

THE EVENT AND THE INFERENCE: EXPOSURE, DEBT, AND THE LIMITS OF THE PUBLIC ADJUDICATION OF PROVENANCE

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ABSTRACT

Some traditions claim not merely to respond to something they did not produce, but to be correctable by it. This paper asks neither whether that something exists nor whether the tradition is right; it asks what would make such a claim examinable from outside the community. Its central thesis is that undergoing constraint and identifying what constrains are items of different kinds: resistance is an event, the attribution of its provenance is an inference — and no property of the event (intensity, cost, duration, unavailability, recalcitrance, personal form) yields that inference on its own. Taking the case of the Philadelphia Society of Friends between 1738 and 1776, the paper transports into this configuration the attribution procedures that operate in other domains, and shows that what crosses over is not what does the work: what is missing is a route of access independent of the very mediations whose provenance is in question. An accounting is then built which charges each rival identification with what it accommodates, what it predicts, what it must add, and what debt it contracts — applied with the same measure to naturalistic descriptions and to the tradition itself. The result is negative and determinate: in the material examined, no public procedure produced the required inequality between rival identifications. What remains is not scepticism but exposure: a public property, poorer than truth and for that reason usable, which distributes no winners and blocks the conversion of absent adjudication into victory for either side.

Keywords: provenance; public adjudication; exposure; tradition; epistemology of religion.

1. THE PROBLEM

A community lived in a certain way for a century and, over the course of a few decades, changed. The change ran against the interests of its own members, cost money, fed disputes that lasted for years, and ended with the exclusion of some of them. None of this is rare. What is difficult to explain is what those people said had happened: not that they had changed their minds, but that they had been wrong — and that what had shown them the error was precisely what they believed they had been obeying from the beginning.

There is a considerable difference between saying that a community corrected itself and saying that it was corrected. In the first case we can remain entirely within its history. In the

second, the community itself introduces a difference that does not allow such closure: it claims to respond to something that is not to be confused with it and that, precisely because it is not to be confused with it, can turn against what it does. A tradition of this kind does not merely admit the abstract possibility of error; it admits that it may be mistaken about the very thing to which it seeks to be faithful.

The case is that of the Quakers of Philadelphia and its surroundings, between the middle and the end of the eighteenth century, in the process that led them to make the holding of enslaved persons incompatible with membership in the society.² Not because it offers an edifying episode, but because it offers a case — and a case is useful only when we are willing to let it create difficulties also for what we would like to be true.

It is worth stating precisely what is being asked, because almost all the neighbouring questions are larger. The question is not whether the thing to which those people said they responded exists, nor whether they were right, nor whether any religion is true. The question begins earlier: what would make tenable, for someone who does not belong to the community, the claim to have been corrected by that to which it responds? What would need to be available for someone from outside to grant or refuse that claim without first deciding whether they believe what the community believes?

The requirement is not imposed from outside: the distinction already exists within the practice. When a community says that a certain demand came from that to which it responds, by means of that claim one orientation is recognized as legitimate, another is refused, a conduct is corrected, and sometimes someone is excluded. The community must therefore distinguish between what it receives as coming from its term and what has merely been attributed to it — and it is from this internal difference that the public problem arises.

This narrows the object: no theory of religion is offered here; rather, a narrow class is isolated — traditions that understand themselves as responses to something they did not produce and that admit they may be corrected by that something. The first half of the description comes from anthropology; the second is an addition that must be answered for, because a tradition can understand itself as responsive without understanding itself as correctable by its term.³

It remains to clarify the use of neutrality. The instrument built here carries no built-in criterion capable of deciding, by itself, the truth or value of the positions examined; it is in this sense, and only in this sense, that it is neutral. Methodological neutrality is not innocence, and here the former will not serve as a name for the latter.

2. TERM, MODE, AND WEAVE: THE TWO SILENCES OF DESCRIPTION

Let us begin with what can be described without controversy. A practice of this kind exhibits three elements. There is a term: that toward which the participants turn, which is not to be confused with the practice and is recognized as not produced by it. There is a mode: learned ways of addressing that term, with their times, gestures, silences, and possible errors — one can go

wrong without transgressing any written rule. And there is a weave: the network of relations that distributes positions among the living and runs through time, preserving, modifying, and transmitting what has been received. The forms of transmission may change; what cannot disappear is transmission itself. If for one generation no one teaches, preserves, and hands on, at its end we shall not have an impoverished meeting: we shall have no meeting at all.

