

Meaning and Primitive Religions

Many contributors to this Journal have adopted what might be called the 'fideist' approach to the study of social phenomena. The term 'fideism' connotes the idea that one should be faithful to one's subject matter; that one should adopt a relativist attitude, paying special attention to how participants conceptualise their activities and how they 'create' various ways of looking at their 'worlds'. Two crucial features of the fideist approach are the emphasis on the fact that cultures do not altogether live in the same 'world', and that the major interpretative task is to examine and describe social life as being informed by various types of meaningful realities. Because of this attention to meaning, some have applied the term 'semantic anthropology' to characterise the work of those who adopt the fideist perspective.

The contributors in question have expressed their dislike of those traditional approaches (including both functionalism and structuralism) which direct attention to causal or logical formulations rather than to the meaningful nature of primitive life. So far as one can gather, they have met a twofold response from exponents of older styles of anthropology: on the one hand they have been accused of failing to show what exactly is entailed by the semantic approach, and on the other they have been accused of being too philosophical, or, to use an even more damaging word, of being 'metaphysical'. To an extent, traditional-minded anthropologists have been quite entitled in adopting a negative attitude to the (often young) upstarts who have dared to say that the study of primitive society has not resulted in a proper appreciation of meaningful realities. Some contributors - myself included - have certainly been rather too inclined to engage in polemics. We have perhaps turned too easily to philosophy and have not always done enough to justify the fideist approach by detailed example.

However, our excuse must be that our elders have let us down. The study of how primitive peoples conceptualise their world, realities, states of mind, moral and aesthetic values, the study, in other words, of how phenomena exist in the primitive universe, is impossible without detailed field reports, especially of a dialogue or conversational form. Yet despite the absolute logical primacy of such facts in the study of even the most 'sociological' aspects of primitive life, the great majority of monographs contain only the most piecemeal descriptions of conceptual arrangements. We learn what the tools of ritual are, but we hear very little about what the ritual specialists think of their activities.

In this paper I shall examine one of the few monographs - Godfrey Lienhardt's Divinity and Experience (1961) - which actually portrays what is involved in the fideist approach to religion. My conclusion will be that Lienhardt's work conclusively demonstrates all the advantages of escaping from one type of canon of 'scientific' clarity, rigour, determinability and respectability. To understand this conclusion, however, we must first introduce a distinction between the general 'positivist' and the fideist approaches. For this distinction will allow us to grasp what is entailed by Lienhardt's concentration on 'meaning' rather than on 'function' or 'structure': it will enable us to see why a truly semantic study of primitive religion is incompatible with a scientific or positivist study.

Most British anthropologists of religion have denied their subject matter a proper reality of its own. Adopting some variety of the positivist scheme (this being the view, in Talcott Parsons' words, that

'positive science constitutes man's sole possible significant cognitive relation to external... reality' (1937:61)), they have had to treat religious phenomena as though they refer to scientifically acceptable domains. Consider the work of those belonging to the Durkheimian tradition who argue that the social scientist cannot accept the existence of specifically religious realities (such as God) and who therefore feel they have to relocate the substance of religion. By their reading, ritual and 'odd' beliefs do not really refer to the states of affairs maintained by participants; instead, they refer to social institutions, processes and values.

Whatever the plausibility of the positivist argument, it results in semantic impoverishment. Religious phenomena are accorded meaning by illuminating them in terms of what are essentially alien realities, and it takes no great stretch of the imagination to realise that this course has distracted anthropologists from understanding religion itself. The consequences of the 'theory-dependent' course of reducing the 'religious meaning' of religious beliefs to something other than the significances attributed by social participants is clearly visible, for example, in Richards' remark that 'They [field workers] have studied religious belief and ritual mainly through the behaviour of the people in these [small scale] communities....[they] have restricted their study of ritual to those aspects which bear on social structure....' (1967:293). A strange restriction, one would have thought, to be imposed on the anthropology of religion. Indeed, to the extent that field workers have interpreted religion in terms of the theory-dependent relationships with social structure, they have run the very grave risk of talking about something other than primitive religion: religion is very largely a participant construct; participants do not simply reduce their religious life to social structure; therefore when anthropologists make the reductionist step, they radically distort the participant's universe of discourse and their meaningful realities.

