

CHAPTER XV

Primitive Mentality

The myth is not my own, I had it from my mother.

Euripides, fr. 488

There is, perhaps, no subject that has been more extensively investigated and more prejudicially misunderstood by the modern scientist than that of folklore. By "folklore" we mean that whole and consistent body of culture which has been handed down, not in books but by word of mouth and in practice, from time beyond the reach of historical research, in the form of legends, fairy tales, ballads, games, toys, crafts, medicine, agriculture, and other rites, and forms of social organization, especially those that we call "tribal." This is a cultural complex independent of national and even racial boundaries, and of remarkable similarity throughout the world;¹ in other words, a culture of extraordinary vitality. The material of folklore differs from that of exoteric "religion," to which it may be in a kind of opposition—as it is in a quite different way to "science"²—by its more intellectual and less moralistic content,

¹ "The metaphysical notions of man may be reduced to a few types which are of universal distribution" (Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, New York, 1927, p. 156; "The great myths of mankind are almost monotonously alike in their fundamental aspects" (D. C. Holtom, *The National Faith of Japan*, London, 1938, p. 90). The pattern of the lives of heroes is universal (Lord Raglan, *The Hero*, London, 1936). From all over the world more than three hundred versions of a single tale had already been collected fifty years ago (M. R. Cox, *Cinderella*, London, 1893). All peoples have legends of the original unity of Sky and Earth, their separation, and their marriage. "Clapping Rocks" are Navajo and Eskimo as well as Greek. The patterns of *Himmelfahrten* [the celestial ascensions –Ed. trans.] and the types of the active *Wunderthor* [miraculous God Thor –Ed. trans.] are everywhere alike.

² The opposition of religion to folklore is often a kind of rivalry set up as between a new dispensation and an older tradition, the gods of the older cult becoming the evil spirits of the newer. The opposition of science to the content of both folklore and religion is based upon the view that "such knowledge as is not empirical is meaningless." The most ludicrous, and pathetic, situation appears when, as happened not long ago in England, the Church joins hands with science in proposing to withhold fairy tales from children as being untrue; it might have reflected that those who can make of mythology and fairy lore nothing but literature will do the same with scripture. "Men live by myths ... they are no mere poetic invention" (Fritz Marti, "Religion, Philosophy, and the College," in *Review of Religion*, VII, 1942, 41). "La mémoire collective conserve ... des symboles archaïques d'essence purement métaphysique" [the collective memory conserves ... the

and more obviously and essentially by its adaptation to vernacular transmission:³ on the one hand, as cited above, “the myth is not my own, *I had it from my mother*,” and on the other, “the passage from a traditional mythology to ‘religion’ is a humanistic decadence.”⁴

The content of folklore is metaphysical. Our failure to recognize this is primarily due to our own abysmal ignorance of metaphysics and of its technical terms. We observe, for example, that the primitive craftsman leaves in his work something unfinished, and that the primitive mother dislikes to hear the beauty of her child unduly praised; it is “tempting Providence,” and may lead to disaster. That seems like nonsense to us. And yet there survives in our vernacular the explanation of the principle involved: the craftsman leaves something undone in his work for the same reason that the words “to be finished” may mean either to be perfected or to die.⁵ Perfection is death: when a thing has been altogether fulfilled, when all has been done that was to be done, potentiality altogether reduced to act (*kṛtakṛtyah*), that is the end: those whom the gods love die young. This is not what the workman desired for his work, nor the mother for her child. It can very well be that the workman or the peasant mother is no longer conscious of the meaning

archaic symbols which are in essence purely metaphysical –Ed. trans.] (M. Eliade in *Zalmoxis*, II, 1939, 78). “Religious philosophy is always bound up with myths and cannot break free from them without destroying itself and abandoning its task” (N. Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, London, 1935, p. 69). Cf. E. Dacqué, *Das verlorene Paradies* (Munich, 1940).

³ The words “adaptation to vernacular transmission” should be noted. Scripture recorded in a sacred language is not thus adapted; and a totally different result is obtained when scriptures originally written in such a sacred language are made accessible to the “untaught manyfolk” by translation, and subjected to an incompetent “free examination.” In the first case, there is a faithful transmission of material that is always intelligible, although not necessarily always completely understood; in the second, misunderstandings are inevitable. In this connection it may be remarked that “literacy,” nowadays thought of as almost synonymous with “education,” is actually of far greater importance from an industrial than from a cultural point of view. What an illiterate Indian or American Indian peasant knows and understands would be entirely beyond the comprehension of the compulsorily educated product of the American public schools.

⁴ J. Evola, *Rivolta contra il mondo moderno*, Milan, 1934, p.374 n. 12. “For the primitives, the mythical world really existed. Or rather it still exists” (Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *L’expérience mystique et les symboles chez les primitifs*, Paris, 1938, p. 295). One might add that it will exist forever in the eternal now of the Truth, unaffected by the truth or error of history. A myth is true now, or was never true at all.

⁵ Just as Sanskrit *parinirvāna* is both “to be completely despirated” and “to be perfected” (cf. Coomaraswamy, “Some Pāli Words”). The Buddha’s *parinibbāna* is a “finish” in both senses.

of a precaution that may have become a mere superstition; but assuredly we, who call ourselves anthropologists, should have been able to understand what was the idea which alone could have given rise to such a superstition, and ought to have asked ourselves whether or not the peasant by his actual observance of the precaution is not defending himself from a dangerous suggestion to which we, who have made of our existence a more tightly closed system, may be immune.

As a matter of fact, the destruction of superstitions invariably involves, in one sense or another, the premature death of the folk, or in any case the impoverishment of their lives.⁶ To take a typical case, that of the Australian aborigines, D. F. Thompson, who has recently studied their remarkable initiatory symbols, observes that their “mythology supports the belief in a ritual or supernatural visitation that comes upon those who disregard or disobey the law of the old men. When this belief in the old men and their power—which, under tribal conditions, I have never known to be abused—dies, or declines, as it does with ‘civilization,’ chaos and racial death follow immediately.”⁷ The world’s museums are filled with the traditional arts of innumerable peoples whose culture has been destroyed by the sinister power of our industrial civilization: peoples who have been forced to abandon their own highly developed and beautiful techniques and significant designs in order to preserve their very lives by working as hired laborers at the production

⁶ The life of “civilized” people has already been impoverished; its influence can only tend to impoverish those whom it reaches. The “white man’s burden,” of which he speaks with so much unction, is the burden of death. For the poverty of “civilized” peoples, cf. I. Jenkins, “The Postulate of an Impoverished Reality,” *Journal of Philosophy*, XXXIX, 1942, 533 ff.; Eric Meissner, *Germany in Peril* (London, 1942), pp. 41, 42; Florian Znaniecki, as quoted by A. J. Krzesinski, *Is Modern Culture Doomed?* (New York, 1942), p. 54, n. 8; W. Andrae, *Die ionische Säule: Bauform oder Symbol?* (Berlin, 1933), p. 65 —“mehr und mehr entleert” [more and more voided—author’s trans.].