This description has two limitations, and the rest of the inquiry depends on them. The first: the description contains no criterion of value. Term, mode, and weave register without difficulty the craft guild, the religious community, and the criminal organization. This does not make them morally equivalent; it means that the judgement that separates them was not produced by this instrument. There is an elementary difference between not possessing a judgement and refusing to attribute to an instrument a judgement it does not supply — and, had the criterion been inscribed in the construction, we would find at the end what we had deposited at the beginning.

The second: the description does not decide the reality of the term either. A practice wholly oriented toward something non-existent can possess a term, a mode, and a weave as dense as one oriented toward something that exists, and multiplying details does not help: the distance between the practice and the reality of its term follows from the kind of thing being described, not from an imperfection that greater precision could fill in.

From this follows a consequence resisted on both sides. The intensity of participation informs us about the participant's relation to that in which he participates; it does not, by itself, inform us about the truth or value of that to which he gives himself. An eighteenth-century Quaker could sacrifice prosperous businesses, refuse fabrics because of the conditions under which they were produced, pay the enslaved persons of the household that hosted him directly so as not to receive for nothing what they had been compelled to give. If depth, sacrifice, or duration measured by themselves the value of that to which someone adheres, cases of this kind would have enormous probative force. They do not: an extraordinary price is paid for a true conviction or for a false one, for a just cause or for a terrible one.

3. PRODUCED IS NOT THE SAME AS ILLUSORY

The question of the reality of the term seems to admit only two answers: either that which the participants claim to encounter exists beyond the practice and the history that formed it, or it does not. The bifurcation is exhaustive and, to that extent, intact; the difficulty lies in what we do with the second possibility after choosing it. One passes almost without noticing from *the term does not exist independently of the practice* to *the practice is a mistake*, as though the second statement were contained in the first. It is not: between the two there is a step that needs to be examined.

It is seen better outside the religious case. In a criminal organization, the term of the practice may be constituted by obligations that the current member finds ready-made: who owes what to whom, what loyalties are demanded, what debts run through time. There is no need to

attribute to them an existence independent of the human beings who instituted them; they have a history, they were established, altered, and transmitted by people. According to the bifurcation, the term is produced. Does it follow that the eighteen-year-old who joins is mistaken in responding to it? The obligations that come to govern part of his life were not made by him, were there before his arrival, resist him, and do not disappear when he violates them. We can condemn that reality entirely without altering the descriptive fact; what we cannot say is that he stands before an image produced by himself.

What the bifurcation erased was an elementary question: produced by whom, and when? Under the same word were gathered what the participant himself produces and recognizes as his own work; what the present community produces and preserves under some power of alteration; and what human beings produced many generations earlier and the living receive as an already constituted reality. In all three there is human production; the participant's relation to what is produced is not the same. To say that money, law, or a language were produced clarifies something about provenance; it does not yet clarify the relation of the one who receives them to what he has received.

The consequence alters the second path: it is not the one in which no relation exists, but the one in which the relation exists — with the historically constituted practice itself, which the participant did not produce, which precedes him and is not subject to his will — and in which that with which he actually relates is not what he thinks he encounters beyond it. This is the serious rival, and it is not a naive theory of error: it grants the experience and displaces the identification.

4. RESISTANCE IS AN EVENT; ATTRIBUTION IS AN INFERENCE

Here lies the core of the argument: resistance is an event; the attribution of its provenance is an inference. The two reach consciousness together, and for that reason it is easy to treat them as one.

A chemist knows the procedure, measures, mixes, heats, and waits; the result does not appear. The experience is prior to any explanation: one thing was expected and another occurred. But the material may not admit what was expected of it; the apparatus may be defective; the reagent, contaminated; the procedure may have been learned wrongly and repeated that way for years; the theory may be wrong; or the result may have occurred and the error lie in the reading. In all these cases the initial experience is practically the same. Being thwarted announces a problem; it does not carry with it the indication of its provenance.

In the meeting of the Friends the same structure appears in a less docile form. A meeting could remain for hours before a question without deciding; there was no vote to close the matter when the majority grew tired, and an objection that could not be absorbed held up the process for months. But the life of that community was traversed by constraints of very different provenances: the discipline resisted the individual; the elders resisted; the minutes resisted, bringing into the present decisions recorded by others; custom resisted even those who had

authority to modify it; the surrounding world resisted, with ridicule, hostility, and material loss; economic interest imposed its weight. And, among all of these, the participants spoke of yet another. All arrive under a similar elementary experience: something does not yield. The problem is that the experience of the limit does not carry inscribed in it the origin of the limit.

