concept as part of the terminology used to distinguish different speech acts. In practice the Chinese recognise comparison as a mode of discourse and often pay attention to the pragmatics of communicative exchanges, the positions and perspectives of those doing the communicating. Yet in classical Chinese there is no equivalent to the notion of metaphor as such and correspondingly no attempt to purge language of such uses deemed to be deviant (Lloyd 2003a). Similarly the ethnographic record throws up plenty of examples where different modes of discourse, tales of past times, old people's tales, fables, even what we sometimes somewhat unguardedly label 'myths', are distinguished from ordinary mundane speech, but again not in a bid to downgrade the status of the former. That will be the subject of Chapter 7.

This implies that it may be quite inappropriate to apply the literal/metaphorical dichotomy to the interpretation of the reported statement that the leopard is a Christian animal. The tactic we have to use, faced with that assertion, is no different from what we have to do in some cases in our own culture. That God is one but also that He is three is an article of faith maintained by devout Christians, many of them highly educated, many practising scientists including quite a few anthropologists, who otherwise share most of the beliefs, practices and values of the non-Christians in the society they all live in together. We may or may not succeed in

understanding the Christians' position, but evidently the first step is to take into account the whole background to their adherence to a religion as well as the pragmatics of the situation in which it is practised and faith in it proclaimed, and of course those background factors are liable to exhibit a quite bewildering diversity. In both the Dorze case and the modern industrialised Christian one there are likely to be plenty of puzzles that remain, both as to the causes and the consequences of beliefs. As to the latter, where the Dorze are concerned it is surely relevant to note that they are themselves devout Christians and so are treating leopards as their co-religionists. The issue for them may be less a matter of animal taxonomy than of human–animal sociality, though to be sure even Sperber himself admits that he remains baffled by some of his Dorze encounters (Sperber 1985: ch. 2). More importantly a simple diagnosis, indeed an accusation, of illogicality or of error will not advance our understanding.

I pointed to the assumption of the psychic unity of humankind. But let me return to what we should say in relation to the divergences we have nevertheless to recognise. One of the developments for which we have good historical evidence from ancient Greece relates to the degree of explicitness with which certain linguistic moves or categories are made. This is not a matter of an invention of a new logic as when modern logicians engage in such exercises (e.g. Priest and Routley 1989), rather one of making explicit the rules that govern valid inference and that had been observed (or not) all along. Plato and Aristotle (again) were the first to identify and define the law of non-contradiction. But that did not mean, to be sure, the end of the making of self-contradictory statements. What it did mean was that, armed with that category, breaches in the law could be identified *as such*. The persons who were accused of such had to defend themselves either by showing that their statements did not in fact break the rule or that such a rule did not apply. The latter option was one that later came to be exploited by the Christian apologist Tertullian, who famously said: 'the Son of God is dead; this must be believed because it is absurd' and again 'having been buried He rose again: this is certain because it is impossible' (*On the Flesh of Christ* ch. 5). Yet obviously to make a virtue out of breaching the rules of discourse has a high price to pay among those who normally abide by them.

The implication of the development of formal logic is, then, not that argument was saved from error. Rather it enabled certain types of error to be diagnosed. The categories that were invoked were in fact potent weapons in the attempt to win debates and persuade opponents they were mistaken – not that all those opponents accepted that the use of such

weapons was legitimate. That in turn leaves us with a very different conclusion from that drawn by those who postulated a pre-logical mentality. The difference that Aristotle and later formal logicians made was a matter of making available certain linguistic categories that enabled second-order reflections on discourse to be made. 'Pre-logical', if we continue to use that term, does not denote the absence of logicality, only the absence of an explicit vocabulary to discuss it.

On this view the differences between the reasonings undertaken by different groups or populations are mostly far more modest than those at issue in the anthropologists' discussion of divergent ontologies. What is at stake in the regimes described as animism or totemism (cf. below, Chapter 4 at note 1) or in Viveiros de Castro's examination of perspectivism is, for sure, far more than a matter of the logicality of the regimes or the degree of explicitness with which the indigenous actors themselves recognise their character. Obviously the organisation of social relations, the relationship to the environment, the sense of the similarities and differences within human beings and between humans and other animals, the fundamental values to which the society adheres, are all implicated. Each poses its characteristic difficulties, each calls for a profound immersion in how the society functions. But if and when we can achieve that, we gain access to marvellous riches in the variety of experience and in patterns of engagement, where we can be led to interrogate not just what is understood but also the nature of the understanding aimed at – and that includes the question of whether indeed it is understanding that is the principal goal, rather than, say, appropriate behaviour, the issue of felicity again.

