Max Müller: '... we feel that we are - in the presence of men who, if they lived with us --- would be looked upon as giants [299] --- [We must] guard against their memory being insulted'.

Müller: Lectures on the Science of Language: 1864

A.A. Macdonell, the professor of Sanskrit at Oxford at the beginning of this century said of Max Müller (Dictionary of National Biography: XXII Supplement: 1909) that his name was as famous as that of any other scholar of the nineteenth century. Well he might, for Müller who died in 1900, besides his contribution to Oriental scholarship, had pioneered in this country the sciences of language and religion and had created the study of comparative mythology. L.R. Farnell, a classicist and Rector of Exeter College, on the other hand, was able to say in 1934 (An Oxonian Looks Back) that 'Andrew Lang's Ballads on Blue China may preserve his name.' Lang, of course, was Müller's most active anthropological adversary, but besides that, one may fairly presume that the Ballads are even less frequently read than his other works.

Nothing of any depth or insight has really been written of Müller. Pater Schmidt, a most learned man, gives a simply erroneous account of his work (see The Origin and Growth of Religion 1931) and Evans-Pritchard's Theories of Primitive Religion (1965) whilst suggesting that Müller's work has been unjustly decried (p.21) nevertheless is generally condemnation. In fact we have had to wait for the publication of Social Anthropology and Language (ASA 10 ed. Ardener 1971); see remarks by Ardener in the introduction and the paper by Henson) for even a hint that Müller might be of value to us. Müller's works do not form part of a standard anthropological education, and of course he is not generally regarded as one of our founding fathers. Indeed, for much of his career he was engaged in dispute with those whom we conventionally take to be our disciplinary ancestors, and were it not for Evans-Pritchard's scholarship we might not even suspect that he existed. But in the present reflective and unsure state of anthropology, there is much in his badly neglected works that can be read with profit. More than that, and without wishing to disparage the work of the Victorian anthropologists, I should like to suggest that in certain respects he outranks them all.

This remark rests partly upon my own attitude to the present state of our subject, and reflects also a vision of how it ought to develop. My initial task, then, is to elucidate this view by discussing the very general context of my thesis! To Evans-Pritchard, in large part, we are indebted for our consciousness of a long line of distinguished scholars from whom we might claim to be descended. The outlines of this lineage are well known - thinkers of the Scottish enlightenment; in France, the Encyclopaedists, Comte, Fustel de Coulanges, the Annee school. Others have continued this work and we can now add to our past Van Gennep, and, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Needham, the brilliant Hoard. Some have not shown any enthusiasm for this type of reinstatement - Gluckman, as is well known, finds van Gennep boring - but the scholars among us can well appreciate the achievements of our forebears.
But I should like to suggest that, despite the work that has already been done, our past is still incomplete, and has in a sense only recently become so. Our interests are becoming linguistic and philosophical and it is now relevant to graft on to our conventional lineage a sub-branch of philosophers, philologists and linguists. Should all this seem decidedly unscientific and remind you of the way in which the Tiv manipulate their genealogies, I should say that the great Jacob Burckhardt defined history as what one generation finds of interest in another. And, if amending genealogies to fit present circumstances seems unhistorical, we have the testimony of Benedetto Croce that in a sense all history is contemporary history. History is not in any simplistic sense simply 'the past', and so I do not feel that I am departing too far from the normal methods of western historical science when I construct a past that has not previously existed. (These remarks, of course, have important implications for those who would contend that there is an absolute distinction between myth and history.)

Who appears in this new sub-lineage? In order to make Müllner chronologically central I shall start it in 1770 and end it in 1970. We may begin with Sir William Jones and Colebrooke, two Sanskritists of enormous learning who wrote much of general anthropological interest. A philosopher also appears at the beginning; Immanuel Kant. Now he appears not because he wrote a book on anthropology in 1767 or because he lectured on the subject at Königsberg, though both these are true. Rather, it is his 'Copernican revolution' as he styled it in his preface to the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason, which entitles him to our consideration. The philosophical revolution was the opposite to that which took place in astronomy, for Kant placed man in the centre of the universe, so to speak, and for that reason his Critique is a profound anthropological treatise - possibly the most important that we possess. And yet it forms no part of our training. What Kant did was to examine critically the powers of the human mind itself, to assess what the mind itself, owing to its own nature, contributes to our knowledge. We may now speak of fundamental structures of the human mind (the Kantian flavour of Mythologiques is well-known) but Kant's investigation into our synthetic a priori knowledge was an enterprise in the same spirit.