⁷ *Illustrated London News*, February 25, 1939. A traditional civilization presupposes a correspondence of the man’s most intimate nature with his particular vocation (see René Guénon, “Initiation and the Crafts,” *JISOA*, VI, 1938, 163-168). The forcible disruption of this harmony poisons the very springs of life and creates innumerable maladjustments and sufferings. The representative of “civilization” cannot realize this, because the very idea of vocation has lost its meaning and become for him a “superstition”; the “civilized” man, being himself a kind of economic slave, can be put, or puts himself, to any kind of work that material advantage seems to demand or that social ambition suggests, in total disregard for his individual character, and cannot understand that to rob a man of his hereditary vocation is precisely to take away his “living” in a far more profound than merely economic sense.

of raw materials.⁸ At the same time, modern scholars, with some honorable exceptions,⁹ have as little understood the content of folklore as did the early missionaries understand what they thought of only as the “beastly devices of the heathen”; Sir J. G. Frazer, for example, whose life has been devoted to the study of all the ramifications of folk belief and popular rites, has only to say at the end of it all, in a tone of lofty superiority, that he was “led on, step by step, into surveying, as from some spectacular height, some Pisgah of the mind, a great part of the human race; I was beguiled, as by some subtle enchanter, into indicting what I cannot but regard as a dark, a tragic chronicle of human error and folly, of fruitless endeavor, wasted time and blighted hopes”¹⁰—words that sound much more like an indictment of modern European civilization than a criticism of any savage society!

⁸ See Coomaraswamy, “Notes on Savage Art,” and “Symptom, Diagnosis, and Regimen” [Chapters XVI and XVII in this volume - Ed.]; cf. Thomas Harrison, *Savage Civilization* (New York, 1937).

⁹ E.g., Paul Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (New York, 1927); Wilhelm Schmidt, *Origin and Growth of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1935), and *High Gods in North America* (Oxford, 1933); Karl von Spiess, *Marksteine der Volkskunst* (1937), and *Vom Wesen der Volkskunst* (1926); Konrad Th. Preuss, *Lehrbuch der Völkerkunde* (Stuttgart, 1939), to mention only those best known to me. C. G. Jung is put out of court by his interpretation of symbols as psychological phenomena, an avowed and deliberate exclusion of all metaphysical significance.

¹⁰ *Aftermath* (London, 1936), preface. Olivier Leroy, *La Raison primitive, essai de réfutation de la théorie du prélogisme* (Paris, 1927), n. 18, remarks that Lévy-Bruhl “fut aiguillé sur les recherches ethnologiques par la lecture du *Golden Bough*. Aucun ethnologue, aucun historien des religions, me contredira si je dis que c’était un périlleux début.” [Lévy-Bruhl was steered towards ethnological research by reading *The Golden Bough*. No ethnologist, no historian of religions will contradict me if I say that this was a dangerous beginning - Ed. trans.]. Again, “la notion que Lévy-Bruhl se fait du ‘primitif’ a été écartée par tous les ethnographes ... son peu de curiosité des sauvages a scandalisé les ethnographes” [Lévy-Bruhl’s conception of the ‘primitive’ has been rejected by all ethnographers ... his lack of curiosity about primitive peoples appalled the ethnographers” - Ed. trans.]. (J. Monneret, *La Poésie moderne et le sacré*, Paris, 1945, pp. 193, 195). The very title of his book, *How Natives Think*, betrays him. If he had known *what* “natives” think (i.e., about Europeans), he might have been surprised.

Another exhibition of the superiority complex will be found in the concluding pages of Sidney Hartland, *Primitive Paternity* (London, 1909-1910); his view that when “the relics of primeval ignorance and archaic speculation” have been discarded, the world’s “great stories” will survive, is both absurd and sentimental, and rests on the assumption that beauty can be divorced from the truth in which it originates, and a notion that the only end of “literature” is to amuse. *The Golden Bough* is a glorified doctor’s thesis. Frazer’s only survival value will be documentary; his lucubrations will be forgotten.

The distinctive characteristic of a traditional society is order.¹¹ The life of the community as a whole and that of the individual, whatever his special function may be, conforms to recognized patterns, of which no one questions the validity: the criminal is the man who does not *know* how to behave, rather than a man who is unwilling to behave.¹² But such an unwillingness is very rare, where education and public opinion tend to make whatever ought not to be done simply ridiculous, and where, also, the concept of vocation involves a corresponding professional honor. Belief is an aristocratic virtue: "unbelief is for the mob." In other words, the traditional society is a unanimous society, and as such unlike a proletarian and individualistic society, in which the major problems of conduct are decided by the tyranny of a majority and the minor problems by each individual for himself, and there is no real agreement, but only conformity or nonconformity.

It is often supposed that in a traditional society, or under tribal or clan conditions, which are those in which a culture of the folk flourished most, the individual is arbitrarily compelled to conform to the patterns of life that he actually follows. It would be truer to say that under these conditions the individual is devoid of social ambition. It is very far from true that in traditional societies the individual is regimented: it is only in democracies, soviets, and dictatorships that a way of life is imposed upon the individual from without.¹³ In the unanimous

¹¹ "What we mean by a normal civilization is one that rests on principles, in the true sense of this word, and one in which all is ordered and in a hierarchy consistent with these principles, so that everything is seen to be the application and extension of a purely and essentially intellectual or metaphysical doctrine: that is what we mean when we speak of a 'traditional civilization'" (René Guénon, *Orient et occident*, Paris, 1930, p. 235).

¹² Sin, Skr. *apāraddha*, "missing the mark," any departure from "the order to the end," is a sort of clumsiness due to want of skill. There is a ritual of life, and what matters in the performance of a rite is that whatever is done should be done correctly, in "good form." What is not important is how one *feels* about the work to be done or life to be lived: all such feelings being tendentious and self-referent. But if, over and above the *correct* performance of the rite or any action, one also understands its form, if all one's actions are conscious and not merely instinctive reactions provoked by pleasure or pain, whether anticipated or felt, this awareness of the underlying principles is immediately dispositive to spiritual freedom. In other words, wherever the action itself is correct, the action itself is symbolic and provides a discipline, or path, by following which the final goal must be reached; on the other hand, whoever acts informally has opinions of his own and, "knowing what he likes," is limiting his person to the measure of his individuality.

