CHAPTER 10 Moral Reasoning

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> *Ongka explains that if money looks after white people then pigs look after them [the Kawelka]. "You have to have pigs for whatever you want to do. Pigs are our strong thing, you must have pigs for everything. Pigs are everything. You must have pigs for moka, to pay for troubles, to get wives. If you don't have pigs, you are rubbish, you are nothing. There are a lot of men who don't realize this."*
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> Ongka, *The Kawelka: Ongka's Big Moka*, 1976

"If you don't have pigs, you are rubbish, you are nothing. There are a lot of men who don't realize this." These words are the conclusion of a two-minute meditation in which Ongka, a Papuan leader, explains how to create a good life. He deliberates the moral contradictions that lie between managing material wealth and upholding the social good. Known as a Big-man, normally a prestigious or a good leader, Ongka must always be ready to present his friends, enemies, and competitors alike with pigs for their enjoyment and use. Ongka reasons that a powerful and good man is a man who can give away his personal wealth lavishly, and show his friends and enemies alike that his wealth is so abundant that he can easily present more than enough pigs to satisfy all who come to the feast. This seeming personal capacity to convince some people to invest their pigs in a complex system of exchange with others' pigs enables his village to flourish. The paradoxes faced by Papua New Guinea (PNG) Big-men might be similar to those known to financial investors whose passionate concern with prestige and flourishing communities of exchange outstrips all measures of economic rationality (Martin 2009). In this essay, I analyze the nature of the moral reasoning that embraces both sentiment and rationality, as do Ongka, his fans, and the financial investors of recent years. In addition, I consider Ongka's growing concern that he has lost respect in the new political order of the independent PNG. Ongka questions his morals: "Is rubbishness eating me?" Does self-interest overtake generosity? Is Ongka like others who recognize that both personal reputation and successful public work is a legacy of their moral deliberations, as they find reason confounded by sentiments?

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Ongka's meditation on pigs is rapidly and intensely spoken, as if the Big-man felt his earnest message would otherwise miss his uninformed viewers. His disquisition can be accessed through YouTube (a media-sharing website) because the film has been cut and divided into seven short videos. Viewers of YouTube have heard and documented their replies to Ongka's speech; long lists of praise can be found underneath the film clips. "Ongka rocks," writes one of the viewers about the YouTube segment one, which is the most popular. Other student responses to the video echo the same sentiment. They are not simply responding to exotic economics; they express real pleasure at finding the opportunity to revisit now what they have enjoyed in their university classrooms. In addition, some document their thoughts about the economy of financial greed. The feast is a social form which is surprisingly familiar to these viewers who are interested in the same questions as Ongka: What is greedy or generous behavior toward others? When is economic rationality not an obvious measure of good judgment? How is respect won and shown?

Not all anthropologists who come upon the YouTube video-casts will know that *Moka* is a Papuan word from the central highlands of PNG, which refers to the material good that is returned to the giver of wealth. Writing of *moka* in the region, Andrew Strathern (1971) compares it to interest on the debt, a return on an investment. Thus, the concept, although untranslated, is not so strange to the viewers, who have quickly established that the social form which is familiar to the Papua New Guinean highlands is also a social form that is meaningful in explaining the contemporary Anglo-American investors' economy of the early twenty-first century. Although interest is a concept that deserves further interrogation (Sahlins 1972, 1976; Gregory 2011; Lederman 1986; Hirschman 1993; Sykes 2004), the measure of interest shown in the making of a *moka* feast might also be described as the measure of morality of investment in each location; yet that standard of measure is elusive to observers and participants alike. Ongka stops to wonder if his "rubbishness," his greed, is eating him, and he therefore cannot achieve the success he desires, to become a Big-man, renowned for generosity with his food and wealth. Those scholars already familiar with the film might also find it intriguing that viewers tune in to Ongka's speech in an era of market volatility, in a period of the free fall of trading standards. It is well known that in Ongka's lifetime, as in the viewers', the measure of the worth of material goods was being eroded by the collapse of the ranked standards of value in that region of the newly independent nation of PNG (Gregory 1986). Thereafter, pigs, like the white man's money, became "everything," and economic bubble and older "currencies" – kina shells, bird feathers, oils, and cowries – became valueless. Pigs are essential to *moka*; they are the embodiment of value as evidence of the social good. Furthermore, the character of the investor, of the market trader, has been scrutinized more narrowly, and found lacking because the trader knows no restraint on his greed. In the contemporary Anglo-American economy, and in the PNG economy on the eve of independence, something, or someone, had to give.