Nearer to the present day this lineage contains such linguists - some of them already accorded a recognition in our past - as de Saussure, the Prague structuralists and Chomsky. But I suggest that anthropology will be similarly fertilised, perhaps more so when it realises the brilliance and anthropological nature of the thought of Wittgenstein and those he has, though in different ways, influenced. I am thinking of Waismann, Strawson and Hampshire in particular. If anthropology were only to recognise the direct relevance of the sensitive type of conceptual inquiry in which these men are experts, anthropology could become a real academic discipline instead of merely a social science. We could also honour our Emeritus Professor who so long ago claimed that our real attachments were with history and philosophy.

But I have begun and ended with Kant and Wittgenstein for a very special reason, for, between them these two men represent firstly, Müllner's main intellectual problem, and secondly a major aspect of its solution. I can speak in such general terms
because one senses in all that Müller wrote a strong unity of purpose and assumption. (Coherence is another matter. Müller's books are long and rambling and less than consistent, but generalisation is still possible). Let me return to Kant. It was in 1881 on the centenary of its first appearance that Müller published his English translation of the Kritik der Reinen Vernunft. In the translators preface to this work he says that the Veda is the first arch of the bridge of thoughts that spans the whole history of the Aryan mind and that Kant's critique represents the perfect manhood of that Aryan mind. Having once learnt from Kant what man can and what he cannot know, my plan of life was very simple, namely to learn, so far as literature, tradition and language allow us to do so, how man came to believe that he could know so much more than he ever can know in religion, in mythology and in philosophy. The problem, and so what remained to be done after Kant, would require a 'Critique of Language'.

This brings me to Wittgenstein. Now I should like to make it perfectly clear here that I intend in no way to suggest that Müller is the historical source of Wittgenstein's notion regarding language and philosophy. Anyone with the slightest acquaintance with the history of philosophy will know that many have discoursed on the relation between language and thought and the place of language in philosophy. Even the Greeks, so little conscious of language as compared with ancient India, produced men who berated the evil influence of language on thought. To show the resemblance of Müller's thought to that of Wittgenstein I shall quote several passages from his book The Science of Thought (1887). He there quotes Hamann -- a friend of Kant's -- as saying, 'Language is not only the foundation of the whole faculty of thinking, but the central point also from which proceeds the misunderstanding of reason by herself'. Earlier, in the preface to his 1861 Lectures on the Science of Language at the Royal Institution, he wrote that it was his aim to attract the attention of 'the philosopher, the historian, and the theologian, to a science which concerns them all, and which though it professes to treat words only, teaches us that there is more in words than is dreamt of in our own philosophy'. And he goes on to quote Bacon: 'Men believe that their reason is lord over their words, but it happens too that words exercise a reciprocal and reactionary power over our intellect. Words -- shoot back upon the understanding of the wisest, and mightily entangle and pervert the judgment.' This is the background to Müller's own phrase 'disease of language'.

In his preface to the Science of Thought, Müller states that it is written 'for a few friends who share his interests and that it will not be popular. 'There is a fullness of time for philosophical as there is for political and social questions'. Now the theme of the book is this, 'that the interdependence of thought and language places philosophy on a new basis (514), an obvious basis but perhaps for that very reason overlooked, namely an investigation of language itself. The history of philosophy is a battle against mythology, he claims (217), and philosophical problems must be solved by a study of language. Thought lives in language and 'philosophy must learn to deal with language as history deals with events'. (550). True philosophy, then, consists of its examination and correction. (573). It seems to me that this is nothing if not a clear enunciation of the 'bewitchment and
therapy's view of philosophy. In 1838 Müller had said (Natural Religion) that the dictum 'we think in words' must become the chapter of all exact philosophy in future. But he reflected in his 1878 paper 'On the Origin of Reason': 'What should we say if biologists were to attempt to discover the nature and laws of organic life without ever looking at a living body. And when we are to find the living body of thought if not in language?' (467). But he goes on to remark gloomily that 'whenever the philologist represents the whole history of philosophy as in truth an uninterrupted struggle between language and thought and maintains that all philosophy must in the end become a philosophy of language, he is apt to be taken as an enthusiast'. I would refer you here to a short article of Müller's in the very first volume of Mind (1876) where he points out some weaknesses in Mill's writings on thought. (348) and suggests they would have been avoided had he only taken care to look more thoroughly into how his language was constructed and worked. He refers there to the 'secret cunning of languages' and comments (349): 'Language, as I have often said, always revenges herself whenever we do violence to her or whenever we forget her antecedents'.

