1

A Critique of the Cognitive-historical Thesis of *The Intellectual Adventure*

Francesca Rochberg

Out of the socio-cultural evolutionism and scientism of the post-war period came *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East,* written by Henri Frankfort, H.A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Thorkild Jacobsen, and William A. Irwin, and published in 1946 by the University of Chicago Press.[1] Its objective was to depict the distinctive intellectual character of the best-known ancient Near Eastern civilizations, namely, Mesopotamia (geographically equivalent for the most part with Iraq), Egypt, and Israel. The authors were interested in what and how ancient social groups thought, especially about humankind's place in the world and in relation to the divine. This was not an intellectual history of the ancient Near East in as much as philosophy and science were regarded as not having taken root there. Despite its acceptance of mid-twentieth century assumptions about what separated ancients from moderns cognitively, evidenced principally in the use of the word primitive to designate ancient thought compared to modern, *The Intellectual Adventure*, written by distinguished Near Eastern archaeologists and philologists, was nonetheless an attempt to reach an understanding of this ancient thought-world not in terms of Western models or constructs (though how successful that was can be debated), but from within the various worlds of its sources. This concise and readable portrait of ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Israelite thought, however, focused on mythological and religious texts as cognitive-historical evidence.

The book was reissued in 1949 by Penguin under the more evocative title *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*. The theoretical framework

The Adventure of the Human Intellect: Self, Society, and the Divine in Ancient World Cultures,
First Edition. Edited by Kurt A. Raaflaub.

for the chapters on Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Israel was set out in an introduction and conclusion, coauthored by Henri Frankfort and Henriette Groenewegen-Frankfort, called "Myth and Reality" and "The Emancipation of Thought from Myth" respectively. The publisher's description, of course written by the authors, shows the scientism of the day (note how myth was to be "overcome"):

> To the people in ancient times the phenomenal world was teeming with life; the thunderclap, the sudden shadow, the unknown and eerie clearing in the wood, all were living things. This unabridged edition traces the fascinating history of thought from the pre-scientific, personal concept of a "humanized" world to the achievement of detached intellectual reasoning. The authors describe and analyze the spiritual life of three ancient civilizations: the Egyptians, whose thinking was profoundly influenced by the daily rebirth of the sun and the annual rebirth of the Nile; the Mesopotamians, who believed the stars, moon, and stones were all citizens of a cosmic state; and the Hebrews, who transcended prevailing mythopoeic thought with their cosmogony of the will of God. In the concluding chapter the Frankforts show that the Greeks, with their intellectual courage, were the first culture to discover a realm of speculative thought in which myth was overcome.

The first sentence of *The Intellectual Adventure* set the tone and point of view for the volume as a whole. It reads: "If we look for 'speculative thought' in the documents of the ancients, we shall be forced to admit that there is very little indeed in our written records which deserves the name of 'thought' in the strict sense of that term." According to the cognitive history of *The Intellectual Adventure,* thought in the ancient Near East lacked "cogency of reasoning," was "wrapped in imagination," and "tainted with fantasy" (Frankfort *et al.* 1946: 3; 1949: 11). What the Frankforts found lacking was in particular the capacity for abstraction. Ancient thought was classified as "pre-scientific," the result of a failure to separate nature from culture, as will be discussed later in this chapter. The Frankforts began, therefore, with an evaluative statement about the deficits of what they termed "speculative thought" as compared against the triumphal results of science, and projected their conclusion that precious little of it was to be found in Near Eastern antiquity.

As the only attempt to offer a synthesis of ancient Near Eastern ideas concerning human beings' relation to (what we distinguish as) the physical and the metaphysical, and how various social groups of Near Eastern antiquity interpreted their experience, the book had tremendous impact on others engaged in research on non-Western cultures. David Wengrow cites Frankfort's influence upon Godfrey Lienhardt's 1961 ethnographic study *Divinity and Experience* as "a unique instance of a major anthropologist drawing significantly upon the thought of an archaeologist" (1999: 608 n.100). The path-breaking historian of pre-colonial Africa, Basil Davidson, credited the book for emboldening him to attempt for African sociocultural history a "new synthesis of cultural patterns and values" (Davidson 1969: 18).[2] He confessed a certain despair about ever reaching such a synthesis, particularly for the history of African cultures where available written records, apart from the many

ancient Egyptian inscriptions, were scant and systematic research was limited. "Then," he said, "I chanced in 1962 on the Frankforts' *Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* where some vivid contrasts are drawn between the mood and temper of the ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations… These civilizations could, it appeared, be given a character" (Davidson 1969: 18).

