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CULTURE AND CULTURAL ENTITIES

TOWARD A NEW UNITY OF SCIENCE

SECOND EDITION

by

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 Springer

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*For Marjorie Grene,
for the pleasure of her company*

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Preface to the Second Edition (2009)

Rereading *Culture and Cultural Entities* now, just short of 30 years since completing the essays for the first edition, I have the distinct impression of viewing myself in photographs of a younger me, whom I recognize of course and who, in an agreeably disconcerting way, was already busy with the puzzles that occupy me now. It's a bit uncanny, and reassuring, since it confirms that I had fastened on a topic not much discussed at the time, which I still believe harbors the best prospects for the future of Western philosophy and its contribution to our now-globalized philosophical world. It might have been no more than an *idée fixe*, but time is on its side. The invitation to bring out a second edition reassures me that others share my conviction against the continuing commitment of those philosophers who still look, longingly, to the early days of the Vienna Circle. In a way, the whole of the twentieth century testifies to the need to annex the topics I had collected in the late 70s to the commanding disputes of the "early days" remembered. I see matters more systematically now and am, accordingly, inclined to wonder a little more audibly about the inertia of the academy.

But will you allow me, also, to say in complete candor that, in retracing the text of the first edition (for possible infelicities and the like), I found myself actually *studying* the details of what I'd already written. I'd forgotten the fine-grained gauge of the considerable research and cogitation that went into the book. I actually found the text instructive. So that it's with a good conscience that I now avoid tampering with the book's running argument. It doesn't need more detail of the kind it originally collected. It needs an informed, more up-to-date opening to the future! I was quite surprised to see how current, after nearly 30 years, the essential argument and supporting examples really are. Obviously, normal philosophy moves more slowly than I realized, and revolutionary philosophy may now be rarer than revolutionary science.

The first edition was meant to eclipse – in a respectful but insistent way – the entire network of arguments in support of extending the unity of science program to the human sciences and to the analysis of the world of human culture. I support the good sense of all that even more confidently now. In fact, its original purpose effectively legitimates the absence (there) of any sustained account of the grander philosophical issues that now confront us. It also signals what would be worth adding (in our own

present) as a more measured reflection regarding the “place” of the first edition in the very different world of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

I see the larger themes in a more contested way than I had: the flux of the world as opposed to assured invariances; the historicity of thought as opposed to the universalizing aptitude of our cognitive faculties; the second-natured cultural transformation of our biological aptitudes as opposed to any mere biologism; the constructed nature of knowledge, perception, thought, science, and understanding as opposed to any pre-established correspondence between cognition and world; and now, more commandingly than ever, the “natural artifactuality” of the self or person as opposed to the assumption that all the materials of the human sciences fit neatly within the scope and competence of the physical sciences. You may well hesitate before endorsing any of these notions, but you cannot doubt that they constitute a strong challenge to the most favored doctrines of the principal currents of Anglo-American philosophy down to our own day. I can only say that, for my part, I have followed the argument where it has led: what I’ve discovered (what I believe I’ve discovered) promises a sort of rapprochement among the principal movements of Western philosophy unwilling to yield on rigor but open to surpassing all the troubling stalemates of the preceding century.

As a critic of my own past, the past of the first edition of *Culture and Cultural Entities*, I think I may say quite accurately that most of the strong themes I dwell on now had a more pioneering tone in the original text; but a good many of those themes were more implicit then than they need be now. It needs to be said that at the time of the first edition, it seemed improbable, particularly within the practice of English-language philosophy, that the “human studies” (or “human sciences”) could be expected to break out of the encompassing grip of the unity of science program. I had the idea of escaping, of course, by emphasizing the irreducible features of whatever is “culturally emergent.” The first chapter opens with that concern, and the rest of the book is more than merely loyal to its manifesto. The book’s subtitle draws attention to the need for a new basis for holding to the unity of science if the inherent reductionism of the original unity conception (very much alive in the 50s and 60s) was to be replaced, and the book itself supplies the argument. My idea was – and still is – that the prioritizing of materialism and reductionism (in the original unity model) had to give way to the conceptual complexities of the cultural world. History and historicity and the culturally constructive (constructivist) nature of knowledge and science were daunting innovations in the philosophy of the 60s and 70s.