At the point that I am writing this, the first video segment, "Ongka's Big Moka," has been viewed over 32,000 times and the second, "Ongka's Meditation on Pigs," has been viewed over 18,000 times within the two or three years since they were first uploaded to YouTube. Although they are things of a different order, it is interesting to compare the number of citations registered by Google Scholar in 2012 for other significant texts in economic anthropology: *Stone Age Economics* (Sahlins 1972)

registers over 4,300 citations, and *Gifts and Commodites* (Gregory 1982) lodged 900 on the same index, whereas Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* (1990) received nearly 9,000 citations. The actual ethnography of the *moka* (A. Strathern 1971) registers 229 citations. Significant books by anthropologists, such as *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Geertz 1973b) which received more than 25,000 citations, have competed favorably with the fame of Ongka's film, but are not quite so widely renowned. Perhaps the high scores for the impact of the film are a measure of the form of presentation: Ongka's famous film first appeared on family television screens in 1976, broadcast by Granada Television, and later became a staple of the undergraduate curriculum. However, if virtual and visual forms of intellectual work make a difference to the regeneration of the intellectual community, then work in related mediums, the economic anthropology blogs, the knowledge "commons," the social networking sites such as the Open Anthropology Cooperative, with 5,900 members at the time of writing, cannot compete with this video distribution of Ongka's words. Can we say that Ongka has succeeded in winning a respectable place in the ranks of the current academic standards of value, ranks that reflect the timely fascination with quantitative measures of the worth of scholarship, and measures that award distinction to concrete evidence of citation and use? In the contemporary university the validity of scholarship is increasingly measured by impact and accounting evidence of the number of citations. I am concerned about the narrowness of this window on measures of scholarly validity, one by which the example of Ongka's celebrity, his status as a commentator on the nature of economic behavior, his ability to address issues of key importance to his viewers' understanding of the contemporary economic collapse, and the scholarly rigor of his argument converge into one scale of value. From this view, we might raise some final important questions for social scientists, especially anthropologists, about living with such contradictions in the moral economy of the contemporary university.

Living with the paradoxes of the contemporary situation wherein the Anglo-American economy appears to be suffering a free fall in the value of its currencies, economic anthropologists might author a better understanding of moral reasoning about wealth and the social good, namely one that reckons with the collapse of value standards or the volatility of a moral economy which relies on one standard – such as pigs, money, or citations – as its rule. Taking a cue from his YouTube celebrity, I suggest that for such times as these Ongka is the man to follow. For the present, at least, it would seem that anthropologists Maurer (2009) and Hart and Ortiz (2008) were right in ways they did not anticipate when they argued that the study of "non-Western" society, a cold war era concept which presumed a division between the western world and the rest of the world, and between late capitalist and non-capitalist societies, no longer provides models for the study of economic reason. The case has been made convincingly that people live in a joined-up world: what scholars of Melanesia can report from recent studies (Errington and Gewertz 2004; Kirsch 2006; Bashkow 2008), and differently from earlier research (A. Strathern 1971; M. Strathern 1981), is that far from being exemplars of "non-Western" society, many studies of PNG societies – such as the Kawelka in which Ongka lives – reveal how people live lives that are profoundly joined up to the Australian and the Anglo-American economy, and further, that the production, use, and distribution of ethnographic studies, replete with compelling images, are themselves most surely part of it. Ongka's experience in

a period of social and economic change on the cusp of full political independence in PNG, is part of Western society, and shares more with the Anglo-American economy of the present, when new forms of economic governance feature in interpersonal business transactions, and new political governance emerges in the form of the corporate state. Ongka's meditation on wealth and the social good is an account of the living paradoxes of his times, a period that feels familiar to his viewers. Ongka's reasoning follows from his experience of the confusion of long-established value standards, and speaks to the enduring question of just what the social good is. In such a global world, in which models of collapsing value standards from the PNG highlands of the pre-independence period pertain to plummeting Anglo-American market values, anthropologists have new questions to ask about that. This essay examines the nature of moral reasoning about the social good, and the questions Ongka's meditation raises for understanding the living paradoxes of a global age.

A few things can be said about the film and its importance in both the wider public and the university. *Ongka's Big Moka* is the subtitle of a film, *The Kawelka*. Not a new film, it was produced in 1976 by Granada Studios in the famous *Disappearing World* series that brought the lives of people in other societies through the medium of ethnographic film to the television screens of viewers who had already warmed to the nature documentary. However, far from being a series that explored human emotions as if they were part of animal behavior, the series of films made for *Disappearing World* used the well-established capacity of the screen image to convey the emotions of its subjects to the viewer, and in turn to create a sense of the place and peoples by drawing on the empathy of those who were watching the films (Loizos 1980). Viewers who watch the full-length film are introduced to Ongka, who is planning a *moka*. Viewers see Ongka first in his home in the central highlands of PNG, where he is organizing the feast at which valuable goods will be redistributed widely to his clansmen as well as to long-term trading partners from distant valleys. The consulting anthropologist for the film, Andrew Strathern, explains to the viewers that Ongka's prestige relies on the success of the feast, not so much as a money-making venture, but more as a vehicle for showing he is a good man. His prestige is proven at the *moka* by virtue of the large number of other prestigious people who bring goods to it: pigs, pearl shells, bird of paradise plumage, as well as intangible goods, such as magic, dance, and music. Ongka explains how to make a *moka* in a detailed fashion, which is shared with the viewers in a long, rapidly spoken disquisition about pigs. The film shows the work of making arrangements for the feast, the work of preparing to give away the valuables, the rearing of pigs, the amassing of shells, the centrality of persuasive rhetoric in soliciting donations, and the necessity of magic to ward off inclement weather on the day. In the film we learn that this ritual exchange is the central social and economic event, if not the only salient one for the establishment of political standing in the region. Making *moka* is a good thing to do, and all involved in it feel this is true. This film is a fine example of the careful deliberations of moral reasoning about the complexity of the meaning of the social good. In it Ongka shows that his passion to do good , for his kinsmen and for his exchange partners, is satisfied by the reasoning about the redistributions of goods. Ongka meditates on relationships between pigs as wealth and the various meanings of the social good in human society in order to enlighten viewers as to the significance of what they see on the screen.