There is a strong reply to this, and it deserves its best version. Even if a human construction acquires enormous independence vis-à-vis each participant and an entire generation, the history of its formation remains, in principle, internal to the human chain that produced it; a resistance whose provenance did not lie in that chain would be something else, and perhaps different origins leave different traces. We would then have a difference that does not require deciding in advance what is in dispute.

The examination of the candidate properties always returns the same result. Persistence will not do: a language is wholly human and runs through centuries, resists states, academies, and concerted reforms, imposes itself on the living as something found ready-made. There are at least two ways for something to resist — because its provenance does not depend on us, or because it depends on us in a way too distributed to be at anyone's disposal — and persistence alone does not say which. Intensity says how much a resistance weighs; duration, how long it takes to yield; content, in what direction it runs against us. None says where it came from. And unavailability is not the same as independence: an order distributed over centuries and across multitudes is unavailable to each person without ceasing to be human.⁴

Nor does the personal form under which a constraint is received establish the nature of what produces it. An experience may present itself as a call without a caller following from it; a practice may be organized as waiting without the waiting establishing initiative on the other side.

There remains testimony, and it cannot do the work alone. The reason is not suspicion about the honesty of the one who speaks: a person may be entirely convinced that she was corrected by something she did not produce and may even be right. The difficulty persists in the case of perfect sincerity, because the claim already contains the attribution one wishes to examine. To take the community's answer as proof of provenance is to turn the practice's self-interpretation into a criterion for confirming it. The circle does not arise from religion: it arises from the procedure.⁵

Shifting the weight onto the circumstances does not save it. Someone gives up an advantage, confronts his peers, loses standing, and insists that he did not choose the change: the cost makes the resistance more impressive; it does not identify its provenance.

And there is an additional difficulty, of another order. In a community, saying that a correction came from the term is not merely reporting: it is acting. Whoever claims it claims for his proposal an authority that should not depend on him, and whoever opposes it will no longer be merely disagreeing with a person. The claim describes a provenance and, at the same time, redistributes authority in the present. It follows that what reaches us has already passed through a selection: we do not find all the occasions on which someone claimed to have been corrected, but

the claims that survived the procedures by which the community decides who may speak and under what conditions what is said will count as a word addressed to the body. The case makes this visible: there were those who formulated accusations against slavery precisely in the language of fidelity and correction that would later become familiar without thereby being received as bearers of a correction, and the institutional response could take the form of discipline and good order instead of refutation; decades later, arguments close in content acquired another efficacy by other routes and in other positions of the weave. There is no need to conclude from this that authority produced the change: it is enough to recognize that it took part in selecting what could count as correction. Possessing the final archive does not tell us what the initial population of claims was.

5. TRANSPORTED PROCEDURES: WHAT CROSSES OVER AND WHAT DOES THE WORK

If attribution is an inference, the right question is no longer which property of the event reveals provenance, but what authorizes the inference. There are domains in which attributions of provenance are made under public control; it is worth asking what, there, actually does the work, and whether that condition remains when the context changes. The comparison is not between strengths: a historian does not fail by not repeating the Peloponnesian War in a laboratory.

Take risky prediction. In the cases in which it worked, it contained two pieces, and it produced inequality only when both were present. The first is determinate anticipation: before knowing the result, someone commits to something precise enough for a later error to be recognized — not the generic hope of finding an intermediate organism, but the restriction of the age of the rocks, of the depositional environment, and of the expected features. The second is different: what supplies the answer comes by a route that is not under the control of the processes that produced the expectation — the calculation could be wrong, but it could not move the planet; the hypothesis could guide the excavation, but it could not put the fossil in the rock. Anticipation creates exposure; the independence of the route of confirmation prevents every answer from being a return of what had already been put into the procedure.

Brought separately to our case, the two pieces do not cross over together. Determinate anticipation exists, and frequently: traditions make claims about events, places, and dates precise enough for it to be known what would count as error. Here everything must be granted: when that thing can be checked by a route the tradition does not control, the procedure crosses over whole for that claim, which can be right and can be wrong — and both the success and the error count.