The book left an imprint on many readers, lay and scholarly alike, interested in ancient thought and in gaining a general grasp of the civilizations in question. A sense of responsibility to present such synthetic treatments of ancient Near Eastern civilization, whose existence had at that time been known from original sources for less than 100 years, was felt in the fields of Near Eastern Archaeology, Assyriology and Egyptology. Not too long after *The Intellectual Adventure*, Robert C. Dentan edited a collection of papers, *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East* (1955), that similarly tried to present a concise portrait of the historical attitudes of the various civilizations of the ancient Near East, in this case not only those of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Israel, but also of Persia, the Hellenistic and Early Christian Mediterranean as well as early Islam, though without a unifying theoretical framework.

While not expressly a work of cognitive anthropology, *The Intellectual Adventure* was certainly interested in cognition, how the ancients perceived and understood their world as diagnostic of their thought. Using religious and mythological textual evidence, the aim was to reconstruct what amounted to a cognitive-historical interpretation of ancient Near Eastern civilizations. The result was a work both of great originality, but also of no small allegiance to progressivism, according to which cultural, intellectual, and cognitive history is viewed as one of inexorable advancement and sees culture (the arts, technology, and science) as establishing control, knowledge, and ever greater distance from nature over the course of history. The corollary is that in the Ur-time of human history, culture had not established sufficient distance from nature to have legitimate (that is, scientific) knowledge of it.

William Y. Adams identified progressivism as "the single most powerful influence in Western historical thought," and as "the tap root of anthropology."[3] Relevant for placing *The Intellectual Adventure* within its own intellectual context, is Adams' "Idealist Progressivism" that sees progress as a function of the human mind maturing over time, as opposed to a materialist version in which the human condition improves as a result of better ways of handling the concrete realities of social and political life. The Idealist Progressivism underpinning *The Intellectual Adventure* determined that history manifests an intellectual evolution from myth through religion to science, signaling a certain and demonstrable maturity of mind, capable of abstract thought, rationality, and the intellectual rigors of logic and theorization.

The question of rationality, particularly whether it was a universal defining feature of human cognition, has long been at stake in anthropological theory. The logical unity of humankind, and with it "the very notion of humanity," as Rodney Needham said, was a question driving much anthropological research over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, and, to paraphrase Needham, the

question of whether human reasoning was the same everywhere or not, and, if not, whether differences were a consequence of genetics or culture, was a matter for comparative ethnography (1972: 159). But, writing in the early 1970s, Clifford Geertz found a reluctance on the part of anthropologists even to accept differences based in culture as fundamental in "defining man." He said, in characteristically vivid terms, that "anthropologists have shied away from cultural particularities when it came to a question of defining man and have taken refuge instead in bloodless universals… [F]aced as they are with the enormous variation in human behavior, they are haunted by a fear of historicism, of becoming lost in a whirl so convulsive as to deprive them of any fixed bearings at all" (1973: 43–44). Those wanting "fixed bearings" lined up on one side of an intellectual fence described by Richard Shweder as the dividing line between theorists with commitments to an enlightenment idea of progress and the universal sway of rationality on one side, and the romantic rebels, the pluralists and symbolists, on the other. Subscribers to "the enlightenment" were thereby unwilling to relinquish their commitment to the universality of reason and other ideas intimately connected to and projected from it, such as, in Shweder's terms, "the idea of natural law, the concept of deep structure, the notion of progress or development, and the image of the history of ideas as a struggle between reason and unreason, science and superstition" (1984: 28). He named as champions of this "enlightenment" approach anthropologists Frazer, Tylor, and Lévi-Strauss (among others), who saw the human mind as a unity, unified in its universal capacity for rationality and the recognition of its authoritative criteria for absolute truth. Here the gap between ancient/"primitive" and modern was a function of evolution. Ancients and "primitives," while having the capacity for reason, were not sufficiently developed and as a consequence were not clued into the power of logic and science, being therefore prone to logical fallacies, false causality, and magical thinking.