I have taught the film *The Kawelka* to undergraduate classes in 2009 and 2010, and have noticed how compelling it is to this new generation of students who believe they face a difficult economic future, when they hear the forecast for a decade of hard times ahead. However, watching Ongka organize his big *moka* throughout the film enlivens most students; it is a film ripe with sexual metaphors to explain economic motivation in the *moka*, coloring their understanding of both the hopes and disappointments of making financial "arrangements." It is, nonetheless, more than a provocation: they see that Ongka struggles with problems they might recognize now and will meet later in life. Informed viewers who use the film in economic anthropology classes know that *Ongka's Big Moka* is used as a "textbook example" that resonates with those of Malinowski, whose study of the exchange of valuables in a system linking renowned traders and chiefs in the Trobriand Islands of the South Pacific emphasized the problematic relationship between utility and the social good. The goodness of the trader is not a matter of expertise alone, but is a trait of his powerful and effective character. His ability to manage the exchange of goods depends upon the persuasiveness of his rhetoric and the success of his social actions in soliciting participation in his feast.

I use the film to show how Ongka, in his meditation on the good, navigates the uncharted waters that lie between "worth" and "wealth." Because the film is popular, and Ongka's power to make a *moka* depends on his ability to persuade through expert use of oratory and rhetoric, the film usually becomes an object lesson in the definition of prestige. However, more importantly, to put it in other academic terms, Ongka knows how those intractable qualities known and felt as value must be concretized first as an object, in the form of a good, before he exchanges that good as a valuable pig in ceremonial exchange or in everyday life. Gregory (1997, 2008) argues that we can use ethnographic case studies to explain how "value" is materialized, such that the invisible chain that links people to things, to other people, and to the institutions and social relationships between people and things can be realized and manipulated to specific ends. Ethnographic film is especially well adapted to doing the job of illuminating the social good, especially when it makes invisible relations of the social good visible by documenting transactions of material goods.

Perhaps Ongka discusses an important and uncharted problem of contemporary wealth. Ethnographies and biographies of politicians, bankers, and appraisers expose how moral sentiments create a tenuous link between economic rationality and the social good that is embedded in most accounts of their work (Schroeder 2008; Ho 2009; Tett 2009). Ongka, by contrast, believes he can tell his viewer how to establish a firm relationship between what is good to do and the value of goods. However, the pathway of his reason is not always unilinear; his narrative is about how wealth comes and goes in the form of pigs, assets which a Big-man acquires and disposes in transactions made along many "roads." His moral reasoning, through the contrary and contradictory value standards of the good, raises important questions about what a good life is. Elsewhere I have argued that anthropology's habit has been to explain difficult and contradictory behavior among the subjects of our research by reference to either the deep structure of their rationality or the relativism of their cultural knowledge (Sykes 2008). I have argued that in order to adequately address the moral sentiments of others whom we know through conducting our fieldwork, the anthropologist must advance a new kind of explanation, one that records the paradoxes and contradictions felt by others, in a close ethnographic description of moral reasoning as a social act.

Expert commentators in both eras, the times shown in *Ongka's Big Moka* and the current period of widely felt distress over economic instability in the global markets, are disposed to reason about the morality of the relationship between the good and the social good, between pigs and neighborliness, or between money and well-being. Media pundits comment on the morality of various investment strategies, the reliability of banks, and the responsibility of political governance over these things during the free fall of the currency markets; Ongka comments on the relationship between moral reason and the good in a rapidly changing world when the value of pigs and shells for bridewealth could not be predicted. The film explores the world of ceremonial exchange in the highlands of PNG, in the era when new political independence from the colonial rule of Australia gave the Papuan residents reason to think that relations between political stature and economic wealth were anything but straightforward. Ongka is a strong and charming leader who is facing the end of a world of ceremonial exchange, of polygamy, of prestige. This world of the Big-man as a "good" man was nearly over. The film projects a sentiment to the viewer that is not unlike what may be the felt experience of European or American youth during times of dramatic economic change in the developed world. The students who respond to the seven clips that make up YouTube's version of *Ongka's Big Moka* live in a time when access to wealth and its use present specific kinds of moral problems. The worth of the good rests more firmly on our trust that bankers, politicians, assessors, and insurers have the expertise to clarify the standards they use to determine the value of tangible and intangible goods. Commonly agreed and established prices for goods were once based on stable economies that insured the costs of living were mostly constant over time. Although one commentator wonders about the cost of a medium-sized pig, a fair price for a pig is not the only problem that Ongka has to address. Ongka, as most student viewers realize, has worked out an answer to life's bigger questions about how we know we are human.