¹³ A democracy is a government of all by a majority of proletarians; a soviet, a govern-

society the way of life is self-imposed in the sense that “fate lies in the created causes themselves,” and this is one of the many ways in which the order of the traditional society conforms to the order of nature: it is in the unanimous societies that the possibility of self-realization—that is, the possibility of transcending the limitations of individuality—is best provided for. It is, in fact, for the sake of such a self-realization that the tradition itself is perpetuated. It is here, as Jules Romains has said, that we find “the richest possible variety of individual states of consciousness, in a harmony made valuable by its richness and density,”¹⁴ words that are peculiarly applicable, for example, to Hindu society. In the various kinds of proletarian government, on the other hand, we meet always with the intention to achieve a rigid and inflexible uniformity; all the forces of “education,”¹⁵ for example, are directed to this end. It is a national, rather than a cultural type that is constructed, and to this one type everyone is expected to conform, at the price of being considered a peculiar person or even a traitor. It is of England that the Earl of Portsmouth remarks, “it is the wealth and genius of variety amongst

ment by a small group of proletarians; and a dictatorship, a government by a single proletarian. In the traditional and unanimous society there is a government by a hereditary aristocracy, the function of which is to maintain an existing order, based on eternal principles, rather than to impose the views or arbitrary will (in the most technical sense of the words, a *tyrannical* will) of any “party” or “interest.”

The “liberal” theory of class warfare takes it for granted that there can be no common interest of different classes, which must oppress or be oppressed by one another; the classical theories of government are based on a concept of impartial justice. What majority rule means in practice is a government in terms of an unstable “balance of power”; and this involves a kind of internal warfare that corresponds exactly to the international wars that result from the effort to maintain balances of power on a still larger scale.

¹⁴ “The stronger and more intense the social is, the less it is oppressive and external” (G. Gurvitch, “Mass, Community, Communion,” *Journal of Philosophy*, XXXVIII, 1941, 488). “In a mediaeval feudalism and imperialism, or any other civilization of the traditional type, unity and hierarchy can co-exist with a maximum of individual independence, liberty, affirmation, and constitution” (Evola, *Rivolta*, p. 112). But: “Hereditary service is quite incompatible with the industrialism of today, and that is why the system of caste is always painted in such dark colors” (A. M. Hocart, *Les Castes*, Paris, 1938, p. 238).

¹⁵ “Compulsory education, whatever its practical use may be, cannot be ranked among the civilizing forces of this world” (Meissner, *Germany in Peril*, p. 73). Education in a primitive society is not compulsory, but inevitable; just because the past is there “present, experienced and felt as an effective part of daily life, not just taught by schoolmasters” (*idem*). For the typically modern man, to have “broken with the past” is an end in itself; any change is a meliorative “progress,” and education is typically iconoclastic.

our people, both in character and hand, that needs to be rescued now".¹⁶ what could not be said of the United States! The explanation of this difference is to be found in the fact that the order that is imposed on the individual from without in any form of proletarian government is a *systematic* order, not a "form" but a cut and dried "formula," and generally speaking a pattern of life that has been conceived by a single individual or some school of academic thinkers ("Marxists," for example); while the pattern to which the traditional society is conformed by its own nature, being a metaphysical pattern, is a consistent but not a systematic form, and can therefore provide for the realization of many more possibilities and for the functioning of many more kinds of individual character than can be included within the limits of any system.

The actual unity of folklore represents on the popular level precisely what the orthodoxy of an elite represents in a relatively learned environment. The relation between the popular and the learned metaphysics is, moreover, analogous to and partly identical with that of the lesser to the greater mysteries. To a very large extent both employ one and the same symbols, which are taken more literally in the one case, and in the other understood parabolically; for example, the "giants" and "heroes" of popular legend are the titans and gods of the more learned mythology, the seven-league boots of the hero correspond to the strides of an Agni or a Buddha, and "Tom Thumb" is no other than the Son whom Eckhart describes as "small, but so puissant." *So long as the material of folklore is transmitted, so long is the ground available on which the superstructure of full initiatory understanding can be built.*

Let us now consider the "primitive mentality" that so many anthropologists have studied: the mentality, that is, which manifests itself in such normal types of society as we have been considering, and to which we have referred as "traditional." Two closely connected questions must first be disposed of. In the first place, is there such a thing as a "primitive" or "alogical" mentality distinct from that of civilized and scientific man? It has been taken for granted by the older "animists" that human nature is a constant, so that "if we were in the position of the primitives, our mind being what it is now, we should think and act as they do."¹⁷ On the other hand, for anthropologists and psychologists of the type of Lévy-Bruhl, there can be recognized an almost specific distinc-

¹⁶ G.V.W. Portsmouth, *Alternative to Death* (London, 1943), p. 30.

¹⁷ G. Davy, "Psychologie des primitifs d'après Lévy-Bruhl," *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, XXVII (1931), 112.

tion between the primitive mentality and ours.¹⁸ The explanation of the possibility of disagreement in such a matter has much to do with the belief in progress, by which, in fact, all our conceptions of the history of civilization are distorted.¹⁹ It is too readily taken for granted that we have progressed, and that any contemporary savage society in all respects fairly represents the so-called primitive mentality, and overlooked that many characteristics of this mentality can be studied at home as well as or better than in any African jungle: the point of view of the Christian or Hindu, for example, is in many ways nearer to that of the "savage" than to that of the modern bourgeoisie. What real distinction of two mentalities can be made is, in fact, the distinction of a modern from a mediaeval or oriental mentality; and this is not a specific distinction, but one of sickness from health. It has been said of Lévy-Bruhl that he is a past

¹⁸ For a general refutation of "prélogisme," see Leroy, *La Raison primitive*, and W. Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, pp. 133, 134. Leroy, for example, in discussing the "participation" of kingship in divinity, remarks that all that Lévy-Bruhl and Frazer have done is to call this notion "primitive" because it occurs in primitive societies, and these societies "primitive" because they entertain this primitive idea. Lévy-Bruhl's theories are now quite generally discredited, and most anthropologists and psychologists hold that the mental equipment of primitive man was exactly the same as our own. Cf. Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, p. 373, "in capacity for logical and symbolical thought, there is no difference between civilized and primitive man," and as cited by Schmidt, *Origin and Growth of Religion*, pp. 202, 203; and Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, p. 156.

¹⁹ Cf. D. B. Zema on "Progress," in the *Dictionary of World Literature* (New York, 1943); and René Guénon, *East and West* (London, 1941), ch. 1, "Civilization and Progress." The latter remarks: "The civilization of the modern West appears in history as a veritable anomaly: among all those which are known to us more or less completely, this civilization is the only one which has developed along purely material lines, and this monstrous development, whose beginning coincides with the so-called Renaissance, has been accompanied, as indeed it was fated to be, by a corresponding intellectual *regress*." Cf. Meissner, *Germany in Peril*, pp. 10–11: "The shortest way of stating the case is this: during the last centuries a vast majority of Christian men have lost their homes in every sense of the word. The number of those cast out into the wilderness of a dehumanized society is steadily increasing . . . the time might come and be nearer than we think, when the ant-heap of society, worked out to full perfection, deserves only one verdict: *unfit for men*." Cf. Gerald Heard, *Man the Master* (New York, 1941), p. 25, "By civilized men we now mean industrialized men, mechanical societies.... Any other conduct . . . is the behavior of an ignorant, simple savage. To have arrived at this picture of reality is to be truly advanced, progressive, civilized." "In our present generation of primary and almost exclusive emphasis on mechanics and engineering or economics, understanding of people no longer exists, or at best only in very rare cases. In fact we do not want to know each other as men.... That is just what got us into this monstrous war" (W. F. Sands in *Commonweal*, April 20, 1945).

master in opening up what is to us “an almost inconceivable” world: as if there were none amongst us to whom the mentality reflected in our own immediate environment were not equally “inconceivable.”