That certain appeals to some of our own familiar concepts are not helpful is clear. I have given illustrations enough of the dangers of bringing to bear the binaries that we have inherited in the main from the ancient Greeks. That includes in the first instance nature and culture themselves, but also the literal and the metaphorical, being and becoming, reality and appearance, mind and body, subject and object. All those dichotomies have to be examined critically and which aspects of them must be rejected, which can be accepted with modification in particular contexts, will vary. But certainly any sweeping appeal to a master binary, rational and irrational, is likely to prove hopelessly misleading (cf. Lloyd 2018).

One very straightforward way by which we can reassure ourselves of the commonalities across all human societies at all times is to reflect on the use of language, where humans are able to articulate what they communicate far more effectively than other species of animals. Unfortunately the differences between human languages have sometimes been invoked to account for the

views and values of those who use any given language, as if the latter were determined by the language in question (cf. below, Chapter 4). That thesis runs into fundamental difficulties, not least in that it fails to account for the manifest differences in the views and values that are expressed by different individuals all of whom use the *same* natural language. That notably applies both to ancient Greek and to ancient Chinese and of course to English, French, German or modern Mandarin.

But I had in mind a different feature of language use, one that is much more obvious but very much underutilised in the debate about psychic unity. All languages proceed by implicitly and sometimes explicitly recognising certain similarities and certain differences between things. But those similarities and differences take different forms. On the side of similarity at one extreme there is identity, in the middle of the spectrum various grades of similarity, in species, in genus, and by analogy, as Aristotle said, and at the limit we are dealing with a similarity that is postulated not found. Equally differences span contradictories, contraries and various grades of opposition.

Now which similarities and differences will be deemed to be important will vary and so too, as we said, will the extent to which an explicit vocabulary to discuss this is available. Yet the fact that all humans are in business using similarity and differences to make sense of experience is a point we have in common,[2] a more modest observation than the more pretentious claim that classification is inherent in all human speculations about the world, but analogous to that. We select the ones that are useful in context and normally that will be – we shall claim – no arbitrary matter, though the modes of justification available to us vary, if, indeed, we see such a need to justify. We evidently must be on our guard not to be taken in by superficial or misleading resemblances,[3] but will still depend heavily on those that have stood the test of experience and that in many cases will form the principal matrix used for making sense of that experience.

The similarity in the ways in which humans reason can start from the obvious point that we are all constantly at work making the most of

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[2] The apprehension of the similarities and differences between things is not confined to human animals, for sure. Recognising predators as such, and prey as such, may be considered a fundamental cognitive tool for survival. But once a concept is made explicit, in language, its boundaries can become the topic of reflection, criticism and revision.

[3] We have powerful statements in both Greek and Chinese writers of the dangers of being taken in by what Plato calls the slippery tribe of likenesses (*Sophist* 231a) and by what the third-century BCE Chinese compendium, the *Lüshi chunqiu*, describes as 'spurious resemblances' (Book 22 ch. 3: *Yi si*). The tension between the inevitability, but also the danger, of relying on similarities is the leitmotiv of Lloyd 2015.

similarities and differences.[4] That does not take us very far, but it may serve as a more solid starting point than those that depend to a greater or lesser extent on categories that exhibit an all too obvious contingent origin in ancient Greek thought. One of the differences in human reasoning we can observe consists in the availability of linguistic categories that facilitate self-conscious second-order reflections on the modes of reasoning themselves. We all reason, make inferences, attempt to prove and persuade – as Aristotle already observed.[5] But the sophistication with which we do so reflects the mental effort expended in that self-reflexivity, efforts, it must be said, that do not always produce uniformly beneficial results. We should surely continue to endeavour to the best of our abilities to make sense of the unfamiliar moves for which there is evidence both in anthropology and in ancient as well as not so ancient history. The challenge remains, and one of the difficulties that ancient history in particular enables us to pinpoint is the still unfinished task of unmasking the legacy of Greek thought (cf. below, Chapter 3).