Moral Reasoning about the Social Good: Anthropology's Black Box

> *We must first of all draw up as large as possible a catalogue of categories, beginning with all those which can be discovered which mankind has ever employed. It will then be seen there have been, and that there still are, many dead moons, and others pale or obscure in the firmament of reason.*
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> Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, 1950 (p. 309)

Visual media, both its apparatuses and the images in which it trades, operates like a "black box" in the discipline of anthropology. A black box does work that is not transparent to others, even while its processes are central to the field of research. Introducing the concept to the sociology of scientific scholarship, Latour reminds us that in the field of engineering, a black box transforms energy or transmits information without the engineer programming it as part of his wider field of research, locating it within the wider system, or linking it to broader knowledge. The conceptual work of a black box is also akin to Mauss's concept of a pale or a dead moon, by which he means a class of knowledge that is both within and outside of the field of study. The quote

from Mauss seems highly appropriate for the current juncture when moral reasoning about the social good requires a refiguring of the work of the discipline, in order to create a moral anthropology that can grapple with the good as an elusive category.

It cannot be denied that the challenge of understanding moral reasoning about the social good is as old as the discipline, if one considers how often anthropologists regularly confront the problem of the untranslatability of most key concepts from their fieldwork. Here I discuss moral reasoning about the social good as it is used in the famous case study of the the *moka*, but correlated concepts included *hau*, potlatch, totem, and taboo, all of which find a place in the discussion in the related disciplines of philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, and modern literatures wherein similar concerns with the character of moral reasoning arise. However, anthropologists have judged their scientific rigor in dealing with such obdurately untranslatable concepts by charting the place of rationality in their work and measuring their success in communicating their understandings against the ethnocentrism by which non-Western societies were seen as irrational. As I will show, this approach also became a meta-level debate about the nature of anthropologic reason that ran for a full generation or more. Others sought to use the poetics of anthropological scholarship to create a meaningful place for the voicing of allegedly "non-Western" ideas, concepts, and beliefs. I take a step back from my somewhat provocative discussion of a specific black box, namely the ethnographic video of Ongka's fame. In the first part of this essay, I showed how it spread throughout the community of viewers on YouTube, in order to introduce the role of moral reason in grappling with an elusive form, the social good. In this section, I examine the role of moral reasoning about the social good in constructing a new field of scholarship named "moral anthropology."

It is fair to say that the way anthropologists approach the nature of moral reason has changed from Durkheim's day, when the study of normative social behavior presented a challenge to a society struggling to understand the rise of secular belief and the decline of religion. Scholars today are concerned not only with social scientific reasoning about the normative moral order, but also with the diversity of moral reasoning about the social (for example, Heintz 2009; Zigon 2009). In an extended discussion of the changing nature of bridewealth exchanges, I argued that ordinary folk and community leaders alike work through the paradoxes of everyday existence, as they deliberate how to make a good marriage or a good life (Sykes 2008). In this section, I subject that example of moral reasoning to examination, in the way of Latour (1979, 1990), who has studied conceptual objects such as scientific reason as if they are black boxes, or tools to create specific ends. Instead of taking up Latour's interest in scientific reason, I began this essay with a discussion of an example of moral reasoning, Ongka's long meditation on pigs. I note that Ongka's monologue ends on a wry note about pigs as both a mark of personal wealth and a social good. Can they be both? He says that a lot of men do not realize the importance of exchanging pigs, and such moral reasoning must be better understood if everyone is to benefit from it. Taking this cue, in the following pages, I shall examine the emergence of moral reasoning as a black box in the social sciences against the background of wide-ranging national debates on both sides of the Atlantic about the status of rationality and scientific reason in anthropology. Whereas philosophers in the Kantian tradition advocate theories of the moral agent as a rational actor, whose reasoning does not tolerate contradiction and paradox as a part of it, an anthropologist allows space for

paradox and ambiguity in reason. I compare moral reason in anthropology as a means to examine ways to know the good, as akin to the inductive reason of the philosophy of David Hume in his search for the good as it is known within human action. The ethnographer describes the process of moral deliberation as a social act, wherein people reason about how to act toward each other so that their interpersonal relationships may flourish. Throughout this chapter, I hold to a caveat: An anthropologist is neither an ethicist nor a philosopher. He or she can examine the range of answers that others offer to the question of what is the good, and then discuss why one should be convinced by those answers. The ethnographer describes the process of moral deliberation as a social act, wherein people reason about how to act toward each other so that their interpersonal relationships may flourish.

