

LEVY-BRUHL'S THEORY OF PRIMITIVE MENTALITY *

This essay is a continuation of my paper on "The Intellectualist (English) Interpretation of Magic" in the last number of our Bulletin.¹ In that paper I gave an account, and made a critical analysis of the theories of Tylor and Frazer about primitive thought, especially thought relating to magical practices. These theories were severely criticised from two camps. Marett and a number of subsequent writers attacked them for paying attention exclusively to the cognitive processes of primitive thought and neglecting the affective states which give rise to them. Durkheim and his School attacked them for trying to explain primitive thought in terms of individual psychology and totally neglecting its social character. On its critical side Lévy-Bruhl's theory of primitive mentality is similar to that of the Année Sociologique group of writers but on its constructive side it has a character of its own and has had wide enough influence to merit separate treatment.²

In France and Germany Lévy-Bruhl's views have been extensively examined and criticised and it is difficult to understand why they have met with so great neglect and derision among English anthropologists. Their reception is perhaps partly due to the key expressions used by Lévy-Bruhl in his writings, such as "prelogique", "representations collectives", "mystique", "participations", and so forth. Doubtless it is also due in part to the uncritical manner in which Lévy-Bruhl handled his material which was often of a poor quality in any case. But responsibility must be shared by his critics who made little effort to grasp the ideas which lay behind the cumbrous terminology in which they were frequently expressed and who were far too easily contented to pick holes in the detail of his arguments without mastering his main thesis. Too often they merely repeated his views under the impression that they were refuting them. In this essay Lévy-Bruhl's main thesis is examined and is tested in its application to the facts of magic. Its application to other departments of social life, e.g. language and systems of numeration, is not considered.

Like Durkheim Lévy-Bruhl defines social facts by their generality, by their transmission from generation to generation, and by their compulsive character. The English School make the mistake of trying to explain social facts by processes of individual thought, and, worse still, by analogy with their own patterns of thought which are the product of different environmental conditions from those which have moulded the minds which they seek to understand.

"Les 'explications' de l'école anthropologique anglaise, n'étant jamais que vraisemblables, restent toujours affectées d'un coefficient de doute, variable selon les cas. Elles prennent pour accordé que les voies qui nous paraissent, à nous, conduire naturellement à certaines croyances et à certaines pratiques, sont précisément celles par où ont passé les membres des sociétés où se manifestent ces croyances et ces pratiques. Rien de plus hasardeux que ce postulat, qui ne se vérifierait peut-être pas cinq fois sur cent".³

The mental content of the individual is derived from, and explained by, the collective representations of his society. An explanation of the social content of thought in terms of individual psychology is disastrous. How can we understand belief in spirits merely by saying, as Tylor does, that they arise from an intellectual need to account for phenomena? Why should there be a need to explain the phenomena of dreams when this need makes itself so little felt about other phenomena? Rather should we try to explain such notions as belief in spirits by stressing the fact that they are collective notions and are imposed on the individual from without and, therefore, are a product in his mind

* Extract from the Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Vol. II, Part I.

of faith and not of reason.

Levy-Bruhl then develops his own point of view. Collective representations explain individual thought and these collective representations are functions of institutions, so that we may suppose as social structures vary the collective representations will show concomitant variations.

"Les séries de faits sociaux sont solidaires les unes des autres, et elles se conditionnent réciproquement. Un type de société défini, qui a ses institutions et ses moeurs propres, aura donc aussi, nécessairement, sa mentalité propre. A des types sociaux différents correspondront des mentalités différentes, d'autant plus que les institutions et les moeurs mêmes ne sont au fond qu'un certain aspect des représentations collectives, que ces représentations, pour ainsi dire, considérées objectivement. On se trouve ainsi conduit à concevoir que l'étude comparative des différents types de sociétés humaines ne se sépare pas de l'étude comparative des représentations collectives et des liaisons de ces représentations qui dominent dans ces sociétés".⁴

Nevertheless it may be said at the outset that Levy-Bruhl in his works does not attempt to correlate the beliefs which he describes with the social structures of the peoples among whom they have been recorded. He makes no effort to prove the determinist assumption set forth in the above quotation nor to explain why we find similar beliefs in two societies with quite different structures. He contents himself with the broad generalization that all primitive peoples present uniform patterns of thought when contrasted with ourselves.

We are logically orientated, or, as one might say, scientifically orientated, in our thought. Normally we seek the causes of phenomena in natural processes and even when we face a phenomenon which we cannot account for scientifically we assume that it appears mysterious to us only because our knowledge is as yet insufficient to explain it. While to primitive minds there is only one world in which causation is normally attributed to mystical influences, even those among us who accept theological teachings distinguish a world subject to sensory impressions from a spiritual world which is invisible and intangible. We either believe entirely in natural laws or if we admit mystical influences we do not think that they interfere in the workings of an ordered universe.

"Ainsi, la nature au milieu de laquelle nous vivons est, pour ainsi dire, intellectualisée d'avance. Elle est ordre et raison, comme l'esprit qui la pense et qui s'y ment. Notre activité quotidienne, jusque dans ses plus humbles détails, implique une tranquille et parfaite confiance dans l'invariabilité des lois naturelles".⁵

Primitive peoples on the other hand are mystically orientated in their thought, that is to say their thought is orientated towards the supernatural. They normally seek the causes of phenomena in supernatural processes and they refer any new or unusual occurrence to one or other of their supernatural categories.

"Bien différente (from ours) est l'attitude de l'esprit du primitif. La nature au milieu de laquelle il vit se présente à lui sous un tout autre aspect. Tous les objets et tous les êtres y sont impliqués dans un réseau de participations et d'exclusions mystiques: c'est elles qui en font la texture et l'ordre. C'est donc elles qui s'imposeront d'abord à son attention et qui, seules, le retiendront. S'il est intéressé par un phénomène, s'il ne se borne pas à le percevoir, pour ainsi dire passivement et sans réagir, il songera aussitôt, comme par une sorte de réflexe mental, à une puissance occulte et invisible dont ce phénomène est la manifestation".⁶

Levy-Bruhl asks why primitive peoples do not inquire into causal connections which are not self-evident. In his opinion it is useless to reply that it is because they do not take the trouble to inquire into

them for we are left with the further question, why they do not take this trouble. The correct answer is that savages are prevented from pursuing enquiries into the workings of nature by their collective representations. These formalised patterns of thought, feeling, and behaviour, inhibit any cognitive, affective, or motor, activities which conflict with them. For example, when a savage is killed by a buffalo, he often enough refers the occurrence to supernatural causes, normally to the action of witchcraft. In his society death is due to witchcraft and witchcraft is proved by death. There is obviously no opening for a purely scientific explanation of how death has occurred for it is excluded by social doctrines. This does not mean that the savage is incapable of rational observation. He is well aware that the dead man was killed by a buffalo but he believes that the buffalo would not have killed him unless supernatural forces had also operated.

Lévy-Bruhl's point of view is perhaps best set forth by giving a couple of examples from his works of the type of thought which he characterises as primitive and prelogical. Thus he quotes Miss Kingsley about the belief of West African Negroes that they will sustain an injury if they lost their shadows. Miss Kingsley writes:-

"It strikes one as strange to see men who have been walking, say, through forest or grassland, on a blazing hot morning quite happily, on arrival at a piece of clear ground or a village square, most carefully go round it, not across, and you will soon notice that they only do this at noontime, and learn that they fear losing their shadow. I asked some Bakwire I once came across who were particularly careful in this matter, why they were not anxious about losing their shadows when night came down and they disappeared in the surrounding darkness, and was told that was alright, because at night all shadows lay down in the shadow of the Great God, and so got stronger. Had I not seen how strong and how long a shadow, be it of man or tree or of the great mountain itself, was in the early morning time?"⁷

It is evident from Miss Kingsley's account that the West African idea of a shadow is quite different from ours and that, indeed, it excludes ours since a man cannot both hold our idea of a shadow as a negation of light and at the same time believe that a man so participates in his shadow that if he cannot see it he has lost it and will become ill in consequence. The second example, from New Guinea, illustrates in the same manner the incompatibility of our view of the universe with that held by savages:-

"A man returning from hunting or fishing is disappointed at his empty game-bag, or canoe, and turns over in his mind how to discover who would be likely to have bewitched his nets. He perhaps raises his eyes and sees a member of a neighbouring friendly village on his way to pay a visit. It at once occurs to him that this man is the sorcerer, and watching his opportunity, he suddenly attacks him and kills him".⁸

Responsibility for failure is known beforehand and the socially determined cause excludes any endeavour to discover the natural cause of absence of fish or game or inability to catch them.