We shall consider, then, the “primitive mentality” as described, very often accurately enough, by Lévy-Bruhl and other psychologist-anthropologists. It is characterized in the first place by a “collective ideation”;²⁰ ideas are held in common, whereas in a civilized group, everyone entertains ideas of his own.²¹ Infinitely varied as it may be in detail, the folk literature, for example, has to do with the lives of heroes, all of whom meet with essentially the same adventures and exhibit the same qualities. It is not for one moment realized that a possession of ideas in common does not necessarily imply the “collective origination” of these ideas. It is argued that what is true for the primitive mentality is unrelated to experience, i.e., to such “logical” experience as ours. Yet it is “true” to what the primitive “experiences.” The criticism implied, for such it is, is exactly parallel to the art historian’s who criticizes primitive art as not being “true to nature”; and to that of the historian of literature who demands from literature a psychoanalysis of individual character. The primitive was not interested in such trivialities, but thought in

²⁰ The anthropologist’s “collective ideation” is nothing but the unanimism of traditional societies that has been discussed above; but with this important distinction, that the anthropologist means to imply by his “collective ideation” not merely the common possession of ideas, but also the “collective origination” of these ideas: the assumption being that there really are such things as popular creations and spontaneous inventions of the masses (and as René Guénon has remarked, “the connection of this point of view with the democratic prejudice is obvious”). Actually, “the literature of the folk is not their own production, but comes down to them from above ... the folktale is never of popular origin” (Lord Raglan, *The Hero*, p. 145).

²¹ In a normal society one no more “thinks for oneself” than one has a private arithmetic [cf. Augustine, *De ordine* II.48]. In a proletarian culture one does not think at all, but only entertains a variety of prejudices, for the most part of journalistic and propagandistic origin, though treasured as one’s “own opinions.” A traditional culture presumes an entertainment of ideas, in which a private property is impossible. “Where the God (sc. Eros) is our teacher, we all come to think alike” (Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* XVII.3); “What really binds men together is their culture—the ideas and standards they have in common” (Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, Boston, 1934, p. 16). In other words, religion and culture are normally indivisible: and where everyone thinks for himself, there is no society (*sāhitya*) but only an aggregate. The *common* and divine Reason is the criterion of truth, “but most men live as though they possessed a private intelligence of their own” (Heraclitus, *Fragment* 92). “Insofar as we participate in the memory of that [common and divine] Reason, we speak truth, but whenever we are thinking for ourselves (*idiasōmen*) we lie” (Sextus Empiricus, on Heraclitus, in *Adversus dogmaticos* I.131-134).

types. This, moreover, was his means of “education”; for the type can be imitated, whereas the individual can only be mimicked.

The next and most famous characteristic of the primitive mentality has been called “participation,” or more specifically, “mystical participation.” A thing is not only what it is visibly, but also what it represents. Natural or artificial objects are not for the primitive, as they can be for us, arbitrary symbols of some other and higher reality, but actual manifestations of this reality:²² the eagle or the lion, for example, is not so much a symbol or image of the Sun as it is the Sun in a likeness (the form being more important than the nature in which it may be manifested); and in the same way every house is the world in a likeness, and every altar situated at the center of the earth; it is only because we are more interested in what things are than in what they mean, more interested in particular facts than in universal ideas, that this is inconceivable to us. Descent from a totem animal is not, then, what it appears to the anthropologist, a literal absurdity, but a descent from the Sun, the Progenitor and Prajāpati of all, in that form in which he revealed himself, whether in vision or in dream, to the founder of the clan. The same reasoning validates the Eucharistic meal; the Father-Progenitor is sacrificed and partaken of by his descendants, in the flesh of the sacred animal: “This is my body, take and eat.”²³ So that, as Lévy-Bruhl

²² Cf. “The lust of the goat is the bounty of God... When thou seest an Eagle, thou seest a portion of Genius” (William Blake). “The sacrificial horse is a symbol (*rūpa*) of Prajāpati, and consubstantial with Prajāpati (*prājāpatya*),” so that what is said to the horse is said to Prajāpati “face to face” (*sākṣāt*), and so “verily he wins Him visibly” (*sākṣāt*, TS V.7.1.2). “One day I witnessed a Rāmlīlā performance. I saw the performers to be actual Sitā, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumān, and Bibhiṣana. Then I worshiped the actors and actresses, who played those parts” (Śrī Rāmakrishna). “The child lives in the reality of his imagery, as did the men of early prehistoric time” (R. R. Schmidt, *Dawn of the Human Mind*, London, 1936, p. 7), but the aesthete in the actuality of the fetish!

²³ In the statement, “in some cases we cannot easily tell whether the native thinks that he is in the actual presence of some (usually invisible) being, or that of a symbol” (Lévy-Bruhl, *L'expérience mystique*, p. 206), “we” can only refer to such profane mentalities as are intended by our authors when they speak of “civilized” or “emancipated” man or of themselves. It would not be true for a learned Catholic or Hindu to say that “this peculiarity of the symbols of the primitives creates a great difficulty for us,” and one wonders why our authors are so much puzzled by the “savage,” and not by the contemporary metaphysician. More truly, one does not wonder: it is because it is assumed that wisdom was born with us, and that the savage does not distinguish between appearance and reality; it is because we choose to describe the primitive religious cults as a “worship of nature”—we who are nature worshipers indeed, and to whom the words of Plutarch are preeminently applicable, viz. that men have been so blinded by their powers of observation that they can no longer distinguish between Apollo and the Sun, the reality

says of such symbols, “very often it is not their purpose to ‘represent’ their prototype to the eye, but to facilitate a participation,” and that “if it is their essential function to ‘represent,’ in the full sense of the word, invisible beings or objects, and to make their presence effective, it follows that they are not necessarily reproductions or likenesses of these beings or objects.”²⁴ The purpose of primitive art, being entirely different from the aesthetic or decorative intentions of the modern “artist” (for whom the ancient motifs survive only as meaningless “art forms”), explains its abstract character. “We civilized men have lost the Paradise of the ‘Soul of primitive imagery [*Urbildseele*].’ We no longer live among the shapes which we had fashioned within: we have become mere spectators, reflecting them from without.”²⁵

The superior intellectuality of primitive and “folk” art is often confessed, even by those who regard the “emancipation” of art from its linguistic and communicative functions as a desirable progress. Thus W. Deonna writes, “Le primitivisme exprime par l’art les idées,” but l’art “évolue ... vers un naturalisme progressif,” no longer representing things “telles qu’on les conçoit” [I would rather say, “telles qu’on les comprend”], but “telles qu’on les voit”; thus substituting “la réalité” for “l’abstraction”; and that evolution, “de l’idéalisme vers un naturalisme” in which “la forme [*sc. la figure*] tend à prédominer sur l’idée,” is what the Greek genius, “plus artiste que tous les autres,” finally accomplished.²⁶

To have lost the art of thinking in images is precisely to have lost the proper linguistic of metaphysics and to have descended to the

and the phenomenon.