When I open the black box marked "moral reasoning," I can unpack several anthropological debates that envelop the ethicist's question of how one should live. From a historical perspective, the debate about the relationships between moral reason and social difference has had three successive incarnations. In the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, anthropology defined social science as the discipline that was fundamentally concerned with the symbolic capacities of human societies to constitute and communicate about moral relationships. In the new social science, cultural difference emerged out of variations in the distinctive relationship between the moral order and the social order (Durkheim and Mauss 1963). In the first half of the twentieth century some anthropologists questioned the grounds of the new science of society. It had become common for anthropologists to examine the intricacies of fieldwork as a way of underlining that the explanations which informants share are reasonable, but not strictly scientific (Evans-Pritchard 1976 [1937]). In the decades after World War II Lévi-Strauss (1968) elaborated a theory of anthropology that focused on the symbolic nature of otherwise inaccessible forms of human knowledge, returning to Mauss's and Durkheim's earlier insights that classificatory logic was the key to forging a rational social science. Even until the last decade of the twentieth century, anthropologists normally insisted that the complex stories and explanations that others recount to anthropologists during fieldwork are distinctive forms of reason that challenged social scientists to confront the limits of rationality, and should therefore be explained in their own terms, as if valuable in their own right (Wagner 1986, 2001; Sahlins 1994; M. Strathern 1999). The twentieth century appears to have swung between explanations that human cohesion and social variation were founded on the principle of a universal capacity for rational thought (structuralists), and descriptions that exposed human commonality and difference in the poetics of interpretation and translation (interpretivists). Was this all one debate, the irreconcilability of the "other minds" of anthropologists' informants with the Western "scientific" rationality of the discipline?

Although the wider epistemological debate between "interpretivists" and "structuralists" in the twentieth century coincided with the discussion within British social anthropology about the nature of reason and "other minds," the different debates do not address the same concerns. A closer examination of the status of moral reasoning in the two arenas of intense discussion shows very different claims about how to answer the ethicist's question. Structural and interpretive anthropology each debated how scholarship created the identity of the anthropological object as a representation of lived experience, but each school differed as to how this was so: on the

one hand were the structuralists who believed the identity of the anthropological object could be reached through the principles of rational logic, and on the other the interpretivists who believed that the identity of the object lay in its meaning as it was elicited through poetic interpretation (Lévi-Strauss 1968; Boon 1972, 1982; Geertz 1973a, 1973b). Because each of the two different approaches to the identity of the anthropological object was concerned with the function of description, the debate floundered when cognitive and linguistic anthropologists showed that the symbolic functions of reason did not make sense (Tyler 1979, 1986). In what later was called the crisis of representation (Marcus and Fischer 1986), anthropologists reflected upon the epistemic bases of their discipline (Fabian 2002 [1983]) and called for a new understanding of moral reason.

A different debate between anthropologists and philosophers of language echoed in the halls of British social anthropology, one which has greater implications for the groundwork of a moral anthropology. In the 1984 meetings of the Association of Social Anthropology which addressed the theme "Rationality and Rationales," those present agreed that the work of reason falls like a shadow between fieldwork and writing (Overing 1985). In the decades leading up to the meetings, anthropological examples had become a resource for philosophers of language, but philosophers' attention ultimately challenged the legitimacy of anthropologists' work. At the meetings, flags were flown in support of the opposing teams, those of Evans-Pritchard and Winch, who differed on the nature of "other minds." Evans-Pritchard argued that, where explanation might seem irrational, ultimately the reason used by others was meaningful in their society, in which case reason's social context was more potent than reason itself. By comparison, Winch was concerned with the truthfulness of others' claims as they are made in language games, emphasizing the efficacy of communication as a human universal. I will not be recovering the details of the debates in this essay, but impressive collections exist for the reader who wants to examine them in detail (Wilson 1970; Hollis and Lukes 1982). By the end of the twentieth century the society of anthropologists had come to agree, at least implicitly, with Evans-Pritchard's assertion that many of his informants' beliefs were not only completely reasonable but empirically correct by their own measures, even if they seemed irrational (Overing 1985). And they conceded, as did Evans-Pritchard (1976), that the privileged place of scientific rationality was in question, not that of reason. A famously quoted example from colonial Africa helps to establish this. Evans-Pritchard discussed the example of the termite-infested veranda which ultimately fell to the ground. The causes of the accident were empirically clear, but scientific explanations for why it buckled at that point in time were very different from the accounts of the moral infractions that led ultimately to its collapse and to the concrete damage felt by the humans endangered by it. Without drawing out the differences between the moral and scientific reasons, as Evans-Pritchard did, the philosopher Peter Winch (1990 [1958]) argued that people normally do not worry about whether their statements are rational or not. Instead, most people understand each other because they play a "language game" which involves judging the effect of their words on another person. He showed that effective communication is the best measure of "rationality," "logic," or "reason." While Winch did not assuage the anthropologists' concern with the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the "truth" of social science, he did allow them to newly engage with their informants as "moral agents," as people who seek an answer to the question of how one should live.

