THE INSTITUTIONS OF PRIMITIVE SOCIETY

The Institutions of Primitive Society

A Series of Broadcast Talks

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BASIL BLACKWELL
OXFORD
1954

Printed in Great Britain for Basil Blackwell & Mott, Limited
by A. R. Mowbray & Co. Limited in the City of Oxford
and bound at the Kemp Hall Bindery

INTRODUCTION

THIS series of B.B.C. Talks were delivered in the Third Programme under the title of 'The Values of Primitive Society' but, as some of the contributors thought that that title did not accurately describe what they contained, they are being published under a different title.

The Talks were intended to show laymen what kind of contribution can be, and is being, made by anthropological studies of primitive societies to various branches of knowledge, and in general I think they do this. It is perhaps inevitable that students of other subjects and people interested in different kinds of scholarship should think of anthropology in terms of theories put forward by anthropologists fifty years ago. New knowledge is very slowly absorbed outside the small circle of specialists who create it, and those who do not belong to the anthropological circle cannot be expected to read the large monographs about primitive peoples and innumerable papers devoted to them in learned journals, and therefore cannot know how much anthropology has changed since professional field research has been undertaken, and on an ever increasing scale. It is the duty of anthropologists themselves to present to the reading public from time to time, and in a more popular form, the conclusions they have reached and the problems they are seeking to solve. It is hoped that this symposium will to some extent serve that purpose. It will do so if it convinces those who read it that, though the anthropologist studies for the most part primitive societies, what he studies in

them are subjects of general interest and problems which are found in all societies, including our own. He is seeking to investigate in particular societies the nature of religion, aesthetics, law, and modes of thought and the basic characteristics and functions of the family and of economic and political institutions. I mention only those topics treated in this book. The knowledge the anthropologist acquires in his research has therefore a general interest and not just an interest for the few who are concerned with primitive peoples.

It is also hoped that the publication of these Talks will provide a guide to students who are starting to read anthropology in university departments and want a brief general account of what it is all about. While the book is by no means a comprehensive treatment of the social life of primitive peoples enough topics are discussed for it to serve this purpose.

It is also a fairly representative statement of anthropological opinion. Anthropologists, like other specialists, do not easily agree among themselves, but the contributors have tried to state what is held by most of their fraternity, and, though some statements are undoubtedly controversial, most of what they say would gain assent from their colleagues. Perhaps none of us would have written our Talks as we did had they been intended for a purely academic audience. We would probably then have been more guarded and hedged some of our statements around with qualifications. This is not possible when a large subject has to be discussed before a general audience, and in twenty minutes. The indulgent reader will make allowance for these circumstances.

E. E. Evans-Pritchard

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THE INSTITUTIONS OF PRIMITIVE SOCIETY

I

RELIGION

By E. E. Evans-Pritchard

EARLY European travellers among savage peoples generally related that they had little or no religion. Anthropological writers often give the impression that they have little else. This contrast is, of course, to some extent accounted for by the great increase in knowledge about these peoples, but it is also due to a wider definition in modern times of what may be regarded as a religious fact. If the early traveller found among a people nothing corresponding to what he himself had been brought up to regard as religion he was prone to report that they had no religion, only some superstitions. As, however, the definition of religion was extended by anthropologists to cover ancestor cults, totemic observances, fetishism, and even magic and witchcraft, the part played by religious conceptions in the simpler societies received greater emphasis. The widening of the definition would seem to be due in part to changes in our own intellectual atmosphere. The early explorers were Christians. The early anthropologists were not. For the explorers we had religion and the savage had not. But the positiv-

ism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, associated in most people's minds with the name of Comte, had had so strong an influence that the positions tended to become reversed in anthropological theories from the middle of last century till well into the present one. Since it was then held that religion is a way of thinking characteristic of the earliest phase of human development, savages had to be portrayed as totally lost in its darkness. Sir James Frazer, speaking of primitive religion, asserted that 'the life of the savage is saturated with it'. Lévy-Bruhl declared that 'the reality in which primitive peoples move is itself mystical'.

But though pictured as immersed in religious superstition it was incompatible with positivist and evolutionary dogmas that the most primitive peoples known to us should have monotheistic religions, or indeed even the conception of God. Sir Edward Tylor, the leading anthropologist in England in the latter half of last century, laid it down as an axiom that the idea of God is a late conception in human history, the product of a long development of animistic thought; and this was so much taken for granted that no one would listen when Andrew Lang, and after him Wilhelm Schmidt, pointed out that, as far as the most primitive peoples in the world to-day are concerned, the evidence points to the opposite conclusion.

Even the best scholars of the time were so dominated by the idea of evolution that they were blind to evidence. Let me take a final example. William Robertson Smith, who died at an early age in 1894, was perhaps the only well-known writer on anthropological topics who was not what used to be called a

free-thinker—he was a Presbyterian minister. According to him the most primitive form of religious sacrifice, including the earliest Hebrew sacrifice, in which he was particularly interested, is a communion in which men and their tribal god feast on the flesh of the victim, which is moreover itself the god in another form, a totemic or theriomorphic god. This theory had a powerful influence, and not only on those primarily engaged in Semitic and anthropological studies, but also on theologians and psychologists. But when we look into the matter we find that there is almost no evidence which would lead us to conclude that primitive peoples have a totemic communion of this kind and that there is no trace of it in the records relating to the early Hebrews. The theory was simply another example of the Victorian anthropologists' tendency to imagine what would be the crudest and most materialistic form of some institution, custom, or belief in their own society and then to postulate this as its earliest historical form.

Such theories of origins—in the chronological sense of the word—are now seen to be little more than speculation and they are accepted by no anthropologist to-day. But what generally went with them, assumptions about psychological origins, are still current. Even though religion was to be regarded as primitive superstition it still remained to account for its existence, and this was done by introspection. The Victorian anthropologist endeavoured to think out how he would have reached savage beliefs were he a savage. The earliest explanations of religion were in terms of intellect. According to Tylor religion began when men tried to account rationally, though erroneously, for such

phenomena as death, sleep, and dreams by supposing that there is a soul detachable from the body. Tylor thought that having hit on this idea primitive man proceeded to endow animals and plants, and even what we regard as inanimate objects, with souls, and this led eventually to belief in powerful beings imbued with the same quality—gods, spirits, and demons. Frazer told us that men first trusted in the power of magic, but that when the more intelligent of them saw that magic does not really achieve the ends aimed at they substituted for it a belief in men-like beings who direct the course of nature and can be prevailed on, by one means or another, to alter it to man's advantage. Other anthropologists—if we may include Max Müller and the rest of the nature myth school under this heading—were busy explaining religion in terms of personification of such natural phenomena as sun, sky, and rain.

These interpretations did not satisfy anthropologists of the next generation. Psychology had in the meanwhile changed its course, and it was now taught that man is guided by his appetites and emotions rather than by his reason, and if this were so for twentieth-century Europeans it must be all the more so for primitive peoples. Explanations of their religions must therefore be sought in affective rather than in cognitive states. The method of analysis was still introspection, but instead of asking how you would think if you were a savage, you now asked yourself how you would feel. Dr. Marett, for example, told us that religion is essentially a mode of feeling, its characteristic emotion being awe. Professor Malinowski told us that religion arises and functions in situations of emotional stress,

and particularly at the crises of life, such as initiation and death. It opens up escapes where there is no empirical way out. Other anthropologists told us that religion is just feeling strongly about things or that it is characterized by a kind of thrill. It is difficult even to discuss theories of this kind for evidence is seldom cited in support of them, and it is in any case perhaps unnecessary to make the attempt, for once again psychology has moved on. Awe, amazement, and thrill are no longer part of its stock in trade. Catching up with it anthropologists now often explain religion in terms of projection, following Freud, for whom religion is an illusion characteristic of a phase of immaturity both for the individual and for the human race.

Durkheim and his colleagues and pupils of the *Année Sociologique* have steadfastly, and in my opinion rightly, opposed any such psychological explanations of religion. In their view religious facts, whatever else they may be, are social facts and cannot therefore be explained only in terms of individual psychology. Religion is not an individual matter. It is a social phenomenon, something general, traditional, and obligatory. The aim of the sociologist is therefore to discover in what way religious conceptions and practices are interconnected and in what way religious facts are bound up with other kinds of social facts.

Presumably no one would deny that religious thought and practice are powerfully affected by prevailing economic, political, and other circumstances, and this is particularly evident in those primitive societies with which anthropologists are chiefly concerned. Religious rites are there performed in relation to

vital events and dominant interests: birth, initiation, marriage, sickness, death, hunting, animal husbandry, and so on; and they are intimately concerned also with family and kinship interests and with political institutions. The influence of other activities of the social life on religion may not be immediately so evident in highly developed and complex societies, but a little reflection shows how strong it has been, and is. However, as that great nineteenth-century social historian, Fustel de Coulanges, so tirelessly claimed, both anthropological and historical facts show us also that religion does not play a merely passive role but shapes domestic, economic, and political institutions as much as, or more than, they mould it. This then is the task of the social anthropologist, to show the relation of religion to social life in general. It is not his task to 'explain' religion.

For Durkheim and his school, with whom, in this matter, I am in agreement, generalizations about 'religion' are discreditable. They are always too ambitious and take account of only a few of the facts. The anthropologist should be both more modest and more scholarly. He should restrict himself to religions of a certain type or of related peoples, or to particular problems of religious thought and practice. Durkheim did not try to explain religion as a universal phenomenon, but only to understand certain characteristic forms it takes in certain primitive societies. He wrote on such topics as the polarity of the sacred and the profane, the sociological significance of totemism among the Australian aboriginals, and primitive forms of classification. Hubert and Mauss and Hertz set themselves particular problems such as the nature of

primitive sacrifice and of magic, the relation of mortuary rites to representations of death in Indonesia, and the reasons for the pre-eminence of the right hand among certain peoples. Sweeping generalizations reached by dialectical analysis of concepts were abandoned in favour of limited conclusions reached by inductive analysis of observed facts. Such studies are, however, few and far between, and it cannot be claimed that anthropologists have yet built up a science of comparative religion, or even that they have yet rid themselves entirely of those preconceptions which have in the past hindered its construction.

We are far from the rigorous discipline which men like Mauss had in mind, a discipline which supposes the specialist study of a lifetime and which, while setting limits to aims and problems, necessitates scholarship which embraces not only a vast range of information about primitive peoples but also the study of the history of religions, of sacred texts, and of exegesis and theology. We shall remain far from it while anthropologists set themselves up to explain in a few sentences the religions of the world, and especially when they do so in terms of 'sentiments' and of 'awe', 'thrill', 'projection', and so forth. Those of my colleagues who continue to write in such terms naturally would not accept this judgement.

It seems to me to be only too evident that our study of religion has hardly begun to be a scientific study and that its conclusions are more often posited on the facts than derived from them. Let me give some brief examples. Anthropologists still distinguish between or pointedly do not distinguish between, as the case may be, magic and religion among primitive peoples

in terms of categories derived from an analysis of ideas of our own culture. The scientific procedure, on the contrary, would be to start from distinctions made by primitive peoples between two kinds of thought and action and then to determine what are the essential features of each and the main differences between them. If one then cares to label them magic and religion one may do so, and if one does so one has reached an understanding by observation and induction of the difference between magic and religion so defined among the peoples under investigation. Again, most anthropologists have simply posited the ambiguity of their own thought on primitive peoples in classing together pneumatic conceptions and animistic conceptions under the general title of 'spirit'. Had they started from an analysis of primitive concepts they would have avoided this confusion. A final example—it is a very common custom, especially in Africa, for two men to bring themselves, and sometimes their kin also, into a close relationship by drinking one another's blood. Anthropologists have tended to explain this rite by saying that as kin are people of one blood so those who partake of each other's blood become kin by doing so, but once more they are reaching conclusions by analysis of their own concepts, for, as a recent book by Dr. Tegnaeus shows, those African peoples who have this custom do not think of kinship in terms of blood. In other words, in the sphere of religion anthropologists still have not yet sufficiently broken away from the rationalist, introspective, and ethnocentric anthropology of the nineteenth century; and their classifications still lack objectivity.

To obtain objectivity in the study of primitive

religions what is required is to build up general conclusions from particular ones. One must not ask 'What is religion? but what are the main features of, let us say, the religion of one Melanesian people; then one must seek to compare the religion of that people with the religions of several other Melanesian peoples who are nearest to the first in their cultures and social institutions; and then after a laborious comparative study of all Melanesian peoples, one may be able to say something general about Melanesian religions as a whole. One can only take this long road. There is no short cut. The great number of field studies now being carried out in many parts of the world among primitive peoples and the turning away of students from speculation to modest and detailed comparative research within restricted geographical provinces give hope that we may eventually reach by this means certain general and significant conclusions about the nature of the religions of primitive peoples as a whole.

But if we are yet far from this goal, at least we know to-day very much more about primitive religions than we did thirty years ago. The fact that the interpretations that satisfied the Victorian and Edwardian anthropologists now appear so lacking in understanding that we are surprised that anyone could ever have thought them adequate, is in itself some measure of our advance. We have moved away from their theoretical positions because they are no longer tenable in the light of our now much greater knowledge of primitive religions. It will give you some idea of the volume of facts now at our disposal, and stored for the use of posterity, if I tell you that Wilhelm Schmidt's

work, *The Origin of the Idea of God*, which deals solely, and in a summary form, with the religions of primitive peoples, already runs into some 10,000 pages and is not yet completed. We may take legitimate pride in this accumulation of knowledge from all parts of the world.

And it is not just a question of accumulation of facts, but is also a matter of evaluation and interpretation. The modern anthropological fieldworker living for two or three years close to the native people he is studying and speaking to them in their own language does not merely record beliefs and rites as isolated facts but can see them in perspective and hence judge their significance. What seems when studied in isolation to be bizarre or unreasonable appears quite differently when seen in its full social context. Religious myths, for example, then appear not as stories requiring some special interpretation but as integral parts of rites in which their meaning is embedded and through the enactment of which it is made manifest. Likewise, the rite of animal sacrifice does not appear any more as a simple and more or less mechanical act once its performance is related not only to the full range of circumstances in which it takes place but also to the whole system of moral and religious conceptions of the people who practise it. It is then seen to be a highly complex rite made up of symbolical acts which can only be understood in the light of a detailed examination of a people's entire categories of thought. Indeed, the importance of symbolism in the religions of primitive peoples is only beginning to be appreciated as our knowledge of their languages increases, but it is becoming more and more evident that it often conceals a

theology which appears to be lacking altogether when one seeks only for a rational system of dogma.

Without discussing any further examples, I can say in conclusion that anthropological studies in the last thirty years or so have constructed at any rate the framework of a science of what is sometimes called Comparative Religion, and that this framework rests on solid foundations of field research, and not, as in the last century, on what was for the most part rationalist speculation. Social anthropology is therefore now in a better position to make a contribution to other subjects concerned with problems of religion—such as Theology, the Philosophy of Religion, Ethics, the History of Religions, and Critical and Exegetical studies of Sacred Texts, and I believe that its significance for these related disciplines will become increasingly evident and important.

II

ORIENTATIONS IN ECONOMIC LIFE

By Raymond Firth

SIXTY years ago the German economic theorist Karl Bücher, a very influential man in his time, wrote a book on the way in which economic systems had evolved, from the simplest savage search for food up to the complexities of modern industrialism. Now Bücher had never studied savage life himself, and though he had accumulated many facts about it from travellers and other records, the framework of ideas in which he set them was a conventional nineteenth-century Western European one. One of his ideas was about economic values. Primitive peoples, he thought, have no conception of value. They live a hand-to-mouth existence, which has no room for acts of judgement, for estimations of the future. In proof of this he pointed to the behaviour of American Indians and African negroes, who often sold their land for a gaudy trifle, a glittering bauble—a few glass beads of no value according to our economic standards. Historically, his facts were correct—there have been many such cases of land sales for very small equivalent. But his interpretation was at fault. Later and more careful research has shown that on the one hand the sellers seem often to have had no notion that they were parting finally and irrevocably with the ultimate title to their land. In their view, it was an occupation

or cultivation fee that they were getting from the settlers, on analogy with similar payments common in their own type of society. On the other hand, even where outright sale *was* meant, the goods—cloth or axes or beads or knives—did represent definite economic values to the primitive people. They were keenly desired and much prized. They could be used in exchange for other goods, or to command the services of other people. Bücher really threw away the basis of his own argument when he talked of the glass beads as having no value *according to our standards*. For economic values are not absolute; they depend on the conditions—of scarcity, and of intensity of demand.