Characteristically, when positivists attempt to justify their procedure they claim that social scientists should not engage in 'theology'. Thus Leach suggests that the 'answer' given by Catholics when asked to explain the birth of Jesus is not 'the sort of answer which should be offered by professional anthropologists in the course of their professional duties'. Replies of the type, 'We know that virgins do not conceive; but we also know that the Holy Mother of God was and ever shall be an immaculate Virgin' are unsatisfactory because 'We are social analysts not theologians'. 'From an anthropological point of view', continues Leach, 'non-rational theological propositions can only serve as data not as explanation' (1969:103).

Leach's rejection of theology is surely correct when it entails the rejection of the view that one should examine religious phenomena in terms of the 'meanings' infused by what he calls the 'supernatural sender' (ibid:9). However, Leach (and other Durkheimians) are so keen to reject the fideistic approach that they do not appear to realise that there are many types of theology. Ramsey, for instance, does not deny that the full significance of the religious way of life is consequential upon what he calls the 'penny dropping', but he still insists on the value of conceptual or philosophical analysis, tracing the logical nature of religious language to show how this logic facilitates the distinctiveness of religious styles of meaning. The positivists, in other words, are so persuaded by the argument that the reality of religion must be relocated if it is to be put under scientific scrutiny that they polemically equate theology with the 'meaning

lies with the Word of God or act-of-faith' argument, and then reject theology in toto. Accordingly, they do not realise the benefits of fideistic (or theological in the sense of theology as conceptual analysis) examination.

With these considerations in mind, it comes as something of a shock to find Lienhardt claiming that for analytic purposes Dinka 'Powers' must be regarded as representations of realities more accessible to a universal rational knowledge than they need to be in the Dinka view of them.. I have described them for the most part as the Dinka themselves understand them; but in this chapter I try to give a different account of them, not now as ultra-human "beings" which might form the subject-matter of a Dinka theology, but as representations (or as I here prefer to call them, "images") evoked by certain configurations of experience contingent upon the Dinkas' reaction to their particular physical and social environment, of which a foreigner can also have direct knowledge' (1961:147). Lienhardt, in other words, appears to be following the positivists, arguing that Dinka religion should be understood in terms of social and physical experiences which we can share, rather than in terms of the Dinkas' own religious entities or realities, namely the 'Powers'. Yet we are treating his work as a classic example of anthropology as the study of meaning.

Perhaps the first thing to notice is that Lienhardt formulates his rejection of interpretation in terms of 'ultra-human beings' in a very narrow and precise fashion. His formulation has two main aspects: on the one hand we, as Westerners, cannot understand Dinka beliefs from within (or theologically) because 'To the Dinka the Powers are known by personal encounter, as living agents influencing their lives for good or evil....but no European actually encounters DENG, GARANG, or the other Powers as the Dinka claim to do'. And on the other hand, the Powers 'cannot be understood by us if they are regarded as referring to theoretical "beings" whose existence is posited, as it were, before the human experience to which they correspond....I have suggested that the Powers may be understood as images corresponding to complex and various combinations of Dinka experience which are contingent upon their particular social and physical environment. For the Dinka they are the grounds of those experiences; in our analysis we have shown them to be grounded in them, for to a European the experiences are more readily understood than the Powers, and the existence of the latter cannot be posited as a condition of the former' (ibid:147,169-70; my emphasis).

We can now locate Lienhardt's work with reference to our distinction between positivism and fideism. One cannot say that Divinity and Experience is entirely free of the positivist spirit: he tends to relocate the reality of Dinka religion by shifting the emphasis from ontologically sound 'ultra-human beings' to those experiences to which Westerners can respond. At the same time, however, his rejection of a theological appreciation is limited to a rejection of the 'meaning is dependent upon the acceptance of irreducible religious experiences or messages or Powers' position. The scope of semantics is assured because he specifically refuses to be drawn into the extremes of the Durkheimian approach (see ibid:10,131,165-6) and because he does not reject theology as conceptual analysis. Concerning the second of these points, we have already indicated that Lienhardt is perfectly prepared to investigate the Powers in terms of how 'the Dinka themselves understand them', and concerning the first point, we might conclude that his semantic approach is greatly encouraged by his insistence that the experiences which offer meaning to the beliefs and activities under

consideration are only of a 'weakly' positivist order.