From many hundreds of examples of the kind just cited emerge the two propositions which together form Lévy-Bruhl's thesis: that there are two distinct types of thought,⁹ mystical thought and logical thought; and that of these two types of thought the mystical type is characteristic of primitive societies and the logical type is characteristic of civilized societies. These two propositions are stated by Lévy-Bruhl in his Herbert Spencer Lecture as follows:-

"1. Il existe une 'mentalité primitive', caractérisée par son orientation mystique, par un certain nombre d'habitudes mentales, et spécialement par la loi de participation, qui y coexiste avec les principes logiques. Elle est remarquablement constante dans les sociétés dites inférieures.

2. Elle se distingue nettement de la notre, mais elle n'en est pas séparée par une sorte de fossé. Au contraire, dans les sociétés les plus 'civilisées' on en aperçoit sans peine des traces et plus que des traces. Dans nos campagnes, et jusque dans nos grandes villes, on n'aurait pas à chercher loin pour rencontrer des gens qui pensent, sentent, et même agissent comme des primitifs. Peut-être faut-il aller plus loin encore, et reconnaître que dans tout esprit humain, quel qu'en soit le développement intellectuel, subsiste un fond inderacinable de mentalité primitive ..."10

As often happens when an author has to sift a great mass of material of uneven range and quality, Levy-Bruhl has sometimes handled his material carelessly and he has been much criticised on this score, the works contra Levy-Bruhl being by this time almost as numerous as his own. Insofar as these works¹¹ are more than mere criticism of detail, they aim at proving that savages have a body of practical knowledge; that they think logically and are capable of sustained interest and effort; that the mystical thought we find in primitive societies can be paralleled in our own; and that many of the ideas regarded by Levy-Bruhl as mystical may not be so lacking in objective foundations as he imagines. In my opinion most of this criticism is very ineffective, disproving what no-one holds to be proved. It seldom touches Levy-Bruhl's main propositions. His theory of primitive mentality may distort savage thought but it would seem better to correct the distortion than to dismiss the theory completely.

I shall not repeat here all the charges which have been brought against Levy-Bruhl but shall draw attention only to the more serious methodological deficiencies of his work. These obvious deficiencies are as follows: firstly, he makes savage thought far more mystical than it is; secondly, he makes civilised thought far more rational than it is; thirdly, he treats all savage cultures as though they were uniform and writes of civilised cultures without regard to their historical development.

(1) Levy-Bruhl relies on biased accounts of primitive mentality. Most of his facts are taken from missionary and travel reports and he uses uncritically inferences of untrained observers. We have to bear in mind that these observers were dominated by the representations collectives of their own culture which often prevented them from seeing the admirable logic of savage critics, thereby attributing to savages impermeability to experience which in some matters might with greater justice be ascribed to themselves. Whom is one to accuse of 'prelogical mentality', the South African missionaries or the Negroes of whom they record that "they only believe what they see" and that "in the midst of the laughter and applause of the populace, the heathen enquirer is heard saying 'Can the God of the white men be seen with our eyes and if Morimo (God) is absolutely invisible how can a reasonable being worship a hidden thing?' "12

Who, in this instance displays "a decided distaste for reasoning?". These Negroes believed in their own invisible beings but considered ridiculous the invisible beings of the missionaries. The missionaries, on their side, believed in the invisible beings of their own culture but rejected with scorn the invisible beings of the Negroes who, they concluded, were impermeable to experience. Both missionaries and Negroes alike were dominated by the collective representations of their cultures. Both were alike critical when their thought was not determined by social doctrines.

It is also necessary to bear in mind, when assessing the value of reports on savage custom and belief, that Europeans are inclined to record the peculiar in savage cultures rather than the commonplace. Missionaries, moreover, naturally show a keener interest in ideas expressed by savages about the supernatural than in their more mundane thoughts and activities, and consequently they have stressed religious and magical belief to the disadvantage of other aspects of social life.

Lévy-Bruhl's thesis is weakened not only by uncritical use of authorities, but also by the comparative method which he used in company with most writers of the period. In my criticism of Frazer I have already shown wherein lies the weakness of this method. Social facts are described adequately only in terms of their interrelations with other social facts and in compilations like the works of Frazer and Lévy-Bruhl they are torn from their network of inter-connections and presented in isolation and therefore shorn of much of their meaning. Nevertheless we ought not to exaggerate the distortion due to the Comparative Method and we must remember that when an author describes social life from a single angle it is not incumbent on him to describe all the social characters of each fact. He expects a margin of error but hopes that it will be minimised by the vast number of phenomena taken into consideration.

The tendency of Lévy-Bruhl's authorities to record mystical practices rather than familiar and empirical occupations, and the method he employed which allowed him to select from hundreds of societies customs associated with mystical beliefs without describing from the same societies the many activities which depend upon observation and experiment, have unduly distorted savage mentality. Out of a vast number of social facts observers have tended to select facts of the mystical type rather than of other types and in Lévy-Bruhl's writings a secondary selection has taken place through which only facts of a mystical type have been recorded, the final result of this double selection being a picture of savages almost continually and exclusively conscious of mystical forces. He presents us with a caricature of primitive mentality.

Most specialists who are also fieldworkers are agreed that primitive peoples are predominantly interested in practical economic pursuits; gardening, hunting, fishing, care of their cattle, and the manufacture of weapons, utensils, and ornaments, and in their social contacts; the life of household and family and kin, relations with friends and neighbours, with superiors and inferiors, dances and feasts, legal disputes, feuds and warfare. Behaviour of a mystical type in the main is restricted to certain situations in social life. Moreover it is generally linked up with practical activities in such a way that to describe it by itself, as Lévy-Bruhl has done, deprives it of the meaning it derives from its social situation and its cultural accretions.

(2) Lévy-Bruhl compares the savage with 'us' and contrasts 'our' mentality with savage mentality. "The discursive operations of thought, of reasoning and reflection" are to 'us' "the natural and almost continuous occupation of the human mind". 'We' live in an intellectualised world and have banished the supernatural to a vague indefinite horizon where it never obscures the landscape of natural order and uniformity. But who are 'we'? Are we students of science or unlettered men, urbanised bourgeoisie or remotely situated peasants? Can we group together Russian peasants, English miners, German shopkeepers, French politicians, and Italian priests, and contrast their logical thought with the mystical thought of Zulu warriors, Malanesian fishermen, Beduin nomads, and Chinese peasants? Is the thought of European peasants so scientifically orientated and the thought of Negro peasants so mystically orientated that we can speak of two mentalities, civilised mentality and primitive mentality?

It is a deficiency in Lévy-Bruhl's writings that whilst insisting on the difference between primitive mentality and civilised mentality and devoting several volumes to a minute description of the former, he entirely neglects to describe the latter with equal care. Lévy-Bruhl tells us about the mentality of our culture:-

"D'autre part, en ce qui concerne la mentalité propre à notre société, qui doit me servir simplement de terme de comparaison, je la considérerai comme assez bien définie par les travaux des philosophes, logiciens et psychologues, anciens et modernes, sans préjuger de ce qu'une analyse sociologique ultérieure pourra modifier dans les résultats obtenus par eux jusqu'à présent".¹³

But, whilst he tells us what missionaries, traders, political officers, and explorers, say about savage thought, he does not inform us what philosophers, logicians, and psychologists, ancient and modern, say about civilised thought. This procedure is inadmissible. Clearly it is necessary to describe the collective representations of Englishmen and Frenchmen with the same impartiality and minuteness with which anthropologists describe the collective representations of Polynesians, Melanesians, and the aborigines of Central and Northern Australia, if we are to make a comparison between the two. Moreover, in describing the thought of Europeans it is desirable to distinguish between social and occupational strata.