In short, then, Müller's way to solve the problem that Kant left is this. We think we know more than we can because we forget how our language is built and so we use words in ways for which they were not originally intended. This is the general background to Müller's system of mythology, and the fact that none of the commentators on his work have fully sensed that this area is but a part of a larger scheme explains, in part, why his writings on myth have been so sadly misunderstood.

I ought to say something of Müller's central assumption that thought and language are inseparable or identical. I am not unaware of the problems this involves. If we take the statement in a philosophical sense we become bemused immediately. What does it mean; does it make any sense at all to ask in general what the relation between language and thought is? I cannot address myself to this general issue here - Wittgenstein himself advocates silence when one cannot speak clearly. But I should like to suggest that whatever the validity of the assertion, it is a stance that has very valuable consequences. Before briefly indicating what I mean with a few examples, I must defend Müller against one obvious objection. Possessed as we are now of a semiological consciousness, we would immediately spot that his equation is wrong. That he over-stresses language as against other modes of symbolic thought I do not deny - as a philologist one would hardly expect anything else. But we must see how Müller uses the word language, and thought also, for it is clear that his identity of thought and language is really the interdependence of human reason (that is conceptual thought, begriffe not vorstellung) and any system of symbolic signs. (Saussure, of course, points also to this dependence of definite ideas upon signs). Language is the best, says Müller, but there are other types of signs which may be substituted for the verbal, and he therefore includes under the term language any system of signs which embodies conceptual thought. As he says in his 1870 lectures on the Science of Religion (1873:356): 'we do not exclude the less perfect symbols of thought, such as gestures, signs or pictures. They, too, are language in a certain sense and they must be included in language before we are justified in saying that discursive thought can be realised in language only.' We have signs and signs of signs. Thus, not only gestural language, ideographic
signs, but such systems as algebra standing in the place of numbers. Language can abbreviate itself, he says, and so we have signs which stand for whole trains of reasoning (ibid: 49). It is clear that what Müller-means is that human beings must think in symbols. 'All I maintain is that thought cannot exist without signs; and that our most important signs are words.' (ibid: 58). This surely is not objectionable. What he means is made clear by his discussion of a game of chess. Müller does not say that when we play chess we need to talk to ourselves, but chess pieces are names, they are signs. One can silently play chess without consciously stating rules, but the pieces are concepts and the game is a set of rules about how to move pieces. This is clear, he says, in that we can talk about these rules in the eventuality of someone making a mistake. If the pieces were not concepts there would be no game, only chaos.6