²⁴ Lévy-Bruhl, *L’expérience mystique*, pp. 174, 180. Lévy-Bruhl appears to have been quite ignorant of the Platonic-Aristotelian-Christian doctrine of the “participation” of things in their formal causes. His own words, “not necessarily ... likenesses,” are notably illogical, since he is speaking of “invisible” prototypes, and it is evident that these invisibles have no appearance that could be visually imitated, but only a character of which there can be a representation by means of adequate (*isos*) symbols; cf. Rom. I:20, “invisible things . . . being understood by the things that are made.”

²⁵ Schmidt, *Dawn of the Human Mind*, p. 7.

²⁶ [“Primitivism expresses ideas through art,” but “art has evolved ... towards a progressive naturalism,” no longer representing things “as they are conceived” {I would rather say, “as they are understood”}], but “as they are seen”; thus substituting “reality” for “abstraction”; and that evolution, “of idealism towards a naturalism” in which the form {*sc. the figure*} tends to predominate over the idea,” is what the Greek genius, “more artistic than all the others,” finally accomplished. - Ed. trans.]. W. Deonna, “Primitivisme et classicisme,” *BAHA*, IV, no. 10 (1937). For the same facts but a contrary conclusion see A. Gleizes, *Vers une Conscience plastique, la forme et l’histoire* (Paris, 1932).

verbal logic of “philosophy.” The truth is that the content of such an “abstract,” or rather “principial,” form as the Neolithic sun-wheel (in which we see only an evidence of the “worship of natural forces,” or at most a “personification” of these forces), or that of the corresponding circle with center and radii or rays, is so rich that it could only be fully expounded in many volumes, and embodies implications which can only with difficulty if at all be expressed in words; the very nature of primitive and folk art is the immediate proof of its essentially intellectual content. Nor does this only apply to the diagrammatic representations: there was actually nothing made for use that had not a meaning as well as an application: “The needs of the body and the spirit are satisfied together”;²⁷ “le physique et le spirituel ne sont pas encore séparés,”²⁸ “meaningful form, in which the physical and metaphysical originally formed a counterbalancing polarity, is increasingly depleted in its transmission to us; we say then that it is ‘ornament.’”²⁹ What we call “inventions” are nothing but the application of known metaphysical principles to practical ends; and that is why tradition always refers the fundamental inventions to an ancestral culture hero (always, in the last analysis, a descent of the Sun), that is to say, to a primordial revelation.

In these applications, however utilitarian their purpose, there was no need whatever to sacrifice the clarity of the original significance of the symbolic form: on the contrary, the aptitude and beauty of the artifact at the same time express and depend upon the form that underlies it. We can see this very clearly, for example, in the case of such an ancient invention as that of the “safety pin,” which is simply an adaptation of a still older invention, that of the straight pin or needle having at one end a head, ring, or eye and at the other a point; a form that as a “pin” directly penetrates and fastens materials together, and as a “needle” fastens them together by leaving behind it as its “trace” a thread that originates from its eye. In the safety pin, the originally straight stem of

²⁷ Schmidt, *Dawn of the Human Mind*, p. 167. Was “primitive man” already a Platonist, or was Plato a primitive man when he spoke of those arts as legitimate “that will at the same time care for the bodies and the souls of your citizens” (*Republic* 409E-410A), and said that “the one means of salvation from these evils is neither to exercise the soul without the body nor the body without the soul” (*Timaeus* 88BC)?

²⁸ Hocart, *Les Castes*, p. 63. [“The physical and the spiritual are not yet separated” –Ed. trans.]. Under these conditions, “Chaque occupation était un sacerdoce” (p. 27). [“Every vocation was a priesthood” –Ed. trans.]

²⁹ Andrae, *Die ionische Säule*, p. 65.

the pin or needle is bent upon itself so that its point passes back again through the “eye” and is held there securely, at the same time that it fastens whatever material it has penetrated.³⁰

Whoever is acquainted with the technical language of initiatory symbolism (in the present case, the language of the “lesser mysteries” of the crafts) will recognize at once that the straight pin or needle is a symbol of generation, and the safety pin a symbol of regeneration. The safety pin is, moreover, the equivalent of the button, which fastens things together and is attached to them by means of a thread which passes through and again returns to its perforations, which correspond to the eye of the needle. The significance of the metal pin, and that of the thread left behind by the needle (whether or not secured to a button that corresponds to the eye of the needle) is the same: it is that of the “thread-spirit” (*sūtrātman*) by which the Sun connects all things to himself and fastens them; he is the primordial embroiderer and tailor, by whom the tissue of the universe, to which our garments are analogous, is woven on a living thread.³¹

For the metaphysician it is inconceivable that forms such as this, which express a given doctrine with mathematical precision, could have been “invented” without a knowledge of their significance. The anthropologist, it is true, will believe that such meanings are merely “read into” the forms by the sophisticated symbolist (one might as well pretend that a mathematical formula could have been discovered by chance). But that a safety pin or button is meaningless, and merely a convenience for us, is simply the evidence of our profane ignorance and of the fact that such forms have been “more and more voided of content [*entleert*] on their way down to us” (Andrae); the scholar of art is not “reading into” these intelligible forms an arbitrary meaning, but simply reading their meaning, for this is their “form” or “life,” and

³⁰ It is noteworthy that the word *fibule* (fibula) in French surgical language means *suture*.