If Lévy-Bruhl had stated that when he spoke of civilised mentality he referred to the type of thought found among the better educated classes of Europe in the twentieth century he would have exposed himself less to the criticism that it is possible to produce a parallel belief among European peasants to almost every belief instanced by him as typical of primitive mentality. This criticism would then have been irrelevant because such beliefs are regarded as superstitious by the educated classes. Lévy-Bruhl admits that there are many evidences of primitive mentality in civilised countries, even among educated people, so that my criticism of Frazer for comparing the European scientist with the savage magician instead of comparing ritual with scientific behaviour in the same culture, either savage or civilised, is also pertinent to Lévy-Bruhl's writings. To this point I return later.

(3) Like many other writers Lévy-Bruhl treats all peoples whom we regard as savages or barbarians as though they were culturally uniform. If patterns of thought are functions of institutions, as he himself asserts, we might reasonably demand that a classification of institutional types should precede a study of ideational types. There are grave objections to illustrating primitive mentality by taking examples from Polynesians, Africans, Chinese, and North American Indians and treating these examples as of equivalent significance, for even in contrast with European culture the cultures of these peoples present little uniformity. In the same way he writes of European culture in vague terms as though it also were uniform. I have already mentioned his failure to distinguish between social and occupational strata. Also Europeans peoples have not an identical culture. But from this point of view the most damaging criticism of Lévy-Bruhl is that he makes no effort to distinguish between prevalent modes of thought in Europe at different historical periods. Mystical and scientific thought can best be compared, as suggested above, as normative ideational types in the same society, or their historical development in relation to one another can be traced over a long period of history in a single culture. Lévy-Bruhl argues that mystical thought is distinctive of primitive cultures and scientific thought is distinctive of civilised cultures. If this is correct then it ought to be possible to show how we who at the present time are civilised changed our collective representations on our emergence from barbarism. Do the English of the 12th century exemplify civilised mentality or primitive mentality? This question is not only relevant but it is imperative that we should know Lévy-Bruhl's answer to it if we are to consent to his views. But he neglects the issue.

If we are to regard English thought in the early Middle Ages as *Prélogique*, and it is difficult to see how we can avoid doing so when such peoples as the Chinese furnish Lévy-Bruhl with many of his examples of primitive mentality, then it is desirable to trace the history of the development of scientific thought in England and to investigate the sociological conditions that have allowed its emergence and growth. Moreover, if an author compares civilised with primitive mentality and illustrates these from the cultures of different peoples, one expects a clear definition of 'civilisation' and 'primitiveness' so that one may test his theory historically.

The criticisms of Lévy-Bruhl's theories which I have already mentioned, and I have by no means exhausted the objections to his views, are so obvious and so forcible that only books of exceptional brilliance

and originality could have survived them. Yet each year fresh polemics appear to contest his writings and pay tribute to their vitality. I suggest that the reason for his writings, in spite of their methodological deficiencies, still exercising a powerful influence on anthropological thought is due to the facts that he perceived a scientific problem of cardinal importance and that he approached this problem along sociological lines instead of contenting himself with the usual psychological platitudes.

We must not, therefore, dismiss his writings with contempt, as many anthropologists do, but must try to discover what in them will stand the test of criticism and may at the same time be considered an original contribution to science. We can best undertake this task by asking ourselves the following questions: (a) Are primitive modes of thought so different from modes of thought current among educated Europeans that the need arises to define wherein the difference lies and to explain it? (b) What does Lévy-Bruhl mean when he says that primitive thought is 'prelogical'? (c) What does he mean by 'collective representations'? (d) What does he mean by 'mystical'? (e) What does he mean by 'participations'?

(a) In his writings Lévy-Bruhl cites the observations of dozens of educated Europeans on primitive custom and belief and shows that they frequently found savage ideas incompatible with their way of thinking.

Many of these Europeans were observers who had long experience of savages and were of the highest integrity. Thus no one knew the Maori better than Elsdon Best who wrote of them:

"The mentality of the Maori is of an intensely mystical nature We hear of many singular theories about Maori beliefs and Maori thought, but the truth is that we do not understand either, and, what is more, we never shall. We shall never know the inwardness of the native mind. For that would mean retracing our steps for many centuries, back into the dim past, far back to the time when we also possessed the mind of primitive man. And the gates have long closed on that hidden road".¹⁴

Miss Kingsley is recognised to have been an incomparable observer of the life of the West African Negro of whom she wrote:

"The African mind naturally approaches all things from a spiritual point of view things happen because of the action of spirit upon spirit".¹⁵

However, in order to meet the possible objection that these Europeans were not trained anthropologists and were unused to strictly scientific methods of investigation, I will quote passages from the recent writings of three anthropologists who have had wide fieldwork experience as further evidence that this incompatibility between savage and civilised modes of thought really exists and was not imagined by Lévy-Bruhl. Prof. and Mrs. Seligman write of the tribes of the Pagan Sudan:

"On this subject (of magic) the black man and the white regard each other with amazement; each considers the behaviour of the other incomprehensible, totally unrelated to everyday experience, and entirely disregarding the known laws of cause and effect".¹⁶

Mr. Fortune writes of the Dobuans:

"Behind this ritual idiom there stands a most rigid and never-questioned dogma, learnt by every child in infancy, and forced home by countless instances of everyday usage based upon it and meaningless without it or in its despite. This dogma, in general, is that effects are secured by incantation, and that without incantation such effects cannot come to pass In brief, there is no natural theory of yam growth, of the powers of canoe lashings of fish nets, of gift exchange in strange places overseas, of disease and death, of wind and rain, of

love between man and woman. All these things cannot possibly exist in their own right. All are supernaturally created by the ritual of incantation with the help of the appropriate technological processes in agriculture, canoe making, fishing preparation, and with the help of more mundane wooing in overseas gift exchange and in love-making, but without any such extra work in making wind and rain, disease and death or in their counteracting (apart only from the practice of bleeding the patient in some cases of illness). This latter type of unaided incantation expresses truly the attitude of the native towards incantation throughout. It is the really important factor in producing an effect".¹⁷

(b) These modes of thought which appear so true to the savage and so absurd to the European Lévy-Bruhl calls 'prelogical'. By 'prelogical' he appears to mean something quite different to what many of his critics attribute to him. He asserts simply that primitive beliefs when tested by the rules of thought laid down by logicians are found to contravene these rules. This does not mean that savages are incapable of thinking coherently, a proposition which Lévy-Bruhl would be the last to defend, but it means that if we examine patterns of belief in savage cultures we shall find they often run counter to a scientific view of the universe and contain, moreover, what a logician would call inherent contradictions. Many of Lévy-Bruhl's critics seem to imagine that he implies cerebral inferiority when he speaks of savages as prelogical and think that if they can show that savages perform cognitive processes of a more elaborate type than mere perception of sensations they will have contraverted him.

Of criticisms of this type he writes:

"Mais beaucoup d'entre elles proviennent d'un malentendu, et s'adressent à une théorie dont personne, je pense, ne voudrait prendre la responsabilité, et selon laquelle il y aurait deux espèces d'esprits humains: les uns, les nôtres, pensant conformément aux principes de la logique, et les autres, les esprits des primitifs, d'où ces principes seraient absents. Mais, qui pourrait soutenir sérieusement une pareille thèse? Comment mettre en doute un seul instant, que la structure fondamentale de l'esprit ne soit partout la même. Ceux en qui elle serait autre ne seraient plus des hommes, de même que nous n'appellerions pas non plus de ce nom des êtres qui ne présenteraient pas la même structure anatomique et les mêmes fonctions physiologiques que nous".¹⁸

Far from suggesting that the savage is intellectually inferior to civilised man, Lévy-Bruhl admits that primitive peoples show great intelligence when their interest is stimulated and that their children show themselves as capable of learning as the children of civilised peoples. Indeed his problem is why peoples who show such great intelligence support beliefs which are so obviously absurd. In view of the opinions so often attributed to Lévy-Bruhl, I may quote a single passage selected from many like passages in his works:

"Ce n'est pas incapacité ou impuissance, puisque ceux mêmes qui nous font connaître cette disposition de la mentalité primitive ajoutent expressément qu'il se trouve là 'des esprits aussi capables des sciences que le sont ceux des Européens', puisque nous voyons les enfants australiens, mélanésiens, etc., apprendre aussi aisément que les enfants français ou anglais ce que le missionnaire leur enseigne. Ce n'est pas non plus la conséquence d'une torpeur intellectuelle profonde, d'un engourdissement et comme d'un sommeil invincible, car ces mêmes primitifs à qui la moindre pensée abstraite semble un effort insupportable, et qui ne paraissent pas se soucier de raisonner jamais, se montrent, au contraire, pénétrants, judicieux, adroits, habiles, subtils même, quand un objet les intéresse, et surtout dès qu'il s'agit d'atteindre une qu'ils désirent ardemment".¹⁹