So where, I must ask, have we got to today, or what lessons do these reflections on past endeavours prompt concerning our agenda and the best way to tackle it? Over and over again, like many other scholars, I have been forced to query deep-seated assumptions that I made at the outset both about what is there to be understood and the very nature of understanding and inquiry themselves. The ancient Greeks discovered nature, I once wrote (Lloyd 1970: 8), until I came to see that it is more correct to say that they invented it. The dichotomy between Nature and Culture, so far from being valid universally, is the contingent outcome of a particular historical situation which pitted competing intellectual leaders or what Detienne (1996 [1967]) called 'Masters of Truth' against one another. So far from providing a reliable framework within which to classify and encompass the great variety of human endeavours to make sense of experience, that dichotomy is liable to distort our efforts at interpretation and comprehension. 'No Nature, no Culture' means we start again to explore the different ways in which humans have related to the

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[4] This has sometimes been discussed as a matter of the metaphors we 'live by' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: cf. Fauconnier and Turner 2002 on 'conceptual blending'), though I have already expressed my reservations about appeals to the vocabulary of 'metaphors'.

[5] At *Rhetoric* 1354a4–6 he remarks that 'everyone tries to some degree to examine and uphold an argument, to defend themselves and to accuse'. By 'everyone' he means his fellow Greeks in the first instance, but the point has general, if not universal, validity, even while we must agree that the degree of argumentativeness exhibited by different individuals and groups differs.

environment, to one another, to other living beings, to other entities to which or to whom intentionality can be ascribed.

When we turn from what is there to be understood to ways of talking about it and understanding it, that other dichotomy that stems from the ancient Greeks, the contrast between the literal and the metaphorical, is not only difficult to apply in practice, but carries, as I said, the major risk of a too easy dismissal of whatever fails to pass the test of strict univocity. Substituting an analysis in terms of semantic stretch opens up all sorts of possibilities for doing justice to the recognition of similarities and differences. True, the price one has to pay is that of leaving the security of the definitive. But then the search for certainty, for incontrovertibility, has often been an all too seductive mirage.

It is undeniably uncomfortable to insist on not foreclosing other possibilities. But there was too much of that, of such foreclosure, throughout the history of Western thought from the ancient Greeks onwards (cf. Chapter 6). We have indeed still a long way to go fully to appreciate the variety of human experience that I have spoken of. That does not mean that they, ancient Chinese or Indians or modern indigenous peoples, were always right on their own terms or on anyone else's – and the difference between those two takes us back again to the problem of making sense *across* conceptual schemata.

Just as we and the ancient Greeks have often been mistaken, so too have other humans throughout space and time. Cognitive scientists, such as Tversky and Kahneman (1982) and Gigerenzer and Todd (1999), and evolutionary psychologists such as Tooby and Cosmides (1989, 1992) have even suggested particular patterns in our mistakes, such as the 'confirmation bias',[6] some of which (such as those associated with 'fast and frugal' reasoning) may be deeply ingrained legacies from our long-distant evolutionary past. While identifying such tendencies carries salutary lessons concerning our own fallibility, the question of how to evaluate our legacy remains as disputed as ever. Kahneman would still have us stick to the rules laid down by probability theory, while Gigerenzer and his associates have argued for the positive advantages, on occasion, of fast and frugal reasoning, when, as he puts it, 'less is more', the reasoning is not just faster, but more efficient (Gigerenzer 2007).

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[6] When people have been told the outcome of an event, they regularly overestimate the accuracy with which they would have predicted it had they not been given such knowledge: cf. Fischhoff 1975, Nickerson 1998.

More importantly, however, we can use this example to ponder the difficulties of giving an adequate assessment of how and why we arrive at the judgements we make. That includes not just the steps we take to make sense of our experience, but also the errors we are liable to fall into and how to learn how to avoid them. We have much work still to do to draw out all the lessons we can learn from a cross-cultural, comparative, study of the fortunes of human reasoning and its consequences in action. So in the investigations I undertake here, some relating to the understanding of conceptual frameworks, some to that of substantive ideas and theories, I shall endeavour to take some further tentative steps towards the clarification of issues that remain as important today as they have ever been. What is at stake is how we understand human understandings. The broader conception of science suggested by the comparative approach will lead to a considerable expansion in the horizons of its history.