On the other side were Shweder's "romantics," Lévy-Bruhl, Sahlins, Geertz, and Feyerabend (among others), who saw "that ideas and practices have their foundation in neither logic nor empirical science, that ideas and practices fall beyond the scope of deductive and inductive reason, that ideas and practices are neither rational nor irrational but rather *non*rational" (Shweder 1984: 28). This gave rise, Shweder said, to an anthropology in which cultures are arbitrary and pluralist, committed to local criteria for truth, express themselves symbolically, and are subject to non-empirical and non-logical effects. The gap between ancient/"primitive" and modern is therefore erased for romantics who view the history of ideas as "a sequence of entrenched ideational fashions" and culture as "a self-contained 'framework' for understanding experience" (Shweder 1984: 28). A good example, and relevant here because of its impact on *The Intellectual Adventure*, are Lévy-Bruhl's ideas on "how natives think," that is, in a manner not dependent upon the logic of temporal or spatial realities and the "law of non-contradiction," but rather in accordance with another logic, the pre-logical, and another law, the law of participation. Lévy-Bruhl's conception of the pre-logical, however, was not meant as a commentary on cognitive evolution, or even on the capacity of people

in traditional societies to understand logical relationships. In his words, "By *prelogical* we do not mean to assert that such a mentality constitutes a kind of antecedent stage, in point of time, to the birth of logical thought," and to further clarify, he said, "It is not *antilogical*; it is not *alogical* either" (Lévy-Bruhl 1985: 78; again emphasis in the original). He remarked that this mode of thought was true for collective representations only, that individuals operated in the world with the same practical reason we would (seeking shelter, escaping from danger, etc.), but "as far as it [mental activity] is collective, it has laws which are peculiar to itself, and the first and most universal of these is the law of participation" (Lévy-Bruhl 1985: 79).

The Frankforts traversed the intellectual territories mapped by Shweder, being both progressivist and "romantic." Or, perhaps, one could say they embedded their cultural relativist leanings within a progressive enlightenment framework. Nonetheless, the theoretical framework of *The Intellectual Adventure*, most clearly set out in the Frankforts' two chapters, owes its principal philosophical debt to romantics Ernst Cassirer and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, as well as to Martin Buber. Although it was not the Frankforts' intent to trace the history or argue for the theory of a primitive mentality (à la Lévy-Bruhl), of mythopoeic thought (à la Cassirer),[4] or the I–Thou relationship (à la Martin Buber),[5] even so, the original works in which these ideas are found were not taken up in the discussion directly.[6] Intellectual kinship with these philosophers centers on the interest in myth. Like them, the Frankforts subscribed to the idea that myth was the special product of the human mind unfettered by logic or physics, and, in accordance with the progressivism of their time, saw this invention of the mind as primitive compared to the intellectual achievement of science.

Because of the Frankforts' conviction that no philosophy or science akin to anything known in the Western tradition was evident in the ancient Near East, Lévy-Bruhl's separation of myth from philosophy and science must have struck a chord, not only from the cognitive evolutionary standpoint (which Lévy-Bruhl would repudiate)[7] but also in relation to the idea that myth expressed another form of thought about the world, one which did not obey the same logic of so-called ordinary reality but was instead the consequence of the participation of individuals in a mystical reality, obeying the "law of participation" (Lévy-Bruhl 1985: ch. 2, also chs. 6–8). Here too is where Cassirer's differentiation between the cognitive domain of myth and that of logical analysis and abstraction seems to have been found relevant. Like Cassirer, the Frankforts' assessment of myth was that it reflected a mode of thought unlike that of religion and science. Indeed, Cassirer found myth to be a form that "defies and challenges our fundamental categories of thought. Its logic – if there is any logic – is incommensurate with all our conceptions of empirical or scientific truth" (1944: 78).