Lienhardt's work lies between the extremes of theology and positivism. His rejection of one type of theological interpretation does not result in the collapsing of the significance of Dinka religion according to the fashion of strict Durkheimians: for instead of being content with the simple theory that religious phenomena are merely a way of 'talking about' social relationships (and functioning to maintain the social order), he is concerned to show the cultural depth of religious life.

To clarify this point, and to suggest what we mean by the term 'weakly positivist' we might reflect on the following passages from his work:

'What is represented...in the oral rites, is what the Dinka see as the truth of a situation - an existential truth, if one may so call it, and not the truth of specific facts in space or time...Like prophecies, the ceremony eventually represents as already accomplished what the community, and those who traditionally can speak for them, collectively intend. Thus the masters of the fishing-spear eventually state that they have freed the man from the agent which is troubling him; ideally, he should get up at once and return to normal health and vigour, and this is what sometimes happens in accounts of idealized sacrifices. The "patient" becomes "convalescent" in the full etymological sense of these terms. In fact, some delay is expected, and the delay shakes no faith. For the sacrifice is its own end. It has already created a moral reality, to which physical facts are hoped eventually to conform.

We have seen that the main oral rites, those at sacrifices, assert by a combination of assertions of control and admissions of weakness a relationship between freedom and contingency in human life, in which freedom appears eventually as the stronger. Human beings explicitly assert their ability to act upon the conditions which they constantly passively experience. It is of particular importance, in this regard, to recognise that the sacrificial rite is first and foremost an act of victimization. A strong and active beast is rendered weak and passive so that the burden of human passiones may be transferred to it (ibid:250-251).

The analysis is far removed from such reductionistic arguments as, 'sacrifice functions to restore social equilibrium when people are threatened by illness'. Our attention is not directed to a theory-dependent (and thus strongly positivistic) view of religion within the mechanistic and determinable (if not measurable) social process. Instead, our attention is drawn to states of affairs which, to an extent at least, lie beyond the positivist frame of reference. To make this claim is to raise awkward philosophical difficulties: for instance, are we (and Lienhardt) entitled to argue in terms of the naturalistic fallacy, to conclude that there exists 'existential truth' which is not 'the truth of specific facts in space or time'? Fortunately for us we can rest our argument on the fact that strict sociological symbolists quite clearly do not feel at ease with such realities

or 'truths'. As positivists, they feel obliged to introduce, via their relocatory procedure, truths of a publicly verifiable (space-time) variety.

By rejecting this position, we have seen how Lienhardt has greatly facilitated a much broader appreciation of religious phenomena than is to be found in the works of those who belong to the Durkheimian tradition. He does not altogether disregard the Durkheimian idea of projection - his emphasis on social experience is quite evident in such remarks as 'clan-divinities represent...the ideal and permanent values of agnation for the Dinka', and, 'when ancestors more recent than the founding ancestor of a whole clan have been for a long time separated in different parts of the country, their descendants, as groups, are differentiated in a way which is reflected in their different range of divinities' (ibid:135,120 my emphasis) - but by utilising the theory as a key to the existential and moral significance of Dinka religious beliefs rather than as a key to Dinka social organisation, he successfully escapes from the confines of strict positivism.

Not surprisingly, the most interesting aspects of Divinity and Experience are those where Lienhardt entirely transcends the general positivist framework. I am thinking especially of those passages where he attempts to lead us into the conceptual framework revolving around Dinka ideas of man-world relations. His examination of Dinka notions of personality, world and reality are of central importance for at least three reasons. Firstly, the analysis conclusively demonstrates the extent to which semantic anthropology has very little to do with scientific reductionism. Secondly, it provides the key to many features of Dinka religion, this key being relatively distinct from the one provided by Lienhardt's use of 'experience'. And finally, his analysis is of great value because it can serve as a paradigm case of the study of meaning: it suggests what is involved in tracing the rationale of the 'deep' beliefs which inform social life; it suggests how difficult it is to engage in what surely must be the primary task of anthropology, namely the exegesis of 'alien' ways of conceptualising, in fundamental fashion, the various types of entities and realities which might be said to exist in the world.