By their own standards at that time, these people were getting goods of economic value. Of course, when their economic horizon widened as the result of experience, they often realized that the basis of their evaluation had been incorrect and their knowledge of the market very imperfect. Their ignorance did not excuse our sharp practice. But that is another matter.

Only a few months ago I was able to pick up some of the threads of this argument. I was living in a remote South Sea island where money was not of much importance, and it was just those axes, knives, cloth, and beads that were of prime interest to the people. They wanted beads for display, particularly for adornment in their dances. It was not only the women who wanted them, either: men, old and young, were just as eager. And it was not just any beads—they were most finicky in their preferences for colour, for size, and for stringing. They took no account of money prices—the most expensive necklace of real

pearls would have rated very low beside a nice long string of bright red beads, costing a few shillings. In their situation I would probably feel much the same. For the value of the pearl necklace is simply a function of the market. If I had ever *had* such a thing on the island, its value in our convention could only have been realized by taking it *off* the island—by putting it on another market. In offering goods in exchange to get the beads, these people showed their preferences too. When they came to me with their wooden bowls, spears, plaited mats, they showed off the quality of these things, made comparisons, asked more for an heirloom or a piece of fine workmanship; they even withdrew their article if they did not think a fair equivalent was being given in return. They were illustrating in action what Bücher regarded as one essence of the process of evaluation—standards of judgement. They had a whole series of preferences, finely scaled, and they could calculate very carefully what was the most appropriate way to expend their resources from this point of view. And in these calculations the second element in Bücher's idea of valuation —estimates of the future—continually entered. In deciding whether to exchange his wooden bowl for a string of beads the Pacific islander weighed up a whole range of considerations—what he would lose by not having that bowl to prepare food in; how easily he could get another made; how much nagging he would avoid from his wife and daughter if he took home the beads; whether later on he would be able to use the beads for another transaction he had in mind. I am not inventing these attitudes. They all came out in

talk with men who were discussing the possibilities of such exchange with me.

I have mentioned Bücher's ideas because, though old, they are unfortunately not out of date. He put in scholarly language and explicitly a notion which many people had, and still have—that primitive communities are somehow devoid of economic concepts, or at least that these concepts are so alien to us that they cannot be expressed in the same kind of propositions.

I hope I have shown that the first part of this notion at least is wrong. As the result of wide research the anthropologist can say categorically that every primitive community has the essentials of an economy. There is that 'prudent allocation of resources' as it has been called, which is one mark of economic activity—a selection of ends, a choice of means to fulfil them, an estimation in terms of scarcities, comparative qualities, alternatives, a concern for margins of input and output, a reckoning of future requirements, and a forgoing of some present satisfactions.

But when we come to talk more precisely of the nature of a primitive economic system, and especially of the nature of primitive economic values, the issues are not so clear. We need not bother overmuch about the term *primitive*, vague though that is. As I (and I think most of my colleagues) use it, 'primitive' is little more than a technological index—a shorthand term for a type of economic life in which the tool system and level of material achievement is fairly simple: little use of metals; no complex mechanical apparatus; no indigenous system of writing. But the

imprecise, rather negative sense of the term does mean that one cannot talk of primitive economic systems as if they were necessarily all of one kind. We can say in a general way that men in primitive societies are not concerned solely with the search for food; that while the household based on the elementary family is commonly a producing unit as well as a consuming unit, the organization of economic effort at many points reaches out into the wider social group; that there are always forms of exchange of goods and services; forms of accumulation and use of capital. But there is great variation in different primitive economic systems, in the ways of organizing production and the size of the groups engaged, in the nature and scope of exchange mechanisms, in all the techniques of controlling and distributing resources, and in the framework of moral ideas which helps to support any economic system.

For instance, compare the attitudes towards taking interest on loans of capital, in three primitive economic systems in the Western Pacific. In one, the Tikopia of the Solomon Islands about whom I have been talking mainly so far, there is practically no idea of interest. Workmen engaged to make a large net or build a canoe are paid partly in food and partly in coils of rope, mats, and bark-cloth. Those things are used for ordinary domestic purposes, but in this case they serve as a kind of liquid capital, helping a man to finance a major productive enterprise. They may be borrowed just for that reason. But if so, they are repaid by similar items later on, without anything extra added. There is no interest, and no account taken of the time over which the loan extends. Now contrast this with the

situation in the Banks Islands, not far to the south. Here there is a very definite notion that a loan of capital should get a special return. This is a society which uses something very like primitive money—sets of shell discs strung on strips of bark in fathom lengths. These are used in many kinds of transactions. Debts are often contracted in them, and are repaid with interest on a cent per cent basis, without regard to time. A fathom of shell money lent gets two fathoms in return, no matter how short a time has elapsed since the loan was made. Now turn to Rossel Island, a few hundreds of miles to the west, near New Guinea. Here, too, is a quasi-monetary shell system, and a procedure like interest-taking. W. E. Armstrong, who discovered it, has given an elegant analysis of it. He has shown that the series of shell objects in the monetary scheme are ranked in scales of values in the calculation of which *time* is a most important element. The various units are not looked on by the natives as simple multiples of one another; their difference is rather to be expressed in the length of time which should elapse for the loan of one to be repaid by another. It is rather as if the relation between a shilling, a florin, and a half-crown were to be put like this: a florin is the worth of a shilling after six months and a half-crown is the worth of a shilling after nine months or of a florin after three months. If our system operated only in this way, without any one giving change, one can imagine the elaborate arrangements there would have to be to make sure that one had coins of the right denomination ready at the right time. The Rossel system works partly because much economic organization is carried on without the use of this money, partly because of a

very widespread lending system, and partly because considerations other than economic in the narrow sense regulate a great many of the transactions. Comparison of these three types of response to an economic situation of lending shows that time is not an absolute in an economic system, an element to be invariably included —at least at the level of conscious judgement.

There are several difficulties in the use of the notion of economic value itself. The concept of value involves the idea of preference-quality in a relationship. By ordinary usage an economic value applies this preference in an exchange relationship. A thing is valued economically by what it will fetch on the market. For ordinary purposes in Western thought this notion has its expression in monetary terms—it is a price. In this sense there are many types of economic relationship in primitive life where it is difficult to introduce the notion of value. The reason is that while some primitive communities have price systems, others have no general medium of exchange which can be called money. Now the definition of money, as economists know, is not so simple as we might think; there are plenty of borderline cases. But it does imply the notion of some means of making exchanges easier, because it allows a wide range of other objects and services to be expressed in its value terms. Of course, in no society are *all* kinds of goods and services so expressible. But there must be a fairly general convertability. The general function of a price system is the expression of values in terms of a single factor. The strings of shell discs in the Banks Islands do seem to have this function. But the mats and the bark-cloth of the Tikopia do not. So if the term price is to be used it

must refer to measurement of values in some non-monetary way—in various kinds of goods or in labour or other services. The difficulty here is to find any common basis. There is often not even any widespread system of directly matching one good or service against another by constant daily process. Exchange is often diffused or indirect. A man makes a gift to another or does him a service—perhaps because he is his brother-in-law or mother's brother. He may get his return through a set of other gifts and services of varying magnitude, spread over time and not equated exactly at any point. Part of them may come from the original recipient, but part may be contributed by other people—other kinsfolk who are cogs in a complex machine of co-operation. There is an idea of some equivalence. But it is not expressed in any precise terms.

So our notion of economic value needs to be held in the broad, not the narrow, sense.

Moreover, even where some medium such as cowrie shells, or metal rings or sticks of tobacco acts as money, the workings of the price system are often subject to many restrictions. There may be no haggling over prices; the buyer either takes the article at the price quoted by the seller or does not complete the transaction. This may be due, as with the fixed price system in our own retail economy, to a highly developed knowledge of market conditions—or at least to a theory that such knowledge exists. The implication is that taking into account differences of quality, of transport costs and so on, each buyer or seller is aware of his possible alternatives. There is also, of course, an element of convenience in having fixed prices,

a certain assurance in short-period planning of the use of resources. But there is also another element: a notion that a 'price', particularly one that is announced or known in advance, has a certain authority or legitimacy about it—that to challenge it is a questioning not simply of an economic relation but of a social relation. To challenge a price is also to some degree to challenge the status of the person who sets it. It is this element as much as the widespread knowledge of market conditions which seems to be responsible for the inelasticity in many primitive price systems.

It is in this respect that the notion of price in a primitive economic system slides over into the notion of gift exchange. A great deal of primitive exchange takes place in the ostensible form of present and counter present. Sometimes the present and its reciprocation form part of the same immediate transaction. A man brings me a couple of fish for my breakfast—as a gift, he is careful to tell me. I immediately go to my stores and bring him a few fish hooks or some tobacco—as a gift, I also am careful to explain. Honour is satisfied—as a rule. But if I do not counter his present on the spot with fish hooks or tobacco or some other small article, sooner or later he is likely to come to me and ask for something that he wants. In some primitive systems the gift exchange is extremely highly developed. It is formalized with very elaborate display in the presentation of articles. According to the canons of etiquette months or even years may elapse before the gift is reciprocated. In some areas, as in South-East New Guinea, there is an elaborate cycle of exchanges. Shell armlets and necklaces of

shell discs, which are equivalent to the jewellery of these people, move in a wide circle from one island group to another, the necklaces moving clockwise and the armshells counter clockwise around the circle. Exchanges take place between regular partners and much emphasis is laid on giving one's trading partner as fine a present as possible. These shell articles are among the most valuable objects that these people possess. Even nowadays when they operate a monetary economy by selling copra on the commercial market and by engaging as wage labourers they still preserve these shell objects in their exchange system. The value of these things can be measured in money and they are sometimes bought and sold for money. But they stand outside the monetary system in the sense that they can be exchanged one against another without the intervention of money, and this exchange is traditionally regarded as being one of the most important kinds of transactions in the native life. It must be classed as an economic transaction since it demands a most careful planning of resources and an exercise of choice. But it involves the existence of a dual price system. This is seen most clearly in the contrast which is often made by the people themselves in their own terms between these gift exchanges and other kinds of exchange such as the buying of fish or vegetables. Frequently the latter allows haggling where the former does not, and objects offered in exchange are very different. Take another instance, in South Africa. The Lovedu, who have a pastoral as well as agricultural economy, draw a sharp distinction between their traditional exchanges of food and services, especially

those which involve the transfer of cattle, and modern money transactions in what they call *bizmis* (that is, business). *Bizmis* involves bargaining, is associated with subterfuge and personal gain, and is regarded with suspicion.

From what I have said I hope you have already had hints of one fundamental characteristic of primitive economic values—the importance of social factors (including ritual factors) in determining them.

The material conditions of primitive existence are often harsh. The technological skills and productive capacity of primitive societies are usually low. But they extract from their economic relations rich and varied satisfactions. To put it another way, they make their economic relationships do social work. A team of men is assembled to build a house. Most of them are kinsfolk and the house owner relies on this tie of kinship to provide him with labour. On the other hand, his payment for the labour strengthens the ties of kinship. And because the transaction involves social as well as economic elements there is not necessarily any attempt to get an exact equation between amounts of labour contributed and amounts of payment. Moreover, the levels of payment and the way in which it is made may relate not only to getting the house built but to the social position of the owner. The higher his status, the more he may be expected to pay. In many primitive economic activities one can translate 'profit motive' as status-increment motive. I am not arguing that such situations do not conform to economic analysis. Primitive economic actions are rationally based. But the concept of rationality must

be understood to include immaterial as well as material advantage. In the economic calculus social factors must be taken into account. Between the economic interests of the market, 'which knows nothing of honour' as Max Weber said, and the status interests of the social order where honour rules, there is often contrast and even conflict. Man may seek his individual gain in primitive as in civilized society. But unless there are external pressures which tend to break up the form of the society and disturb its values the interests of the social order tend to win.

In all this primitive economic systems differ only in degree and not in kind from our own. But these differences mean a lot when the member of a primitive society is trying to adapt himself to Western economic patterns. In his labour relations with European employers or in his production of crops for a commercial market he finds it difficult to drop those social elements from his economic calculations. The result is often misunderstanding and friction. The difficulty is that one cannot secure the material benefits of civilization and retain the work habits of a primitive economy. Yet material benefits have meaning only in terms of the social uses to which they are put. The problem for the people themselves and for those concerned in their welfare is to decide which of the social uses are most essential to the well-being of the community and to adapt the economic effort accordingly.

In the last resort the choice of values lies in the hands of the people. But for all interested in their economic betterment it is important to know what are the alternatives—from what values they are likely to choose. Yet

to the general public, and even to governmental and other interested agencies, the situation is often not at all clear. Here is where the social anthropologist can be of help in defining and explaining just what are the issues which the people feel are of most meaning to them.

III

AESTHETICS

By E. R. Leach

I AM an anthropologist not an art critic, so that I am not qualified to talk about the *merits* of any particular works of art. My primary concern is not 'What does primitive art mean to *us*?' but rather 'What does it mean to the people for whom it is made?' I want to discuss how far the substance of what the primitive artist 'says' and the way he says it to his own community correspond to something with which we are ordinarily familiar with regard to the art of our own society.

First of all: what is primitive art? Even if we ignore altogether the vast field of music and dancing and poetry, and confine our attention to the plastic arts alone, primitive art must certainly still include such varied objects as Bushmen rock paintings, Eskimo drawings on ivory, Fijian prints on bark-cloth, and decorated ancestral skulls from New Guinea; and that is without arguing whether *primitive* is a proper adjective to apply to such relatively sophisticated products as the stone carving of ancient Mexico, the pottery of prehistoric Peru, or the cast metal work of West Africa. Altogether, the variety before us is immense and bewildering.

Now, obviously, up to a point, the form and content of any plastic art is conditioned by the medium through

which it is expressed; and in primitive society the medium of artistic expression is partly determined by environment. People who live in tropical deserts are not likely to be expert wood carvers but they may have an elaborate aesthetic of sand drawing. The fact that primitive peoples in different parts of the world have entirely different forms of art must not then be taken to imply that there are fundamental differences of artistic temperament in the different branches of the human race.

However, our European reactions to Primitive Art depend a good deal upon what sort of art it is. When the medium of a primitive art is a substance like sand or bark-cloth which is not an ordinary medium for art in Europe the effect of the finished product upon ourselves is largely neutral; we have no preconceived notions of what the things *ought* to look like, and are not tempted to make judgements as to whether it is good or bad of its kind—we do not expect such art to 'say' things which we can understand. But with sculpture it is different. When you or I first encounter a carving from New Guinea or West Africa or British Columbia we automatically see it *as if* it were a work of European art. One may like it or dislike it, but in either case judgement is based on an assumption that the primitive artist is trying to 'say' the same sort of thing as European artists try to say. There is also an assumption that the symbolic conventions which a primitive artist uses are essentially the same as those which form the core of European tradition. Test this out for yourself. I feel fairly certain that the expression 'Primitive Art' calls to your mind either a prehistoric rock painting or some more or less startling piece of wood-carving.