In spite of such clear statements Lévy-Bruhl has often been accused of denying to savages the capacity of making observations and inferences. To take a single example from among his critics; my friend Mr. Driberg attributes to Lévy-Bruhl the thesis that the savage is "incapable of reasoning logically, that he is, to use the technical term, prelogical".²⁰ Mr. Driberg is easily able to refute a thesis so obviously absurd yet,

though he is unaware of it, he brings the full weight of his great African experience not against, but in support of, Lévy-Bruhl's contentions. Mr. Driberg asks what it is which differentiates one culture from another and answers that it is "the categories or assumptions on which belief is based", and he gives an example to explain what he means by categories or assumptions:

"Why, for instance, should a man be afraid to tell a stranger his name? Why should he believe that it would prejudice his life to do so? Because names have an intimate connection with his personality, and knowledge of his name would give the stranger a magical power over him".²¹

Mr. Driberg in the above quotations merely calls categories or assumptions what Lévy-Bruhl calls representations collectives and speaks of intimate connection where Lévy-Bruhl speaks of participation mystique. The sense is the same; only the words differ. Lévy-Bruhl might have written Mr. Driberg's conclusion:

"But between them (savage cultures) and our more developed cultures there is no bridge, because without our more scientific knowledge they cannot share our civilisation or adjust their outlook to ours. They approach the manifestations of our culture through categories which are not able to cope with them".²²

I have chosen passages from Mr. Driberg's book, because they sum up concisely the usual forms of criticism directed against Lévy-Bruhl. This form of criticism is by no means peculiar to Mr. Driberg.²³

I have quoted at length from the writings of Lévy-Bruhl and his critics to show to what confusion the use of a word like 'prelogique' can lead. It is a pity that Lévy-Bruhl did not use the expression 'unscientific' or even 'uncritical' for many of his readers are apparently ignorant that when a philosopher speaks of 'logic' he means a scientific discipline and technique²⁴ whereas they translate the word into some such phrase as 'ability to think clearly'. Lévy-Bruhl is himself mainly responsible for the misunderstanding which had led his critics to judge him so harshly since he nowhere makes a clear statement of what he means by 'prelogique'. In his latest discussion of the subject he says that by 'prelogique' he does not mean:

"que les esprits des primitifs soient étrangers aux principes logiques; conception dont l'absurdité éclate au moment même où on la formule. Prélogique ne veut dire alogique, ni antilogique. Prélogique, appliqué à la mentalité primitive, signifie simplement qu'elle ne s'astreint pas avant tout, comme la nôtre, à éviter la contradiction. Elle n'a pas les mêmes exigences logiques toujours présentes. Ce qui à nos yeux est impossible ou absurde, elle l'admettra parfois sans y voir de difficulté".²⁵

Those who discover philosophical subtleties in the above quotation may find it and other passages of the same sort easier to understand if they will remember that by 'logical' Lévy-Bruhl means 'conforming to the system of logic which regulates modern science' and that by 'thought' he means 'the social content of thought which forms part of the cultural heritage which a man acquires from the community into which he is born'. Unless these two points are grasped Lévy-Bruhl's theories will appear nonsensical. The first point forms the subject of the present section and the second point the subject of section (c).

I conclude that when Lévy-Bruhl says primitive thought is prelogical he does not mean it is chaotic, being devoid of all order and system. It would then not be thought at all. One may say that thought is 'logical' in the sense in which this term is employed in everyday speech but not logical in the sense in which a modern logician would use the term, or that thought may have a logic which is not the logic of science. Hence a pattern of thought may be deduced from false premises and for this reason must be regarded as unscientific thought. Lévy-Bruhl

uses the word 'logical' in this sense of 'scientific' and for a clearer presentation of his views I prefer to substitute 'unscientific' for 'prelogical'.

As Lévy-Bruhl has seen, primitive thought is eminently coherent, perhaps over-coherent. One mystical idea follows another in the same way as one scientific idea in our own society engenders another. Beliefs are co-ordinated with other beliefs and with behaviour into an organised system. Hence it happens that when an anthropologist has resided for many months among a savage people he can foresee how they will speak and act in any given situation. I have tested this fact again and again in Central Africa where I found that my questions to the peoples among whom I carried out ethnological research eventually became more and more formalities since I was able to supply the answers to my questions before I asked them, often in almost the identical phraseology in which the replies were afterwards given. For once we have understood wherein lie the interests of a primitive people we can easily guess the direction which their thinking will take, for it presents the same intellectual characters as our own thinking.²⁶

(c) Besides misunderstanding what Lévy-Bruhl meant by 'prelogical' his critics have also misrepresented the meaning he attaches to the word 'thought'. According to them Lévy-Bruhl contends that savages think illogically whereas I understand him to say that savage thought is mainly unscientific and also mystical. In my opinion he refers to the content of thought while in their view he is speaking of the psycho-physical functions of thought.²⁷ The one is mainly a social fact while the other is an individual physiological process. To say that a person thinks scientifically is like saying that his heart beats and his blood circulates scientifically. Lévy-Bruhl on the contrary is speaking of patterns or modes of thought which, after eliminating individual variations, are the same among all members of a primitive community and are what we call their beliefs. These modes or patterns of thought are transmitted from generation to generation either by organised teaching or more usually by participation in their ritual expression, as in initiation ceremonies, etc. Every individual is compelled to adopt these beliefs by pressure of social circumstances.

These 'patterns of thought' are the 'representations collectives' of Lévy-Bruhl's writings. A collective representation is an ideational pattern, which may be associated with emotional states, and which is generally expressed not only by language but also by ritual action. When Lévy-Bruhl says that a representation is collective he means that it is a socially determined mode of thought and is therefore common to all members of a society or of a social segment. It will be readily understood that these 'collective representations' or 'patterns of thought' or 'like ideas' are 'collective' or 'patterns' or 'like' because they are functions of institutions, that is to say, they are constantly associated with uniform modes of behaviour.

If the mystical thought of a savage is socially determined so also is the scientific thought of a civilised person. Therefore, any evaluation between the savage's capacity for 'logical thinking' and the civilised man's capacity for 'logical thinking' is irrelevant to the question at issue which is whether patterns of thought are orientated mystically in primitive societies and orientated scientifically in civilised societies. As a matter of fact Lévy-Bruhl does not introduce notions of value so that there is no need for his critics to defend the savage so vigorously since no-one attacks him.

The fact that we attribute rain to meteorological causes alone while savages believe that Gods or ghosts or magic can influence the rainfall is no evidence that our brains function differently from their brains. It does not show that we 'think more logically' than savages, at least not if this expression suggests some kind of hereditary psychic superiority. It is no sign of superior intelligence on my part that I attribute rain to physical causes. I did not come to this conclusion myself by observation and inference and have, in fact, little knowledge

of the meteorological processes that lead to rain. I merely accept what everybody else in my society accepts, namely that rain is due to natural causes. This particular idea formed part of my culture long before I was born into it and little more was required of me than sufficient linguistic ability to learn it. Likewise a savage who believes that under suitable, natural and ritual conditions the rainfall can be influenced by use of appropriate magic is not on account of this belief to be considered of inferior intelligence. He did not build up this belief from his own observations and inferences but adopted it in the same way as he adopted the rest of his cultural heritage, namely, by being born into it. He and I are both thinking in patterns of thought provided for us by the societies in which we live.

It would be absurd to say that the savage is thinking mystically and that we are thinking scientifically about rainfall. In either case like mental processes are involved and, moreover, the content of thought is similarly derived. But we can say that the social content of our thought about rainfall is scientific, is in accord with objective facts, whereas the social content of savage thought is unscientific since it is not in accord with reality and may also be mystical where it assumes the existence of supra-sensible forces. What we are asked to accept is that a man who is born into a community of savages acquires as a consequence notions about reality which differ remarkably from the notions he would have acquired had he been born into a community of civilised people, and that the difference between these two sets of notions lies partly in the degree of scientific accuracy they express and partly in the importance they attach to mystical causation.