But one must immediately ask what was confirmed when there was success, and the answer is smaller than it seems: that claim about the world was confirmed. A community can be right about a place, a date, or an event and still have its internal transformation entirely explained by its own history: the confirmation arrived by an independent route, but it bore on something else. The difference is worth keeping: crossing over is a property of the procedure; doing the work

depends on what it bears upon. Transporting a procedure does not carry with it the object of the inference for which it had force — and it is this silent passage that makes certain comparisons seem more conclusive than they are.

Let us turn to the claims of direct interest: not about something in the world that can be checked by another route, but about the term itself and what it demands of the community. Here the first piece may still exist — a tradition may commit itself in a determinate way to abandoning a practice or correcting a position. It is the second that disappears: what would confirm that the demand came from the term arrives through the same mediations whose provenance we are trying to judge — texts, memories, authorities, practices of discernment, procedures by which a claim is accepted or refused. There is no equivalent here of the region of the sky at which the telescope is ordered to be pointed.

The same holds for intervention, whose force came from putting what was claimed to exist to work for a goal independent of the one for which it had been introduced, with a result verifiable by a route of its own: either the result is a public occurrence in the world — and then it counts for the empirical claim that was made — or there is no result verifiable by an independent route, and the piece that gave the procedure its power is missing. As for recalcitrance under motivated effort, it crosses over easily and exists in abundance in these traditions, which preserve, against their own interest, texts and decisions that accuse them; but what crosses over is the property, not the discriminating power, since a distributed order can be recalcitrant to the same degree.

6. THE TWO CANDIDATES THAT REMAIN ADMISSIBLE

Two procedures remain that do not depend in advance on the identification they are supposed to test. They need not decide it: by the rule used from the beginning, it is enough that they produce inequality.

6.1. Convergence Between Traditions Without Contact

The first looks for determinate coincidence where transmission does not explain it: if two historically independent traditions converged on determinate contents whose similarity the rival explanations had not taught us to expect, there would be something there to measure.

The examination returns an unforeseen trade-off. Where content is abundant and directly accessible, historical independence weakens, because there is possible or demonstrated transmission. Where historical independence is exceptionally strong, independent access to the content prior to the encounter weakens: the record available to us was produced after contact and through the categories of those who arrived. What should function as a second, independent witness reaches us by means of the first.

The difficulty runs deeper than bias. In the language of that people, even the term we would be tempted to translate as *god* constitutes a problem: the nearest concept designates an

animating power — that which makes the maize and the potato grow, forms mountains, men, and animals — and the world described there does not begin with things brought into existence out of nothing. The Castilian of the chroniclers brought another architecture, and very little is needed for one to pass for the other: the verb used to render that action could bring it close to nourishing or sustaining, and a minimal alteration brought it close to creating. A vowel could make an animating power begin to look like a creator.⁶

Note what was found: not a difficulty with sources, but the condition fixed at the entrance, appearing where it was least expected. We needed a route whose force did not depend on the identification under judgement, and the record of the second case was produced through the categories of one of the identifications we intended to compare; the convergence could belong to both traditions or could have been produced in the act of making one of them fit the vocabulary of the other. None of this defeats the procedure: the candidate did not fall; what fell was the sample it was possible to build.

6.2. Otherness of Content

The second does not depend on finding two traditions. It asks whether a practice can be constrained in the direction of a content that the standards by which it itself judged, applied rigorously, would not deliver. The initial formulation required demonstrating an absence across an entire historical repertoire and was almost impracticable; the reformulation makes the question examinable, because it is no longer necessary to prove that no one had the idea, but to establish positively what the received standards produced when applied. The procedure is not imaginary: there are configurations in which a description encounters something its repertoire did not deliver and in which that encounter can be checked from outside.

Applied to the tradition examined, the signal came back inverted. The content by which it described itself as corrected was not foreign to its standards: those who first formulated it took scruples the community already practised, turned them on a practice it still tolerated, and carried them through to a consequence it had not wanted to draw. The content was new as application and not as principle. This does not show that no correction came from outside — something that exceeds the community could correct it by making it see a consequence of the standards it already possessed — but only that, here, otherness of content does not supply what was sought: the internal history produces the content without adding any piece that was not already available.