In other words, we tend to fit the concept 'Primitive Art' into the traditional European Fine Art categories of painting and sculpture. We expect to be able to understand primitive art as a variant of European art in this restricted sense. Well, let us have it that way. When I talk about *primitive art* you can take me to mean mainly carving in wood, and when I talk about *primitive people* you can take me to mean people who live in the forest and have plenty of wood to carve.

But with this qualification, please. In our society the various arts are conceptually separate—painters and sculptors and poets and musicians and dancers only occasionally integrate their activities as in the staging of a ballet or grand opera. We have come to think of both the practice and the enjoyment of the arts as private pursuits. But in primitive society privacy is seldom valued; the arts are an adornment for public festivity, and on such occasions music, dancing, poetry, and the plastic arts all come together in a single complex. Even if you think of my primitive artists primarily as wood-carvers you must realize that they are poets and dancers as well.

As for the word 'artist', I mean by this simply the individual who makes the things which European critics describe as works of art. But you need to remember that the notion of artist is a European one.

With us the artist tends to be a professional specialist. A work of art, even if it is a very bad one, is readily distinguishable. We think of the artist and the craftsman as distinct individuals with quite different technical functions. Even the most hostile critic would hardly describe Henry Moore as a stonemason.

For primitive society this clear distinction does not

apply. Among the forest peoples, houses and boats and equipment of all kinds are mostly made of wood. But since saws and iron nails are lacking, the tools and skills required to make a piece of furniture are much the same as those required to make a 'work of art'. In primitive society the master carpenter and the master sculptor are often one and the same individual. Besides which, such manual skills are often very widely distributed among the population.

One important characteristic which distinguishes primitive society from our own is the relative self-sufficiency of local communities. With us, most of the things we use in everyday life—clothes, furniture, utensils, gadgets of all kinds—have been made elsewhere by people we do not know and by processes we do not understand. But in primitive society trade is much less important; most of the things which people use have been made by local craftsmen by processes familiar to everyone. In a North Burma village in which I lived every adult woman without exception was an accomplished weaver of elaborately brocaded cloth, while every adult male knew all the multifarious techniques of housebuilding. In other words, in this village, weaving for women and house-building for men were considered normal and essential requirements, just as reading and writing are normal and essential in *our* society.

Let me pursue this analogy. With us, reading and writing are technical skills used in communication. Writing in particular calls for long training and a kind of precise muscular control which to the illiterate appears uncanny. We have this muscular control

because we have been handling pencils and pens since we were about four years old. In contrast, at the age when a European infant starts to play with a pencil, a Borneo Dyak boy starts to play with a knife. By the time the European can express himself reasonably well by writing conventional symbols on paper, the Borneo Dyak can do the same by carving conventional shapes out of wood. In such societies nearly every adult male can carve after a fashion. Master carvers, of course, are just as rare as are master calligraphers in our own society.

The illiteracy of primitive peoples is also significant in another way. Whereas we are trained to think scientifically, many primitive peoples are trained to think poetically. Because we are literate, we tend to credit words with exact meanings—dictionary meanings. Our whole education is designed to make language a precise scientific instrument. The ordinary speech of an educated man is expected to conform to the canons of prose rather than of poetry; ambiguity of statement is deplored. But in primitive society the reverse may be the case; a faculty for making and understanding ambiguous statements may even be cultivated.

In many parts of Asia, for example, we find variants of a courtship game the essence of which is that the young man first recites a verse of poetry which is formally innocent but amorous by innuendo. The girl must then reply with another poem which matches the first not only in its overt theme, but also in its erotic covert meaning. People who use language in this way become highly adept at understanding

symbolic statements. This applies not only to words but also to the motifs and arrangements of material designs. For us Europeans a good deal of primitive art has a kind of surrealist quality. We feel that it contains a symbolic statement, but we have no idea what the symbols mean. We ought not to infer from this that the primitive artist is intentionally obscure. He is addressing an audience which is much more practised than we are at understanding poetic statement.

At this point I must say something about the attitudes adopted by European art critics, for a number of popular misconceptions derive from this source.

In any work of art there are, roughly speaking, three distinguishable elements—firstly, the sheer technical skill with which the work is accomplished; secondly, the qualities of form and overall design; and thirdly, the metaphysical content of what is expressed. European critics when they consider a *European* work of art take all three elements into account; when they consider a *primitive* work of art both the language of communication and the subject matter of what is communicated are so strange that they find themselves at a loss. Some writers have assumed that since they cannot understand what the primitive artist has to say the primitive artist must be talking gibberish. For example, Worringer, the German aesthetician whose views are often endorsed by Sir Herbert Read, has described Primitive Man as 'a creature who confronts the outer world as helplessly and incoherently as a dumbfounded animal', and again 'artistic creation means for primitive man the avoidance of life and its

arbitrariness, it means the intuitive establishment of a stable world beyond the world of appearances. . .'.[1]

For Worringer, apparently, the idea is that the semi-imbecile primitive produces works of art instinctively without consciously trying to convey anything coherent at all. Clive Bell was once quite explicit on this point. 'Primitives', he wrote, 'produce art because they must. They have no other motive than a passionate desire to express their sense of form.'[2]

Given a romantic hypothesis of this kind the tendency is to idealize the primitive artist as a practitioner of Art for Art's sake. To quote Clive Bell again, 'In Primitive Art you will find no accurate representation; you will find only significant form . . .'.[3]

Critics of this school tend to see the primitive artist as an exponent of twentieth-century abstraction after the manner of Paul Klee or Barbara Hepworth.

Others less favourably impressed are equally mystified as to what the primitive artist may be trying to say, but they suspect the worst. Thus Eric Newton, reviewing a London exhibition of African sculpture some years ago, declared: 'The spirit behind it is always the same. It is that of a trapped animal trying to escape by means of magic.'[4]

All that I can say about such opinions in a talk of this kind is that they are wrong. The primitive artist is in every way as rational and sensible a being as his European counterpart. The great bulk of primitive

[1] See Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, translated by Herbert Read, 1927, p. 152; also Herbert Read, *Education through Art*, 1943, pp. 83, 87–8.

[2] Clive Bell, *Art* (Phoenix Library edn., p. 39).

[3] Ibid., p. 22.

[4] *Sunday Times*, Dec. 29, 1946. Quoted in Firth, *Elements of Social Organization*, p. 160.

art is definitely representational rather than abstract. It is intended to be understood. And in the ordinary way it will be understood by the audience for whom it is designed. For the audience for which a primitive artist works is composed of members of his own community steeped in the same mythological traditions as himself and familiar with the same environment of material fact and ritual activity; the primitive artist can therefore afford to communicate in shorthand; symbols have the same basic significance and the same range of ambiguity for artist and audience alike.

It is very different for the European critic who tries to understand primitive works of art. He knows nothing of the religious and mythological background of the objects he is examining. He is therefore forced to concentrate his attention upon form alone. It is this which leads to the kind of misapprehension which I have quoted.

As a by-product of the notion that primitive artists are inspired by instinct, it is sometimes supposed that primitive art is characterized by a startling originality. The reverse is the case. The forms of primitive art are original only in the sense that they are alien to the European tradition; in their own context they are often in the highest degree conventional and academic —originality is an admired virtue among modern European artists; in most primitive contexts it is a vice.

Even as regards our own society, although we value originality so highly, we recognize that individual artists operate within the conventions of an established style, Byzantine, Gothic, Baroque, and so on. But in European art such conventions are unstable, there is

always local development which produces further special styles in chronological sequence. Thus in the history of Italian painting Venice comes *after* Florence; Florence comes *after* Sienna. In the European scheme of values each generation of artists is temporally outmoded by the innovations of the next, and this is consistent with the high value which we set upon originality. Analogy with primitive art can be deceptive. All European art styles are, despite their differences, historically related. Even the most revolutionary innovator is, technically speaking, very close to his immediate predecessors; thus to-day, for example, even the greatest experts are not sure whether they can distinguish a painting by Masaccio from one by Masolino. Thematically also, all European art is related to the common mythological background provided by the Iliad and the Christian Bible. Broadly speaking, the same kinds of symbolism and the same kinds of metaphysical statement recur again and again in every phase of European art. There is no such common background to the innumerable local art styles of primitive peoples. There are regional types; it perhaps makes sense to speak of African Negro art in the same way that one can talk of European art; but it is plainly useless to look for historical connections between the arts of West Africa and those of the New Zealand Maori. In other words, the opposition that I have been making between European art and primitive art is a false opposition. European art ranging over the whole continent of Europe and through a time span of 3,000 years has an essential unity. Primitive art is not a unity at all. Among primitive peoples all over the world each local cultural group has its own

aesthetic traditions which are peculiar to that group and to that group alone. Just as the European aesthetic is linked with the mythology of Christianity and classical Greece, so the aesthetic of any primitive society is linked with the mythology of its own peculiar religion. It follows that any discussion of primitive aesthetic values can only be in most general terms.

In general terms, then, why is the primitive artist an artist? The answer, I suppose, is 'Partly for fun and partly because the public provides a market for his work'. Can we say anything about the relation of the primitive artist to his market? In European societies there have been, broadly speaking, two kinds of market for the artist's products—the Church and the private patron, the sacred and the profane. The two outlets may vary in importance and sometimes partly overlap but we can think of them separately. In Italy down to about the middle of the fifteenth century the Church was virtually the only buyer of art, and art was required to make statements about universal truth. The Renaissance grandees who later dominated the market had little interest in universals, but were much concerned with their own reputations. Each patron endeavoured to commission work which would outshine that sponsored by his rivals. It is clear that this shift in patronage had a marked influence not only upon the content, but also upon the style of what late Renaissance artists produced.

Similar factors operate under the conditions of primitive society. A work of primitive art is much easier to understand if one knows whether it was designed to display the unity of some religious group or to assert the prestige of an individual patron.

The principal markets for the primitive artist's products are three: firstly, the furnishing of religious ceremonial; secondly, the decoration of the houses, boats, and personal equipment of wealthy and important persons; and thirdly, the provision of memorials for the celebrated dead—the last being a category that combines both secular and sacred functions.

Up to a point I think it is possible to distinguish the influence of these several factors. Take the religious element. Primitive peoples do not have church buildings that need to be decorated. Primitive religious art is largely associated with ritual dances and dramas in which the principal performers represent deities who are identified by traditionally established costumes. Masks are nearly always intended to be seen by a crowd of people at a distance, the statement therefore is strident not intimate, the representation has the stark simplicity and exaggeration of a poster on a hoarding; its content is heraldic—obvious to the initiated, obscure to everyone else. It is fatuous to comment on such work as if it were intended to decorate the corner of a fashionable drawing-room. The extraordinary forms of many of these masks, the weird combinations of human and inhuman characteristics, become comprehensible enough once it is understood that they are intended as representations of supernatural beings. All deities necessarily have some human attributes, for man cannot conceptualize a divine personality except in terms of his own. But if gods are like men they are also unlike men, and if gods have personalities they are not individual but generalized personalities. The god, it has been said, is a collective representation

of the people who make offerings at his shrine. Religious masks are thus an attempt to express an abstract idea in material form.

If we are to go further than that and try to understand the symbolism at all completely, we shall need to know something about the form of the society to which it relates.

Thus many primitive societies are what the anthropologist describes as 'segmentary'. They consist of a number of distinct groups each of which resembles any other except that each group has a different name, a different territory, and a different set of religious rites. Each such group tends to have its own gods which differ from the gods of the other groups in the system only in name and seemingly minor ritual attributes. In much the same way each English parish has its own patron saint which serves to distinguish it from other parishes. In such a case, then, the significance of the masked dancers is not simply that they represent particular gods; it is further that each particular god also represents the special interests of a particular group of people.

To generalize satisfactorily about the profane aspects of primitive art is much more difficult for there are glaring exceptions to every rule. Yet I think that there is something in the proposition that style in non-religious art serves to express current ethical ideals about the proper relations between man and man. For example, there are societies in which it is asserted as an ideal that all men are equal; there are others where it is taken for granted that men are unequal and that each individual acquires at birth a peculiar unalterable status, and again there are other societies

in which although differences of rank are emphasized this is not felt to be inconsistent with a good deal of mobility up and down the social scale. I maintain that there are characteristic differences of artistic expression which go along with such differences of ethical ideal.

Let me try to illustrate the sort of thing I mean. Some of you will be familiar with the totem poles of British Columbia. There is a fine example in the ethnological museum at Cambridge; an immense tree trunk about fifty feet high covered all over from top to bottom with grotesque and intricate carving. Or perhaps you know the wood-carving style of the New Zealand Maori with its extraordinary elaboration of circular and spiral ornamentation covering everything from canoe prows to door posts. In cases such as these, value seems to be attached to size and complexity and elaboration for its own sake; also there is a tendency to produce decorated versions of everyday objects which are not only flamboyant but technically useless. The adjective 'ostentatious' sums up the whole complex. From this point of view these primitive art styles from the Pacific area have much that was characteristic of the artistic taste of mid-nineteenth-century England.

I believe that such correspondences are not altogether accidental. The resemblances in artistic taste reflect common moral values, in this case the moral values of the socially ambitious. For as in Victorian England, the primtive societies of British Columbia and New Zealand were characterized by notions of a class hierarchy coupled with much social competition.

Everywhere there is some intimate relationship between ethics and aesthetics and, since ethical systems

vary from one society to another, so aesthetic systems must vary too. The aesthetic values of any primitive work of art are only to be understood in the light of a knowledge of what is thought to be right or wrong or socially desirable by the artist concerned and the patrons who employed him.

Finally, one moral for ourselves. New Ireland in Melanesia is the home of the most startling of all primitive art styles. You perhaps know the objects in question under the title *melanggan.* If not, then imagine one of the more elaborately dissected of Piccasso's paintings worked out in full colour in three dimensions. Ethnographically what is unusual is not so much the style as the fact that New Ireland artists are professional specialists. They are hired to construct their masterpieces by rich patrons who pay them lavishly for their services. The finished work of art which may take six months or more to construct is exhibited at a festival held specially for the occasion. After that the treasure is thrown away.

Might we not do the same? Let us save all the money spent upon the acquisition and preservation of the works of old masters and patronize instead the work of the living. How much more flourishing contemporary art might then become! We need patrons of art, not collectors. And that applies to primitive society as well. Primitive art everywhere is now mostly dead or dying. The traditional patrons of the primitive artist are ceasing to exist, consequently it becomes more profitable to learn to read and write than to learn to carve. It is one or the other; there is no time to do both.

IV

LAW

By J. G. Peristiany

IT is no easy matter to draw a sharp, clear line between primitive societies and advanced ones, for no single human society is simple or easily characterized. When we consider their political organization, which is necessary for any examination of law and its administration, we find that both 'primitive' and 'advanced' societies have one common feature: they are not composed of a single cell or segment, but of a number of such units—groups of people bound by kinship, or by dwelling in a particular place. These groups are linked together in a certain way, and this linkage, this articulation, provides both the society and its component parts with their social personality. The more advanced societies, like our own, have a political superstructure which is organically distinct from the organization of their constituent elements. Here it is not possible for a band of kinsmen to act as avengers seeking redress from a group of a similar nature, as the state tends to monopolize the legitimate use of force.

But the opposite is true of the less differentiated societies. There, the political organization may go no further than the segments and the way in which they are interconnected. When this is the case the most explicit norms and the most clearly defined offices

concern the safeguard of sectional interests. It thus appears to me that the distinctive problem of primitive law is to discover how sectional interests may be transcended. To illustrate this, rather than talk about an hypothetical or imaginary society I shall refer to an East African tribe with pastoral values, the Kipsigis who live in the Highlands of Kenya.

This tribe and its problems are representative of at least one major class of primitive stateless society. They are a warlike and virile people: the main political function of woman is to link, through marriage, two patrilineal families. Only the men—and amongst the men only those who are fully initiated—participate publicly in the institutions which give the society its political structure. These institutions are of two kinds. Some have a territorial basis; others, and I shall refer to those first, do not.