Yet more influential was Cassirer's take on the perception of nature in myth, namely, that an empirical sense of nature governed by strictly material causes was not yet formed.[8] Myth conceived of nature rather as "a dramatic world – a world of actions, of forces, of conflicting powers" (1944: 76) lending myth its emotional dimension. Cassirer went even further in this argument to say something that one

sees again in *The Intellectual Adventure*, namely, that in the mythic perception of the realm of physical phenomena, "things" are not, in Cassirer's words, "dead or indifferent stuff. All objects are benignant or malignant, friendly or inimical, familiar or uncanny, alluring and fascinating or repellant and threatening" (1944: 77) – in other words, personalized. Cassirer's juxtaposition of the mythopoeic experience of a personalized emotional world with "the ideal of truth that is introduced by science" (1944: 77) was echoed in *The Intellectual Adventure*. Cassirer, in dialog here with Lévy-Bruhl, agreed that myth manifests its own "mystic" causality, but disagreed with the idea that this mode of thought was generally characteristic of traditional cultures, existing even outside of the holy (1944: 78–80). This, however, was the very thing Lévy-Bruhl would later retract.[9]

Buber, on the other hand, did not separate his postulated two modes of being in the world as though they were different mentalities. Rather, it was a matter of presence (or "the present") and object (*Gegenwart und Gegenstand*). What is present is what lives and is lived and is not epistemological. I–It is epistemological as it allows us to describe, analyze, and classify. I–You, in contrast, exists as "the mystery of reciprocity" (Buber 1970: 68). This is indeed what the Frankforts were drawing on when they said, "'Thou' is a live presence, whose qualities and potentialities can be made somewhat articulate – not as a result of active inquiry but because 'Thou,' as a presence, reveals itself" (Frankfort *et al.* 1949: 13). They, however, took the awareness or experience of this "presence" to be a form of cognition all its own. The Frankforts said, "The fundamental difference between the attitudes of modern and ancient man as regards the surrounding world is this: for the modern, scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an 'It'; for ancient – and also for primitive – man it is a 'Thou'" (Frankfort *et al.* 1949: 12). The further clarification of this idea in the ensuing pages is clearly and heavily dependent upon Buber. Interestingly, the Frankforts chose to quote not from Buber but from Alfred Ernest Crawley, most known for his ethnology of marriage (1902), whose claim was that to the "primitive" the world is "personal." They found this to resonate with the attitude in Near Eastern antiquity – not that the world was animistic or that natural phenomena were personified, but rather that the world was simply and thoroughly animate, that is, "personal." The relation as described between the individual and a phenomenon, experienced as a mysterious and reciprocal relationship without the detachment that typifies our experience of "things," however, comes directly out of Buber's *I and Thou* (for example, 1970: 54–59).

The idea that myth not only belonged to a different kind of thinking that was incompatible with that employed in philosophy or science, but was also chronologically prior and prelude to them – more primitive as well as more ancient – was a fundamental premise of these chapters: hence the revised title chosen for the second edition, *Before Philosophy*. The Frankforts' cognitive-historical view was that whatever products of intellection are evident in the ancient Near East, they represent earlier stages of thought than philosophical or scientific reason. To argue more persuasively for this view, the book's conclusion compared the mythological thought-world of

the ancient Near East with intellectual activity in ancient Greece, where, it was assumed, philosophy and science were first born with the Pre-Socratics.