Here too the candidate did not fall, and the debt is more precise: it would be necessary to show, through documentation prior to the correction, that the normative criteria of a tradition, applied rigorously, delivered one thing, while the correction led it in a determinate way to another that was not an extension, deepening, or recombination of those criteria — and still to ask by what route the new content entered, because otherness with respect to the repertoire is not otherness with respect to human history.

7. THE ACCOUNTING

Not finding a procedure that adjudicates does not authorize saying that all descriptions are in the same situation: they say different things and pay different prices for saying them. What is needed, therefore, is a grid that runs over any identification, including the one from which we started. There are four questions: what does it accommodate of the material we have? What does it predict that the others do not? What must it add in order to do so? And what debt remains open?

7.1. Postulate, Inaccessibility, Audacity

The strongest rival description grants the experience and displaces the identification. It establishes the separation between having a relation with something and being right about what that something is — a separation that this inquiry reached on its own account and that had already been formulated, with sufficient clarity, by the author of the rival description. There is no dispute to be won here: there is a distinction prior to ours, which we must acknowledge and preserve.

It is after this that the paths diverge. Once the distinction is made, that description identifies: the reality that mythologies conceived under different forms, the objective and lasting cause of the sensations proper to religious experience, is society. The relevant question is not whether this explains anything — it explains a great deal — but what authorizes the passage from showing that society can produce anteriority, exteriority, obligation, and constraint to concluding that it is what is being experienced. And the foundation is not hidden: the text itself declares, twice and in decisive places, the status of what it uses. At the opening, the postulate that a human institution cannot rest on error and falsehood, for otherwise it would encounter in things resistances it could not overcome; in the conclusion, the postulate that the unanimous feeling of believers of all times cannot be purely illusory, followed by the image of the tree known by its fruits.⁷

Once granted, these postulates prevent the explanation from being a simple theory of error. But they make the first move, not the second: from the proposition that the experience cannot be entirely empty it does not follow that the reality sustaining it is society. To establish that a sensation of heat has an objective cause is not yet to establish what that cause is — and the observation is the author's own. The tree and the fruits authorize, if the postulate is accepted, the search for a tree; they do not say which tree produced them. It should be added that the two reasons invoked for making the crossing — duration as a sign of foundation and the extent of adherence — had already been examined earlier, in the examination of language: the measure was not cut to fit the adversary.

A second description refuses to identify the term, and for that reason produces no prediction about it and contracts no corresponding debt: its comfortable position in the accounts comes from having asserted less, not from having demonstrated more. A third predicts that no statement will be able to say adequately that to which it purports to refer, by means of a clause that makes the term inaccessible to the examination that could run against it: it predicts much, but the prediction and the protection are born together.

The fourth goes further. It predicts not merely that the community will err, but the determinate form the error will take: if a remote event remains active under distortion, certain recurrences cease to be material accommodated after the fact and become what the mechanism told us to expect. The advantage is real, and for that reason the charge can be as well. What it must add is a transgenerational psychic transmission of acquired content that the available biological science rejected — and the author does not hide the point: he records the resistance, admits that he cannot do without what meets it, and assumes the audacity. When he asks what would authorize retaining the hypothesis, he offers as evidence the very phenomena that, within the construction, require the derivation; and, at the limit, the declared reason is no longer evidence of another provenance, but internal necessity: without this factor, he writes, one cannot advance.⁸

This forces a refinement of the rule. It is not enough to ask how much an identification predicts and how many mechanisms it must add; one must ask whether what produces the prediction has support that does not come exclusively from the description's own need for it. A postulate may be modest and well supported; large and examinable; declared inaccessible; or it may receive as its main evidence the very phenomena for whose explanation it was introduced. What matters is not only how much is owed, but to whom it is owed and whether there is an independent route for collecting it.

It is worth stating with equal precision what this does not do. Nothing here proves that any of these identifications is wrong. A description may depend on an inadequate mechanism and, for other reasons, be right in what it identifies; showing that the road does not sustain the journey does not demonstrate that the place is not there. What is closed is the account of the argument, not the reality it seeks to reach. And there is a coincidence worth recording because it was not sought: in the two cases in which the commitment became most visible, the place where it was lodged was marked by the author himself — one called *postulate* that on which he made the study rest, the other called *audacity* that without which he could not advance. I did not find the weak point: I had to read it.

7.2. The Rule of Symmetry

To run the account only over the rival identifications and to interrupt it upon reaching the tradition's own identification would be to apply the rule halfway and to call the asymmetry a result.