A man is born into his father's lineage which is a segment of a larger unit, the clan, and he also joins his father's regiment, an organization now almost devoid of military significance. Again, the initiation rituals, of which circumcision is the most important, provide him with an age-set; that is, with a group of age-mates who remain his social co-evals through life. The lineage, regiment, and age-set are widely dispersed; so that a man journeying far from home in a society which lacks a police force and a welfare organization, is assured of help and protection wherever he may be. The patrilineal descent group is bound by strong bonds of solidarity, for property is inherited within it and this group has a strong incentive to act corporately in defence of its interests. Whenever he has to transfer

cattle in order to acquire a new wife or to pay compensation, a man goes on a begging tour of his closest agnatic kinsmen. The wealthy polygynist, in order to prevent quarrels and to safeguard his cattle from disease and theft, distributes both his cattle and his wives throughout the tribal area and the local members of his regiment help him to set up his separate establishments. Members of his age-set invite him to share their food, provide him with shelter, and, if necessary, act as a matrimonial agency.

Each of these non-territorial institutions provides a man with a clearly defined nucleus of social action. Through them a man extends his social bonds and his range of action beyond his immediate kinsmen and his residential unit. At the same time a man resides in a village and this village is a unit within a larger territorial community. Within this community a man will usually find representatives of his regiment and of his age-set, and the bonds of common residence and the corporate activities of the community as well as the bonds of kinship which link many of its members endow the non-territorial institutions with a new significance. This corporateness is expressed in the constitution of a council of elders which adjudicates between the community's resident members.

I now come to my first problem: the emergence of a public opinion expressing not the sectional interests of the community's constituent groups but the common values which link them together.

The council of elders meets under a shady tree and all the initiated men of the village may address it. Each council is led by a great elder who owes his position to age, wisdom, character, and to divine favour

manifested in the number and longevity of his cattle, children, and wives. He is the one person within the community who comes nearest to the tribal conception of an ideal leader. It is by knowing and trying to understand this ideal type that the anthropologist may gain a clear insight into the society he is studying.

One of the most significant differences between the constitution of this council of elders and a European judicature is to be found in the relation between officer and office. The council elders do not hold their office from a higher authority. They are not appointed, but they emerge as leaders. The mainspring of their power rests in the apparently contradictory capacities of wooing, dominating, and canalizing public opinion. They court public favour in order to accommodate conflicting sectional interests, they dominate public opinion by reaffirming the traditional values in which the community recognizes its ideal self, and they canalize it by reconciling what is with what ought to be. The elders are intimately acquainted with the litigants and they know the background against which claims and counter-claims are pitted against each other. I remember in particular one case in which the council elders were able to trace the progeny of a cow over three generations; they knew its original means of acquisition and the methods by which rights in its progeny had been transmitted. And at each step appropriate precedents were quoted in support of the actions the council wished to uphold.

When the council adjudicates between its resident members it is not possible for the litigants to defy the consensus of public opinion without, at the same time,

seceding from their own territorial unit. When corporate life and moral integration are well developed the prospect of schisms or ostracisms appears as a grave sanction. A verdict is a remedy which has to satisfy the council, the plaintiff, and the defendant. A just verdict is a compromise between the moral order and social reality. To the members of these small-scale and undifferentiated societies the European court of law with its detachment, its profession of principles, and its frequent insistence on retribution rather than indemnification, may well appear as administering not justice but a rigid, abstract, and inhuman formula.

One is often asked whether primitive societies know both criminal and civil law. In this type of society it is not possible to classify offences according to their subject-matter, for the same offence will meet with divers treatment according to the political distance which separates the two factions. For instance, the murder of a fellow lineage member cannot be compensated and is beyond human penalties. It partakes of the nature of sin. Theft or adultery within the community are more heinous offences than when committed outside it.

What characterizes most of the actions which come up for settlement, even those arising from homicide, is that they are introduced by a private person in defence of sectional interests and that they claim restitution or private damages and not social retribution. It is, usually, the individual or a patrilineal descent group which are conceived to have suffered a wrong and not the community or society as a whole. In our idiom, most actions in societies of this type would come under civil rather than criminal wrongs.

There are, nevertheless, actions which are considered so injurious to communal interests that a collective action may follow a private accusation.

When a man is an habitual wrongdoer his neighbours shun him, and members of his community boycott his family. His own lineage may, then, decide to expel him. Perhaps I have already made it clear that this means far more than our 'being cast off by the family'. In this primitive society, a man without lineage is a man without citizenship. No vengeance group may avenge his death or claim damages on his behalf. In pre-administration days the community could assemble and put this man to death. To-day the council of elders, which includes kinsmen, regimental and age-fellows of the wrongdoer, puts a collective curse on his head. These forms of collective retribution point to the gradual emergence of an organized public opinion and of criminal law within the compass of the territorial unit. This is a clear example of how the community based on locality tends to resolve the conflicts between all other groups and to absorb them into its own corporate unity.

But above the level of the community there are no organized jural links between the larger territorial sections; and we come to the second main question, which is to ascertain how law and order are maintained when organs representative of the entire tribe, or large sections of it, are wanting. Alter the form of this question for a moment, so as to ask: 'What is the largest Us, the largest group, in which one normally merges the self?' For the question is more sociological than it may at first appear. A man begins life as a member of a small family which satisfies all his early

needs. During childhood and adolescence he gradually widens his range of contacts and of social activities. At initiation into manhood he acquires age-mates and regimental associates, who are distributed over the entire tribal area. Later he marries and he acquires a new political identity. This is also the stage I had reached in my outline of this society. But social growth does not stop here. For, as one advances in age, so should one tend to assume a tribal as against a sectional outlook. The elders are often called upon to preach in word and action the pre-eminence of tribal over sectional values. Thus, when the warriors oppose the initiation of their juniors, whom they consider as potential sexual rivals, the elders intervene and advise them to set aside their petty interests when the survival of the tribe is at stake. It is interesting that the elders who are thought of as having transcended sectional interests become either priests or travelling counsellors; they become, that is, either intermediaries between man and God or between sectional and social values.

What is significant in this connection is not that common values should exist, but that they should be expressed although no common political organization corresponds to them.

An indication of what is regarded as the ideal procedure also provides a clue to the resolution of this problem. If a wise elder is asked what council would hear a dispute between members of spatially and politically distinct territorial units he will answer: 'The four retired provincial leaders of the four regiments who belong to the most senior age-set'. But the most senior age-set has only few living representatives, and

it is highly unlikely that the retired leaders of the four regiments would be found amongst them. In reality the elder's answer specifies the kind of wisdom and the kind of balance necessary to a just solution. This is a judgement of value and *not* an existential judgement. If a territorial unit could be formed inclusive in relation to the communities of the conflicting parties and also representing all regimental units and the most senior age-sets, then clearly the constitution of the council would transcend most sectional interests. If no such council can be formed, then the values of unity have to be affirmed and enforced by a number of other constraints.

When a man considers himself to have been wronged by a person residing outside his community he may either use force to retrieve his loss—in which case force may be met by force until common kinsmen and neutral neighbours intervene and the defendant's council is called into action—or the plaintiff mobilizes his own village council in defence of his interests. As a result of either type of action elders from both communities meet and invite as chief speaker a neutral elder with transcendent qualifications similar to those demanded from the members of the ideal council of regimental leaders. The main role of this joint council is to act as conciliator and to bring the two parties freely to accept its verdict. If it fails to do this the case remains open—and it may remain open for a considerable period of time.

The joint council, nevertheless, has two means open to it in order to resolve the conflict. When it is clear that the public opinion of both communities is agreed on the merits of the case and that one of the litigants

refuses to assent in spite of the overwhelming weight of evidence against him, he is asked to take an oath affirming his innocence. This oath may well take a dramatic form. I was present at a long drawn out trial when one of the elders suddenly displayed a dead man's skull, and called upon one of the litigants either to drink from it or to accept the council's decision. The man submitted rather than take the oath. Indeed, the main effect of the constraint by oath is to reverse the normal trend of kinship loyalties. If a man has to transfer cattle-wealth following his defeat in a jural contest, his nearest paternal kinsmen share his loss since he will beg some of this cattle from them. It is, therefore, in the kinsmen's interest to lend their active support to his defence—especially when no reprisals are feared. But should their kinsman take a false oath either of two consequences may follow. He may himself die or dire calamities such as reindeer-pest, sterility, sickness, and even death may overtake not the culprit himself, but his agnatic kinsmen. The immanent logic of this conception is that, given time, the false oath will yield such evil fruit that his own agnates, in self-protection, will force him to recant. Rather than expose themselves to this menace the agnates of a potential perjurer will use their influence to bring him to assent to the compromise proposed by that council. Thus the deferring of the oath is an effective constraint which serves to neutralize sectional interests and to uphold the authority of public opinion as expressed through the councils of elders.

When the council has reached a satisfactory compromise, but fears that either party might not carry out its decision, an animal is killed and the contents

of the entrails are examined by a specialist. If they are full of green grass—and, in my experience, the entrails of animals so examined are invariably in this condition —the auspicious sign imposes a divine seal on the human judgement. Through haruspication the deity has spoken and transgression would now carry with it the automatic sanctions of this type of sin.

The examples of the oath and of haruspication point, then, to the fact that when a society lacks specialized organs whose status both transcends and links its sectional interests, the conflict is resolved by the recognition of common values, by an appeal to a common *religio*.

I asked a moment ago what was the largest group with which a man was prepared to identify himself. In that area to which I am referring, we find a number of neighbouring societies speaking the same language, sharing the same culture, and using kinship terms in their references to each other. It might be assumed that as each tribe lacks centralized authority these neighbouring tribes merge into an amorphous cultural area. Far from this being true it is possible to distinguish between the separate societies by using criteria of a political and of a jural nature. Thus, each of these tribes is identified by a specific name and by a common public opinion which is effective only within the tribal boundaries. Innovations concerning the organization of regiments and age-sets are sponsored separately by each tribe and the obligation to pay blood-wealth is effectively sanctioned only when it concerns the murder of a fellow tribesman. The obligation to pay compensation for the murder of a member of a brother tribe is only a moral one. The social and political

distance increases as we move beyond the circle of closely allied societies. To kill a foreign warrior is a praiseworthy action but otherwise one's treatment of them should be made dependent on their degree of conformity to the tribal conception of the ideal type of man. The tribes which live up to this standard are highly respected and peace treaties were sworn with them in the past. Breaking these treaties affected the *religio* of these tribes and it was said of the individual transgressors that they had sinned and that their sins would find them out. When these breaches led to acts of open hostility with which large sections of the tribe became associated, the public opinion of each society identified itself with tribal and no longer with intertribal values, a situation not unknown in international law. Beyond the Us and the people like Us lies the no-man's-land where social norms arising from communion in a shared humanity fall away, and we are in the realm of the 'dog-like beings', whose huts may be burnt and whose women and children may be destroyed with impunity.

Aristotle rightly observes that there are as many types of law as there are kinds of social bonds. This made it necessary for me to refer to a single society, but even from this limited example perhaps it is possible to see that a study of the primitive legal process reveals, in the most objective manner, the relation between a social system and a system of values. A study of law in the breach is a study of beliefs in action.

V

THE FAMILY AND KINSHIP

By John Layard

THE basis of every human society, from the most primitive to the most complicated, is the family. There is no form of society known to us of which this is not the case. Freud's theory, put forward in *Totem and Taboo*, of the primeval horde which was promiscuous, and of which the males finally clubbed together to kill the father in order to get for themselves the women whom he possessed, may indeed be taken as representing in symbolic terms the psychological truth of the Œdipus complex; but it does not tally with any form of society known to anthropological research.

However, the origin of the misconception which gave rise to this erroneous conclusion may serve as a nucleus round which to talk. For the terminology of kinship—that is to say, the terms used for different degrees of relationship such as our terms mother, father, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, cousin, and so on—is among all primitive peoples so different from our own, and uses such different methods of classification, that it might sometimes appear from these that women were wives where in fact they are not so, or that a child has many fathers or mothers, which almost all primitives know as well as we do is not the case. This so-called classificatory system of kinship terminology in use, with variations, among all primitive

peoples, is based on the fact that, in a small tribe, every single person is a relative of some kind or another, that there are no people who are not relatives, and that kinship with them dominates the whole scene of human relationships and activities, whether these be of a more restricted family nature or of a wider tribal or political one. Kinship dominates also even religious life, in so far as certain relatives may be responsible for a child's or adult's secular welfare, while other relatives of a specified but different kind may be the purveyors of inner rather than outer truth, and are the channels through which religious and ritual re-birth may be attained; as when the mother's brother in some societies confers on his nephew his new religious name, and thus fulfils the function of what we call the 'godfather'.

These kinship categories are by no means arbitrary, but form part of the very structure of outer and inner development by means of which mankind has emerged from a hypothetical purely animal stage (which *is* a hypothetical one: it exists nowhere) into becoming a social and spiritual being. In one Pacific island, the island of Pentecost in the New Hebrides, the gods—that is to say, the objectified psychic functions of man—are all named after such categories of relatives.

I will shortly describe what some of the chief categories are. But first it is necessary to point out that the whole structure of human society, in whatever form it may be found or wherever it may be, as well as of the divine order, is based on something extremely concrete; namely, the incest taboo. This is basic to all social and religious life. A man may not marry or have intimate concourse with, firstly and most basically,

his mother, in the second generation his sister, and in the third generation his daughter. Conversely, a woman may not marry or have intimate concourse with her father, brother, or son. I do not say that these things do not occur. They do, even among ourselves. I am speaking of what society demands. If such things occur in our own society, they are punished, but they are not ranked with murder. Among primitive peoples they are regarded as worse than murder. In most primitive societies, as you all know, the killing of enemies as a result of quarrels or in warfare is far from rare. Such killings, however, even when sanctioned, kill the body only. But incest, though the offending parties remain alive, is death to the soul—not, be it noted, to the soul of the two individuals concerned, but to the soul of the tribe. A case in point is the well-known Œdipus myth which I mentioned just now. It was *not* Œdipus and his mother who, owing to their unwitting mating, died of sickness due to the wrath of the gods. It was the *whole community* that became decimated by the plague. The wrath of gods is the unconscious terror of men. The sin was an unconscious one. But ignorance is no excuse where elemental forces are concerned. The tribe or city suffered, it knew not why. But when it found out, it purged itself by the elimination of the incestuous pair.

Why should incest be such a crime, that it is punished among most primitive peoples by instant death of the two parties? And why, as paradox, should many of the gods, and in particular the most important ones, in most mythologies, be said to be incestuous and be admired for it, like Zeus and Hera, his sister wife? This is because incest is not a biological crime. It is

primarily a social one. It disrupts the family from within through sexual rivalry and jealousy. If permitted it would make tribal life impossible. In disrupting the delicate balance of give and take on which tribal life is built up, incest would also destroy the tribe's collective soul and weaken its power of survival in face of the manifold inner and outer dangers which threaten it. Gods represent the unfulfilled desires, desires which, unfulfillable in the flesh because of social life and the survival of the tribe, have to be fulfilled in the spirit, which is their realm. Actual incestuous marriages or matings may not be made, so that the tribe may survive; but this itself gives rise to the complementary opposite phenomenon of incest among the gods, which mirrors in mythology the unfulfilled desires, and represents the compensating internal union of male and female elements within the individual psyche. And so religion also, which is peculiar to mankind, may be said to have as one of its roots the incest taboo, and therefore the institution of the family.

So the incest taboo sets in motion a double process. On the one hand it forces a man to seek a mate outside the immediate biological family unit, and thus leads to the expansion of society. On the other hand it tends towards a differentiation of the personality by creating a conflict within the psyche which has to be solved internally if he is to survive as an individual.