(d) We have seen that Lévy-Bruhl commonly speaks about savage thought as 'mystique'. This is another term which has done much to alienate English anthropologists from his theories. Yet he means no more by this term than is meant by English writers when they speak of belief in the supernatural which they often divide into magic, religion, and mythology. It must be remembered, however, that in Lévy-Bruhl's view there is no 'natural' to the savage and therefore no 'supernatural'.²⁸ Hence we may say that mystical beliefs are what we would call beliefs in supernatural beings and forces or the endowment of natural objects with supernatural powers and relations with mankind and each other, but that to the savage, who has no notion of the natural as distinct from the supernatural, these beings and forces and powers and relations are merely supra-sensible. In his own words:

"J'emploierai ce terme, faute d'un meilleur, non pas par allusion au mysticisme religieux de nos sociétés, qui est quelque chose d'assez différent, mais dans le sens étroitement défini ou 'mystique' se dit de la croyance à des forces, à des influences, à des actions imperceptibles aux sens, et cependant réelles".²⁹

In his discussion of the way in which mystical doctrines combine with the most elementary sensations in forming savage perceptions, Lévy-Bruhl embarks upon psychological speculations which are irrelevant to his main argument. According to Lévy-Bruhl as soon as savage's sensations become conscious perceptions they are combined with the collective representations which they evoke. As far as the sensory processes of perception are concerned the savage sees an object as we see it but when gives conscious attention to it the collective representation of the object has already intruded to dominate the image of its purely objective properties. For collective representations form integral parts of perception and the savage cannot perceive objects apart from their collective representations. The savage perceives the collective representation in the object. Hence a savage does not perceive a shadow and then apply to it the doctrine of his society according to which it is one of his souls. When he is conscious of his shadow he perceives his soul. Lévy-Bruhl's view can be best understood if we say that 'belief' only arises late in the development of human thought when perception and representation have already fallen apart. We can then say that a person 'perceives' his shadow and 'believes' it to be his soul. The question of belief does not arise among savages because

the shadow is the belief and the savage cannot be conscious of his shadow without being conscious of the belief. In the same way a savage does not perceive a leopard and believe that it is his totem-brother. He does not perceive a leopard at all as we perceive it but he perceives his totem-brother. We see the physical qualities of the leopard and our perception of it in the higher cognitive processes is limited to these physical qualities but in savage consciousness these same physical qualities become merely a part of the mystical representation implied by the word 'totem' and are in fact subordinated to it.

The following passages from Les fonctions mentales will show that I have not done Lévy-Bruhl an injustice in my analysis of his theory of mystical perception.

"En d'autres termes, la réalité où se meuvent les primitifs est elle-même mystique. Pas un être, pas un objet, pas un phénomène naturel n'est dans leurs représentations collectives ce qu'il nous paraît être à nous. Presque tout ce que nous y voyons leur échappe, où leur est indifférent. En revanche, ils y voient beaucoup de choses dont nous ne nous doutons pas".³⁰

"Quel que soit l'objet qui se présente, à eux, il implique des propriétés mystiques qui en sont inséparables, et l'esprit, du primitif ne les en sépare pas, en effet, quand il le perçoit. Pour lui, il n'y a pas de fait proprement physique, au sens que nous donnons à ce mot".³¹

In committing himself to the statement that primitives do not distinguish between the supra-sensible world and the sensible world and that the former is just as real to them as the latter owing to their inability to perceive objects apart from their mystical values, Lévy-Bruhl has, in my opinion, not been careful enough to define his terms. It is difficult to state his point of view because one is not certain how one ought to interpret such expressions as 'distinguish', 'real', and 'perception'. Nevertheless I will attempt to explain his point of view as I understand it. Lévy-Bruhl is in danger of the accusation that he does precisely what he objects to others doing, namely, using psychological terms where they do not apply. We may leave to the psychologists to determine to what extent perception is influenced by emotional states and by socially standardised representations. Thought becomes data for the sociologist as soon as, and only when, it is expressed in speech and action. We cannot know what people think in any other way than by listening to what they say and observing what they do. Once thought is expressed in words it is socialised. Hence what applies to savage perception in this respect applies also to civilised perception. If the savage expresses in speech and action the mystical qualities of an object so also does civilised man express in speech and action stereotyped representations of objects which, though mystical properties may not be attributed to them, are none the less social or collective representations. The very fact that an object is named shows its social indication.

As James, Rignano³² and others, have shown, any sound or sight may reach the brain of a person without entering into his consciousness. We may say that he 'hears' or 'sees' it but does not 'notice' it. In a stream of sense impressions only a few become conscious impressions and these are selected on account of their greater affectivity. A man's interests are the selective agents and these are to a great extent socially determined for it is generally the value attached to an object by all members of a social group that directs the attention of an individual towards it.

It is, therefore, a mistake to say that savages perceive mystically or that their perception is mystical. On the other hand we may say that savages pay attention to phenomena on account of the mystical properties with which their society has endowed them, and that often their interest in phenomena is mainly, even exclusively, due to these mystic properties. It is a mistake to say that savages perceive a plant mystically or that their perception of it is mystical, but we may say that a savage's

perception of, in the sense of noticing, or paying attention to, or being interested in, a plant is due to its mystical properties.

In emphasizing that attention is largely determined by collective representations and that it is they which control selective interests, Lévy-Bruhl has stressed a sociological fact of the greatest importance. It is evident that the Bakwiri, mentioned by Miss Kingsley, pay attention to their shadows because in their society shadows have a mystical significance. Educated Europeans, on the other hand, do not notice their shadows unless influenced to do so by desire to discover the points of the compass or by some aesthetic interest. It is not so much that perception of a shadow causes the belief to enter into consciousness but it is rather the belief which causes the savage to pay attention to his shadow. It is the belief which translates purely psychological sensations into conscious images. A shadow is seen by us in the sense that we receive a visual sensation of it but we may not consciously perceive it since we are not interested in shadows. In the same way when a savage sees a beast or a bird or a tree he pays attention to them because they are totems or spirits or possess magical potency. We may also pay attention to them but, if we do so, it is for a different reason. Our interests in phenomena are not the same as savage interests in them because our collective representations differ widely from theirs.

A restatement of Lévy-Bruhl's main contentions about the mystical thought of savages is contained in the two following propositions both of which appear to me to be acceptable:

(1) Attention to phenomena depends upon affective choice and this selective interest is controlled to a very large extent by the values given to phenomena by society and these values are expressed in patterns of thought and behaviour (collective representations).

(2) Since patterns of thought and behaviour differ widely between savages and educated Europeans their selective interests also differ widely and, therefore, the degree of attention they pay to phenomena and the reasons for their attention are also different.

(e) When Lévy-Bruhl speaks of mystical participations he means that things are often connected in savage thought so that what affects one is believed also to affect the others, not objectively but by a mystical action. (The savage, however, does not distinguish between objective action and mystical action). Savages, indeed, are often more concerned about these mystical relations between things than about their objective relations. This mystical dependence of one thing on another, usually a reciprocal dependence between man and something in nature, is best explained by examples. Several good illustrations of mystical participation have already been quoted in this paper. Thus the Bakwiri might be said to participate in their shadows so that what affects their shadows likewise affects them. Hence were a man to lose his shadow it would be a calamity. We have seen also that savages often participate in their names so that if you can discover a man's name you will have not only it but its owner also in your power. Among many savage peoples it is necessary for the parents of an unborn child to observe a whole series of taboos because it is thought that what happens to the father and mother during this period will affect also their child. This participation between child and parents may continue after birth as among the Boronos of Brazil where if the child is ill the father drinks the medicine.³³ In our analysis of Frazer's theory of magic we were examining a typical form of mystical participation under the title of Sympathetic Magic in which things are held to influence one another in a ritual situation in virtue of their similarity or contiguity.

These participations form a network in which the savage lives. The sum total of his participations are his social personality. There is a mystical participation between a man and the land on which he dwells, between a tribe and its chief, between a man and his totem, between a

man and his kin, and so on.

Lévy-Bruhl's exposition of mystical participation is abundantly defined by the examples which he cites in his books and does not stand in need of explanatory comment. What I have said in the preceding section of this essay in criticism of his conception of 'mystical' applies equally to his conception of 'participation'.