Note something that ran through the four rival descriptions: none claims that what the community responds to wants to be recognized by it. Society does not purport to reveal itself under the representations it produces; a psychic structure does not purport to be correctly identified by those who experience its effects; a remote event that survives in distorted form does not try to correct the distortion. In all of them, therefore, the fact that the participants do not publicly identify what constrains them is a difficulty for us, not for the identified term.

Hence the rule: the public unavailability of an identification does not weigh equally against all descriptions; its weight depends on what each gives us reason to expect about the

recognizability of the term it postulates. When the identification asserts that the term wants to make itself known, calls, reveals, corrects, and intends that those to whom it addresses itself recognize that it is the one doing so, then the unavailability encountered ceases to be merely a limit of our procedures and becomes something that this identification must accommodate — not because we have decided in advance how a term of this kind ought to act, but because the description itself attributed to it a purpose whose realization would make a difference to what we expect to find.⁹ It is the tradition itself, and not the observer, that supplies the measure here.

8. EXPOSURE IS NOT TRUTH

What remains, when the identification cannot be adjudicated, is a public property that can be described without settling the open question. A claim can expose itself in different ways: through predictions that can fail; through assertions the world can belie; through subjection to a canon that can turn against what it now maintains; through the acknowledgement of revision, which admits that some present position may come to occupy the place of those it now calls errors; through procedures capable of delivering results the community did not want; and through the admission of information produced outside itself. To these are added two that interpretation itself generates: exposure to the consequences of what it puts to work, and exposure to comparison with its own claims to recognizability.

Three cautions prevent this from delivering more than it delivers. The first: exposure has value only insofar as something can really count against the claim. It is not enough for a practice to go through difficulties or revise positions; there must be, before the result, a difference between what it could encounter without trouble and what would oblige it to recognize that something went wrong. Without that difference, what looks like vulnerability is merely a capacity for accommodation.

The second: the forms do not constitute a scale. A tradition may expose itself strongly to the facts of the world and hardly at all to revision; acknowledge errors readily and shield the identification of the term from any consequence; bind itself severely to the canon and possess interpretive resources capable of accommodating almost any result. Closing one door does not close the others, and opening many does not compensate for the closing of another. What is obtained is not a grade, but a profile.

The third, and the most important: exposure is not another name for truth, nor for rationality, nor for superiority. It is a poorer property and, for that reason, a more usable one: the quantity and kind of things a claim allows to count against what it asserts. A tradition may be right and expose itself little; it may be wrong and expose itself a great deal; it may increase its exposure as it becomes more determinate and thereby offer its critics instruments that a vague position would never offer. Exposure does not reward those who expose themselves.

What it does is determinate: it makes the public situation of claims unequal. An assertion that can fail is not in the same situation as another for which no result counts as failure; an

interpretation that can be confronted with a text it does not control is not in the same situation as another capable of retroactively rewriting its own measure; a community that records its own errors is not in the same situation as another for which every apparent error confirms, by definition, its deeper correctness. And to be thwarted is not to be refuted: it is to contract a debt. Before the result, that explanation was not necessary; after it, it is — and this is a public difference, even when the truth of the identification remains where it was.

9. THREE QUESTIONS THAT ARE NOT THE SAME

The inquiry obliges us to separate what occupied the same argumentative place.

The first is about the world: is there something there, and is it *that*? This examination reached its edge and stopped. It found people actually constrained by something, a community unable to dispose entirely of what constrained it, rival descriptions capable of accommodating the same material, and no procedure that publicly decided which of them correctly identifies the term. To say this is not to declare all answers equally good; it is not to confuse the reach of the instrument with the extent of reality.

The second does not ask what exists, but what can be established among people who need not share in advance the identification in dispute. Here there is a result, negative and determinate: routes were sought whose force did not depend on what they were supposed to judge, mechanisms were transported from domains in which attributions are made, the tradition's internal procedures were examined, independent convergence, otherness of content, and determinate anticipations were sought — and, in the material examined, no public procedure was found that produced the required inequality.