In discussing the evolution of the family we have therefore to be double-minded, having in mind on the one hand the external sociological factors which tend more and more towards multiplication of contacts and the expansion of society, and on the other hand

the internal mirror-image which tends towards differentiation of the individual personality and expansion inwardly. These two processes are complementary to one another, and their two facets are social organization which organizes and expands externally, and religion, of which the function is to organize and integrate internally. It is important to remember that both go hand in hand, and are indispensable to one another. They are complementary opposites which mirror the basic split in human life, of which the biological expression is the split between the sexes.

'Male and female created He them.' Every society is faced with this problem of dividedness. Without the incest taboo this would not be so marked. Mother and son, sister and brother, would still be one. But now they are divided. A man must seek his wife elsewhere. Here, however, another factor comes in. In the most primitive societies, communities are very small and cohesion is absolutely necessary if mankind, almost defenceless physically, is to survive. And, in these primitive communities, cohesion means kinship.

We, in this country, may be mildly interested in our more distant relatives. But most of them are of comparatively little interest to us. Other interests come in between. This used not to be the case, however, even with us. In a famous Border ballad the long lost hero in trouble who has been abroad and now returns to his native land wondering how he will be received, meets a native of the soil, and the two naturally begin discussing kinship by inquiring after one another's origins. The native finally exclaims, 'You are my mother's own sister's son. What nearer cousins could we be?' And forthwith he helps the hero through thick and thin,

which he would not have done had they failed to establish the kinship tie. Among many primitive peoples, this principle is carried to extremes. In parts of central Australia, for instance, a stranger approaching some tribal settlement is kept outside while some old man well versed in matters of kinship goes out to question him. If kinship, however remote, can be established, all is well. The stranger can be admitted. If not, he must be killed. He is not 'human' in the tribal sense. He does not belong to the Human Family as known to the natives, which means The Tribe. He would have no natural loyalties. No one would know which accepted and conventionalized norm of behaviour towards kinsmen he should adopt to him. And since these norms are that which distinguishes mankind from beasts, the emotional jungle would be let loose, and that means murder and death.

I should like here to call attention to the fact that in the example taken from the Border ballad it is kinship traced through the female line that is the decisive factor. Patrilineal kinship would be more easy to establish, but matrilineal kinship, though more hidden, is almost equally strong. The same holds for central Australia, where overt descent is patrilineal and the less obvious kinship ties are those traced through the female line. For there is no such thing anywhere as a community which is either purely patrilineal or purely matrilineal. Even in England, which is predominantly patrilineal, we now have a Queen, and though she succeeds to the throne patrilineally, her son will succeed matrilineally, through her.

In other countries special laws have been made to exclude this possibility, such as the Salic Law which

excluded women from the throne of France. Succession is not quite the same as inheritance, and both can differ from descent, but I mention this particular instance to show that the rules governing kinship are not quite so simple, even in our own predominantly patrilineal society, as it might at first sight appear.

In ancient Egypt, as in some Asiatic countries to-day, things were the other way round. Succession was predominantly matrilineal. The outward expression of royalty, the King, was masculine, but the blood stream that conferred on him his royalty was the female one. The Pharaoh in his own person combined both male and female principles.

So do, in fact, all societies, and it is one of the virtues of the study of anthropology that primitive society shows this much more clearly than ours. For in all such societies both matrilineal and patrilineal lines count, although with varying emphasis, and both in differing degrees are given their due place in the social system. So are the apparently opposing principles of exogamy (not marrying relatives) and of endogamy (which means marrying within the clan). If a tiny community in a hostile world is to survive at all it must be homogeneous, but it must at the same time observe the primary incest taboo. So in many primitive societies a man marries the nearest thing to a sister he can who is not actually a sister; that is to say, a first cousin. And, since the mother is the most obvious parent, he seeks a wife from among the nearest of her relatives in his own generation, in order to preserve the homogeneity. But exogamy also has to be observed. So one of the basic patterns in primitive society is that a man marries, not his mother's sister's daughter, but

his mother's brother's daughter. Jacob in the Bible marrying Rachel, his mother's brother's daughter, is a case in point.

This widespread form of preferred marriage with the mother's brother's daughter involves two basic sociological principles: firstly, the marriage of very close relatives whose relationship to one another is traced contrasexually (meaning through alternating sexes); that is to say, from a son through his mother who is a woman, through her brother who is a man, and so to the mother's brother's daughter who is a woman again, and who becomes his bride. Secondly, it often involves also the basic principle of exchange. A man in marrying a woman deprives her group of one of its members. So he makes good this loss by giving his sister in exchange to be married to his wife's brother, thus restoring the balance. For proper balance between dichotomies of all sorts is basic to human life, and yet another value of anthropology is that we can see such basic principles at work so much more clearly among primitive peoples than in our own more complicated societies.

In a primitive so-called 'closed' system of this kind in which each man marries a mother's brother's daughter, the result is that his mother's brother is at the same time his wife's father, and his wife's mother is his father's sister. This may seem puzzling to us, but it is not to the primitive people in question to whom it is quite natural. So narrow is the circle of intermarriages that many other relatives fulfil what to us would appear to be more than one kinship role.

The fact that such intermarriages between very close relatives are not only allowed but preferred (that

is to say, considered the most desirable) among many peoples to-day, and that this seems to have been the case during the childhood of most of our race for countless generations, at a time when the basis of civilization was being laid and mankind was fighting for its very existence against every kind of obstacle, sufficiently disposes of the current idea that such close unions are biologically harmful. At that stage of development they were essential for the survival of the race.

After a long time, however, judging from what seems to have happened in Australia and elsewhere, these close marriages also became frowned on, not for biological reasons, but for social and religious ones. They had originally been necessary for the consolidation of a small group, in which every member of society marries the same type of close relative. But when this process of consolidation had reached a certain stage, the small group became in itself a too restricted one. Various elements combined to force it to expand, jealousies from within, and increased cultural contacts from without. Different groups reacted to this problem differently. With some the principle of marrying a cousin on the mother's side was maintained, but was expanded to include more distant cousins, more or less irrespective of who the fathers were. In others the father's side was also taken into account, and in this case a second cousin on the mother's side but also related through the father became the preferred bride. In yet other forms of society which have taken a somewhat different turn, kinship on the mother's side is comparatively ignored and the cousins to be married are sought primarily

on the father's side. Such a case is that of many Hamites to-day, where a man marries his father's brother's daughter instead of his mother's.

In most instances, the line of descent that is most repressed in the kinship system, and so also in social organization, becomes the bearer of the compensating religious value. Among predominantly matrilineal communities religion tends to become extravert (a masculine function) and to be expressed in a mass of complicated ritual. Among predominantly patrilineal ones, it tends ultimately to develop more along lines of internal religious mysticism, in which the feminine function of inner receptiveness predominates.

And so society has gradually expanded in different directions, and in each case the concept of incest expanded also, to include in the taboo those nearer cousins and other relatives who once were the preferred brides but are no longer so. The process continued among the more advanced societies until, as in our own, they became so large that these primitive extended taboos are no longer of such basic importance. Their object with regard to the increasing expansion of society had been achieved, and so they could be largely dropped, although the primary taboo still remains as basic as it ever was.

I have spoken so far of relatives and of family relationships as though the family unit in primitive society was much the same as our own. But there are important differences. We think of the family as being composed of father, mother, and exclusively the children to which their union has given rise. But in primitive society this is not so exclusively the case. To begin with, there is often a plurality of wives,

sometimes but more rarely of husbands. Furthermore, few primitive peoples live isolated lives, as many of our own country people do. Most primitive communities live close together in villages for their mutual protection and for community of living and of religious observances. A man may have children by several wives, and he may share a compound with his brothers who have their wives and children too. Conversely, in some matrilineal societies, it is the mother's brother who rules. The husband is only a visitor who has no power over his own children, but exercises power over his sister's children who live with him. There is every kind of adjustment between these two extremes. But each such method of adjustment, during the course of its social existence, attains a rigidity which is extremely formidable and embodies a mass of unwritten rules and conventions which are the life-blood of that society so long as it lasts.

None of these domestic arrangements, however, imply what was by early theorists wrongly deduced from the classificatory systems of kinship terminology as indicating, among other things, widespread community of wives. This does, in some cases but always within certain limits, exist, but it is comparatively rare and need by no means, where it is found, be taken as indicating a primitive form. Often it may be the result of some quite other complicating factor in social life. The classificatory system is a sociological and political one necessary for the organized cohesion of the tribe and intertribal relationships, and is restrictive rather than permissive. It's basically socializing nature may be most clearly seen in smaller societies of a so-called 'segmentary' type, which antidate chieftainship and in

which public opinion backed by tradition and rigid convention centring around kinship is the prime force in regulating all matters having to do with social life. In such a system all relatives (that is to say, all members of any given tribe or community) are classed in categories, which vary in individual communities according to the particular structure of the community, but always exist in some form or other and always follow logical patterns. In this way, for example, though a child knows perfectly well who his mother is, his mother's sister will be called 'mother' too, and will indeed fulfil many of the functions of a second mother, thus obviating in cases of difficulty much of the fixation to a single mother that we suffer from. In the same way, his mother's sister's children will be called by the same term as his own brothers and sisters, and treated as though they were; though if it comes down to matters of inheritance or other disputes the 'own' brothers and sisters are always known. But mother also has many such more distant 'sisters' (whom we would call her cousins), whom the child also calls 'mother'. So there arises a whole category of women all of the same generation on the mother's side, whom the child calls 'mother'. In the same way the child has many additional 'fathers' (in name and in function, other than that of having procreated him), including all father's brothers and cousins in the male line in this classificatory sense. But, owing to sex dichotomy and tribal organization, whether predominantly patrilineal or matrilineal, a child's 'brothers and sisters' on its father's side in this extended sense are not the same as those on the mother's side. They are in a different category. The child grows up with quite a different attitude

towards them, and they indeed fulfil quite different functions towards him in the organization of tribal life.

There are thus not only two different types of cousin, there are also two different types of uncle and aunt. Mother's brother is quite a different kind of kinsman from father's brother, who is reckoned among the 'fathers' and is thus no true type of uncle from the primitive point of view. In the same way, father's sister is an 'aunt' in her own right, and has special functions in the society of a somewhat masculine nature, whereas mother's sister is, as we have seen, only a kind of secondary 'mother'. Our own words 'uncle' and 'aunt' originally had this differentiated meaning. The Latin *avunculus*, from which our 'uncle' comes, originally meant 'mother's brother' but *not* 'father's brother', and our word 'aunt' is derived from the Latin *amita* which meant 'father's sister' and *not* 'mother's sister'. In our language, owing to the relative unimportance which kinship now has for us, such fine distinctions have disappeared.

The principle of categories applies to every kind of relative and applies also to that group of female relatives from among whom, and from among whom only in the more primitive forms of society, a man is allowed to and must take a wife. In this way the native word which we in our individualistic way translate 'wife' does not mean only 'wife', but refers to a whole group of women from among whom a man or his parents (or one parent) may select the one or ones who may become his wife or wives. The fact that the terminological nomenclature remains the same for all the women belonging to this group has

given rise to the unfortunate misunderstanding shared in the past by many Europeans that it necessarily indicated a communal possession of wives. The truth is, however, that it does not, any more than the extended use of the term for 'father' means that a man had many fathers.

Such communal terms do, however, emphasize the predominating importance of the tribe in family and social organization (for they are one and the same thing) as over against the individual. They regulate formal behaviour and behaviour-attitudes towards members of the different kinship categories, in delicate balances of respect, familiarity, fear, jealousy, subordination, or authority in many subtle ways, in which such emotional attitudes have to be canalized if the tribe is to survive and not fall to pieces in a chaotic mass of conflicting interests. They even on occasion demand that a man and wife give up their child to be adopted by another couple in a suitable kinship category so that the balance of population for tribal or religious purposes may be maintained. In such a case the parents have no choice. Drums may be sounded at the birth of a man-child, and I have seen prospective adopters racing towards the spot. The first one to arrive has undisputed claim to the new-born infant after it has been weaned and certain rites have been accomplished, which at the same time regulate payment and amount of access the biological parents may have. The hardship is not so great as might appear to us. The parents have many children, and the removal may not be greater than a few yards to a neighbouring compound, or even to father's brother's hut within the same extended house-enclosure.

Primitive people may be individually passionate in individual concerns, but a second passion is always for the community, of which the welfare is of greater concern than that of the individual. But this does not mean that they are hide-bound in their ideas. The very rigidity of the social system leaves great latitude for individual qualities. In contrast to ourselves who seem so free externally, most primitives are much freer internally, and they are very free to hate. The very marriage system in most cases allows for this and makes it inevitable. For, in primitive kinship systems in which each segment is liable to be at war with the other, wives are taken almost always from potentially enemy groups. It thus comes about that, in a patrilineal society, it is alliances with women of other related groups which knit together the social system by forcing the men, primarily pushed out by the incest taboo, to seek wives from among communities with whom otherwise there would be only warfare. So that not only externally in society, but also internally within the individual, a new set of delicate balances is set up between the forces of hate resulting from fear and of the urge to propagate; in other words, between aggression and desire. And so new bonds are forged, tending to expand society and at the same time to deepen the faculty of personal self-control through the actual unification in marriage of these two apparently opposite forces. It is thus the female element which in a patrilineal community is the 'binding' one, both externally as regards opposing groups and internally with regard to individual development. It also gives rise to the compensating religious rites.

In this way social life, self-knowledge and religion go hand in hand in expanding one another, not without many setbacks in the form of quarrels, jealousies, social revolutions in the kinship system, and sometimes suicides for unrequited love, in such cases where ego cannot fit in with what is expected of it. All these are founded on the organization of the family, through alternating pulsations of taboo and the lifting of taboos.

There is no scope in a short talk to describe of its more detailed workings, either as regards the individual or as regards society. All that has been possible here has been to point out a few of the fundamental principles governing it. But it must be realized that we are here dealing not only with slow and infinitely varied process of social change and expansion, but also with the innumerable personal lives full of passionate conflicts, hopes, fears, and obediences, of individual men and women, who in their own lives have both submitted to, and through their own conflicts have brought about, the innumerable variations in family structure.

VI

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

By MAX GLUCKMAN

THE so-called primitive peoples range from small groups of hunters, fishermen, or wild-fruit collectors, like the Eskimo and Bushmen, to African kingdoms such as those of the Zulu and Baganda. Even the great West African states of Ashanti and Dahomey are considered primitive in comparison with Western states. In these greater African states as distinct from the smaller communities, we find political institutions more akin to our own. There are established governmental officers and councils with executive, judicial, and legislative powers. These function in a system of checks and balances of the kind with which we are familiar. The general interest of these developed states for us is that they present some of our own political problems in a simpler form. But a study of how the 'more primitive' societies, those without governmental institutions, live in political unity, under peace and good order, opens new fields of interest; and it is these I want primarily to discuss.

Here the most striking conclusion of modern anthropological research is that the organization which was required to hold together a thousand people on a South Sea island[1] was almost as complicated as that

[1] See, for example, R. Firth, *We, the Tikopia*, George Allen & Unwin (1936).

which rules a city like London. The organization was complicated even though these island societies, like many others in continental Africa and elsewhere, did not have a cultural apparatus as complex as ours: their technological equipment was much simpler, and their happy lack of clock and calendar gave an easy tempo to life. They were not connected to the same extent as we are with distant persons in one vast economy, or in widespread political and religious alliances. On the whole, a comparatively few people were involved in face-to-face relations which directly satisfied most of their needs. They produced, distributed, and consumed most of their goods in small groups of kinsmen; and these groups also functioned as educational institutions, recreational clubs, religious congregations, and, of course, as political units. But these groups were everywhere cut internally into a number of divisions; and in these divisions different people were associated with various neighbours. Social ties were thus established to link together people who in other contexts were enemies. Indeed, social cohesion appears to depend on this division of society into a series of opposed groups, with cross-cutting membership.