Some anthropologists in recent years have turned to Kant (1998) in order to find inspiration for anthropology as a kind of practical ethics, as if anthropology's deep reconciliation with the discipline of philosophy would resolve both of anthropology's national debates in the United States and Britain. However, Kant's anthropology cannot subsume the two debates without succumbing to nationalistic intellectual traditions. A better Kantian "anthropology as practical ethics" of the grassroots, or the subaltern peoples would be welcomed by many anthropologists and philosophers alike. As a step toward that, I am concerned here with the role played by people whom anthropologists meet in their fieldwork, men such as Ongka, whose moral reasoning about the nature of the social good has influenced the thought of many anthropologists, students, and educated viewers alike. The questions raised by Ongka and other individuals in conversations with anthropologists are often challenging. Friends, acquaintances, and informants in the field question the kind of reasoning which gives shape to the moral economy of the Western European world, and its relationship to the different pace of economic development in the rest of the world. Anthropologists have charted these questions about the moral economy, and how they answer them is giving rise to a new anthropology of the moral economy in which "reasoning" takes center stage.

How moral reason navigates contradiction and paradox inflects the new moral economy that has emerged in the period after decolonization and the end of the cold war. In his afterword to *Savage Money* (1997), Gregory argues that any progress toward a "radical critical ethnography" must also reason through the nature of the commonplace contradictions that the subjects of our anthropological research navigate in such a complex society. Ongka had wanted to make a *moka*, to give pigs to the first parliamentarian in PNG, and thereby outdo and overshadow the prestige of the new leader by "giving so much." However, Ongka also questions the sincerity of his own altruism in making *moka*, and wonders if his competitiveness with the parliamentarian is self-interested. He ponders his "rubbishness" in moments when he believes he is more interested in his own wants than he is in the best interests of others. Ongka manages the contradiction between his desire to be known as a truly Big-man and his wish to be generous toward others, but not by resolving or eliminating the paradox. It is not that Ongka is simply competitive and seeks fame under a guise of generosity. He shows us that he is a human being who is capable of both self-interest and altruism, and that these are complexly interwoven. As he says of the possibility that his feast will fail, "It is possible that I will lose my investment, but I will never lose the glory of giving it." Such altruism can coexist with self-interest, and one value (altruism) does not exclude the existence of others (self-interest). Although it is the case that some more axiomatic contradictions, those emerging from relationships of mutual negation, are resolved one way or the other. (For example, can a relationship founded in antipathy be at the same time a bond of empathy? Or can a relationship of gamesmanship recognize both players winners?) However, as a moral reasoner, Ongka meets the commonplace paradoxes of living and finds them to be both irresolvable and unavoidable, and so he proceeds with daily life by reasoning through the morality of his actions.

Whereas late twentieth-century anthropologists argued that legitimate social science relied on the separation of reason from emotion as a way of insuring scientific objectivity about economic decision-making, at the beginning of the twenty-first

century much older concerns with the relations between moral economy and moral reason have returned to center stage. New scholarship (Sen 2010) has re-examined the arguments of Adam Smith in *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments* (2010 [1759]), and of David Hume in *A Treatise on Human Nature* (2000) (O'Neill 2011).

Commonplace Contradictions: Moral Reason, Moral Economy, and the Good

The problem of knowledge is posed in new terms.
Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 27

The most important lesson to be taken from Ongka's meditation is not the spread of his fame through the YouTube community. Rather, at the time of writing, he has challenged 32,000 viewers to reflect on the nature of his moral reason. If moral anthropology is timely, or rather more than timely, it is because the field builds on the recognition that there has been a shift in how anthropologists have addressed moral reason. It is a shift that also grasps the change in the nature of the moral economy. The aim of the new moral anthropology is less to judge the morality of the people we study, although this has long been a debatable aim (but see D'Andrade 1995; Scheper-Hughes 1995), and more to grasp the changing terrain of contemporary human experience of the moral dilemmas of a global age. A fresh debate about the nature of moral reason in a global economy has been flagged by some anthropologists as the forward flank of the pragmatists' project in establishing the human economy (Gregory 1997, 2009; Hahn and Hart 2009). The appeal of Aristotle's moral philosophy to anthropologists and social scientists is strong because efficacious reason often succeeds; its outcomes are the good, a conceptual object that is both a description of what is and a prescription of what ought to be. In anthropology, pragmatic reason, as a legacy from the ancient philosophers, remains different from scientific reason, which holds the distinction between fact and value as a legacy of the modern enlightenment. In the last decades, other anthropologists have argued in very different ways (for example, Dumont 1970; Fabian 2002 [1983]; Laidlaw 2004) that the fact/value distinction collapses in anthropology when scholars become most concerned with the effects of ethnography in social life and the role of scholarship in the constitution of the good. The burgeoning debate about the moral economy of the twenty-first century and the forms that the good might take has involved anthropologists in fresh discussions.