The third begins where the second ends, and it is not received for free from the other two: is it rational to adhere? Three shortcuts must be closed. The negative one says that, since the identification cannot be publicly decided, whoever adheres believes what he cannot show, and that this is irrational. The passage needs a premise — that a belief is rational only if it can be publicly adjudicated between rival alternatives by procedures available to anyone — which is strong, was not established here, and condemns at a stroke many things that no one treats as irrational, including a good part of what anyone believes about his own life, about those he knows, and about what happened before he was born. Whoever wishes to use it will have to bring it in from outside and sustain it. The positive one is symmetrical and equally short: there being no way to decide against is not having reasons in favour; a thing may be undecidable and be held for the worst motives in the world. The third is more discreet: it would be natural to turn exposure into a criterion of rationality and say that adhering to a tradition that exposes itself a great deal is more rational. It does not follow: responsibility in public space is not being right.

With the shortcuts closed, the account on the side of the believer has two columns. What non-adjudicability takes from him is considerable, and it is precisely what he would naturally offer: he cannot present as a public argument the resistance he encountered, nor the cost he paid,

nor the antiquity of his tradition, nor the transformation he saw in himself and in others, nor the experience of having been corrected. He continues to have them and to be able to say them — but not as reasons that bind those outside. What it does not take from him is more than one might suppose: it does not show that he is wrong, nor that what he responds to is not what he says it is, nor that his reasons are bad reasons for him; and it does not reduce his adherence to individual fabrication, because he receives a practice and relates to something that precedes him and is not his own work.

What remains open, and is now correctly formulated, is the next question: what must a person have, do, and admit for adherence to a non-adjudicated identification to be rationally legitimate? The requirement, it should be noted, does not belong to one side of the dispute. If the believer may be asked what would make him revise the identification, whoever identifies it as an entirely human product receives the same question; if it is suspect that a community should accommodate any result without revision, equally suspect is a naturalistic explanation capable of receiving any experience and any resistance as what it already expected to find. The requirement belongs to whoever asserts.

10. THE INSTRUMENT AS AN EXPOSED PRACTICE

It would be incoherent to demand exposure of all claims and to exempt the one that makes the demand. Three observations return the measure to its bearer.

The first concerns the order in which things happened. The bias was not introduced when the instrument was already finished and, among several cases, the one that best lent itself to examination was chosen. The case came first; it was from it that the questions became visible. The difficulty runs deeper than the selection of the object: there was also a selection of the properties that became examinable because that documentation existed. The documentary trace was not afterwards declared important because there was a great deal of it; it was the abundance of the trace that made it possible to discover that revision, recalcitrance, and change against preference could be investigated in this way. This does not make the instrument circular — the questions were taken to other domains, some survived the transport, others lost force — but it leaves it with a history, and the history matters.

The second concerns legibility, which has two conditions: there must be a trace, and the trace must allow some separation between what the practice did and the categories of those who recorded it. An enormous archive may fail the second; an oral tradition, the first; and the two failures leave the instrument silent for different reasons. Hence a decisive asymmetry: the presence of a trace that satisfies one of the conditions is positive information; its absence may mean that the practice does not expose itself in that way or that it exposes itself in a way that does not produce the required trace — and the less legible the practice, the less force the second inference has. This reaches even the expression used so many times: *we did not find* carries two variables that must be kept together, where we looked and with what instrument.

The third concerns the repertoire. There may be ways in which a practice exposes itself that leave none of the marks this examination knows how to recognize, or that leave them in a form it does not know how to read; if one appears, it will not be legitimate to refuse it because it does not fit those that were found — they were found, not decreed. The correct way to leave the instrument, therefore, is not as a tribunal situated outside what it judges, but as one more practice that exposes itself: with conditions of operation, blind spots, costs, and a domain in which it speaks better than in others. None of this makes it useless; it merely withdraws from it the privilege it refused to all the others — that of turning the limits of its own vision into limits of what exists.

11. CONCLUSION

The result distributes no winners. The tradition followed here did not receive what it said it received: public confirmation of the provenance of what corrected it. The rival description did not receive what it might want either: the demonstration that nothing exceeded the history capable of producing that correction. Both inhabit the material we have — one says that history is mediation, the other that it suffices — and showing in detail how the second can suffice does not demonstrate that it did suffice, just as showing how the first could operate through history does not demonstrate that it did operate.

This may seem a purely negative result, and it is not. Before this inquiry, different things occupied the same argumentative place: a practice could be historically produced and, for that reason, taken as refuted; it could resist its participants and be taken as external to its history; it could transform lives and have the truth of what it asserted inferred from its effects; it could endure and receive from its endurance a provenance that endurance does not contain. Separating these inferences does not add an answer, but it alters the conditions under which a future answer may be accepted.