Nowhere have we found a single family of parents and children living on its own. In the first place, a study of the techniques for producing food, shelter, and other material goods shows that a solitary family could not solve its basic technological problems, and therefore even the least developed of societies, such as the Southern Bushmen, were organized in associations of families. These families were usually linked together by ties of blood-kinship, and our present evidence

indicates that sentiments of family respect were strong enough to hold them together in unity. But once a society had grown towards a hundred in number, a more complicated internal system developed, as among the Northern Bushmen, whose hunting hordes were larger than those of the Southern Bushmen.[1] These latter had been reduced, before they came to be studied, by White and Bantu attacks. In addition, even smaller groups had to have ties of friendship with their immediate neighbours: for if men were to hunt, to herd, and to cultivate, they had to feel secure against incessant attack. Men could not work their gardens if they feared that those next door would suddenly ambush them. Neighbours had to feel some security that others would be fair in their dealings and honour promises. This security was achieved by many devices, and hence all the various ties of friendship linking one small group with another have political functions and are political institutions. These ties of friendship were often of kinship, but there were also trading and ritual ties. Particularly important are the linkages set up by intermarriage between groups, because ties of kinship enjoining co-operation—or ties of co-operation which were based on other considerations but which were stated in kinship terms—had a high political value in primitive society. Kinship ties and marriage ties were spun into an elaborate network which constrained people to co-operate in order to maintain customary rules and group survival.

All known societies have laid heavy stress on the rule of exogamy—the rule of marrying-out—which required that a man must not marry inside a defined set of his

[1] I. Schapera, *The Khoisan Peoples of South Africa*, Routledge (1930).

own kin. It may be that the ban on sexual relations in a small family group existed because promiscuity in the family would destroy it. Freud and Malinowski argued thus. Beyond that, positively, the rule required that a man must marry a woman who belonged to some other set of kin. This immediately established links of in-lawship with people who were, by standards of blood-ties, his enemies. Some groups in fact stated quite explicitly of their neighbours: 'They are our enemies: we marry them'. Hostility between the kin of bride and bridegroom was manifested in many customs: thus among the Zulu of Natal, as soon as a betrothal was formed, the engaged parties practised ritual avoidance of one another; at the wedding they abused and threatened each other, and there was a pretended forceful capture of the bride. These symbolic expressions of enmity between intermarrying groups were so widespread, that a wedding has been described as 'a socially regulated act of hostility'. In fact, in those societies all marriages tended to be marriages of state which linked together groups which were otherwise hostile.

No one can conceive of a universe without gravity: and no anthropologist can conceive of a society without exogamy—even though its importance declines as governmental organs develop to impose peace over a wide area. In small-scale societies without these governmental organs, the women whom a man might not marry were very numerous, since the kinship system extended to class distant kin with near kin. Hence marriages constantly spread more widely, and then renewed, any one group's alliances with its neighbours. In these circumstances, the ban on marriage

with distant kin might be emphatically on marriage and not on sexual relations as such. In the Trobriand Islands of New Guinea, the seasoned libertine found spice in a liaison with a clan-sister. Similarly, among the Tallensi of the Gold Coast a man might not marry his clan-sisters, but they were his appropriate mistresses. These examples emphasize that, outside the nuclear family itself, the ban had high importance as compelling *marriage*, rather than *sexual relations*, with strangers.

Marriage gave a man friends among his enemies, since he and his in-laws had a common, if sometimes conflicting, interest in the welfare of a woman and her children. And these children had maternal uncles and grandparents and cousins, whose attitude to the children was often as loving as that of the mother. These bonds of kinship through marriage gave a man particular friends among groups other than his own, groups which were inimical to him in other respects. In the past, an Ibo in Nigeria could only travel safely in distant parts to trade by following chains of relationship of this kind from place to place.

Kinship by blood and marriage was thus a primary mechanism for establishing political links. But a converse process was also at work. In our own civilization we speak of a king as father, or of allies as brothers, thus stating political bonds in terms of kinship. In the same way, in simple societies as a general rule, wherever there were common interests between groups, these interests were liable to be explained by a kinship tie, which might be reinforced by actual marriages, but which equally might be imaginary. In several feuding societies, such as the Bedouin of Cyrenaica, whole tribes can be placed on a single

genealogy. Their common descent demands friendship and co-operation. But there is evidence to show that parts of these genealogies are false, and that they directly reflect the topography and ecology of the land. For example, where nomadic groups cross each other's tracks in drives between winter and summer grounds they are related in the genealogies so that they ought to settle blood-feuds. In practice the settlement of those feuds is an economic and political necessity.

Other cross-links both within and between groups were established by the loan and giving of land or chattels to strangers. In certain African tribes men invested their surplus cattle by placing beasts with herders in strategic places where they had no kin, and thus they obtained friends there. This principle of organization was highly developed in the *Kula* exchange which linked together a ring of islands off the south-east tip of New Guinea.[1] Here shell necklaces travelled round the ring between set partners in one direction, and shell bracelets passed between the same partners in the opposite direction. The value of these goods increased according to the number of exchange acts in which they had been used, and they had value only in this exchange. The essence of *kula* trading was that a man should outdo his partner in generosity. This was a ceremonial exchange which allowed big expeditions to travel to their enemies' lands in safety, and under its protection trade in useful products went on. *Kula* partners were allies in enemy territories; thus when a Trobriand expedition was wrecked in Dobu one man was spared, since his *kula* partner was in the Dobuan party which found the

[1] B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Routledge (1922).

castaways. Similar ceremonial exchanges interlinked the tribes of Australia: in Africa, men established blood-brotherhood in alien tribes for this purpose. Dr. Livingstone recorded how his porters used blood-brotherhood to get trading partners outside their homeland, so that later on they might move there in safety. Ceremonial exchange and blood-brotherhood operated also within political units, of course, and these usages were not confined to the establishment of political relations.

Yet other forms of specialized groups were found in most societies at this stage of political development. For example, the Plains Indians of North America were organized in tribes which numbered some two to five thousand members. In the severe winter a tribe broke up into small bands of kin: in the summer it united in a camp for joint defence and for the buffalo hunt. Public control was exercised by one of a number of military associations in turn. The selected association policed the camp march and the buffalo hunt, and punished certain offences. The associations were in open competition with one another. Among the Crow Indians, the Fox and Lumpwood associations during one fortnight used publicly to kidnap one another's wives, and the robbed husbands could not protest. The rules of election to the military associations worked so that almost all of them contained members of almost all of the local bands.[1]

Ultimately, the varied ties of friendship in primitive society were expressed in allegiance to common ritual

[1] R. H. Lowie, *The Crow Indians*, New York: Farrar & Rinehart (1937). J. H. Provinse, 'The Underlying Sanctions of Plains Indian Culture' in *Social Anthropology of North American Tribes*, University of Chicago (1937).

symbols. The people participated in ceremonies to secure the good things of social life—which were, almost everywhere, food, children, health, success, and peace over a certain area. The congregations which joined in these ceremonies often established yet another set of linkages, since they drew their members from diverse groups. Or the ceremonies were so constructed that every representative of a political group had ritual powers, but these powers were exercised in a cycle of ceremonies in which every group's representatives took part. All had to act if each was to be prosperous. The ceremonies aimed to achieve communal prosperity.[1] This communal prosperity might conflict with individual prosperity, since men and groups struggled over particular pieces of land and animals, or women; while the society as a whole was interested in the general fertility of land and animals, or women. The ritual power attaching to symbols and political officers, on which communal prosperity depended, then appeared to express the recognition of a moral order which would allow the society as a whole to enjoy peace, and go about its business. It enforced moral and lawful rights against certain individual interests. The political structure itself was made sacred.[2] In Africa this was commonly done by association with the Earth. Among the Nuer in the Sudan, the home of a 'man-of-the-Earth' was a sanctuary for killers from the wrath of their victims' kin, and he negotiated a

[1] M. Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi*, Oxford University Press (1945), Chapter VII.

[2] M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (editors), 'Introduction' to *African Political Systems*, Oxford University Press (1940), p. 16. Generally consult essays in this book.

settlement. In West Africa the cult of the Earth linked together in worshipping congregations, groups which were otherwise not united. For society exists on the Earth and on it men build, rear their children, raise crops and herds—and appropriately the Earth becomes the symbol of their unity.

Thus a thousand people on an island in the South Seas, or a couple of thousand in a Plains Red Indian tribe harried by constant attack, seemed unable to hold together as a political unit unless they were involved in cross-cutting systems of alliance, so that a man's opponents in one system were his friends in another. Across every cleavage in the society ran bonds of co-operation. In each system of relations individuals and groups might come into conflict—but that conflict set up disturbances in the other systems where the disputants shared membership, or had common partners. This joint membership, or these common partners, exerted pressure to bring about a settlement of the conflict. It is striking that the so-called vengeance-group, which took revenge for the killing of a member or helped a member enforce his rights, was in only a few societies the local kinship group which co-operated in producing and consuming its subsistence, rearing children, and so on. The vengeance-group was usually dispersed through several such subsistence units; and so was the group on which it had to inflict vengeance. Hence avengers could only exercise vengeance if they were willing to create widespread social disturbance, and run the risk of quarrels with many groups to which they might be related. The risk arose because either the guilty parties lived among the

innocent, or the guilty themselves were related to other kin of the avengers. Thus the classical picture of the feuding society of the ancient Anglo-Saxons, as presented, for example, in *The Shorter Cambridge Mediaeval History*,[1] is of men at constant war with one another. Yet it is well-known that the locally resident group, which co-operated in farming, often consisted of a patriarch, his sons, and their sons, with their wives, while the feuding group, on the other hand, was the *sib*. The sib was all of a man's relatives through both father and mother up to sixth cousins.[2] If one of the sib was killed, the sib could claim *wergeld*—blood-money—or wreak vengeance on any of the murderer's sib, which could only escape by paying the blood-money. In practice, it is clear that since many of a man's sib were linked to him through his mother, and through his grandmothers, the vengeance group must have been widely scattered through the basic patriarchal families. Indeed, where an offence was committed in a long-standing neighbourhood, some people must have been members both of the group seeking vengeance, and of the group liable to vengeance. Hence their dual loyalty would enable them to procure a settlement. Furthermore, since every man was a member of several sibs, whomsoever the avengers killed, they would be involved in a series of feuds throughout their home area. As it happens, an almost identical set of alignments has been analysed among the Kalingas of the Philippine Islands and the

[1] *The Shorter Cambridge Mediaeval History*, edited by C. W. Previté-Orton, Cambridge University Press, Vol. 1, pp. 128–9.
[2] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'Introduction' to *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, Oxford University Press (1950), p. 15.

Tonga of Northern Rhodesia.[1] Here the dispersal the vengeance group leads to settlement of disput and to payment of blood-money, through the pressu of countervailing alliances. The redress of injury self-help thus worked not through superior or u restrained force, but by the pressure of persons relat to both disputants in various ways. These relat persons enforced acceptance of standard rights. Whe feuds did rage, they occurred in isolated communit marrying only close neighbours; or they occurred intermarrying communities only at social distanc where the fighting did not shatter other links.

These primitive societies all have very long histor behind them, to produce this complex of intersecti ties. Studies of group-formation as it goes on, both the Western and the Colonial worlds, suggest that groupings of persons tend to split into smaller grou These are at first informal cliques, but their intern and external relations quickly become formalized, a set in custom and symbol. Significantly, these cliqu also tend to cut across already established lines social division, so that the system as a whole becon complicated, and able to absorb conflict and quarre In a factory in the United States the cliques in small department embraced men with quite differe technical functions, and though each clique on t whole comprised men working in one part of the roo one or two members of each clique sat in the oth

[1] R. F. Barton, *The Kalingas*, Chicago: University of Chicago Pı (1949). The point is brilliantly exhibited by Elizabeth Colson in article, 'Social Control and Vengeance in Plateau Tonga Society', the journal *Africa*, Vol. xxiii, 3 (July, 1953), for which the backgroun an essay in *Seven Tribes of British Central Africa*, Oxford Univers Press (1951).

half of the room. Thus in Western society, as in primitive society, it would seem as if groups have an inherent tendency to segment, and then to become bound together by cross-cutting alliances.[1]

These are the social processes which maintained order, and even law, in societies which lacked government. The same processes are at work in the greater and more developed primitive states, though their important contribution to the states' cohesion is less manifest because there are governments to maintain law and order. These governments operated much as ours does in judging disputes, in legislating to meet new situations, in levying taxes, and in general administration. The deeper cohesion of the states resided in a complicated system of conflicting loyalties. Law and order in the Zulu[2] kingdom—a kingdom which was powerful enough to destroy a British army at Isandlwana—was manifestly maintained by the armed power of the king. Yet the king did not exercise his authority through a single structure of administration. All subjects had a direct loyalty to the king, but they were linked to him in a threefold manner: through provincial chiefs, through royal princes, and through age-regimental commanders. Different groups of men were banded together in these differing links with the king. Their various leaders intrigued against one another for power around the king and tried to win adherents from one another; and some princes intrigued for the kingship itself. If a king was a despot some groups would support a prince against him, thus

[1] G. C. Homans, *The Human Group*, New York: Harcourt Brace (1950), Chapter V.

[2] M. Gluckman, *Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa* (The Frazer Lecture, 1952), Manchester University Press (1954).

in effect fighting a rebellion not to attack the kingship, but to defend its values against the despot. Or a prince's section would support his claim against another section's prince who was derided as a usurper. A rebellion thus affirmed allegiance to the kingship and the royal family's title to that kingship. The struggles of territorial provinces for land and people seem to have been channelled into the system of princely allegiances. At this stage of political development, where an integrating economic framework was lacking in the kingdom, civil wars did not break the national unity, but preserved that unity as a system. I am tempted to go further and suggest that a periodic civil war was *necessary* to preserve that national unity: sections fought for the kingship, and not for independence from it.

The unifying process in civil wars operated through manifold allegiances in the political structure. Hence the chief function of these cross-cutting allegiances seems to be that they enabled quarrels, and also some social development, to proceed without producing absolute schisms. Conflicts in one set of relations were absorbed and redressed in the countervailing relations. Open quarrels and even warfare were kept in bounds since they were controlled by the structure itself.

This process can continue while a society is comparatively stable. Obviously, the situation is different where radical social change is occurring, or after the recent establishment of a political system. Here schism operates unchecked. It is not absorbed in manifold alliances, and produces further radical change in the social system itself.

I have described these primitive political institutions in the past tense, even though we can still observe

some of the social processes at work. But, of course, the whole situation in which they operate has been altered. In Africa these peoples are now a part of the Western world, and the major problems which they face are those arising out of Western overlordship and economic expansion. In South Africa, many of the kingdoms resisted the whites by force. There and elsewhere different kingdoms, and even peoples without chiefs, united behind prophets who promised supernatural help to sweep the white man away. After White conquest, there have been periodic outbursts of this kind, where the attempt has been to drive out the whites with ancestral or messianic aid, and by magic to turn bullets into water. However, as the Africans have become involved in Western economy and polity they have begun a political struggle for greater rights and power within the Western system. They cease to look only back to the past. Farming associations, trade unions, National Congresses—a variety of specialized political bodies have developed. The African in the South and East African towns, whether he is settled there permanently or is a temporary labour migrant, acts in an urban industrial situation in which he is usually a poor, unskilled, and segregated worker. In West Africa he is part of a more differentiated African society. Increasingly these developments affect the rural areas, which themselves are subject to important changes. Tribal councils become concerned with the colour bar, national independence, land shortage, cash crop prices, wages, relations with trade union leaders. Political problems are no longer settled by the spear: the main weapon in tribal intrigues becomes the European administrator, who must be won over to

one's side. Indigenous chiefs, where they are used in administration, are caught between the pressure of the Western Government whose servants they are, and the pressure of the people whom they represent against that Government. Where there are no indigenous chiefs, the Government has no machinery to work through, since it cannot handle the allegiances of kinship groups and of religious congregations. Where Governments appointed their own chiefs, these were not restrained by indigenous sanctions, and often became rank exploiters of their fellows. Moreover, they were not part of the indigenous cross-cutting alliances. They were regarded as tools of Government, and became the first objects of attack, as among the Ibo in 1929—and possibly now among the Kikuyu.