³¹ “The Sun is the fastening (*āsañjanam*, one might even say “button”) to whom these worlds are linked by means of the quarters. . . . He strings these worlds to Himself by a thread; the thread is the Gale of the Spirit” (ŚB VI.1.17 and VIII.7.3.10). Cf. AV IX.8.38, and BG VII.7, “All ‘this’ is strung on Me like a row of gems on a thread.” For the “thread-spirit” doctrine, cf. also Homer, *Iliad* VIII.18 ff.; Plato, *Theatetus* 153 and *Laws* 644; Plutarch, *Moralia* 393 ff.; Hermes, *Libellus* XVI.5.7; John 12:32; Dante, *Paradiso* I.116; Rūmī, *Dīvān*, Ode XXVIII, “He gave me the end of a thread...”; Blake, “I give you the end of a golden string...” We still speak of living substances as “tissues.” See also Coomaraswamy, “The Iconography of Dürer’s ‘Knots’ and Leonardo’s ‘Concatenation,’” 1944, and “Spiritual Paternity and the Puppet-Complex,” 1945.

present in them regardless of whether or not the individual artists of a given period, or we, have known it or not. In the present case the proof that the meaning of the safety pin had been understood can be pointed to in the fact that the heads or eyes of prehistoric fibulae are regularly decorated with a repertoire of distinctly solar symbols.³²

Inasmuch as the symbolic arts of the folk do not propose to tell us what things are like but, by their allusions, intend to refer to the ideas implied by these things, we may describe them as having an algebraic (rather than “abstract”) quality, and in this respect as differing essentially from the veridical and realistic purposes of a profane and arithmetical art, of which the intentions are to tell us what things are like, to express the artist’s personality, and to evoke an emotional reaction. We do not call folk art “abstract” because the forms are not arrived at by a process of omission; nor do we call it “conventional,” since its forms have not been arrived at by experiment and agreement; nor do we call it “decorative” in the modern sense of the word, since it is not meaningless;³³ it is properly speaking a principial art, and supernatural rather than naturalistic. The nature of folk art is, then, itself the sufficient demonstration of its intellectuality: it is, indeed, a “divine inheritance.” We illustrate in Figures 4 and 5 two examples of folk art and one



Figure 4. Sarmatian (?) Ornament.

of bourgeois art. The characteristic informality, insignificance, and ugliness of the latter will be obvious. Figure 4 is a Sarmatian “ornament,”³⁴

³² See Christopher Blinkenberg, *Fibules grèques et orientales*, Copenhagen, 1926. The ornamentation of these fibulae forms a veritable encyclopedia of solar symbols.

³³ See Coomaraswamy, “Ornament” [Chapter III in this volume - Ed.].

³⁴ Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

probably a horse trapping. There is a central six-spoked wheel, around which revolve four equine protomas, also wheel-marked, forming a whorl or *svastika*; and it is abundantly clear that this is a representation of the divine “procession,” the revolution of the Supernal Sun in a four-horsed and four-wheeled chariot; a representation such as this has a content evidently far exceeding that of later pictorial representations

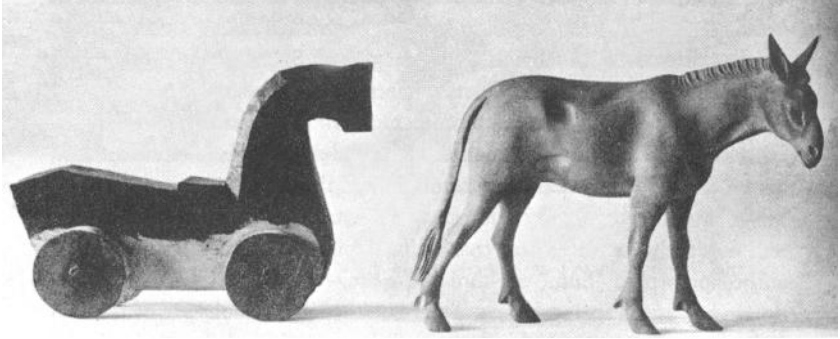


Figure 5. Horse and Donkey: Folk Art and Bourgeois Art.

of an anthropomorphic “Sun,” or human athlete, riding in a chariot actually drawn by four prancing horses. The two other illustrations are of modern Indian wooden toys: in the first case we recognize a metaphysical and formal art, and a type that can be paralleled throughout a millennial tradition, while in the latter the effect of European influence has led the artist not to “imitate nature in her manner of operation,” but simply to imitate nature in her appearances; if either of these kinds of art can be called “naïve,” it is certainly not the traditional art of the folk!

The characteristic pronouncements of anthropologists on the “primitive mentality,” of which a few may be cited, are often very remarkable, and may be said to represent not what the writers have intended, the description of an inferior type of consciousness and experience, but one intrinsically superior to that of “civilized” man, and approximating to that which we are accustomed to think of as “primordial.” For example, “The primitive mind experienced life as a whole.... Art was not for the delectation of the senses.”³⁵ Dr. Macalister

³⁵ Earl Baldwin Smith, *Egyptian Architecture* (New York, 1938), p. 27. “It was a tremendous discovery—how to excite emotions for their own sake” (A. N. Whitehead). Was it really? “No, not even if all the men and horses in the world, by their pursuit of pleasure, proclaim that such is the criterion” (Plato, *Philebus* 67)!

actually compares what he calls the “Ascent of Man” to Wordsworth’s *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, not realizing that the poem is the description of the descent or materialization of consciousness.³⁶ Schmidt remarks that “In ‘heathenish’ popular customs, in the ‘superstitions’ of our folk, the spiritual adventures of prehistoric times, the imagery of primitive insight are living still; *a divine inheritance*. . . . Originally every type of soul and mind corresponds to the physiological organism proper to it. . . . The world is conceived as being partner with the living being, which is unconscious of its individuality; as being an essential portion of the Ego; and it is represented as being affected by human exertion and sufferings.... Nature-man lives his life in images. He grasps it in his conception as a series of realities. His visions are therefore not only real; they form his objective insight into a higher world.... The talent, in the man of understanding, is only obstructed, more or less. Artistic natures, poets, painters, sculptors, musicians, seers, who see God face to face, remain all their lives eidetically rooted in their creations. In them there lives the folk-soul of dissolving images in their most perfect creative form.... Natural man, to whom vision and thought are identical.... The man of magic ... is still standing in a present world which includes the whole of primeval time.... [On the other hand] the emancipated man, vehicle of a soul ... differentiates the original magical somato-psychic unity.... Outward and Inward, World and Ego, become a duality in the consciousness.”³⁷ Could one say more in support of the late John

³⁶ Preface to Schmidt, *Dawn of the Human Mind*. The customary virtual identification of the “childhood of humanity” with the childhood of the individual, that of the mind of Cro-Magnon man with his “fully developed forehead” (Schmidt, p. 209), with that of the still subhuman child, is illogical. “Since we are forced to believe that the race of man is of one species, it follows that man everywhere has an equally long history behind him” (Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, p. 18). That the child can in certain respects be used as an adequate symbol of the primordial state, in the sense that “of such is the Kingdom of Heaven,” is quite another matter.