I should add briefly here that Müller was a fierce opponent of Darwin over the nature and origins of language, though he, like many German scholars, was an evolutionist long before the Origin of Species was published. Müller wanted to insist upon there being a difference of kind between human language and animal communication and his arguments would benefit the naïve type of ethologist that exists today. Müller, quite rightly, says that human language is more than a medium of communication, it is also a complex conceptual structure. For this reason, the question of the origin of language cannot be tackled in isolation, but must be viewed as part of a larger problem (see Origin of Reason: 1878). He says in his lectures on Darwin's philosophy of language (Fraser's Magazine 1873: Vol VIII) that 'our concepts and our words are produced by a faculty or by a mode of mental action which is not simply a barrier between man and beast, but which creates a new world in which we live.' In other words: 'We live in concepts.' (Three lectures on the Science of thought: 1887). As a Kantian Müller accepted that we must acknowledge that the world must accept our terms of knowing. To this extent we do create our own symbolic world. (I commented on this fact in my essay 'Anthropology and the Philosophy of Science' (JASO Vol II No.1). Müller's remarks in fact come close to the central ideas in Langer's Philosophy in a New Key - an inspiring anthropological philosophy). Müller said in 1861 that man possessed a specific capacity for forming general ideas and using general names, and that this put him, uniquely in a human world of symbols and concepts. (see Frazer's Magazine, Vol. VIII: 11). 'Through reason we not only stand above the brute creation, we belong to a different world.' (1861: 364). There is a point here of great import for the humane sciences, namely that there are concepts necessary to and specific to the description of human phenomena. When this is realised and its methodological consequences fully grasped, the social sciences will begin to be useful.

I should now like to talk briefly about some of the consequences of his assumption that thought and language are identical. Firstly, though I cannot here develop it, language for Müller is a social institution and it follows that thought is social too. I have time for one quotation only, which of course raises its own problems. It is from the lectures on Darwin's theory of language: 'Though the faculty of language may be congenital, all languages are traditional. The words in which we think are channels of thought which, we have not dug ourselves, but which we find ready made for us.' (1873: 528). We must
remember the individualistic associational psychology which so influenced the work of his contemporary anthropologists and to which the French sociological school, including Lévy-Bruhl quite legitimately took such strong exception. Secondly, consider this remark from his preface to the Science of Thought (1887): '... there is no such thing as intellect, understanding, mind and reason ... all these are only different aspects of language'. No one should be upset, however, for - (and giving us a Wittgensteinian comfort) - he says that these philosophical remarks leave the world exactly as it was before; we simply have a more valid understanding of ourselves. Now whatever we think of this particular assertion several important facts follow from his view that language is the embodiment of mind - and indeed in its historical aspect is the autobiography of the human mind. Many philosophers had complained that they had no reliable evidence with which to talk about mental phenomena. With an incredible blindness they had overlooked the fact that the evidence they needed was language itself. As Müller says later in the same book (290-5) 'the true philosophy of the human mind - is the philosophy of language'. It is well known that psychology in our century has retreated to a nonsensical experimentalism or unrealistic behaviourism even, afraid of the 'problem of other minds'. But language is surely the means of access to, and the proof of, our knowledge of other minds (see Müller: Chips IV 1875: 460). It is the most important medium in which our intersubjective understanding lives. Müller said on so many occasions that the investigation of language had a central role in psychology and the fact that social psychology has still not fully realized this fact will stand as one of the most absurd methodological errors committed by any social science. Thirdly (and I must make this my last example) logic for Müller was a general grammar. Now whilst his philological work was outdated before his death, the fact that Müller's interest in language was part of a larger problem means that he displayed that consciousness of the relevance of linguistics to philosophy that Chomsky possesses. Müller, in fact, considered (see Three Lectures on the Science of Thought: 4) comparative philology as a means towards the investigation of larger problems, as a severe apprenticeship to be served before the wider questions of the science of language could be tackled. He writes in 1885 ('The Lesson of Jupiter' in Chips IV 1895 ed: 380) that the widest comparisons in philology could show what was essential to language, as such, and therefore to thought. It would be possible to construct a general grammar, not speculatively as philosophers had done in the past, but empirically. Though I must leave the issue here, I should just add that Müller was extremely interested in universals, as indeed were many of the Victorian ethnologists. But Müller, for reasons which I shall shortly discuss was extremely conscious of the abuses of this type of wide comparison; the method might lead us to think we had definite conclusions when we had not understood any of our evidence. But, discussing the ethno-psychological approach to mythology he says this: 'If that motive turns out to be due to our common human nature, the ethnological method assumes quite a new interest, and may in time lead to very important results'. Such statements on direct expressions of the human mind are not infrequent.