The principal question driving the original *Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* was how the ancient civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia (Iraq), Egypt, and Israel (and Greece, for contrast's sake) understood and explained humankind's place in relation to the world. Differences were drawn along linguistic, geographical, and cultural lines, but in contrast to what developed in the West (that is, Greece) the ancient Near East (less so Israel) was portrayed as a realm apart. The essentializing of Mesopotamian thought, or Egyptian thought, or even "ancient Near Eastern thought" presupposed an idea of civilizations as discrete cultural entities defined along the lines of political or ethno-cultural identities. James Clifford, in the context of modern ethnographies, deconstructed the idea of "bounded, independent cultures" as a feature of the "mode of representation" by modern anthropologists, and not simply a given (1988: e.g., 22). This notion has of late been reappraised and critiqued again, most sharply perhaps in the response of Edward Saïd to Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1996). In *The Nation* (Oct. 22, 2001), Saïd said, "[Huntington] wants to make 'civilizations' and 'identities' into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entitites that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history, and that over centuries have made it possible for that history not only to contain wars of religion and imperial conquest but also to be one of exchange, cross-fertilization and sharing." In place of Huntington's "encounters" between otherwise isolated alien civilizations, David Wengrow, in his book *What Makes Civilization?* (2010), brought archaeological evidence to bear precisely to demonstrate the interaction and interdependency between the civilizations of the ancient Near East. For him, commercial interchange had an impact on religious and cosmological ideas which are made manifest in iconography and literary sources. The unitary understanding of what civilizations are that was perhaps not so often questioned in the mid-twentieth century has by now given way to a more fluid and dynamic conception, with permeable and changing boundaries.

The Intellectual Adventure set about to answer the principal question as to the ancient understanding of the place of human beings with respect to the phenomenal as well as social worlds, but it did so on the basis of myth and religion. Its claim was that, since in Egypt and Mesopotamia the divine was immanent in nature, a "live relationship between man and the phenomenal world" was forged (Frankfort *et al.* 1949: 237).[10] The barrier between nature and culture essential to the modern sense of the human being's place in the world was therefore not yet demarcated. This lack of clear boundaries to separate humankind from nature and from the divine was what the Frankforts found most essential in defining the intellectual attitude of the two ancient Near Eastern civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia; despite the great differences between them outwardly, "the two peoples agreed in the fundamental assumption that the individual is part of society, that society is embedded in nature, and that nature is but the manifestation of the divine" (Frankfort *et al.* 1949: 241). Ancient Israel did not agree, maintaining a different

version of the humankind–nature–divine relation. Shortly after *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man,* H. Frankfort's *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of the Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* appeared (1948). This work similarly contrasted ancient Israel, specifically as represented by the biblical books of the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), with Egypt and Mesopotamia, where "the ancients… experienced human life as part of a widely spreading network of connections which reached beyond the local and the national communities into the hidden depths of nature and the powers that rule nature" (Frankfort 1948: 3).

Running through *The Intellectual Adventure* was the assumption of a fundamental difference, taken to define and distinguish ancient from modern, namely whether nature was conceived of as a realm apart from human or divine influence, as the special realm where phenomena everywhere operate in accordance with impersonal determining forces, commonly referred to as the laws of nature. The existence of a conception of nature, therefore, came to signal the great break with the primitive attitude, where no separation of an independent "nature" was yet recognized. But Geoffrey Lloyd has pointed out that having "no explicit concept of 'nature' itself… should not be confused with a denial that they [ancient societies] have an implicit grasp of that domain" (2007: ch.7, "Nature versus Culture Reassessed," 132). This is quite true, for example, in ancient Mesopotamia where specialized literati considered celestial phenomena as objects of empirical observation, quantitative description, and prediction (attested outside the limits of mythological texts) without an apparent need to distinguish the natural from the cultural domain.

Although *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* was a study in the history of ideas, it offered an anthropology of ancient culture based on an unbridgeable divide between ancient and modern "modes of thought," consistent with earlier ethnographical investigations that found in the nature–culture fusion the decisive difference between Us and (the putative) Them. Bruno Latour has indicted modern ethnography on precisely this score, calling into question the claim that an undifferentiated nature–culture belongs only to the remote time before modernity. Accordingly, ethnologists have viewed indigenous practices and ideas about the world as an integrated part of culture and, as a consequence, have not classified them as "medicine" or "science," making use instead of terms such as "ethnomedicine" and "ethnophysics" to underscore the differences between indigenous systems of medicine or science and their modern Western counterparts. In so doing, nature, at least in the modern Western sense, remains inaccessible or meaningless to indigenous systems of knowledge, in the same way that the Frankforts make nature inaccessible and therefore meaningless to the ancients (Latour 1993: 96). Latour's critique, however, is that the "seamless web," as he calls it, comprising nature *and* culture, still exists! Modernity may have removed the divine from nature, but not nature from culture. Latour's point is that the imagined gulf between Us and Them is really just so much classificatory rhetoric, that we do not have direct access to nature either, and he proposed looking at other cultures as well as our own, comparing "natures–cultures," as he put it, and laying aside

the "moderns' victory cry" of our absolute cognitive difference. Voicing their mid-twentieth century attitude, the Frankforts did indeed subscribe to the cognitive divide, as is clear in the following statement alluding to the success of (modern) science:

> In our own time speculative thought finds its scope more severely limited than it has been at any other period. For we possess in science another instrument for the interpretation of experience, one that has achieved marvels and retains its full fascination. We do not allow speculative thought, under any circumstances, to encroach upon the sacred precincts of science. It must not trespass on the realm of verifiable fact; and it must never pretend to a dignity higher than that of working hypotheses, even in the fields in which it is permitted some scope. (Frankfort *et al.* 1946: 3–4)

Science, according to the Frankforts, with its knowledge of the universal laws of nature, answers questions with precision and truth, while "speculative thought," because it is merely a cultural representation, offers hypotheses at best, though it is also aimed at some (albeit undignified) explanation of experience. Writing in the days when positivism and objectivity were unquestioned hallmarks of science, the Frankforts opposed "scientific" to "speculative" thought as a way to distinguish between modern and ancient ways of explaining, unifying, and ordering experience. When the Penguin edition came out, Henri Frankfort took pains to point out that, contrary to the criticism of some reviewers, he did not "sing the praise of rationalism or equate religion with superstition" (Frankfort *et al.* 1949: 8). While he may have wanted to distance himself from a Humean evaluation of the difference between the kind of thought (abstract reasoning) characteristic of science and that reserved for religious or metaphysical knowledge (sophistry and illusion),[11] he most definitely accepted the same divide. And despite his not seeing the ancient patterns of thinking as inferior to modern, but rather as an alternative mode – another mentality altogether (his romanticism) – as a man of his time he accepted that a developmental progress in the history of ideas led the way from myth and religion to reason and science (his progressivism).

It is noteworthy that *The Intellectual Adventure* appeared at a time when "mind" took on importance as an independent subject of investigation, before giving way to the social history of the 1960s and a new focus on material realities such as social-economics and demography, as well as on the not so material forces of social construction. Interestingly, it was just in this period, in 1948, that Herbert Butterfield put forward the idea of the "Scientific Revolution" as an intellectual watershed and as formative for the modern mind (Westman and Lindberg 1990: xvii). By now, however, the history of ideas as such, and especially of an evolutionary nature of thought commensurate with that ideational history, has been demoted, marginalized, and finally made irrelevant by the gradual dissolution of "mind" and "mentality" into the categories of culture, language, and meaning. Today's concerns with the history of thought have more to do with meaning than

mentality, which is to say that cultural not cognitive differences are explanatory (Rochberg 2009).

Already since the last quarter of the twentieth century, a succession of reappraisals, reassessments, and reconsiderations have taken place across the social and humanistic sciences. Today terms such as The Scientific Revolution, The Western Literary Canon, The Grand Narrative, or The Unity of Science have been subjected to critique and deconstruction, and if they are still used at all it is usually with some degree of qualification. Even those who have not entirely repudiated such schemata in favor of de-centered ambiguities and pluralisms must admit that they are rooted in an age when conceptual bedrock entailed commitments to objectivity, logical empiricism, and the idea of progress. Ideas about the psychic unity of humankind and the unity of science both held sway during the period in which *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* and *Before Philosophy* were written. And it would be another almost 20 years until these and other formerly normative and foundational ideas were called into question in the intellectual postmodernism of the last generation. While the *Intellectual Adventure* produced by Frankfort and his colleagues surely does not belong in quite the same category as the grand concepts enumerated above, those of us engaged in study of the ancient Near East and who object to the evolutionism and essentialism of the Frankforts' book have long known it was time for a reappraisal and reconsideration of that too.

Notes

1 A revised version of this essay will be part of chapter 2, "Old Ideas about Myth and Science," in my *Before Nature: Cuneiform Knowledge and the History of Science* (forthcoming).