Discussing the 'difficult question of differences between Dinka and European self-knowledge', Lienhardt argues that,

'The Dinka have no conception which at all closely corresponds to our popular conception of the "mind", as mediating and, as it were, storing up the experiences of the self. There is for them no such interior entity to appear, on reflection, to stand between the experiencing self at any given moment and what is or has been an exterior influence upon the self...It is perhaps significant that in ordinary English usage we have no word to indicate an opposite of "actions" in relation to the human self. If the word "passions", passiones, were still normally current as the opposite of "actions", it would be possible to say that the Dinka Powers were the images of human passiones seen as the active sources of those passiones' (ibid:149,151).

When most anthropologists have been faced by ethnographic situations where central Western concepts are either absent or differently located by reference to one another, they have tended to ignore the implications

of their findings. Some indeed have even failed to report any findings at all (), for example, have given accounts of what happens to the concepts or states of affairs) 'love' and 'jealousy' in the context of polyandric or polygynous marriage systems?). Horton, to mention just one example of someone who has at least recognised the fact that other cultures often have distinctive conceptual configurations, does not appear to know how to handle his finding that many African societies do not possess the modern distinction between 'mind' and 'matter' (1970:157). This rather depressing situation can surely be attributed to the difficulties of such exegesis, difficulties which can often be attributed to the fact that what is at stake is the relationship between language and reality. In other words, what is at stake is the problem of determining the extent to which language can create its own reality: to cite a now classic question, 'Is belief an experience?'.¹ Again, is the existence of love or jealousy dependent on the existence (in any particular culture) of these notions, or are they extra-linguistic entities? Moving somewhat closer to Divinity and Experience, what are we to make of those modern theologians who appear to treat the reality of God in terms of the language game of God-talk? And finally, this time taking an example which bears directly on Lienhardt's work, exactly what perceptual, experiential, existential, conceptual, moral and even ontological issues are dependent upon the absence of 'our popular modern conception of the "mind" as mediating and, as it were, storing up the experiences of the self'? What is it to maintain, as Lienhardt does, that 'Without these Powers or images or an alternative to them there would be for the Dinka no differentiation between experience of the self and of the world which acts upon it' (1961:170)?

Since this paper is only designed to emphasise the possible scope of a semantic anthropology, I willingly excuse myself from a general discussion of these most complex matters. Let us instead outline some of the ways in which Lienhardt gives substance and meaning to Dinka ideas of self-knowledge:

MEMORY: For the Dinka, past experiences are not mediated by what we call 'mind'. It follows that 'what we should call in some cases the "memories" of experiences, and regard therefore as in some way intrinsic and interior to the remembering person and modified in their effect upon him by that interiority, appear to the Dinka as exteriorly acting upon him, as were the sources from which they were derived' (ibid:149). To use a word developed by certain Wittgensteinian philosophers, this state of affairs affects the 'grammar' of several Dinka notions associated with the act of 'remembering past experiences'. Dreams are not 'only' dreams; the strong impressions Dinka might receive on visiting, to use Lienhardt's example, Khartoum, are not simply thought of as the 'influence' of the place; what for us is only the 'prompting of a guilty conscience' is not so regarded by the Dinka; and, perhaps most fundamentally of all, what we might call the 'immanence' of spiritual activity cannot be conceptualized in quite the same way by the Dinka (see ibid:149-150). In all these examples, what are presumably in some sense distinctive states of affairs (such as are denoted in English by the terms 'memory', 'dream', 'guilt' and so on) are conceptualised by the Dinka in a different way because they lack our notion of 'mind'. With their religious entities functioning, according to Lienhardt's analysis, as 'the images of human passiones seen as the active source of those passiones', the Dinka seem to conceptualise memories of past experiences in terms of religious phenomena.

In other words, granted the basic premise that the Dinka treat their 'memories' as affecting them in the fashion of passiones, the only way they can ensure a degree of control over the automatic pressures of the external world (or as Lienhardt says, effect a 'differentiation between experience of the self and of the world which acts upon it') is by 'imaging' their memories. And this they do in a religious way: dreams are associated with free divinities (ibid:57); Khartoum is said to follow the Dinka who have lived there for some time as 'divinities are said to "follow" those with whom they have formed a relationship' (ibid: 149); the fetish MATHIANG GOK 'works analogously to what, for Europeans, would be the prompting of a guilty conscience' (ibid:150),² and, to give one more example, illness and suffering are conceptualised in terms of something 'akin to "individual totemism" or "nagualism" (ibid:151).