This paper attempts to be explanatory rather than critical and any adequate criticism of Lévy-Bruhl's conception of primitive thought would involve a detailed analysis based on my own and other ethnological researches too lengthy for the present communication. In this essay I will do little more than enumerate headings under which criticism can be arranged.

It is not in fact true that the whole of nature and social life is permeated with mystical beliefs. In the greater part of his social contacts and in his exploitation of nature the savage acts and speaks in an empirical manner without attributing to persons and things supernatural powers. An impression is erroneously gained that everything in which savages are interested has always a mystical value for them by presenting a composite and hypothetical primitive culture, as Lévy-Bruhl has done, consisting of a selection of customs from many different cultures. Since it is possible to find among some tribe a belief which attributes mystical significance to almost every phenomenon one may, by selecting examples from a great number of tribes show that in primitive mentality every phenomenon is regarded as a repository of mystical power.

It may be said that in societies where we find such amorphous and ubiquitous notions as those of the witchcraft---sorcery type or those of the mana-wakanda type almost any object may on occasions be associated with mystical thought. It is, therefore, necessary to investigate the situations in social life which evoke patterns of mystical thought towards objects which at other times evoke no such ideas.

It is probable that when a savage pays attention to objects which have for him an exclusively mystical value, a pattern of mystical thought is easily evoked since his sole interest in these objects is in their mystical powers. There are many plants in the bush which have no utilitarian value but which, insofar as they are used by man, are used for ritual purposes alone. Such also are the objects which are fashioned to be used as ritual implements and have no other functions, the bull-rosier, the decorated jaw-bone of a dead king, oracular rubbing-boards, and so forth.

But even when objects are essentially ritual objects I have observed that savage attention is directed towards them on occasions by interests quite other than interest in their sacredness. I suppose that all field-workers have been struck by the casual manner in which savages frequently speak of and even handle sacred objects. I have often noticed Azande lean their spears up against, or hang baskets on, the shrines they build for the spirits of their ancestors in the centre of their homesteads, and as far as it is possible to judge from their behaviour, they have no other interest in the shrine than as a convenient post or peg. At religious ceremonies their attitude is very different. Among the Ingassana of the Tabl hills God is the sun and on occasions they pray to it but, as far as I could judge, in ordinary situations they looked upon the sun very much as I did, as a convenient means of telling the time, as the cause of intense heat at midday, and so on. If one were not present at some religious ceremony on a special occasion, one would remain ignorant that the sun is God. Mystical thought is a function of particular situations.

I think that Lévy-Bruhl made a serious error in failing to understand this point. His error is understandable because he was not really comparing what savages think with what Europeans think but the systematized ideology of savage cultures with the content of individual minds in Europe. His authorities had collected all the information they could

get about the mystical beliefs held by a community of savages about some phenomenon and pieced them together into a co-ordinated ideological structure. These beliefs, like the myths which Europeans also record, may have been collected over a long period of time and from dozens of informants. The resulting pattern of belief may be a fiction since it may never be actually present in a man's consciousness at any time and may not even be known to him in its entirety. This fact would have emerged if records of everything a savage does and says throughout a single day were recorded for then we would be able to compare our own thoughts more adequately with the real thoughts of savages instead of with an abstraction pieced together from persistent enquiries conducted in an atmosphere quite unlike that of the savage's ordinary milieu and in which it is the European who evokes the beliefs by his questions rather than the objects with which they are associated. It would also have emerged had Lévy-Bruhl attempted to contrast the formalised beliefs of Europe with those of savages, had he, for instance, attempted to contrast the formal doctrine of Christianity with the formal doctrines of savage religions. What he has done, in fact, is to take the formalised doctrines of savage religions as though they were identical with the actual mental experience of individuals. It is easy to see that it would never do to regard as identical the thoughts of a Christian with Christian thought. Moreover, primitive thought as pieced together in this manner by European observers is full of contradictions which do not arise in real life because the bits of belief are evoked in different situations.

Moreover, these same observers upon whom Lévy-Bruhl relied often neglected to inform their readers whether objects associated with mystical thought do not also figure in other contexts in which they have no mystical values. So Lévy-Bruhl considered, and, as I believe, incorrectly considered, that the sensations produced by an object and the mystical doctrines associated with it were interdependent to such an extent that the object would not be perceived by savages if it were not evoked by mystical interests and that the elementary sensations produced in consciousness by its objective properties are inevitably and always blended with collective representations of a mystical kind.

We have already noticed that this error is likewise to be found in Frazer's writings on magic where he suggests that the mystical relationship between objects which are similar or have once been in contact with one another is invariable. He does not see that they are associated only in particular situations. My observations on this point may, therefore, be compared with those I made on the gold-jaundice association of Greek peasants in the last number of our bulletin. But in Lévy-Bruhl's writings the error goes much deeper and obscures his lengthy discussion of mystical participations. He will not admit that when the elementary sensations produced by the sight of an object reach consciousness any other images can be evoked to combine with them in perception than those of its mystical qualities even if these qualities are irrelevant to a particular situation. It would appear from his thesis that if the object is to be perceived at all these images cannot be excluded.

That different ideas are evoked by objects in different situations can be shown in other ways. It can be shown that many of the most sacred objects of primitive cult only become sacred when man deliberately endows them with mystic powers which they did not possess before. Thus the fetish and idol are repositories of mystical force because man after having made them infuses this force into them by ritual. As we have already seen magic is always man-made. It is the rite itself which gives virtue to materia medica and often only for the duration of the rite.

Or again it can be shown that mystical notions about nature are part of culture and, therefore, have to be acquired by every individual. They are learnt slowly throughout the years. Hence there are periods in the life history of every individual when mystic notions cannot be evoked in perceptions to complete elementary sensations because the mystic notions are unknown to the person who experiences the sensations. Also many objects have a mystical value for some members of a society but not for others. A plant has mystical value for the person who

knows its ritual uses but not for those who ignorant of them. An animal has a totemic relationship with members of a single clan while members of other clans eat it with relish.

From many points of view, therefore, it would be easy to demonstrate that the interests which savages have in objects are not always of a mystical type; that often they are entirely utilitarian and empirical; and that the same objects may at different times or in different situations evoke different ideas. Savage thought has not the fixed inevitable construction that Lévy-Bruhl gives it.

The very contradictions which according to Lévy-Bruhl characterise prelogical thought and distinguish it from our thought, are to be accounted for by the fact that a single elementary sensation may evoke in different situations different images in perception. An object may be perceived in different ways according to different affective interests, interests which in their turn are evoked by different situations. Hence it comes about that a savage can be both himself and a bird, that a shadow can be both a shadow and a soul, that a plant can be both a plant and a magical substance, and so on. As suggested above, the contradiction only becomes glaring when European observers try to piece together ideas evoked in different situations into a consistent ideological structure.

When a particular situation evokes one set of ideas other ideas are inhibited, especially if they contradict those evoked, at any rate as far as speech and action are concerned. But it is a mistake to suppose that because a savage attributes some happening to a mystical cause that he does not also observe the natural cause even if no particular attention is paid to it in formalised belief and traditional behaviour. Thus I have ample evidence from my own research in Central Africa that while death is attributed to witchcraft people are not oblivious to the natural cause of death whether it be the spear of an enemy, the claws or horns of a beast, or disease. They fully recognise these causes but they are socially irrelevant. Their irrelevancy arises from the social action which follows death, namely vengeance. It is evident that of the natural and mystical causes of death the mystical cause is usually the only one which allows any intervention (except when a man is murdered by a fellow-tribesman) and when it is a social rule that death must be avenged it is clearly the only cause towards which social action can be directed. The other cause whilst perfectly well known to the people is socially irrelevant and, therefore, excluded as far as the persons directly involved (the kin) are concerned though it may be more readily admitted by others. The same mixture of sound knowledge with mystical notions is found in primitive ideas of causation in procreation, in disease, etc. As I intend to deal with this subject in a forthcoming publication, I will not discuss it further here.³⁴ I may add, however, that the selective interest which directs attention to one cause rather than to another, to the mystical cause than to the natural one, may be derived from an individual and psychological situation, e.g. sometimes a savage attributes his misfortune to witchcraft while his neighbours attribute it to incompetence or to some other cause.