This is the political situation which confronts the modern anthropologist, even when he is trying to rescue some knowledge of the political past. It may be that in the early years of colonization, ignorance of primitive political institutions led to trouble. For example, it is said that a British officer's demand to be enthroned on the Golden Stool of the Ashanti provoked the Ashanti War, since no chief sat on this stool which enshrined the souls of ancestral chiefs. Our experience indicates that similar ignorance continues to produce unnecessary friction. But the major political difficulties with primitive societies to-day are created by a different kind of ignorance: the European failure to realize that Africans and other primitive people are to-day so deeply involved in our own social system that they are moved by the political forces which are at work around us at home.

VII

MIND

By Meyer Fortes

ANTHROPOLOGISTS, nowadays, fight shy of expressions like The Mind of Primitive Man; for there is no such being as a generic primitive man and no such entity as a collective mind of any variety of mankind. The phrase comes, by long descent, from men of letters and social philosophers who know primitive societies only at second hand and use the knowledge to support a pet theory. Best known is the French social philosopher, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, who brilliantly invented a 'pre-logical mentality' for his generalized primitive man. More subtle is Professor Henri Frankfort's[1] adaptation of the German philosopher, Ernst Cassirer's, concept of mythopoeic thought. The primitive mind, Professor Frankfort declares, cannot apprehend causality as the working of impersonal laws. It is engrossed in particular happenings and emotionally involved in them in such a way that it can perceive them only as wilful—that is, personal—actions. I do not dispute the literary felicity of the idea as it is used by Professor Frankfort. But for anthropological purposes it has a fatal flaw. We cannot test it by referring to the actions, thoughts, and feelings of living people in any real human society. Whatever other and more exalted meanings the concept of mind may have, to me

[1] Henri Frankfort and Others, *Before Philosophy* (Pelican Books).

as an anthropologist it makes sense only as a shorthand term for certain aspects of the activities of living people. Let us come to earth, therefore, and consider some of these activities.

No human society, be it the handful of people who live on a remote coral atoll or the teeming millions of China, could exist without language. We know that languages differ tremendously from one another. But all have the same social functions. They are varieties of a unique means of communication and expression. To serve these purposes a language has to be common to all those who use it, it has to be public, and its speakers have to abide by a set of rules. The details of the process of learning one's own tongue as it has been described by psychologists, need not concern us; but it has two aspects which are important for my theme. The first is this: language comes to the child from the outside. It is there, in the child's environment, like people, like material objects, like day and night, and he acquires it almost as if he were collecting material objects. Little children often play with new words or usages they have just heard as if they are toys, until they are quite familiar. But there is this difference, and it is fundamental. The bits and pieces of language become welded together in what we call the child's mind through internal processes which psychologists describe by terms like remembering, perception, and cognition. What was external becomes, by degrees, internal and yet still remains subject to outside—that is, public—control. It is private and yet has a tool-like quality since it can be used to bring about desired changes in the outside world or to fend off pressures from it; and it has also, of course, the social

quality of linking person to person, mind to mind, if we care for such a way of putting it.

The second aspect I want to stress is the context of social relationship in which language learning takes place. This is, primarily, the family and then society at large by a kind of delegation from the family. The essentials of language are imparted to a child by his parents with all the weight of authority, power, and omniscience which parents in all societies seem to possess in relation to their young children; but also with the tenderness and solicitude which parents—at any rate, mothers—everywhere have for their infant children. So, the mother-tongue is built up in the child as a skill and as a medium of social relations, but charged at the same time with moral authority and emotional values. Psychologists tell us that this is not a passive process, but one in which internal tendencies, to which they give such names as instincts and drives, play a major part.

What I have said of language is true of everything in the social outfit of a community, which we call its culture, especially in a primitive society. It applies to practical skills like hunting, farming, and the making and use of tools. It also applies to the ideas and beliefs men use to interpret both the world of objects and people outside them and the things that happen within themselves. I am reminded of a saying of Whitehead's that a good notation sets the mathematician's brain free for more advanced problems—a good notation being, in the sense of my argument, outside the mathematician's mind, a common possession of all mathematicians, and yet the very essence of his mental operations. Take, for instance, my belief that the earth

rotates on its axis and revolves around the sun. I did not discover this for myself and I, personally, cannot prove it to the satisfaction of anybody who does not accept it. Africans who have never been to school are, quite rightly, sceptical of it because it is so obviously contrary to the evidence of their senses. The theory is a social creation, the outcome of many pooled discoveries; and I accept it because it was taught to me on reliable authority, because it has the approval of my society, and because rejection of it would, in effect, imply rejection of the whole system of thought and action on which my social relations are based. I should have to disbelieve not only what physicists tell me about the nature of matter but, what is much more important, what my doctor tells me about the nature of disease, since I cannot, in either case, test their theories by the evidence of my senses. The organized routine of my life, in such matters as my daily time table and the care I exercise over my health, would break down.

I do not want to labour the point, which is simply this: a hard and fast line cannot be drawn between the inner realm of mind and the outer world of society and custom. This is masked in our complex and diversified society because a person may belong to a number of mutually exclusive associations, for work, for worship, for recreation, for political ends. Each group has its own customs and his habits may differ accordingly. But in a small and homogeneous African or Polynesian society all activities go on in the same framework of social relationships and in a common idiom of ideas and attitudes, so the fusion of the private world of the individual and the public world of the community is more obvious.

But lest the examples I have given may seem rather fanciful, let us consider a more concrete case. In our culture time is a commodity that must not be wasted. This is impressed on us from childhood with all the moral authority of parents and teachers, and continues to be impressed on us by all our social institutions. It fits in with our cosmology and with our idea of history as linear development. It fits our family system, with its virtual lack of continuity for more than one generation at a stretch. But many primitive societies have a very different concept of time. They see it as a perpetual cycle of seasons following one another in the same succession. Their social life seems to them to be the same for generation after generation, with grandsons replacing their grandfathers to carry on the traditional order. They express this in beliefs in reincarnation and in myths—the myth, for instance, that the rainbow is a celestial serpent who appears every year at the appropriate time.

During the past thirty years or so various attempts have been made to find out by means of intelligence tests how primitive peoples compare with Americans and Europeans. The results have been quite inconclusive, even with material as apparently universal in character as coloured wooden blocks and simple mazes. And one of the main difficulties has been the time sense of the subjects from primitive tribes. The social system of an Australian aborigine does not require him to calculate the expense or effort in small units of time of hours and minutes.[1] When he is asked to find his way through a pictorial maze he is quite willing to spend a whole afternoon on the task, aiming

[1] S. D. Porteous, *The Psychology of a Primitive People*, 1931.

at certainty rather than speed. I must make it clear that this is not just a matter of a habit of taking things easily. It is a symptom of a general outlook on life. I found something like it among African tribesmen whom I studied. How often have I waited wearily in the noonday sun for a ceremony to begin, which had been planned for the crack of dawn. Yet when it came to the sowing or harvesting of crops they could drive themselves as hard as any of us to get through the work speedily. Time is an aspect of the occasion, the purpose, the need met, not something expendable in its own right.

It is the same with the idea of space. It is significant that in our everyday activities we equate 'space' with 'room'. Our spatial notions probably come from our childhood experience of exploring rectangular rooms with rigid boundaries which are filled with objects arranged in precise order according to the commands of a parent. Later the idea of measurement is added. In one African community I know well, people do not think of space in these ways. For them space is equated with emptiness, in one sense, with direction in another. I think this has a close connection with their mode of living in round huts which are almost devoid of furniture. As a matter of fact, they can hardly be said to live *in* their huts. Their daytime life is public and shared with the whole world, for it is carried on in the open courtyards of the homestead or under the shade tree in front. They do not experience space as made up of regular closed-in units or shapes. Whenever boys and girls came to visit me I used to give them crayons to amuse themselves with. They would scribble and draw energetically until they had covered

the whole sheet of paper. But what was striking was the surprise they showed when they came to the edge of the paper, as if they quite expected the blank space to stretch infinitely in all directions. Incidentally, an English child of twelve or thirteen who drew as poorly as these children would be regarded as mentally defective. But no mental defective could have the self-reliance, the knowledge of their environment, and the skill in farming and cattle husbandry of these African children. What they put on to the paper was largely determined by their unfamiliarity with the materials and the task. But the point I want to emphasize is their concept of space, a fact of the individual's perception, yet apparently derived from their material and social environment.

I have spoken of time and space concepts on purpose, just because they are rather pedestrian subjects. For most Europeans, however, primitive cultures are associated with exotic customs and queer practices. They think of witch doctors and of strange religious beliefs, of raiding warriors and of chiefs dressed in barbaric splendour. Indeed, I do not know any social anthropologist who would deny that it is these exotic and often spectacular aspects of primitive cultures that most fascinate him. And a very important reason for this is that we still have little understanding of their nature. What lies behind the widespread customs of initiating young men and women into adulthood by secluding them, and compelling them to undergo humiliating and painful rites like the cutting of body marks, circumcision, and the knocking out of teeth? What is the explanation of the beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery that are found in every part of

the world? What goes on in the mind of people who hold such beliefs?

To appreciate the religious, magical, and mythological beliefs and practices of primitive peoples we must recognize that they are expressions of the common humanity of all mankind. Apart from being far more logically coherent, once the premises are granted, African beliefs about witches are startlingly like those of Shakespeare's day. Sir Isaac Newton held beliefs about occult powers that would seem thoroughly sensible to a modern Melanesian or pagan African, and I do not suppose anybody would claim that he was a savage in his mental development, or inferior in intellectual capacity to the mathematical physicists of to-day. There are influential sects in our society whose members regard disease as being purely spiritual affliction, and who would die rather than submit to treatment by drugs or surgery. The Navaho Indians, groping towards the kind of theories we nowadays describe by the name of psycho-somatic medicine consider every illness to be equally and at the same time a disease of the body and a disturbance of the spirit. So they combine physical treatment by sweating, purging, and other measures, with psychological treatment by ritual chants addressed to divinities. There is no belief or practice found in primitive cultures which lacks a counterpart in our civilization. The difference is that what is usually common, public, and authoritatively held in a primitive society is with us often confined to a sect, a party or a clique, or it may even be a personal idiosyncrasy. There are, in technologically advanced societies, not only a multitude of cranks and freak cults but also nationally sanctioned political

practices which their opponents describe as witch hunting. There are the individuals with obsessional and paranoiac fears whose fantasies about themselves and their fellows, as Freud perceived, sound like morbid caricatures of primitive beliefs. But most to the point, for comparative purposes, are the ideas and attitudes of ordinary people especially when they are confronted with a crisis. It was of ordinary people that Montaigne, with insight foreshadowing modern psycho-analytic observations, was thinking when he said, 'I am of opinion that no fantasie so mad can fall into human imagination, that meetes not with the example of some publike custome, and by consequence that our reason doth not ground and bring a stay'. Our problem is, what are the fantasies mirrored in custom and, in particular, in customs which assume the existence of occult or supernatural forces and qualities?

Primitive people express the elementary emotions we describe by terms like fear and anger, love and hate, joy and grief in words and acts that are easily recognizable by us. Some anthropologists say that many non-European peoples are sensitive to the feeling of shame but not to guilt feelings. I doubt this. One of the most important functions of ritual in all societies is to provide a legitimate means of attributing guilt for one's sins and crimes to other persons or outside powers. In many primitive societies this function of ritual customs is prominent and it leads to the impression that individuals have a feeble sense of guilt, by comparison with Europeans. The truth is that our social system throws a hard and perhaps excessive burden of moral decision on the individual who has no

such outlets for guilt feelings as are found in simpler societies. This is correlated with the fragmentation of social relations, and the division of allegiances and affections in our society. I am sure it has a great deal to do with the terrifying toll of mental disease and psychoneurosis in modern industrial countries. We know very little about mental diseases in primitive communities. What evidence there is suggests that those regarded by many authorities as of constitutional origin occur in the same forms as with us. But disturbances of personality and character similar to those that cause mental conflict and social maladjustment in our society seem to be rare. I do not mean to imply that everybody is always happy, contented, and free of care in a primitive society. On the contrary, there is plenty of evidence that among them, as with us, affability may conceal hatred and jealousy, friendliness and devotion enjoined by law and morals may mask enmity, exemplary citizenship may be a way of compensating for frustration and fears. The important thing is that in primitive societies there are customary methods of dealing with these common human problems of emotional adjustment by which they are externalized, publicly accepted, and given treatment in terms of ritual beliefs; society takes over the burden which, with us, falls entirely on the individual. Restored to the esteem of his fellows he is able to take up with ease the routine of existence which was thrown temporarily off its course by an emotional upheaval. Behaviour that would be the maddest of fantasies in the individual, or even the worst of vices, becomes tolerable and sane, in his society, if it is transformed into custom and woven into the outward and visible

fabric of a community's social life. This is easy in primitive societies where the boundary between the inner world of the self and the outer world of the community marks their line of fusion rather than of separation. Lest this may sound like a metaphysical lapse, I want to remind you that it springs from a very tangible and characteristic feature of primitive social structure, the widely extended network of kinship. The individual's identification with his immediate family is thus extended outward into the greater society, not broken off at the threshold of his home.

One problem which ordinary people have to deal with in all societies is the passage from childhood to adulthood. With us, adolescence can be a great strain on the child and a trial to his parents and teachers. It is often accompanied by moods of rebellion against parents and other representatives of society, as well as by a tendency to swing between attitudes of mature responsibility and relapses into childish habits. The difficulty is that we have no general customs for interpreting the transition to adulthood, and so are unable to direct it. All we have is an arbitrary legal definition of the age of majority.

Many primitive societies deal with this crisis more logically and, what matters most, more consistently with its emotional undercurrents, by means of initiation ceremonies. In these ceremonies the different phases of the transition from childhood to adulthood are dramatized and acted out in symbolic form. First, society, in the person of the elders, asserts its control over its youthful members by removing them from their homes and the care of their mothers. This, as the novices are often told in songs and riddles, stands

for their severance from the dependent and irresponsible—or, as we might say, innocent—state of childhood. It may be carried out drastically, for there is emotional resistance to putting aside childhood. Then come the ordeals of the transformation of the child into the adult. These are partly trials of endurance in which the novices prove their ability to take on the burdens of adult responsibility, and partly humiliations intended to impress on them the paramountcy of the social order. The climax of circumcision, or other form of mutilation, not only sets the seal of irrevocable adulthood on them but is a pledge of adherence to the moral norms of the society in the most exacting sphere of adulthood; that is, sex life and parenthood. The whole ceremony is often acted out as if it were a dying and being reborn, which is what in fact it is on the psychological level. The men in charge may impersonate gods or ancestors, and this has the double effect of investing adulthood with sanctity and of drawing away from the real fathers and grandfathers of the novices the terror and resentment they may feel beneath the superficial pride in becoming recognized as grown up. Finally, the new adults are returned to public life with dance and festivity, henceforth to take a serious part in the life of the society.

What I want to stress is the psychological value of such ceremonies. In these simpler societies there is no room for recalcitrants, and no way of escape from the control of society. Everybody has to learn to accept the social order not just willingly but whole-heartedly, or else it may be wrecked. Nor is it enough for conformity to be enforced by outside sanctions. It must be implanted in the mind, must become a matter of

conscience; and for this to be achieved, the emotional resistance of the coming generation must be changed to emotional identification. This is done by bringing the clash into the open and dramatically proclaiming its conversion into common purpose. So custom, a social creation, changes the adolescent's suppressed hostility to the authority of the elders into a constructive force.