I realize, now, that when I gave the original lectures on which the first edition was based, I was not entirely aware how daring (possibly even irresponsible) they may have seemed even in their early efforts at exploring the topics mentioned. But certainly during the decade between the appearance of the first edition and the publication of my *Historied Thought, Constructed World* (University of California Press, 1995), I was prepared to give explicit form to what had become essential but had also been somewhat muted or inchoate in the earlier effort. I have never yielded since: nearly everything I’ve published from about the time of *Historied Thought* simply enlarged and strengthened my commitment. For example, I foresaw in the late 70s the inherent weakness of Chomsky’s notion of universal grammar, which

in a way Chomsky has now admitted (independently) at the start of the new century; and I foresaw the essential irrelevance of Davidson's attempt to bridge the gap between a materialist account of action and a potentially historicized or hermeneutic account (linked by Davidson in recent years, a little lamely, with Hans-Georg Gadamer's very different reading of the matter.) These controversies (and others of a similar sort) were all vestigially tethered to the great surge of scientism that marks the strongest projects of analytic philosophy during the whole of the previous century.

I would now name three lines of inquiry that I've had to master to bring the innovations of the first edition to full strength: for one, a proper grasp of the true import of the interval spanning Kant and Hegel, which, for me, defines the beginnings of "modern" modern philosophy, particularly a valid way of rendering Hegel's critique of Kant without yielding to Hegel's own extravagances; for another, a pertinent analysis of the philosophical import of Darwinian evolution on the distinction between biology and culture, particularly with regard to the decisive difference between biological and cultural evolution; and for a third, an understanding of the profound challenge of Thomas Kuhn's account of scientific revolutions beyond the rather abstract way in which Kuhn himself originally treated his own contribution, particularly the way in which he bridges the difference between the natural and the human sciences. It's hard to remember how primitively these issues were treated in American philosophy at the time, despite the very large presence of the most advanced Austrian and German versions of the philosophy of science.

I've been at the same labors through the entire interval from the time of the original publication of *Culture and Cultural Entities* to the present. So that in taking up the invitation to prepare a new edition, I have a clear sense of what I must add to a book that I'm actually rather pleased with. I see that it's much more than a mere archival record: I can say for instance that, in rereading the opening chapters, I was forcibly struck by the fact that I'm quite sure I would put the issues under discussion – the very large issue of the unity of science for instance – in essentially the same way now that I did in the first edition. The difference I sense has almost nothing to do with precision or accuracy or actual doctrine – though there are bound to be changes of emphasis, of fine-tuning, even of theory. The important differences have to do more with the articulated systematic amplitude of the entire vision, for instance in accommodating the three lines of inquiry I've just mentioned that I would want to integrate with what is offered in the first edition.

The details of what had been already worked out I think I am quite willing to accept without any wincing: I find that what my younger self composed is not bad at all! It's only that we've come a long way from the hegemonies of the second half of the twentieth century.

The spirit of the argument is thoroughly analytic in its rigor, but the thesis remains honorably heterodox: where more needs to be said, I must now recover all that *has* been said *before* in a dialectically more challenging way than before – that is, by presenting the entire account in terms that begin to demonstrate just *how* to supersede the reductionist idiom in a way that is plainly informed about the complexities of the self, history, language, interpretation, the integration of intentional

(and what I call Intentional [that is, culturally significant and significative]) and physical attributes; so that the distinction between the natural and the human sciences can be clearly and convincingly stated and the prospects of an entirely new form of the unity of science, rightly vindicated.

Seen this way, what needs to be added – what I add in the way of a new final chapter – need not disturb the argument of the first edition at all. What needs to be done is catch up the argument in terms of a fresh conception that draws on the best and most inclusive new themes that explain not only why the old forms of scientism no longer make sense but how we can hold on to the kind of account I actually offer in the first edition, under conditions that can now be more satisfactorily developed than was possible then. I have in mind just those larger themes I mention at the beginning of these remarks.