Patterns of thought of a mystical kind are never exclusively mystical. They are never fantastic for they are bound by limits imposed by psychological and biological requirements. At the core of mystical thought we find recognition of natural causation and other scientific observations which lie, as it were, dormant, known yet socially inhibited because they are irrelevant to the particular situation which evokes the pattern of thought or because they contradict it. If this were not the case it would be difficult to understand how scientific thought could ever have emerged. Since it is the case, it is easy to understand how social change involving reorientation of interests has directed attention to elements in a chain of causation or to the objective properties of things which had hitherto been known but socially unemphasised.

We may now consider shortly the theories of Lévy-Bruhl and of Tylor and Frazer in relation to each other. If the theories of Frazer and

Tylor about magic have concentrated too exclusively on some qualities of magical ritual but have neglected other qualities of equal, if not greater importance, this distortion should be evident when we compare them with the writings of Lévy-Bruhl whose focus of interest was quite different.

Tylor, Frazer and Lévy-Bruhl, are in agreement that magical practices are typical of primitive societies and tend to disappear and to be regarded as superstitions in societies of higher cultural development. This is most strikingly seen if we compare, as Lévy-Bruhl has done, the thought of savage cultures with ideas current among educated Europeans of the 20th century.

Lévy-Bruhl is totally uninterested in distinctions drawn by scholars between magic and religion and therefore his theories do not bear upon the lengthy arguments devoted by Frazer and so many other writers to devising ritual categories.²⁵ Lévy-Bruhl seeks to understand the characteristics of mystical thought and to define these qualities and to compare them with the qualities of scientific thought. Since magic and religion, as separated by Frazer, have, from the point of view of Lévy-Bruhl's investigation, the same mystical character, there is no need to maintain this particular distinction, nor, indeed, any distinction, between them. The sharp division which Frazer has insisted on in *The Golden Bough* must appear quite arbitrary, and even futile, to Lévy-Bruhl.

But it is in their analyses of the ideology of magic that the English and French Schools are at greatest variance. To Tylor and Frazer the savage believes in magic because he reasons incorrectly from his perception of similarities and contiguities. To Lévy-Bruhl the savage reasons incorrectly because he believes in magic. Now there can be no doubt that if we study the manner in which any individual acquires a magical belief in a savage society we shall have to admit the accuracy of Lévy-Bruhl's contention. An individual does not note similarities between objects and then come to the conclusion that in consequence of these similarities the objects are mystically connected. He simply learns the pattern of thought in which this mystical connection is socially established. Nevertheless, Lévy-Bruhl has not paid sufficient regard to the fact that collective representations have an intellectual structure and indeed must have for mnemonic reasons. Unless there is a mutual dependence between ideas we cannot speak of thought at all. Thought requires, in order to be thought, notions of similarity and contiguity. For when we speak of thought we mean coherent thought and without these notions magic would be chaotic and could not possibly persist. Tylor and Frazer have shown us the intellectual character of magic. Lévy-Bruhl has shown us its social character.

Looking at magic from this point of view of its ideational or intellectual structure, Tylor and Frazer felt that they were called upon to account for savages not observing that magical rites do not achieve the end they aim at achieving. Since savages reason, observe similarities and contiguities, and make inferences, even if incorrect ones, from their observations how is it that they do not apply these intellectual powers to discovering whether magic really produces the results it is supposed to produce. This was the problem that confronted Tylor and Frazer and in their attempts to solve it they did not sufficiently appreciate the difference between ratiocination and scientific reasoning, between intellectual operations and logic. Men may reason brilliantly in defence of the most absurd theses; their arguments may display great intellectual ability and yet be illogical. To prove this we need not go further than the writings of our metaphysicians. The intellectual operations of the mind are subordinated to affective interests and are above all subservient to collective representations. We know what happens to people whose intellectual operations lead them to conclusions which contradict social doctrines. Lévy-Bruhl therefore saw no need to ask why savages do not observe how baseless are their beliefs and why they do not pay attention to the contradictions they embody, for in his opinion savages are inextricably enmeshed in a network of mystical

participations and completely dominated by collective representations. There is no room for doubt or scepticism. There is not even need to avoid contradictions.

But a representation is not acceptable to the mind merely because it is collective. It must also accord with individual experience³⁶ and if it does not do so then the representation must contain an explanation of its failure to do so. No doubt in purely transcendental thought contradictions do not matter, as theology amply illustrates, but thought which directs experience must not contradict it. A pattern of thought which decrees that a man may put his hand in the fire with immunity has little chance of persisting. Magical thought which claims that a man who eats certain medicines will never die or that agriculture and hunting can be carried on by magical procedure alone will not prove acceptable to individual minds in any society. Even mystical thought is conditioned by experience and this is the reason for many secondary elaborations of doctrine which account for discrepancies, failures, contradictions, and so on, for mystical thought must, like scientific thought, be intellectually consistent, even if it is not logically consistent. The scientific and mystical notions that are so often found side by side in a pattern of thought must be harmonised either by situational selection or by some explanatory link. Tylor's brilliant analysis of the factors which keep mystical thought in touch with reality or which explain its failure to do so is therefore needed to complete Lévy-Bruhl's description of collective representations.

To sum up: My exposition of Lévy-Bruhl's theories has been a task of great difficulty. His writings are extensive and his thought often tortuous. So vague are many of the terms he uses and so inconstant is the meaning he attaches to them that I have sometimes had to select between several possible interpretations. It may even be charged against me that I have given a sense to his words which others might fail to derive from them. I would answer that a book gains its value not only from the ideas which an author puts into it but also from the ideas to which it gives rise in the mind of the reader. In order to grasp Lévy-Bruhl's views I have had to reformulate them in my own language.

Contrary to the judgment of most English anthropologists I find Lévy-Bruhl's writings a great stimulus to formulation of new problems and I consider the influence he has had not only on anthropological theory but also in directing the attention of fieldworkers to a new set of problems to have been most fruitful. For when in disagreement with his opinions we must acknowledge that they are not the usual facile explanations of social anthropologists which obstruct all thought by their futility and finality and turn out to be no more than a restatement in other terms of the problem to be solved. Lévy-Bruhl does not, in fact, attempt to explain mystical thought. He is content to show its characters of generality and compulsion or, in other words, to demonstrate that individuals act and speak in ways that are socially determined. In stressing the social character of patterns of thought he has performed a great service to social anthropology and in our efforts to understand magic we have to start by recognising the social character of its thought. This is obvious as soon as it is stated but it has first to be stated and then it becomes obvious.

Besides emphasizing the social character of thought Lévy-Bruhl has tried to classify types of thought and to show that their interrelations with one another and with behaviour can be studied. It is true that his two categories of scientific and mystical are defined in the rough and without precise analysis and that he takes no account of thought which lies outside both categories. The immense scope of his work and the voluminous data which he handled made this inevitable and it is left for other students to enquire with more detailed analysis into the gradations and blendings of thought-types and their variations as functions of different situations, if indeed it is found desirable upon closer scrutiny to maintain his classification.

Perhaps Lévy-Bruhl's most important contribution to sociology is to

have shown that ignorance, like knowledge, is often socially determined and that primitive thought is unscientific because it is mystical and not mystical because of an inherent incapacity to reason logically. He demonstrates that the images which are evoked to combine with elementary sensations to complete perception are evoked by selective interests which in their turn are directed by collective representations towards the mystical qualities of things rather than to their objective qualities.

Moreover, contrary to the usual opinion, Lévy-Bruhl's writings show clearly how primitive mystical thought is organized into a coherent system with a logic of its own. He recognises the existential value of mystical thought. No primitive society is able to maintain its equilibrium without the mystical beliefs which link together its activities by ideological bonds. Thus, for example, the belief that witchcraft is the cause of death has existential value in a society in which the kinship group is also a blood-revenge group.

Beyond this he does not, and indeed cannot go, for the method of comparative analysis that he employed imposes effective limits to deeper research. By comparing savage thought with civilised thought Lévy-Bruhl was able to disclose certain general correlations between the degree of technological development and the development of scientific thought. But at this point he was unable to make any further progress as is shown clearly in his later writings which carry his researches into the nature of thought no further than his earliest writings.

A programme of research which will lead us to a more comprehensive and exact knowledge of mystical thought, indeed of all types of thought, must await a later communication.