I should now like to turn to another problem altogether - the question of 'ethnological-isms', which arises from Henson's essay in ASA 10 ('Early British Anthropologists and Language'). There she criticises quite justifiably the naive way in which native categories such as tabu, totem etc., were used as technical terms by C19 anthropologists. I shall add here as a similar error the promiscuous utilization of such terms as fetishism and animism,
native terms - in a sense - from our own culture. Now we would possibly be wrong to suggest that the anthropologists were completely unaware of the problems involved, but beyond the difficulties involved in any one of these terms is the simple fact that their employment at all involves a very general error concerning the way in which we should seek to understand meaning. But Müllcr must be exempted from a general indictment, for it was precisely over these terms that he was most censorious of his contemporaries. He, a translator and philosopher showed in this respect a sensitivity to conceptual problems which they lacked, and which most anthropologists today even cannot match.

As an introduction to this particular section of my paper I had better perhaps say something general on Müller's conflict with the ethnologists. Müller was the representative of German scholarship in England, but we should not exaggerate his hostility to the new science. After all, it was he who in a review in the Times in 1865 first brought to the public attention the profound importance of Tylor's Researches. He should also remember that he was attending lectures on anthropology at Leipzig as a student in the early 1840's a generation before the science existed in England. And he was using savage evidence in mythology before most of the ethnologists, but became disillusioned. He also attempted to establish a journal called Ethnological Records of the Colonies, for which no finance was forthcoming. However, he did send directives through the Colonial Office to begin the collection of linguistic and cultural data. We have been told that the value of field work was only realised in this century, even that Malinowski invented the new method. So let me refer you to a passage which Müllcr quotes in an address of 1891. They were written by Codrington, himself a Melanesian expert who was in the field for a vastly longer period than the few years of Malinowski during the First War. "When a European has been living for two or three years among savages, he is sure to be fully convinced that he knows all about them; when he has been ten years or so amongst them, if he be an observant man, he knows that he knows very little about them, and so begins to learn". (Let us remember also that Radcliffe-Brown one of the founders of modern anthropology never did any real field-work. He could not speak the language of the Andaman Islanders, and worked through interpreters for the whole duration of his stay there.) Codrington was just one of a group of real Victorian field-workers - other names are Callaway, Bleck, Gill, Hahn - and it was almost exclusively on their evidence that Müllcr relied. He refused to use evidence from those who could not speak the relevant languages.

But whilst Müllcr was enthusiastic about anthropology in these ways, he urged many cautions of method and assumption, which we should now accept as absolutely sound. He of course shared many assumptions with the ethnologists such as developmentalism, for instance, but he could not tolerate nursery psychology, nor the crude suggestion that savages were primitives. This later equation was of course, fundamental for the anthropologists, for it generated from a taxonomy the supposed historical time into which progress and survivals could be fitted. But Müllcr's main objection was a question of language. For him, as a philologist aware of the difficulties involved in deciding the meaning of Greek texts and acquainted with the problems of translating Sanskrit manuscripts he could not accept the way in which anthropologists drew such bold conclusions about societies whose languages they did not understand at all. For him it was simply obvious that if you knew nothing about a people's language then
you could know nothing about its culture. Anthropologists he thought could learn some caution from scholars: 'what I have ventured to say on several occasions is, let us wait till we know a little more of Hottentots and Papuans, let us wait till we know at least their language, for otherwise we may go hopelessly wrong'. (Natural Religion: 216). Müllcr reflected in his 1891 presidential address to the anthropological section of the British Association that anthropology 'has been raised to the dignity, but also to the responsibility of a real science'. He said that the time would come when an accurate knowledge of language would be regarded as a sine qua non of anthropological work, when the need for a 'scholarly conscience' would become clear. He concludes the address with these words: 'If anthropology is to maintain its high position as a real science, it's alliance with linguistic science cannot be too close'.