I therefore endorse the earlier edition (if you don't mind a bit of parental pride), though I do see the need for shepherding the argument's dialectical gains a little differently than before. I'm very pleased indeed, therefore, to take up the chore in the setting of this particular book. Because I've come full circle, for reasons having to do with the biography, so to say, of my continuing inquiries. I've pursued a good many seemingly discrete lines of speculation since the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s; and now, miraculously, they've come together again in terms of a fresh start on the theory of the cultural world. How very nice, then, to be able to provide in a brief form my own sense of the deeper meaning of that continuum. In my mind, in recent years, the issue has become inseparable from an examination of the prospects of a fruitful rapprochement of the whole of Eurocentric philosophy. I shall try to give you a glimpse of all that in the new chapter.

November 2008

Joseph Margolis

Preface

I have tried to make a fresh beginning on the theory of cultural phenomena, largely from the perspectives of Anglo-American analytic philosophy. This is partly because of my own training; partly because I am persuaded that the analytic tradition can be enriched, without betraying its admirable sense of rigor, in such a way that it can incorporate important and subtle questions that it has characteristically ignored in recent decades; and partly because I believe that philosophy prospers by drawing its arguments out dialectically from the partial achievements of the strongest and most admired contributions of its immediate past. The themes developed I have approached in a variety of ways in a number of other publications: but here, I have tried to bring the discussion to bear on the converging issues of the so-called human studies – in particular, on the topics of language, history, action, and art. I have already, I may say, moved on in this direction in ways that look forward to a full rapprochement between Anglo-American and Continental philosophy. But I can hardly deny that I have been infected already with a sense of the importance of that.

The occasion for first preparing these essays was a series of lectures that I was invited to give at City College and at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, during the academic year 1979–1980, through the Program in the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology. I served at that time as Visiting Professor in the Department of Philosophy, City College; and the lectures and some related seminars were co-sponsored by The Conference on History and Philosophy of Logic, Science, and Technology. I particularly wish to thank Professor K. D. Irani for his kind invitation to join the Department in this capacity; to Professor Martin Tamny and Dr. Raphael Stern for their friendship and unfailing good will in launching and shepherding the entire venture; and to Professor Marshall Cohen for the invitation to present a good part of Chapter 3 at the Graduate Center. Parts and versions of various chapters were also presented at the German-American Colloquium on the Philosophy of Technology (1981), Lehigh University (1980), Michigan State University (1980), State University College at Brockport (1979), a joint meeting of the Fullerton Club and the Washington Philosophy Club (1979), the Fourth International Wittgenstein Symposium (1979), the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (1979), the Center for Philosophy of Science and Department of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Pittsburgh (1978), the New Jersey Regional Association for Philosophy (1978), and the American

Association for the Advancement of Science (1976). I hadn't quite realized how many trials of these sorts were actually involved in shaping these essays; but I am enormously grateful to the host institutions and colleagues for the opportunity to test and refine my views.

I must also thank Mrs. Grace Stuart, who prepared the manuscript in her unfailingly splendid way. These essays have been somewhat delayed by a longish illness, which fortunately is now past. But the interval has enabled me to benefit from additional reflections undertaken with an entirely new project in mind.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
November 1982

Joseph Margolis

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With alterations and additions, some rather extended, (1) has appeared as ‘Nature, Culture, and Persons’ in *Theory and Decision*, XIII (1981); (2) as ‘The Concept of Consciousness’, *Philosophic Exchange*, III (1980); (4) as ‘Action and Causality’, *Philosophical Forum*, XI (1979); and (5) as ‘Puzzles about the Causal Explanation of Human Actions’, in Larry Laudan (ed.), *Mind and Medicine: Problems of Explanation and Evaluation in Psychiatry and the Bio-medical Sciences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). Permission to reprint has been granted.