And there is a positive, transportable gain. Before a tradition that claims to respond to something that exceeds it, the first question need not be whether that something exists, nor whether the tradition is true, nor even whether whoever adheres is rational. It can be prior and cheaper: what would have to be different for this claim to have encountered something it did not expect? Where can it lose? What would it recognize as correction? And, when correction occurs, what part of what happened authorizes attributing it to that which the tradition names? There is a difference between a claim that allows itself to be thwarted and one that does not make clear what would count against it; between a description that merely accommodates what happened and another that risks saying what ought to happen; between a commitment whose cost can be sought and another that declares, by its very form, that the cost can never be collected. None of these differences delivers truth. They deliver exposure — which is less than truth, but is not nothing: it is what allows a claim to enter a space in which consequences can be charged without its being necessary to decide in advance whether it is right.

Two debts remain open in a way different from the others. There are questions that remained open because we do not yet know how to investigate them, and there are questions that remained open even though we know what to look for: in the first case we lack the instrument; in the second, we lack the case. The two admissible procedures — determinate coincidence where transmission does not explain it, determinate content where the repertoire does not produce it — belong to the second group. Neither delivered the inequality we needed; neither was shown incapable of delivering it. An investigation that finds tomorrow what was missing will not be adding a note to these pages: it will be changing their result.

That is why it is not concluded here that the identification cannot be decided: after this inquiry, that would be the only sentence with no right to be written. What can be said is something smaller and more precise: with the case, the material, and the procedures examined, it was not decided.

One observation remains about the question itself. *To whom do we respond?* supposes that what lies on the other side of the response belongs to the kind of thing that can be called a *who*; but the examination of personal form showed that the form under which a constraint is received does not establish the nature of what produces it. The rigorous question would have to be formulated with a poorer word: *to what do we respond?* I keep the other on purpose, because that is how the traditions in question here speak — and because an inquiry that spent so many pages showing that current formulations carry unearned passages would be incoherent if it did not say this also of its own title.

Four propositions, then, and in this order. That there is response is one thing. That the term has reality is another. That this term is someone is another. That it is what a tradition says it is, yet another. Each passage requires something the previous one does not deliver. I did not discover to whom we respond; I discovered that we respond before we know how to answer that question, and that between there being a response and getting the name right there is a distance — because names carry commitments, produce expectations, contract debts, and sometimes expose those who pronounce them to being thwarted. These pages were written to measure it. They did not cross it. But now we know where it lies.

It is not the answer that was sought. It is the question in a condition to be asked.

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NOTES

1 This article condenses and reformulates, in the mode of argumentative exposition, the inquiry developed in *A quem respondemos? Tradições que se dizem corrigidas* [To Whom Do We Respond? Traditions That Say They Have Been Corrected] (forthcoming), from which the case examined and the conceptual apparatus employed here are drawn. Quotations from works consulted in Portuguese or Spanish translation, and from the author's own works, are rendered into English by the author.

2 The institutional landmarks used below are: the 1738 document by which the yearly meeting disowns Benjamin Lay's book; the 1758 minute, the first disciplinary measure provided with a sanction; and the 1776 act, which directs that disunity be testified against those who refused to execute instruments of manumission. See LAY (1738); A BRIEF STATEMENT (1843); REDIKER (2017).

3 On tradition as a historically extended and argumentatively living practice, MacINTYRE (1981); on the warning regarding the universalization of the category, ASAD (1993).

4 The convergence between MARX (1867) and HAYEK (1960) regarding the existence of orders that result from human action without resulting from human design is recorded here only on this point, and not as a thesis about either of them.

5 The separation receives corroboration — not evidence — from the clinical description of the feeling of knowing as a state that arrives by its own routes and can present itself identically when one is right and when one is not; BURTON

(2008).

6 BERNAND (2021), in the examination of the sources and of Quechua religious terminology. For the parallel warning regarding the categories through which the Greek material is read, VERNANT (1990).

7 DURKHEIM (1912), Introduction and Conclusion; the word *postulate* is the author's own.

8 FREUD (1939), in the part on the archaic heritage. Nothing is asserted here about what biology later came to establish; the account is closed with the material the author himself puts on the table.

9 The requirement can be formulated precisely because there are traditions that maintain, in a determinate way, that their term speaks and wants to be recognized; see WOLTERSTORFF (1995) and ALSTON (1991).