I shall start my discussion of Müllcr on 'ethnological-isms' by exposing a lost chapter in the history of totemism. By this I mean to indicate my annoyance that Lévi-Strauss nowhere make any reference to Müllcr's precocious remarks. We remember that Lévi-Strauss talks of a totemic hysteria, Müller talks of a totemistic epidemic - and he lived through much of it. In Natural Religion, he says this: 'There seems to be a peculiar fascination in strange names...in order to secure clearness of thought and honesty of reasoning in the study of religion I am afraid these terms (animism, fetishism, totemism) ought to be sent into exile. They have become dangerous...' (159-60). In an appendix on totemism in Anthropological Religion, he adds: 'All this is thoroughly unscientific: to take a foreign word without accurately defining it and then to add to it the magical termination of ism, may save a great deal of trouble, but what is here called trouble, is in reality accurate thought'. (409) Müllcr claims (Nat. Relig. 159; 522) that a totem is what it means to certain groups of Red Indians. There it is a clan-mark, a visible symbolic sign, an emblem such as primitive societies frequently used. And 'totem' should not be promiscuously used or made a general term of comparison. Indeed, even the word totem itself is wrong. Müllcr claims, on the authority of Father Cuq, a Canadian philologist, that the proper word for family mark is ote (genitive otem) (Biography of Words and the Home of the Aryas 1888: 249 n. 1). He quotes Brinton commenting on 'the animate symbolism employed with such marked preference by the red race to express abstract ideas'. (Anthr. Relig: 407-8). All this was written in the early 1890's, and if it does not make totemism unreal, at least its superiority to what contemporary anthropologists were saying is absolutely clear. For Müllcr, totemism was a civil institution among some Red Indian tribes by which groups in a village chose emblems to distinguish themselves. The beliefs in the sacredness of the animal, in descent and so on were secondary and grew up, as he says, 'naturally'. The sign chosen 'became surrounded as the colours of a regiment are even now, by a halo of many recollections'. (Nat. Relig: 522). An uncanny parallel, for Levi Strauss makes exactly the same point referring to Linton's 'Rainbow' Division. (Le Totemisme Anjourd'hui: 10). I will bring this little discussion to a close by saying that Müllcr was not alone. Wintermitz, another orientalist was asked by him to compile the massive index which forms Vol L of Sacred Books of the East. It was published in 1910 after many years labour and in an introductory note Wintermitz remarks on the errors that had been made in constructing theories on the origin and development of religion before adequate
What was defined as Muller's astuteness, material object. The object must be useful', but, he maintains that 'we must possess a complete 'ancestral spirit (an Indian concept)' (Contributions to the Science of Mythology: 1897: 195). And for Muller anyway it was quite obviously a 'grammatical' error to talk of anyone worshipping a material object. The object must clearly symbolise something else. Muller's astuteness, however, resided not solely in his caution over these terms referring to what is conventionally called religion: it extended to social organisation also. Witness the following on caste (Six Systems of Indian Philosophy: 1899: 11-2). He says that the word casta is a misleading term for understanding the social conditions of ancient India because it was invented by Portuguese sailors who used it to describe any social divisions that struck their fancy; to ask therefore what casta means in India is like asking what it means in England or what fetish means in Portugal.

What we really want to know is what was implied by such Indian words as Varna (colour) Gati (kin) Kula (family), Pravara (lineage); otherwise we shall have once more the same confusion about the social organisation of ancient India as about African fetishism or North American totemism. Each foreign word should always be kept to its own native meaning; or, if generalised for scientific purposes, it should be most carefully defined afresh. Otherwise every social distinction will be called caste, every stick a totem, every idol a fetish'. Or let me take another custom, the couvade. Muller did not like folklore method, for it seemed to him nonsense to attempt wide comparisons of beliefs or institutions before any of the examples used was really understood - the similarities, for instance, might be merely superficial. He says (1897: 226) 'a comparison of savage and civilised customs might be useful', but, he maintains that 'we must possess a complete insight into the one as well as into the other, before we can hope that our comparisons may be of real scientific value'. Speaking specifically of the couvade he says: (ibid:290) 'Unless the motive is the same, the custom is not the same; unless the motive is discovered the facts themselves are curious, but no more'. For motive we should read meaning, and there is a great deal in this perceptive remark on 'sameness' that I cannot go into here. This quote will have to suffice. 'It may be said that anybody can describe what he sees, even though unable to converse with the people. I say, Decidedly no' (1891 Address: 10). One of Muller's chief reasons for disliking folklore was that it assumed to understand you needed first to compare. Muller never denied that materials were to hand (XIV). He goes on to say that in his index such familiar terms as totemism, animism, taboo and fetishism are all 'excluded because they refer to the theories not to the facts of religion. Likewise the mythologist Robert Brown Jnr, who in 1898 wrote a book defending Muller against Lang's journalism says: 'the totemism of the 'untutored anthropologist' is necessarily destined to an absolute collapse'. (Semitic Influence in Hellenic Mythology: 203).
comparison could be illuminating, but he did suggest it was absurd to explain Vedic ceremonies from savage customs before attempting to explain them from the veda itself (1897: 210): 'we need an explanation from within not from without (ibid: 225) as was involved in ethnological comparison.' Müllier disliked the way savages seemed to charge ustodaYl.h exactly these with'