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References

1. "The Intellectualist (English) Interpretation of Magic", Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, vol. 1, Part 2, 1933.
2. Lévy-Bruhl's theory of primitive mentality is complete in his first volume on the subject, Les Fonctions Mentales dans les Sociétés Inférieures, 1st ed. 1910. An authorised translation of this book into English by Lilian A. Clare was published under the title of How Natives Think (London, 1926). All references in this paper are to the 9th ed. (Paris, 1928) under the letters F.M. The page number of the English translation is given in brackets, e.g. F.M., 86-87 (E.T., 84-85). His later publications repeat the argument of Les Fonctions Mentales and adduce voluminous evidences in support of them. The first is La Mentalité Primitive, 1st ed., 1922. 1922. An authorised translation of this book has also appeared in English under the title of Primitive Mentality (London, 1923), Lilian A. Clare again being the translator. All references are to the 2nd ed. (Paris, 1922) and under the letters M.P. No reference is made to the pages of the English translation since this is inaccessible at the time of writing. Lévy-Bruhl's two later works are L'Âme Primitive (Paris, 1927) and Le Surnaturel et la Nature dans la Mentalité Primitive (Paris 1931). They have been very little used in this essay where they are referred to as A.P. and Le Surnaturel. A concise summary of Lévy-Bruhl's view on primitive thought is contained in his Herbert Spencer Lecture delivered in Oxford and published under the title of La Mentalité Primitive (Oxford, 1931). This is referred to as H.S.L.
3. F.M., p. 13 (E.T., 23).

4. F.M., p. 19 (E.T., pp. 27-28).
5. M.P., p. 17.
6. M.P., pp. 17-18.
7. Mary Kingsley, West African Studies, p. 176, quoted in F.M., p. 50 (E.T., p. 54).
8. Guise, Wangela River, New Guinea, J.A.I., xxviii, p. 212, quoted in F.M., p. 73 (E.T., p. 73).
9. Types of thought must not be confused with types of mind classified by some writers as "synthetic" and "analytic", "intuitive" and "logical", "extravert" and "intravert", "romantic" and "classic", and so on.
10. H.S.L., p. 26.
11. The most ambitious critical work on the so-called theory of prelogisme is Olivier Leroy's La Raison primitive, Essai de réfutation de la théorie de Prelogisme, Paris, 1927. Besides other writings mentioned in this paper I may mention the critical but laudatory summary of Lévy-Bruhl's theories in Dr. Goldenweiser's, Early Civilization, 1921, and the not unfriendly criticism contained in G. Van Leeuw's, La Structure de la Mentalité primitive, extrait de La Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse, 1928. The best account of Lévy-Bruhl's theories is by Davy in the 4th part, pp. 193-305, of his Sociologues d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, Paris, 1931. See also: Durkheim, Année sociologique, t. XII, p. 35; and Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse, 1912, pp. 336-342; Mauss, Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie, 1923; Raoul Allier, Les non-civilisés et nous, 1928. D. Essertier Philosophes et Savants français du XX^e siècle, La Sociologie, Paris, 1930.
12. Missions évangéliques, XXIII, 1848, p. 82 (Schrumpp). Quoted in M.P., pp. 3-4.
13. F.M., p. 21 (E.T., 29-30).
14. Elsdon Best, Maori Medical Lore, Journal of the Polynesian Society, XIII, p. 219 (1904). Quoted in F.M., p. 69 (E.T., p. 70).
15. Miss Kingsley, West African Studies, p. 330. Quoted in F.M., p. 65 (E.T., p. 67).
16. Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan, by C.G. and B.Z. Seligman, 1932, p. 25.
17. Sorcerers of Dobu, by R.F. Fortune, 1932, pp. 97-98.
18. H.S.L. pp. 10-11.
19. M.P., p. 12.
20. The Savage as he Really is, by J.H. Driberg, London, 1929, p. 4.
21. The Savage as he Really is, by J.H. Driberg, London, 1929, pp. 12-13.
22. Idem, p. 18.
23. Prof. Malinowski writes "Professor Lévy-Bruhl tells us, to put it in a nutshell, that primitive man has no sober moods at all, that he is hopelessly and completely immersed in a mystical frame of mind. Incapable of dispassionate and consistent observation, devoid of the power of abstraction, hampered by a decided aversion towards

reasoning', he is unable to draw any benefit from experience, to construct or comprehend even the most elementary laws of nature", etc. (Magic Science and Religion, published in Science, Religion and Reality, 1925, p. 28). Other authorities could be quoted to the same effect.

24. Or, perhaps, one ought to say that this is what he may mean for philosophers give to the word many different meanings (see Lalande, Vocabulaire technique et critique de la Philosophie, art. "Logique"). It is a great pity, therefore, that Lévy-Bruhl introduces the term without stating precisely the meaning he attaches to it. In this paper I distinguish between scientific logic which is the technique of the sciences and which tests not only inferences and the interdependence between ideas but also the validity of premises, and logic which in no way concerns itself with the validity of premises but only with the coherent structure of thought.
25. H.S.L., p. 21.
26. It is essential to understand that thought which is totally unscientific and even which contradicts experience may yet be entirely coherent in that there is a reciprocal dependence between its ideas. Thus I may instance the writings of mediaeval divines and political controversialists as examples of mystical thought which far from being chaotic suffers from a too rigid application of syllogistic rules. Also the thought of many insane persons (monomaniacs, paranoiacs) presents a perfectly organised system of interdependent ideas. Perhaps the only thought that we can class as incoherent is that of certain types of insanity (mania and Dementia Praecox) and that of dreams but even in these cases it is probably more correct to say that the principle of coherence is unknown to us. Has not Freud shown how very logical and coherent our dreams can be?
27. As a matter of fact Lévy-Bruhl is hardly consistent in his usage of words like 'esprit' and 'mentalité' for he sometimes suggests the psychological process of thinking and at other times the social content of thought. It is largely his own fault that his opinions are misrepresented.
28. "L'homme superstitieux, souvent aussi l'homme religieux de notre société, croit à deux ordres de réalités, les unes visibles et tangibles, soumises aux lois nécessaires du mouvement, les autres invisibles, impalpables, 'spirituelles', formant comme une sphère mystique qui enveloppe les premières. Mais, pour la mentalité des sociétés inférieures, il n'y a pas ainsi deux mondes au contact l'un de l'autre, distincts et solidaires, se pénétrant plus ou moins l'un l'autre. Il n'y en a qu'un. Toute réalité est mystique comme toute action, et par conséquent aussi toute perception". F.M., p. 67 (E.T., p. 68).
29. F.M., p. 30 (E.T., p. 38).
30. F.M., pp. 30-31 (E.T., p. 38).
31. F.M., pp. 37-38 (E.T., p. 43).
32. William James, The principles of psychology, 1901. Eugenio Rignano, The psychology of reasoning, English translation, 1923.
33. K. von Den Steinen, Under den Naturvölkern Zentralbrasiliens, pp. 289-294. Quoted in F.M., p. 300 (E.T., p. 259).
34. I may, however, refer to papers in which I have given special attention to these problems: "Witchcraft (mangu) among the Azande", Sudan Notes and Records, 1929; "Heredity and Gestation as the Azande see them", Sociologus, 1932; "Zande Therapeutics" in Essays presented to C. G. Seligman to appear this year.

35. See what he has to say on this point: F.M., pp. 341-345 (E.T., pp. 293-296).
36. Lévy-Bruhl, it is only fair to say, realises that mystical thought is bound to coincide, at any rate to some extent, with experience for pragmatic reasons. Thus he writes "Toutefois, même pour cette mentalité (primitive mentality), les représentations relatives aux morts, et les pratiques qui s'y rattachent, se distinguent par un caractère prélogique plus marqué. Si mystiques que soient les autres représentations collectives, relatives aux données des sens, si mystiques que soient aussi les pratiques qui s'y rapportent (chasse, pêche, guerre, maladie, divination, etc.), encore faut-il, pour que la fin désirée soit atteinte, pour que l'ennemi soit vaincu, le gibier pris, que les représentations coïncident en quelques points essentiels avec la réalité objective, et que les pratiques soient, à un certain moment, effectivement adaptées aux fins poursuivies. Par là se trouve garanti un minimum d'ordre, d'objectivité, et de cohérence dans ces représentations". F.M., pp. 354-355 (E.T., p. 303).