CONTROL OVER EXPERIENCE: Mention of the Dinkas' attitude to suffering allows us to complete the extract we earlier gave concerning Dinka sacrifice. Lienhardt concludes with the words, 'It [the sacrificial beast] suffers vicariously for those for whom sacrifice is made, and men, thus symbolically freed from the agents which image their sufferings, and corporately associated with each other and with the agents which image their strength, proclaim themselves the creatures whose deliberate action prevailed over the first master of the fishing-spear and received his gift of "life"' (ibid:251). Imaging their experiences, which is another way of saying that the Dinka 'extrapolate', 'transfer', 'reflect', or 'represent' them in terms of religious entities (ibid:150-1, 165-6), ensures that 'there arises for them...the possibility of creating a form of experience they desire, and of freeing themselves symbolically from what they must otherwise passively endure' (ibid:170; See also p.291). To offer a somewhat crude generalisation, we of the West have great freedom and control: our 'minds' allow us to act on the world, often in a scientific manner. The Dinka, on the other hand, neither have 'minds' nor have a scientific response to illness. Refusing to entirely bow to the passiones, they so to speak create a 'secondary' mind: much of the interest of Divinity and Experience lies in the way in which Lienhardt traces the interplay between the control of religious entities over human affairs and the mediated way in which men can control their experiences through the sacrificial process. To an extent at least, religious entities function as 'mind', but the differences between the two ways in which both the Dinka and ourselves effect a distinction between 'a subject and an object in experience'(ibid) suffice to alter the 'grammar' of such notions as freedom and control. The consequences for political anthropology are obvious, this suggesting the primacy of semantic anthropology over more 'sociological' endeavours.

BELIEF: There are many other implications of Dinka conceptualisations of self-knowledge, but I want to conclude by mentioning just one more. Our discussion of 'belief' will then act as a convenient point of introduction to the conclusion of this paper: the problems raised by the relationship between Dinka notions of self-knowledge and Lienhardt's emphasis on 'experience' as a way of interpreting their religious phenomena.

According to Lienhardt, it is 'not a simple matter to divide the Dinka believer, for analytic purposes, from what he believes in, and to describe the latter then in isolation from him as the "object" of his belief' (ibid:155). As we have seen, the Dinka attach more

importance to the role of the 'world' in acting on them than do we of the West (hence the fact that 'in ordinary English usage we have no word to indicate an opposite of "actions" in relation to the human self').³ We have also realised that in so far as the Dinka distinguish between 'a subject and an object in experience', they do so via religious means (or the imaging process) which allow much greater interplay between human action and religious passiones than is the case with our predominantly verificatory and manipulative relationship with reality. Taking these two considerations together, we realise that the Dinka do not, at least to the same extent as us, live in a world where 'belief' would be important. As Lienhardt puts it, 'Their world is not for them an object of study, but an active subject; hence the world (piny) as a whole is often invoked for aid along with other Powers' (ibid:156).

The world acts on the Dinka: hence Lienhardt's emphasis on the notion passiones. And hence also his claim that the notion 'belief' is of dubious value when applied to their universe. But there is more to this question than simply pointing to the interplay between actions and passiones, and it is at this point that we can return to some of the considerations with which we began. What we can now do, in other words, is suggest how Lienhardt's analysis of Dinka ideas of self-knowledge has encouraged him to use 'experience' as a key to their religion. In conclusion, therefore, I hope to show that whilst there is undoubtedly some connexion between his two keys to Dinka religion (namely 'experience' and ideas of self), his appeal to the former key is not quite so successful as his appeal to the latter. I should point out that the semantic issue here at stake is the absolutely crucial one of how the Dinka conceptualise their various 'realities'.

First, what exactly is the connexion between these two keys? It is to be sought in Lienhardt's claim that Dinka Powers are 'the images of human passiones seen as the active sources of those passiones'. 'Experience' is important because it provides the initial grounds of the passiones; and Dinka theories of self-knowledge enter into the picture because, as should now be obvious, the Dinka articulate their distinction between the self and the world in such a way as not to encourage our own clear-cut idea of believing in something.