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later (ibid: 451) he adds: 'I am bound to say, I know, as yet, of few cases only where Tasmanians, Minicoupies, or Blackfeet have proved half as useful to us as even Sayana's much abused commentary'. Müllier, in his publication of the Rig-Veda-Sanhita included, not without the criticism of others, the vast 14th century commentary of Sayana. Though I cannot present any of the evidence here7 Müllier and other Orientalists had rehearsed our problem of the use of native models. Should one translate and not consider the native exegesis, or should one slavishly follow the native understanding? Neither, says Müllier, (Sacred Books of the East: 1867 Prospectus) the native commentary is absolutely the essential beginning to comprehension, but we should expect it to contain errors, even a systematic bias, so that the scholar should begin with the native understanding and construct a translation based upon a critical interpretation of that.

Appendix V to Anthropological Religion is called 'On the Untrustworthiness of Anthropological evidence'. Müllier disliked 'anecdotic' anthropology, which took fragments of evidence from societies whose languages were unknown and from sources whose reliability could not be assessed. As Müllier said (1897: 205) 'I know what our dangers are nearer home' - 'He, a translator and philosopher could not imitate the fearless anthropologist. Of them he said - and he was right - (ibid: 193) 'They thought that their task was much easier than it really is'. Now if a philosopher - Macintyre, Hampshire, the ghost of Wittgenstein, were to charge us today in exactly these terms, it would be equally true. We cannot simply dismiss it as a comment from another discipline. We have, in short, as an academic subject failed; we have not appreciated the extreme complexity of our task. We have not yet truly grasped what is involved in doing anthropology well. That 'neo-anthropology' will be demanding is very clear from Ardener's Malinowski Lecture, but as we incom­petently attempt to establish universals or simply try to comprehend something particular, we should look back to see what has already been achieved. The purpose of this paper was to suggest that Müllier belongs to a past which we did not know we possessed and that these achievements and this history are 'good to think with'.

Fortes was able in his inaugural lecture at Cambridge to exclaim that we at last had a true science of anthropology. The predecessors of Malinowski seemed merely to get in the way of this achievement. I can only express my complete disagreement. Compared to the significance of the problems with which our Victorian predecessors grappled, I regard much of the work of British social anthropologists in this century as trivial; it could have been left to sociologists. And besides their own obvious theoretical failings, I regard it as the greatest insult of those who have dominated our discipline to have ignored their history, to have pretended that they have done better by not continuing the concerns
with which their ancestors wrestled. But conventionally we are
descended from Frazer, and scholar though he was, he was the least
original of them all (see Leach 1965). It is a nonsense to accord
him such a place of honour when there are others of Müller's
stature not accorded any recognition at all. Many of our important
notions within recent decades have come from outside the
discipline, and the suggestion here is that Müller belongs to a
'past' of which we ought to be more conscious. We have, in brief,
robbed ourselves of valuable insights by not thinking about this
lineage of men who were similarly outside our discipline, and who,
in Müller's case, would not have wished to have been called an
anthropologist. It is now many years since Jarvie's 'Back to
Frazer's...sage' has been echoed. Apart from Frazer being the worst
possible choice, I shall conclude with this remark. This
historical essay looks forwards not back. One does not simply
want to give a man a place in our history. The 'return' is no
more real than that of de Saussure who, reflecting on the classical
grammarians claimed that linguistics 'retournera...mais dans un
esprit nouveau et avec d'autres procédés-' (119). One wishes
merely to suggest that in certain ways Müller's astuteness exceeds
that of many of our professors, that many of his views belong to
the very present of our discipline. If I have glanced back, it
should be clear that my mind has really been on our future, and the
immense problems with which we shall require much assistance in
creating an anthropology that deserves to exist.