Clearly not only a feature of anthropological scholarship, the commonplace contradiction features in the moral reasoning of men and women like Ongka who must live every day with the mundane paradoxes of a global age. Although it is as old as Milton's logic and grammar, Gregory (1997) identified this form of reason as central to the work of a radical critical ethnography for a postcolonial anthropology, which recognizes that the development of the discipline shared the history of the people it studied while not sharing the same values and norms. A fine example of a commonplace contradiction is that of the good, and the distinction drawn between gifts and commodities as a way of reflecting upon and measuring out experiences of transacting the good. The commonplace contradiction between the gift and the commodity does not absolutely negate the other (as it would if one were informed by rational logic and the

other irrational belief); instead, the identity of each form of good is created by and complements the other (as with reason and sentiment). Ongka knows very well how everyday life rests on paradoxes; his own experience confirms it, following the collapse of multiple currencies in the central highlands, following the inflationary bubble in pearl shells that had emerged in the new nation on the eve of independence in what Anglo-American economies might call a renegotiation of trading standards (A. Strathern 1971; Gregory 1997).

There have been many paths of anthropological inquiry into the moral economy of the good. With Ongka as a guide, the economic anthropology of Melanesia becomes an educational journey. It is primarily interested in the motivations of the people at the grass roots, who might either avoid or assail the dominant values of the economic elites in the course of daily life. PNG has long been recognized as one of the birthplaces of economic anthropology, and the publication of Malinowski's (1922) first monograph grappled with the nature of economic reason. It was followed by a critical rejoinder addressing the theory of the gift (Mauss 1990). Contemporary anthropologists (Kirsch 2006; Bashkow 2008) have recently shown that Melanesians still pose some of the most compelling questions about the workings of the contemporary global economy and about their moral agency in it (Robbins 2004; Sykes 2007). For example, the Melanesian leader Yali famously asks what it is about Western economic practice that insures the success of development there and its failure elsewhere (Diamond 1997; Errington and Gewertz 2004). In short, new studies of the moral economy in Melanesia draws neither on culture nor politics as the bottom line for its truth, but takes the moral paradoxes of social life as endemic in life there.

For those contemporary anthropologists who wish to unpack the good from the black box of moral reason, the key issue is to know *who* is asking *what* and *of whom*. The observation that "reasoners" create reasons and "valuers" create value (Gregory 2008) might seem obvious at first, but these are basic insights that have been overlooked in the literature which has been dominated largely by philosophical inquiry into the logical consistency of moral reason, as if rationality were its own justification of and for moral reason. Anthropologists are not so concerned with rationality or with the quality of philosophical argument. They use different intellectual skills when they describe the social process by which moral agents as reasoners create reasons, and thereby establish both expert and inexpert modes of reasoning. Anthropologists have at their disposal a means of explaining the efficacy of moral reasoning in alienating concepts, moral values, and social worth as goods. If an anthropologist explains the good as an outcome of a particular form of moral reasoning, then a careful description of his or her informants' actions can distinguish the good as a gift or as a commodity, depending upon the existing motives to alienate the value of the good from the social relationships in which it is transacted (Gregory 1982). Reflecting on his earlier work, Gregory (1997, 2009) shows that just who raises the questions about whether or not one should give or receive the gift matters a great deal to its status (or not) as an inalienable object. It is through a process of moral reasoning that a person can alienate the good as an object for commodity exchange or enchain others with obligations to reciprocate it. In the new moral economy, the material good, whether as a gift or as a commodity, is the outcome of the act of moral reasoning, in which a practical ethic informs the selection of one form of reason rather than another.

David Hume, one of the fathers of the modern study of the moral economy, and also of the epistemology of inductive reason, argued that pragmatic reason was a form of moral reasoning because the objects of its study were convention and justice. Still, moral claims for Hume were imaginative ones, reasoned inductively from the basis of empirical fact. That there was a moral economy at all depended on the possibility that a person could imagine the needs of another, based on the earlier record of their own need. For example, a person might make a series of observations over years about the needs of his own household for food in harsh times, as when the food stored for winter has been used up according to a pattern that the householder recognizes over years. That pattern allows him to infer that there is a relationship between the amount of food kept for the household and its well-being during periods of more general scarcity of food. From intellectual experiments such as ones like this, Hume argues that the institution known as private property was not grounded only in the nature of self-interest, as when a person calculates his rights to hold property in relation to his needs for his own household and the necessity of fulfilling them. Rather, private property is a complex moral institution grounded on justice. The ability of a person to imagine the food necessary to fulfill the needs of another household is a moral claim grounded in convention and justice; the personal experience of want of food alone is insufficient to ground human knowledge of private property. Hume reasoned that it was necessary to link the want for wealth with its use, yet there was nothing in lived experience that insured the existence of a causal link between the necessity of having food in the household and satiation of the household's needs. That linkage required speculation, whether by custom or using the human imagination. Accordingly, Hume pointed out that knowledge of private property as a moral institution relied on its negative correlate, the concept of theft. He reckoned that a person did not take the food of the household without reasoning about that household's needs, and to take food from a household without concern for their needs would be a theft from it. Theft of food from the household provisions, according to Hume, is conceived of as a moral infraction committed against a household. The logic is based on the imagination that the other household's needs were like the thieves' experience of their own household necessities and on the customary wisdom that each household must plan to provide for its members.