³⁷ Schmidt, *Dawn of the Human Mind*, pp. 1, 13, 89, 126, 212 ff.; italics mine. The final sentence contrasts poignantly with Plato’s famous prayer, “grant to me that I may become beautiful within, and that my outward and my inner man may be in fond accord” (*Phaedrus* 278C); cf. BG VI.5 and 6, on friendship or enmity between the empirical and the essential “self.” Schmidt is referring, of course, to the clear distinction of subject from object which ordinary “knowledge” presupposes; it is precisely this kind of “knowing” that is, from the standpoint of traditional metaphysics, an *ignorance*, and morally an “original sin” of which the wages are death (Gen. 3); cf. Coomaraswamy, “The Intellectual Operation in Indian Art” [Chapter X in this volume - Ed.], n. 20.

The remarkable expressions of Schmidt are tantamount to the definition of the modern, civilized “man of understanding” as an atrophied personality, out of touch with his environment. That he also envisages this as an *ascent* of man can only mean that he

Lodge's proposition, "From the Stone Age until now, *quelle dégringolade*?" [what a decline –Ed. trans.].

If it is difficult for us to understand the primitive belief in the efficacy of symbolic rites, it is largely because of our limited knowledge of the prolongations of the personality, which forces us to think in terms of a purely physical causality. We overlook that while we may believe that the anticipatory rite has no physical effect in the desired direction, the rite itself is the formal expression of a will directed to this end, and that this will, released by the performance of the rite, is also an effective force, by which the environment in its totality must be to some extent affected. In any case, the preliminary rite of "mimetic magic" is an enactment of the "formal cause" of the subsequent operation, whether it be the art of agriculture or that of war that is in question, and the artist has a right to expect that the actual operation, if carried out on this plan, will be successful. What seems strange to us, however, is that for the primitive mentality the rite is a "prefiguration," not merely in the sense of a pattern of action to be followed, but in the sense of an anticipation in which the future becomes a virtually already existent reality, so that "the primitives feel that the future event is actually present": the action of the force released is immediate, "and if its effects appear after some time it is nevertheless imagined—or, rather, in their case, felt—as immediately produced."³⁸ Lévy-Bruhl goes on to point out very justly that all this implies a conception of time and space that is not in our sense of the word "rational": one in which both past and future, cause and effect, coincide in a present experience. If we choose to call this an "unpractical" position, we must not forget that at the same time "the primitives constantly make use of the real connection between cause and effect ... they often display an ingenuity that implies a very accurate observation of this connection."³⁹

Now it is impossible not to be struck by the fact that it is precisely a state of being in which "everywhere and every when is focused" (Dante), that is for the theologian and the metaphysician "divine": that at this level of reference "all states of being, seen in principle, *are* simul-

regards the "seers, who see God face to face" and in whom the folk soul survives, as belonging to a strictly atavistic and inferior type of humanity, and thinks of the "divine inheritance" as something to be gotten rid of as soon as possible.

³⁸ Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *La Mentalité primitive* (Paris, 1922), pp. 88, 290. The problem of the use of apparently ineffectual rites for the attainment of purely practical ends is reasonably discussed by Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, pp. 15-18.

³⁹ Lévy-Bruhl, *La Mentalité primitive*, p. 92.

taneous in the eternal now,” and that “he who cannot escape from the standpoint of temporal succession so as to see all things in their simultaneity is incapable of the least conception of the metaphysical order.”⁴⁰ We say that what seems to “us” irrational in the life of “savages,” and may be impractical, since it unfits them to compete with our material force, represents the vestiges of a primordial state of metaphysical understanding, and that if the savage himself is, generally speaking, no longer a comprehensor of his own “divine inheritance,” this ignorance on his part is no more shameful than ours who do not recognize the intrinsic nature of his “lore,” and understand it no better than he does. We do not say that the modern savage exemplifies the “primordial state” itself, but that his beliefs, and the whole content of folklore, bear witness to such a state. We say that the truly primitive man—“before the Fall”—was not by any means a philosopher or scientist but, by all means, a metaphysical being, in full possession of the *forma humanitatis* (as we are only very partially); that, in the excellent phrase of Baldwin Smith, he “experienced life as a whole.”

Nor can it be said that the “primitives” are always unconscious of the sources of their heritage. For example, “Dr. Malinowski has insisted on the fact that, in the native Trobriand way of thinking, magic, agrarian or other, is not a human invention. From time immemorial, it forms a part of the inheritance which is handed down from generation to generation. Like the social institutions proper, it was created in the age of the myth, by the heroes who were the founders of civilization. Hence its sacred character. Hence also its efficacy.”⁴¹ Far more rarely, an archaeologist such as Andrae has the courage to express as his own belief that “when we sound the archetype, the ultimate origin of the form, then we find that it is anchored in the highest, not the lowest,” and to affirm that “the sensible forms [of art], in which there was at first a polar balance of physical and metaphysical, have been more and more voided of content on their way down to us.”⁴²

The mention of the Trobriand Islanders above leads us to refer to one more type of what appears at first sight to imply an almost incredible want of observation. The Trobriand Islanders, and some Australians, are reported to be unaware of the causal connection between sexual intercourse and procreation; they are said to believe that spirit-children

⁴⁰ René Guénon, *La Métaphysique orientale* (Paris, 1939), pp. 15, 17.

⁴¹ Lévy-Bruhl, *L'expérience mystique*, p. 295.

⁴² Andrae, *Die ionische Säule*, “Schlusswort.” [Andrae's Schlusswort (Closing Words) are translated by Coomaraswamy, Chapter XVIII in this volume – Ed.]

enter the wombs of women on appropriate occasions, and that sexual intercourse alone is not a determinant of birth.⁴³ It is, indeed, implausible that the natives, “whose aboriginal endowment is quite as good as any European’s, if not better,”⁴⁴ are unaware of any connection whatever between sexual intercourse and pregnancy. On the other hand, it is clear that their interest is not in what may be called the mediate causes of pregnancy, but in its first cause.⁴⁵ Their position is essentially identical with that of the universal tradition for which reproduction depends on the activating presence of what the mythologist calls a “fertility spirit” or “progenitive deity,” and is in fact the Divine Eros, the Indian Kāmadeva and Gandharva, the spiritual Sun of RV I.115.1, the life of all and source of all being; it is upon *his* “connection with the field”⁴⁶ that life is transmitted, as it is by the human “sower” that

⁴³ M. F. Ashley Montagu, *Coming into Being among the Australian Aborigines* (London, 1937); B. Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages* (London, 1929). Cf. Coomaraswamy, “Spiritual Paternity and the Puppet-Complex,” 1945.

⁴⁴ Montagu, *Coming into Being*.

