

Weston La Barre, prefazione a *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences*, The Hague-Paris, Mouton, 1967, pp. VII-X.

Preface

This is a brilliant book. It is also an important, indispensable, and long overdue book in the history of the social sciences. For it embodies that rare and disturbing phenomenon; a basic and genuinely revolutionary insight. We must be prepared to be deeply vexed with it. All the natural sciences long since have sought to become exact sciences, first through discernment of the *possibility* and the *nature*, and then through analysis and measurement the *magnitude*, of 'probable error' *inherent in the very process of observation* and measurement, as exemplified by chromatic and other distortion in the microscopic lens itself, and the like. Indeed, this same sophisticated epistemological discipline has been undergone also in metaphysics (as in science) in the revolutionary change from historic synthetic to modern analytic philosophy: during many centuries, from Plato to Kant, synthetic speculative system-building metaphysics got precisely nowhere, until analytic philosophy gained the wit to *examine the tools and process of philosophizing* (words, mathematics, symbolic logic) in the post-Kantian days of Wittgenstein, Cantor, Dedekind, Whitehead and Russell, Ogden and Richards, and their like, thereby giving us philosophy in a new key. In astronomy, Einstein has shown us the imperative necessity of *reckoning with the position of the observer* in a relativistic universe; in physics, Heisenberg has shown us the indeterminability (not the undeterminedness, as theologians choose to misunderstand it) of some intra-atomic events *without, in the process of observing, changing* the events themselves. There is no hitching-post in this etherless universe. Meanwhile, self-designated 'social sciences,' yearning for the prestige of exact physical sciences from the seventeenth century onward, solemnly continue to pattern themselves on a seventeenth century mechanistic Newtonian model, quite as if Einstein and Heisenberg had not revolutionized physics in the three-century interim. It is more than ironic that the least exact of social studies, the hopelessly humanistic "bird-watching" naturalistic study of man, should first learn this relativist-indeterminist anthropic sophistication, the invisible man desperately trying not to be seen seeing other men, while academic psychology and sociology are even farther down the primrose path of Newtonian epistemology. Fatuously "experimental-manipulative" social scientists have lacked both the humility and the wit to recognize that they are feeding *multiply* man-contaminated data into their Truth Machine and - despite obsessively exact 'methodology' - are therefore merely rediscovering (deviously, laboriously, and above all unwitting) the local contemporary folklore about our society, which after all is what they have programmed into their protocols and which indeed (far less ponderously and pretentiously) simple ethnography might have given us. Perhaps because psychology was sooner boogged down in neo-Pythagorean numerology, we find rather earlier in psychology than in sociology astute isolated figures like Sigmund Koch who have discovered the sterile scholasticism of such 'social science' and have identified the epistemological existentialist predicament of people trying to study people without being human themselves. Again, it was in naturalistic 'bird-watching' *clinical* psychology - studying

whole, functioning, non-experimentally-manipulated, non-rat, statistically undismembered human persons – that the Freudian revolution occurred: man is not unquestioned master in his own house, the rationalizing mind; the would-be analyst must first arduously win through to an analysis of himself, if he would observe others with some correction of the distortions of observations within, himself as observer. Man studying man was not so simple as it seemed. For *he* too occupies psychological space in a relativistic universe. Examination of subjective countertransference is a vexing, difficult, and highly unwelcome demand when social scientizing, left alone, might otherwise remain a pleasant indulgence, a gratifying theology of man, discovering him to be as we would precognitively wish. Patently a nasty man, Devereux has raised the alarming possibility that field ethnography (and indeed all social science), as presently practiced, may be a species of autobiography. Where once the hairy-chested anthropologist could suppose that he entered the field wholly innocent of any ideas, motivations, theories or apperceptive culture of his own, we are now invited to discern the anthropologist at once as *sapiens* culture-bearer person, and the possibility that his simple 'science,' if undisciplined by awareness of countertransference, may be a self-indulgent branch of lyric poetry, telling us how he projectively feels about the unknown. It is necessary to state our epistemological predicament thus trenchantly. For, with a few honorable exceptions (Lévi-Strauss, Maybury-Lewis, Kenneth Read, Buettner-Janusch, Gearing, Evans-Pritchard, Devereux and Laura Bohannan), few fieldworkers have had the combined intelligence, integrity and intrepidity to discern countertransference phenomena : how the observer of human data reacts as a person and as a human being to his own observations. I venture to suggest, however, that only a man with Devereux's unique intellectual and professional equipment – a practicing psychoanalyst and fieldworker with a professional's knowledge of modern mathematics and physics, a European acclimatized to an alien America - could have apprehended the problem in its full size and intellectual presence. Indeed, a basic datum of all social science (as Devereux astutely shows) is *what happens within the observer* - in the large sense his own 'countertransference' reactions as a specific human being. Linton and a few other anthropologists have been aware that in the preparation one must go carefully through a field monograph and remove all telltale traces of the ethnographer writing it; the voice of science must be made to sound firm and apodictic: it was no mere man observing these people, only anastigmatic recording lens. But the problem is not to be disposed of by sweeping it under the rug! Since this is the professional habit, however, it will be obtrusively obvious that illustrative examples of Devereux's point are embarrassingly rare in the literature, and that *a fortiori* Devereux has been forced to provide many of the examples from his own work. As one of the very few psychoanalytically oriented ethnographers myself, I can only marvel at Devereux's courage and integrity in doing this. His elegant and eloquent device of frequent 'case' examples is didactically superb; these examples have a kaleidoscopic variety and give great sharpness of focus to the argument. My own impulse is not to cavil at the spectacle of a continuously and consciously self-critical man, or invidiously to throw stones, but rather to admire a mind willing thus, for this professional purpose, to live in a glass house: accepted insight imposes a moral burden on the learner to learn about himself and his motives, were we now to attack him *ad hominem* as a technique of ignoring his message. The un-selfexamined anthropologist henceforth has no right or business anthropologizing.

Anyone with analytic clinical experience knows how we feel impelled to punish those who, in giving us insight into ourselves, have aroused our anxiety and burdened the

ego with still heavier demands of conscience. And it is astonishing, with all the evidence we have from the history of science, that we should still be surprised to find that authentic innovation is always punished because it too arouses anxiety and forces painful cognitive reorientation. But in commending with overt admiration this work to our profession, I confess I fear for Devereux not so much contumely, for that proves the presence of unacknowledged cognitive insight (ending, hopefully, in ultimate conscious recognition), but rather simple denial and non-seeing neglect, which are easier ways of handling the emotional difficulty and burden of these insights. Nevertheless, until we grapple - seriously, in depth, and at length - with the problem Devereux has posed, I consider there is no possibility whatever of authentic social science, but only charismatic posturing and feckless changes of fashion in 'methodology'-rationalized folklore about man.

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