Malcolm Crick.

Notes

1. This article is a shortened version of a paper read at a
research class at the Institute of Social Anthropology,
Oxford, during Hilary Term 1972. It represents the first
fruits of six months research on Max Müller. The essay is
dedicated to Exeter College, Oxford, and her talented sons
A.M. Hocart and E.E. Evans-Pritchard.

2. On the production of the edition princeps of the Rig-Veda,
Müller spent the first half of his academic life.

3. Because his mode of composition, it is difficult to know
exactly what Wittgenstein read, but it may be interesting to
note that Wittgenstein's phrase 'family likenesses' or
'resemblances' is used frequently in Müller's work. It is
used firstly, with regard to the organisation of various
versions of manuscripts according to the distribution of
errors, and secondly to refer to features shared by
the members of a language family. Müller's use predates
the appearance of the term in Galton's essay 'On Composite
Portraits' in J.A.I. 1879.

4. I am conscious of the fact that I have only given part of
Wittgenstein - the intolerant, and sociologically less
interesting aspect. On the other hand, this brief discussion
represents only a part of Müller. He - and unlike his
anthropological contemporaries - displays in his work on
religious thought some of those 'charitable' aspects which
characterize the later Wittgenstein and which do not appear
in the literalist anthropologists.
5. See also (1) 'My Predecessors' 1888: 492-3 where he speaks of utilitarian moral philosophy as 'jugglery'. He points out that 'good' like other words has a range of meanings. It has one sense in moral philosophy, but also can mean 'effective'. This latter sense is not one with which ethics has any concern; utilitarianism is a simple confusion of these two senses. (2) Three Introductory Lectures on the Science of Thought 1887: 79-84 where he says that 'true philosophy is a constant katharsis of our words'. He refers there to somersaults in the history of philosophy and calls materialism a 'grammatical blunder'.

6. See the correspondence appendix to Three Lectures on the Science of Thought 1887 especially the last letter by Müllner and his letters to Galton. Readers of de Saussure's Cours will know the great use to which he puts the chess analogy, and its appearance, and the discussion of signs in general by Müllner may have a significance for the history of ideas. Saussure, like Müllner was an Indo-European philologist and de Saussure refers to his 1861 lectures on language as brilliant, but goes on to add, rightly, 'mais ce n'est pas par excès de conscience qu'il a péché' (1949: 16). One should further say that Müllner defines mythology (1897: 35) as the result of a pathological reaction of the 'sign' on the 'signified'. For Müllner, as for de Saussure the 'signified' is a psychological reality. To these remarks one must add that the term 'sign' has a long history in philosophy. Locke in his Essay (called by F. Lange in his History of Materialism a 'critique of language') asserts that words are signs of concepts and not of things. Also, it must be said that components of Saussure's thought - language as an institution, for instance - would more likely have been derived from the writings of the Yale Sanskritist W.D. Whitney, whom de Saussure rated above Müllner.

See also William Thomson's book Outline of the Necessary Laws of Thought (3rd ed. 1853) to which Müllner appended his 'Essay on Indian logic'. In this work, Thomson has a chapter on language, in which there is a discussion of different types of signs. He also suggests that verbal language is analytic - from which 'Whorfian' conclusions are drawn, whereas the signs in the language of art are 'compositive' and have to be 'unfolded'.

7. The evidence is mainly in; S.B.E. Prospectus; Müllner's History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature (1859); prefaces to Vols III (1856) and IV (1862) of the Rig-Veda-Sanhiita. Briefly, the issue revolves around Müllner's inclusion of the native commentary in his editio princeps, and his critique of the principles adopted by H.H. Wilson in his translation of the Rig-Veda.

8. See Jarvie: The Revolution in Anthropology (1964). Subsequent debate - see esp. Leach (1965) show that Jarvie knew very little about Frazer or Malinowski.

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