2 I thank Adam David Miller for drawing my attention to Davidson's work.

3 See Adams 1998: ch. 2, "Progressivism: The Tap Root."

4 Cassirer employed this term in a quote from Prescott 1927: 10: "The myth-maker's mind is the prototype; and the mind of the poet… is still essentially mythopoeic." See Cassirer 1944: 75.

5 Although Martin Buber's *I and Thou* was not mentioned in *The Intellectual Adventure*, the use of the terms "It" and "Thou" as a way to describe the relation of the human being to objects in the world outside herself (Frankfort *et al.* 1949: 12) must certainly have been drawn from this work. In his review of the 1977 edition of *The Intellectual Adventure*, Robert Segal (1979: 664) said the Frankforts "equate Buber's distinction between I–Thou and I–It relationships with Lévy-Bruhl's and, following him, Cassirer's distinction between mythopoeic and scientific thought. Buber's I–Thou, however, does not involve the experience of a thing as a person, the effacement of the distinctions between subjective and objective…" Segal is quite right to see that the Frankforts drew a connection between Buber's dualistic view of the world in accordance with the relations expressed by I–You and I–It and Levy-Bruhl's idea of mystical participation. However, the nature of Buber's "object," whether "You" or "It" does not separate into person and thing, as Segal maintained. A thing can be "It" when contemplated, analyzed, and understood as an object, but it can become "You" when a relation is established that

is of the particular and reciprocal nature of the "I–You" relationship. One of Buber's examples is of a tree. He said, "I can dissolve it into a number, into a pure relation between numbers, and eternalize it. Throughout all of this the tree remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition. But it can also happen," and here is the key difference, "that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It…" (Buber 1970: 58). This is no animism. Buber said, "what I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself." It is not that things have mysterious inner qualities only apprehended by "the primitive mind." This would be, in Buber's vision of human knowledge and experience, a mere "mysteriousness without mystery," a "piling up of information! It, it, it!" (1970: 56). The I–You relation is not dependent upon a "mentality" incapable of the analytic contemplation of objects in what he calls the "spatio-temporal-causal context." And the conversion from It to You also occurs, he says, in works of art as we make our connection with them and they with us. Contrariwise, whatever can be You in the I–You relation can also become It. In Buber's words, "Every You in the world is doomed by its nature to become a thing or at least to enter into thinghood again and again" (Buber 1970: 69). Even human beings can become Its (as when love is lost).

6 Cassirer's *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, II and Lévy-Bruhl's *How Natives Think* (the edition of 1926) are mentioned in the list of suggested readings following the introductory chapter. Buber's *I and Thou* (*Ich und Du*, 1923) is not. Cassirer is mentioned (Frankfort *et al.* 1949: 30) in the context of the perception of time, personalized as analogous to the biological rhythms of human life, rather than as an abstract natural process, but not in relation to the concept of mythopoeic thought.

7 In *Les Carnets de Lévy-Bruhl*, published posthumously in 1949, he said, "… let us expressly rectify what I believed in 1910: there is not a primitive mentality distinguishable from the other by two characteristics which are peculiar to it (mystical and prelogical). There is a mystical mentality which is more marked and more easily observable among primitive peoples than in our societies, but it is present in every human mind." C. Scott Littleton, in his introduction to the Princeton publication of *How Natives Think* in 1985 said, "part of the problem was Lévy-Bruhl's terminology, which remained for the most part the same as it had been in *How Natives Think*." Expressions such as "prelogicality" (which he eventually abandoned), "undeveloped peoples," "primitive mentality," and even "the natives," no matter how carefully defined, were bound to infuriate a generation of anthropologists that had struggled to free their discipline from the shackles of ethnocentrism, and who, like Boas, were firmly committed to the proposition that all human beings everywhere are endowed with the same potential for cultural attainment. Indeed, this remains a problem for the modern reader, as the author of this introduction, who is firmly committed to what Geertz (1984) has recently called "anti anti-relativism," can readily attest. See Lévy-Bruhl 1985: xx.

8 Cassirer defines nature here with Kant (*Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, sec. 14) as "the existence of things as far as it is determined by general laws."