Hume famously said that "reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions" (2000 [1739–40]: 2.3.3.4) and then put his efforts to the test using the empiricist approach, whereby humans know the world through experiencing it via their senses rather than through rational categories. By "passions" Hume meant several things: the senses, the felt goods, received wisdom or custom, and also the means of induction, by which he came to create an epistemology of inductive reason as the very ground for human knowledge. Many later commentators on Hume argue that he believed that human knowledge, not humankind's ability to understand, was limited by inductive reason. When I consider his definition of the concept of property, I think that they are right. Hume certainly claims to know things about the human world through invoking notions such as "custom" or "the imagination," but he thought these claims could best be used speculatively to raise doubts about what could be known rather than to assert new truths or to declare certainty of insight about the conditions of being in the world. It seems reasonable then to conclude, as did Kenyon and Craig (1985), that inductive reason is not a pathway to truth about the quality of relations

in the natural world, but a way of raising doubts about the rigidity of conventional wisdom and the status of widely shared beliefs.

Hume's is a useful way to reach a better understanding of moral reasoning which is neither simply rational self-interest nor altruistic. His assumptions require a small critical revision for a moral anthropology. As Mauss has urged us to see in *The Gift* (1990), the *hau*, the spirit of the gift, is known in the moment, in the act of valuing or judging the good; the *hau* is unknowable prior to the act of giving. He brings to his study of the moral economy many long years of reading about the role of giving in different societies in order to better understand a classic question about the social and moral nature of economy. For Mauss, as for many other scholars, moral economy was a deceptively simple term that described the moral and social relations that people called up as they struggled with the old question of what is the just price for the good. Some contemporary uses of the term "moral economy" mean enjoining reciprocal relationships with family, neighbors, friends, and colleagues in cooperative resistance, as in E. P. Thompson's (1971) study of the moral economy of how the English crowd took over the price-setting rules in the open markets in the towns of the early industrial revolution. "Moral economy" later was used to describe the moral grounds of agrarian resistance in the context of subsistence (Scott 1976), whereas the general sense of the term, as Mauss understood it, is part of classical scholarship.

It is fair to say that Mauss's own studies and education were sufficient to make him familiar with the thought of classical philosophers, and hence with the concept of the just price. Mauss started a new anthropological discussion about the qualities of the good, wherein the concept of the just price refers to the sense of what is good about the exchange of things. The just measure of equivalence of goods can be felt in the sense that this transaction insures a fair exchange of goods. It is also fair to say that Mauss understood gift-giving as a universal phenomenon which manifested itself in many different forms. When understood in this way, the moral grounds of social life were more malleable and less fixed, long-lasting rather than ephemeral, and mutual rather than individual. The universality of the gift was evidence of the felt sense that the bonds between people were the substance of social life itself and these were not to be taken simply as the product of one individual's actions toward another. Ongka is wise too about his own social circumstances; his wealth is inextricable from his social life. He measures his work and pronounces, "It is possible that I will lose my investment [the pigs], but I will never lose the glory of giving it."

Conclusion

Anthropologists have sometimes felt challenged to bring their disciplinary expertise to bear on the task of analyzing the moral economy, but without also rethinking the nature of moral reason. In order to rectify that, this essay has made moral reasoning the object of study, first in a discussion of how to value the video clip referred to as "Ongka's meditation on pigs," then in an analysis of the debates over reason and sentiment and the disputes about symbolic thought. Finally, I examined moral reasoning as a navigation of commonplace contradictions of daily life and as a keystone of the contemporary study of moral economy. For example, I have shown that reasoning about the exchange of goods is never simply a discussion of whether these are gifts or

commodities, or goods with spiritual values. What is at stake is a better understanding of the process of moral reasoning, and its work in advancing decisions about the social good. If that is so, then it is possible to say that Ongka's meditation on pigs enlightens us as to the moral economy of PNG on the eve of independence, and a fuller study of the moral economy can in turn shape a better understanding of the nature of investor behavior in the morning after the collapse of the standards of value for world currency trading. In either case, the study of the commonplace contradictions and living paradoxes of moral reasoning can be a significant point of entry for a study of the good in the new moral economy of a global age.

To my mind, moral reason is the keystone of the arch that supports the moral economy: I wonder how apposite that seems to members of the university when value standards of scholarship are in disarray, and when the validity of scholarship in the present has come to rely on concretizations of its value in citation indexes, as if these had become, like pigs, everything and excluded all other goods from use. I suggest this new focus on the materializations of the value of anthropological knowledge has replaced a century-old debate about the status of reason in anthropological argument, and its relationship to what can be known through the moral imagination, sentiments, and empathetic investigations. One might hope that anthropology was a form of moral reasoning. Through engaging in a study of moral reasoning, anthropologists learn just how the subjects of their research have negotiated the complex terrain of intercultural exchange, where multiple and changing standards of value are commonplace. This essay argues that moral reasoning does not require expert skill. Rather, it is an exercise which anyone can pursue, and which can fully engross each person.

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