However, the greatest, because utterly inevitable, crisis of life in all societies is the fact of death. Though it is universally known to be inevitable, yet it always comes as a shock, if only because a death always throws routine patterns of social relationship into disorder. So in every society we find a system of interpretations by means of which the brutal fact is explained—or rather explained away—and customary rituals by means of which the emotional shock is neutralized; and this is of general importance in the study of the psychology of custom. It is noteworthy that among many primitive peoples death is interpreted as an attack from outside, either by gods or ancestors, by witches, or by sorcerers in another tribe. Those who are most directly affected are thus permitted by the sanctions of religion and law to express anger and hostility to outside powers while, at the same time, bowing to their will, which is by definition beyond human contol. The inscrutable fact of death is thus transformed into something emotionally and intellectually tangible, and action can be substituted for the paralysis of fantasy.

But let us remember that death is only the extreme case of a daily accident of human life. In a simple society, as in our own, there are two sources of dis-

order in the safe routine of social life. One is the inborn impulses of man; the other, the uncertainty of individual fate. If law and morals are means of keeping social control over the first, ritual is chiefly concerned with the second. It lets the spectres of private fantasy come out into the open and so enables man to bring them under intellectual control. In a primitive society we see this very clearly just because custom is overt and common to all—the values of the individual are those of the whole community.

VIII

MODES OF THOUGHT

By Godfrey Lienhardt

NONE of us who study savage societies would say, to-day, that there are modes of thought which are confined to primitive peoples. It is rather that we ourselves have specialized ways of apprehending reality. The speakers in this series of talks may, indeed, have described notions which we do not easily take for granted, but which are commonplace among many peoples without our modern science and technology. But any historical sense of proportion—and our historical thought, our sense of relativities, is among our distinguishing characteristics—reminds us that it is some of our own habits of thought which are newly-formed and uncommon. We stand more or less alone, for example, in not taking witchcraft seriously, or distant kinship; and our indifference in such matters divides us equally from savages, and from those ancient cultures whose civilization, in other respects, we are proud to inherit.

Further, since the eighteenth century at least, we have been rather disposed to forget that a satisfying representation of reality may be sought in more than one way, that reasoning is not the only way of thinking, that there is a place for meditative and imaginative thought.

Our thought has in some ways broken the traditional

mould; and a regret for a lost integrity of thought and feeling which seemed to be part of primitive experience led such men as D. H. Lawrence, for example, or Gauguin, to depict a gnostic savage, instinctively aware of some harmony absent from modern urban life—a savage vigorous, active, unreflective. Perhaps many of us who have lived with primitive peoples come to sense what a difference it makes to the nature of apprehension when the mind turns directly towards what it seeks to know, without also being concerned with itself as an object of knowledge. This was the point of William James's comments on Walt Whitman's neo-paganism, when he wrote of Whitman's 'conscious pride in his freedom from flexions and contractions, which your genuine pagan would never know' and contrasted this with 'the integrity of the instinctive reactions' and 'freedom from all moral sophistry and sham' which, James said, 'gives a pathetic dignity to ancient pagan feelings'.

These, however, are impressions of the unself-consciousness of primitive thought. Anthropologists seek first a knowledge of its content. When we live with savages and speak their languages, learning to represent their experience to ourselves in their way, we come as near to thinking like them as we can without ceasing to be ourselves. Eventually, we try to represent their conceptions systematically in the logical constructs we have been brought up to use; and we hope, at the best, thus to reconcile what can be expressed in their languages, with what can be expressed in ours. We mediate between their habits of thought, which we have acquired with them, and those of our own society; in doing so, it is not finally some

mysterious 'primitive philosophy' that we are exploring, but the further potentialities of our own thought and language.

The problem of describing to others how members of a remote tribe think then begins to appear largely as one of translation, of making the coherence primitive thought has in the languages it really lives in, as clear as possible in our own. For this sort of translation, concise dictionaries, with their simple equivalents, are of little use. If, for example, I report without further comment that some primitive men speak of pelicans as their half-brothers, I do little more than offer the reader a form of words which, as it stands in English, suggests the atmosphere of the fairy tale, or nonsense. Of course, we understand, from many writings on savages, that such situations exist; but thus stated, we cannot say that we properly understand them in themselves. Among the people who relate men and birds or beasts in this way, there is, however, a naturalness in the association, a taking for granted that such things are possible, and in what sense they are possible, which eludes a simple literal translation. In order to make this understood in English, it would be necessary to give a full account of views about the relations of the human and non-human quite different from those which we entertain, but not, therefore, necessarily, less reasonable.

It is when we try to contain the thought of a primitive society in our language and categories, without also modifying these in order to receive it, that it begins in part to lose the sense it seemed to have. I have often been told in the Sudan that some men turn themselves into lions, indeed *are* lions existing also in the form of

men. Put thus in English, the statement seems curious and superstitious, because we think at once of man and lion as necessarily two different beings. It does not at once occur to us that they may represent two possible ways of viewing the same being. The question arises of whether a creature is 'really' a man, or 'really' a lion, for it is not usual for us to think of any creature as existing in more than one mode. This, however, is what is asserted in parts of the Sudan, when some men are said to be beasts of one kind or another.

We are inclined, moreover, to translate this equivalence of men and lions into a simile or a metaphor, or to look round for reasons why such a 'confusion', as we may be tempted to put it, could have occurred. But the people themselves do not confuse men with beasts; they merely do not distinguish *all* men from *all* beasts in the same way as we do. They seem to suggest that an animal nature, and a man's nature, may be co-present in the same being.

As anthropologists, we have to give at least a temporary assent to such ways of thinking. By assenting to them, I mean merely being prepared to entertain them in the mind, without at once trying to rationalize them to fit them into a place, so to speak, already prepared for other, more familiar, ideas. Only by such suspension of criticism can one learn gradually how thought of this sort, in its context, is a representation of experience which at least is not obviously self-contradictory; and which can satisfy men no less rational, if less rationalizing, than ourselves. We have our neat distinctions between metaphor and fact, and we are bound at first to assume that the assertion 'Some men are lions' is an assertion of one or the other kind,

either figuratively or literally accepted. We have to learn that often, in translating primitive languages, it is not possible to make just such sorts of distinction between the literal and the metaphorical; and we have to be content to recognize that such statements made by primitive people cannot really be said to be of the one sort or the other. They lie between these categories of ours. They do not properly fit.

How, for example, can a European assent to African thought about witchcraft? It is a matter, I think, of not at once trying to bring arguments to bear against witchcraft as an existential reality, of trying first to see what a belief in it represents to a particular society. The fullest study of witchcraft in Africa we have is Professor Evans-Pritchard's book, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*; and since witchcraft seems, perhaps, as remote from our thought as any notions of primitive peoples, I should like to suggest, by reference to the Azande, what we do when we study primitive modes of thought.

The Azande are a highly intelligent people of the Southern Sudan and the Belgian Congo. In order to understand what witchcraft means to them, we have to start, as in assenting to anyone's thought, by making one or two assumptions which they make. We have to assume that a man's death or misfortune demands specific explanation; we have to assume that human beings, without any physical act, can injure each other; and we have to suppose that a possible way of accounting for death or suffering is to say that someone, some human witch, is responsible for them. Further, we have to accept it as possible that oracles can reveal truth when other means fail.

To make these assumptions may seem to separate us at once from the Azande; but we perhaps seem less remote from them when we learn that they also recognize what we should call the *natural* causes of death and misfortune, according to their scientific knowledge which is, of course, defective compared with ours. They are not satisfied, however, to regard natural causes as the only causes; and from this point of view, their reasoning about causes is more searching than our own. We are usually content, in cases of death or trouble, to speak of 'accidents', often assuming that further questions are pointless. But the Azande do ask a further question—why should it happen that a particular man, and at a particular time, becomes ill or meets his death? Theoretically another man might equally have suffered in his place; or the accident might not have happened. What, then, has placed that man in the very circumstances where he is killed?

If we should ask such questions, we answer them generally by saying that it was Providence, or fortune, or coincidence. We cannot, however, act against these; and the Azande in misfortune seek some explanation which gives them an opportunity for action. They want to deal with the trouble at its source, to save further suffering. They thus hold witches responsible for some misfortunes and they seek to find out which particular people have injured them by putting the names of those they suspect of wanting to harm them, before an impersonal oracle.

Their system of consulting the oracle shows certain affinities between their thought and ours in a situation which is otherwise far removed from anything we know. They give a special poison to fowls, and then

ask this oracular poison in the fowls the questions which they want to have answered. They tell it that if such-and-such is the case, then the poison should kill the fowl, whereas if the reverse is true, the fowl should live. If a fowl survives after the first question, then often it must die when the same question is put again negatively in order to confirm its first answer.

Usually, a number of such matters are placed before the oracles at one session. If it contradicts itself over one or two of the questions, the interference of a witch is suspected, and those questions are held over till another day. But if the poison kills all the fowls, it is called a foolish poison, and if it spares them all, it is called a weak poison. A poison that is suspect is tested with a deliberately absurd question, as for example:

'Poison oracle, tell the chicken about those two spears over there. As I am about to go up to the sky, if I will spear the moon to-day with my spears, kill the fowl. If I will not spear the moon to-day, poison oracle spare the fowl.'

It will be seen that the object of the consultation is to discover certain sorts of truth not otherwise accessible; but it is interesting to note that in administering poison to chickens, the Azande yet show an affinity with our more rigorous procedures for determining truth. They attempt to test an hypothesis both positively and negatively; and they use also the test of absurdity in extreme cases.

Yet, our own belief in the importance of wider critical and experimental testing of conclusions is not found among the Azande. They do not seek to generalize their experience of witchcraft and oracles into a single, and self-consistent, theory; and they could

not do so; for their confidence in their notions is supported, not by a logical inter-relationship between them on the plane of abstraction, but by their adequacy to explain particular isolated situations. Thus, the anthropologist's theory of Azande witchcraft would not demolish their belief in the reality of witches; rather it would provide for them a theoretical and critical understanding of the subject, to supplement their practical rule-of-thumb experience.

Now this is not because the anthropologist becomes committed to a belief in witchcraft as the Azande understand it. *He* views it from quite a different angle. By reference to witchcraft, the Azande account for certain sorts of misfortune, and death; the anthropologist does not seek to account for these troubles by his theory of witchcraft, but to explain what happens when they are attributed to witchcraft, and not, as among ourselves, to other causes.

There is one more feature of witchcraft I should mention too. It is that, generally, people suspect those people of bewitching them whom they suspect of hating them, and whom, therefore, they hate. As a psychological analysis of a situation, we understand this perfectly. We know that we suspect of evil intentions those towards whom we ourselves feel uncharitable. But the same situation may appear quite strange when what we see as the *internal* workings of bad feelings and attitudes are externalized, when it is thought that they can do real harm of a sort we attribute only to physical agents. In Zande, instead of wondering which people have the inclination to do us an injury, we ask the oracle which, of the people we know, are trying to bewitch us.

There are other examples, too, from primitive peoples, of what we see as coming from *within* the mind, a state of conscience, perhaps, being represented as something external to it, a force working upon it from without, not produced by it. What here in England, for example, would be described as a nervous or psychological derangement may be regarded in primitive societies as possession by a spirit or demon. The figures appearing in dreams similarly are often clearly distinguished from the dreamer who encounters them; they come *to* him, not, as we often see it, *from* his mind. In some ways we thus distinguish less clearly than primitive peoples between the self as subject of experience, and what is not the self as the object of experience. For increasingly we seem to regard the human mind as in some way creating what it then proceeds to know.

On the whole, I have been talking about what primitive peoples are said to 'believe'; and generally, what may be regarded as their faith has received more publicity than their scepticism. Yet, scepticism and an ironical recognition of the ambiguities of human experience and knowledge are undoubtedly found among them. I have met many individuals whose apparent agnosticism about matters to which, nevertheless, they give a certain assent, would surprise those who regard intelligent doubt as a recent European accomplishment. Some primitive peoples may question, upon reflection, the religion which they still practise, remarking on the unlikelihood, even the silliness, of some of the mythical situations upon which it is yet founded. Many improbable happenings, about which they have been told in the traditional

lore of their society, clearly seem strange to them as they do to us; but, unlike us, they do not dismiss such happenings as impossible, merely because they seem unlikely. In any case, a myth is 'what men say'; it is not something of which one can acquire the direct experience which can be called knowledge. In some primitive societies, at least, no one would pretend to *know* whether the story of human origins was true in itself. People know about what they have been told, and that is enough. They often recognize also that other peoples have different traditions; but they do not feel obliged, therefore, to seek for a consistency in different stories, nor to assert, dogmatically, the truth of one rather than the truth of another. The same man can thus entertain in his mind different accounts of the same mythical event, not 'believing' one rather than the other, yet not regarding either as fictitious. When earlier travellers record, therefore, that a primitive people '*believes*' this or that, they sometimes create an unjustified impression of savage credulity. Most anthropologists have had the experience of being laughed at for their own credulity, in taking too literally some story told by the people they have studied. It is as though, having heard it said in England that there was a man in the moon, a foreigner was to proceed to talk to the English as though they believed that.

One may be told, for example, that at one time animals could talk like men, and men and animals formed one single society. Our reaction to such stories is to ask whether people accept them as statements of historical fact, which is what 'believing' has come to

mean to us. We soon find that they do nothing of the sort, and that, as with our fiction, it is irrelevant to them whether the stories are *objectively* true, as we might say. They lack our tradition of the critical discernment of fact from fiction in the scientific study of history, and they do not, therefore, equate the true with the factual, as we are inclined to. Still, in many primitive societies there *is* something of the distinction we make between myth and history, events of the recent past being understood in a different sense from those of remotest, original time, which, by being placed at the very beginning, really transcend historical time, sequence, and probability. Consequently, it gives a quite wrong impression of what primitive people are able to be convinced of, if we suppose that their myth has for them the sort of validity which our history has for us.

It was Lévy-Bruhl who laid the foundations of the study of primitive thought. He was the first to see clearly that often, in studying it, it was necessary to seek for the nature of its coherence outside the logical principles of our own formal thinking. Unfortunately, in doing so he created a theoretical 'primitive mentality', with a structure and orientation quite different from our own. By what he admitted to be a conscious distortion, he presented a savage whose thought consisted almost entirely of the fusion of what *we* see as the qualities, and properties, of things; whose language was often the scarcely-transformed representation of direct, sensuous experience. Some more recent writers have tried to refine upon his notions by saying that, for primitives, the distance between subject and

object, knower and known, seems less than among ourselves. These are attempts at a compromise between the old-fashioned literalism of our interpretations, which often made savages seem childish and irrational, and Lévy-Bruhl's somewhat impressionistic accounts of primitive peoples as being 'utterly mystical' in the apprehension of reality. It is not true, of course, that primitive peoples are less practical and logical than ourselves in the ordinary course of their daily lives. All value empirical knowledge, and exercise skill, foresight, and common sense; and to this extent we understand their reasoning without effort. We should not therefore suppose that all thought attempts to become like our own, as our own appears when we reflect upon it as 'thought'—either concerned, that is, with the logical demonstration of truth and error, *or* meditative and imaginative. If we suppose this, we introduce into primitive thought distinctions which we have arrived at by elaborate systematic reflection upon our own. We do not see it as it is.

The study of some primitive thought, then, reminds us that it is not always appropriate to suppose that metaphorical and literal interpretations of experience are, in the very nature of thinking, distinct; it is only when we, unlike most primitive peoples, think about thought, that we begin to make such distinctions. It is in the apprehension of analogies that much non-scientific thought seems to lie—analogies such as, for example, sky is to earth as God is to man, as rain is to crops, as high is to low, and so on. Such systems of analogy vary from society to society, and they are accessible to anthropological study. It is only when we

take them to be other than they are—to assert the identity of rain and God, for example, and not an analogical relationship between them—that we begin to wonder how reasonable beings could come to 'believe' them.