9 The key passage, from *Notebook VI*, August 29, 1938, is, "If I glance over all I have written on the subject of participation between 1910 and 1938, the development of my ideas seems clear to me. I started by positing a primitive mentality different from ours, if not in its structure at least in its function, and I found myself in difficulties in explaining the relationships with the other mentality, not only among us but also among 'primitive peoples'… [L]et us entirely give up explaining participation by something peculiar to the human mind, either constitutional (in its structure or function) or acquired (mental

customs). In other words, let us expressly rectify what I believed correct in 1910: there is not a primitive mentality distinguishable from the other by *two* characteristics which are peculiar to it (mystical and pre-logical). There is a mystical mentality which is more marked and more easily observable among 'primitive peoples' than in our own societies, but it is present in every human mind." See Lévy-Bruhl 1949: 129–32, quoted here from the English, in 1975: 100–01 (emphasis in the original).

10 For a more nuanced discussion of the immanent and the transcendent in the ancient Near East and Israel, see Kawashima 2006.

11 The famous passage is, "If we take in our hand any volume of divinity or school metaphysics (works on religion and philosophy) let us ask this question, does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact or existence? No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can be nothing but sophistry and illusion" (Hume 1900 [1748]: Section xii: "Of the academical or skeptical Philosophy," Part iii, Paradigm 132).

References

Adams, William Y. 1998. *The Philosophical Roots of Anthropology*. Stanford.

Buber, Martin. 1970. *I and Thou*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York. First published 1923.

Cassirer, Ernst. 1944. *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. New Haven.

Clifford, James. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge MA. 10th printing 2002.

Crawley, Ernest. 1902. *The Mystic Rose: A Study of Primitive Marriage*. London.

Davidson, Basil. 1969. *The African Genius: An Introduction to African Social and Cultural History*. Boston and Toronto.

Dentan, Robert C. (ed.). 1955. *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*. New Haven.

Frankfort, Henri. 1948. *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of the Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature*. Chicago.

Frankfort, Henri, H.A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Thorkild Jacobsen, and William A. Irwin. 1946. *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay of Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East*. Chicago.

Frankfort, Henri, H.A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, and Thorkild Jacobsen. 1949. *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*. Baltimore.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York.

Geertz, Clifford. 1984. "Distinguished Lecturer: Anti Anti-Relativism." *American Anthropologist* 86: 263–78.

Hume, David. 1900. *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Chicago. Orig. publ. 1748.

Huntington, Samuel. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Making of World Order*. New York.

Kawashima, Robert S. 2006. "The Priestly Tent of Meeting and the Problem of Divine Transcendence: An 'Archaeology' of the Sacred." *The Journal of Religion* 86: 226–57.

Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge MA.

Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien. 1949. *Les Carnets de Lévy-Bruhl*. Paris.

Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien. 1975. *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*. Trans. Peter Rivière. Oxford.

Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien. 1985. *How Natives Think*. Trans. Lilian A. Clare, with a new Introduction by C. Scott Littleton. Princeton. First published in 1926.

Lloyd, G.E.R. 2007. *Cognitive Variations: Reflections on the Unity and Diversity of the Human Mind*. Oxford:

Needham, Rodney. 1972. *Belief, Language and Experience*. Chicago.

Prescott, F.C. 1927. *Poetry and Myth*. New York.

Rochberg, Francesca. 2009. "Inference, Conditionals, and Possibility in Ancient Mesopotamian Science." *Science in Context* 22: 4–25.

Segal, Robert. 1979. Review of Frankfort *et al*., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, reprint 1977. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47: 662–64.

Shweder, Richard A. 1984. "Anthropology's Romantic Rebellion against the Enlightenment, or There's More to Thinking than Reason and Evidence." In Shweder and Robert A. LeVine (eds), *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, 27–66. Cambridge.

Wengrow, David. 1999. "The Intellectual Adventure of Henri Frankfort." *American Journal of Archaeology* 103: 597–613.

Wengrow, David. 2010. *What Makes Civilization? The Ancient Near East and the Future of the West*. Oxford.

Westman, Robert S., and David C. Lindberg (eds). 1990. *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*. Cambridge.