⁴⁵ “God, the master of all generative power” (Hermes, *Asclepius* III.21); “the power of generation belongs to God” (*Sum. Theol.* I.45.5); “ex quo omnis paternitas in coelis et terra nominatur” (Eph. 3:15) [“of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named”—King James version—Ed.]. In Gaelic incantations (see A. Carmichael, *Carmina gadelica*, Edinburgh, 1928), Christ and the Virgin Mary are continually invoked as progenitive deities, givers of increase in cattle or man; the phrasings are almost verbally identical with those of RV VII.102.2, “Who puts the seed in the plants, the cows, the mares, the women, Parjanya.” “Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your father, which is in heaven” (Matt. 23:9).

⁴⁶ “The Sun is the *ātman* of all that is motionless or mobile,” RV I.115.1. “Whatsoever living thing is born, whether motionless or mobile, know that it is from the union of the Knower of the Field and the Field itself,” BG XIII.26. “It is inasmuch as He ‘kisses’ (breathes on) all his children that each can say ‘I am,’” ŚB VII.3.2.12; “Light is the progenitive power” TS VII.1.1.1; cf. John 1:4, “the life was the light of men”; “when the father thus actually emits him as seed into the womb, it is really the sun that emits him as seed into the womb,” JUB III.10.4. Further references to solar paternity will be found in ŚB I.7.2.11 (Sun and Earth parents of all born beings); Dante, *Paradiso* XXII.116 (Sun “the father of each mortal life”); St. Bonaventura, *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, 21; *Mathnawī* I.3775; Plutarch, *Moralia* 368C, *phōs ... gonimon* [generative light—Ed. trans.].

In connection with the “Knower of the Field” it may be remarked that his “conjunction” (*samyoga*) with the “Field” is not merely cognitive but erotic: Skr. *jñā* in its sense of “to recognize as one’s own,” or “possess,” corresponding to Latin *gnoscere* and English “know” in the Biblical expression “Jacob knew his wife.” Now the solar manner of “knowing” (in any sense) is by means of his rays, which are emitted by the “Eye”; and hence in the ritual in which the priest represents Prajāpati (the Sun as Father-Progenitor), he formally “looked at” the sacrificer’s wife, “for insemination”; a metaphysical rite

the elements of the corporeal vehicle of life are planted in *his* “field.” So that as the *Majjhima Nikāya*, I.265–266, expresses it, three things are required for conception, viz. conjunction of father and mother, the mother’s period, and the presence of the Gandharva:⁴⁷ of which the two first may be called dispositive and the third an essential cause. We see now the meaning of the words of BU III.9.28.5, “Say not ‘from semen,’ but ‘from what is alive [in the semen]’”: “It is the Provident Spirit [*prajñātman*, i.e., the Sun] that grasps and erects the flesh” (Kauṣ. Up. III.3); “The power of the soul, which is in the semen through the spirit enclosed therein, fashions the body” (*Sum. Theol.* III.32.11). Thus, in believing with Schiller that “it is the Spirit that fashions the body for itself” (*Wallenstein*, III.13), the “primitive” is in agreement with a unanimous tradition and with Christian doctrine: “Spiritus est qui vivificat: caro non prodest quicquam” (“it is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing,” John 6:63).⁴⁸

It will be seen that the Trobriander view that sexual intercourse alone is not a determinant of conception but only its occasion, and that “spirit-children” enter the womb, is essentially identical with the metaphysical doctrine of the philosophers and theologians. The notion that “old folklore ideas” are taken over into scriptural contexts, which are thus contaminated by the popular superstitions, reverses the order of events; the reality is that the folklore ideas are the form in which metaphysical doctrines are received by the people and transmitted by them. In its popular form, a given doctrine may not always have been understood, but for so long as the formula is faithfully transmitted it remains understandable; “superstitions,” for the most part, are no mere delusions, but formulae of which the meaning has been forgotten and are therefore called meaningless—often, indeed, because the doctrine itself has been forgotten.

that the anthropologist would call a piece of “fertility magic.” See also Coomaraswamy, “The Sun-kiss,” 1940.

⁴⁷ For “to be present,” the Pāli equivalent of Skr. *praty-upasthā*, “to stand upon,” is employed; and this is the traditional expression, in accordance with which the Spirit is said to “take its stand upon” the bodily vehicle, which is accordingly referred to as its *adhiṣṭhānam*, “standing ground” or “platform.” Gandharva, originally the Divine Eros, and Sun.

⁴⁸ That St. John is speaking with reference to a regeneration by no means excludes application to any generation; for as exegetical theory insists, the literal sense of the words of scripture is also always true, and is the vehicle of the transcendental significance.

Aristotle's doctrine that "Man and the Sun generate man" (*Physics* II.2),⁴⁹ that of JUB III.10.4 and that of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, may be said to combine the scientific and the metaphysical theories of the origin of life: and this very well illustrates the fact that the scientific and metaphysical points of view are by no means contradictory, but rather complementary. The weakness of the scientific position is not that the empirical facts are devoid of interest or utility, but that these facts are thought of as a refutation of the intellectual doctrine. Actually, our discovery of chromosomes does not in any way account for the origin of life, but only tells us more about its mechanism. The metaphysician may, like the primitive, be incurious about the scientific facts; he cannot be disconcerted by them, for they can at the most show that God moves "in an even more mysterious way than we had hitherto supposed."

We have touched upon only a very few of the "motifs" of folklore. The main point that we have wished to bring out is that the whole body of these motifs represent a consistent tissue of interrelated intellectual doctrines belonging to a primordial wisdom rather than to a primitive science; and that for this wisdom it would be almost impossible to conceive a popular, or even in any common sense of the term, a human origin. The life of the popular wisdom extends backward to a point at which it becomes indistinguishable from the primordial tradition itself, the traces of which we are more familiar with in the sacerdotal and royal arts; and it is in this sense, and by no means with any "democratic" implications, that the lore of the people, expressed in their culture, is really the word of God—*Vox populi vox Dei* [the voice of the people is the voice of God –Ed. trans.].⁵⁰

⁴⁹ To which correspond also the words of a Gaelic incantation, "from the bosom of the God of life, and the courses together," (Carmichael, *Carmina gadelica*, II, 119). In Egypt, similarly, "Life was an emanation of progenitive light and the creative word.... The Sun, Râ, was the creator above all others, and the means of his creative power were his eye, the 'Eye of Horus,' and his voice, the 'voice of heaven, the bolt'"; the Pharaoh was regarded as having been born, quite literally, of the Sun and a human mother (Alexandre Moret, *Du caractère religieux de la royauté pharaonique*, Paris, 1902, pp. 40, 41).

⁵⁰ The misunderstanding of the folk is accidental rather than essential; because they are not sceptical, nor moralistic, "by faith they understand." On the other hand, the literary artist (Andersen, Tennyson, etc.) who does not scruple to modify his narrative for aesthetic or moral reasons, often distorts it (cf. Plutarch, *Moralia* 358F, on "the unestablished first thoughts of poets and litterateurs"); and so, in the transition "from ritual to romance" we often have to ask, "how far did such and such an author really understand his material?"