Concerning these points, Lienhardt continually emphasises the fact that 'Statements about the divinities, as represented in hymns, are imaginative and creative, not dogmatic or doctrinal. There is no formal orthodoxy, and any imaginative association which does not contradict the general configuration of associations for particular divinities in the mind of any Dinka can be accepted as an insight into the nature of the divine' (ibid:91). Again, discussing whether or not the Dinka have to face the problem of evil, he concludes that Divinity and MACARDIT 'are not conceived as "beings" actively pitted against each other, as experiences in themselves cannot actively oppose each other. The difference between them is not intrinsically in them but in the human experiences they image' (ibid:159). It follows that by treating Dinka religious entities as 'experiences' (or, perhaps more accurately, as being about experiences), Lienhardt adds plausibility to his theoretical assumption that Dinka religion is best interpreted 'as representations of realities [i.e. experiences of the natural or social world] more accessible to a universal rational knowledge than they need to be in the Dinka view of them'. What is entailed in this is made quite obvious in the following quotations:

. it is in the representation of extremely complex configurations of moral and physical experience, the elements in which are not distinct from each other but are embedded, as it were, in extensive metaphors, that the Powers have their force' (ibid:161).

'But to attempt to produce an account, however lucid and ingenious, of a kind of Dinka "creed" and pantheon, would be to start concealing what, as I see it, is the clue to our understanding the facts - that is, that Dinka religion begins with natural and social experience of particular kinds' (ibid:96).

Now it might well be the case that Lienhardt is perfectly correct to emphasise that Dinka religious phenomena are pervaded by 'experience' rather than resting on 'logical or mystical elaboration of a revealed truth as are our own theological considerations....' (ibid:156), this suiting his rejection of a 'theological' understanding. But one cannot help suspect that however much his desire to apply the key of 'experience' is facilitated by the evidence provided, amongst other things, by Dinka notions of self-knowledge, it results in a semantic distortion of how the Dinka themselves regard their religious phenomena. For according to his analysis, the Powers seem often to become experiences or extensive metaphors, a fact which does not fit easily with his assertion that 'To the Dinka the Powers are known by personal encounter, as living agents influencing their lives for good or evil'.

The point I am making is this: a semantic anthropology cannot afford to make a simple minded distinction between how participants regard their religious phenomena and how the outside observer might be prompted to construe them in theory-dependent (or positivistic) terms. This might appear to be a large claim, but it rests on the simple consideration that to say 'x' people's religious entities are merely symbolic expressions or metaphors of social or physical experiences' is not to say anything much about what must be the crucial concern of a semantic anthropology (namely 'participant meaning') if the participants themselves assert, for example, that their religious entities are 'living agents'. Lienhardt, I should hasten to add, cannot easily be criticised on this score, if only because he is surely correct in using 'experience' as a key to Dinka religion (one can hardly deny that we as Westerners must find some way of interpreting phenomena which are alien to us, even though such an interpretation might run contrary to certain participant assertions). Nevertheless, even if it be admitted that it is justifiable for Western anthropologists to 'add' certain things to participants beliefs in order to satisfy their own canons of intelligibility, we should still not lose sight of the limitations of such an approach.

It seems to me that what we require is a form of 'two-way' intelligibility. On the one hand, Lienhardt gives much evidence to suggest that many aspects or features of Dinka religion can quite justifiably be interpreted in terms of the 'experience' model: 'Divinity is thus comprehended in and through natural experience, and not merely as a theoretical force producing the order of the world from without' (ibid:158). Appropriately applied, this model seems to bridge quite satisfactorily the gap between what understanding must be for us, and what understanding religious phenomena is for the Dinka. It can also sometimes be applied to illuminate for us certain features of Dinka religion which the Dinka themselves do not regard in quite the same way (the Dinka regard their

Powers as living agents, and, for all we know, do not possess the term 'extensive metaphor'. But this is not to say that we cannot acquire understanding by treating the Powers as gaining some of their 'force' from their metaphorical relationship with 'experience'. On the other hand, however, there comes a point when we ask different questions of the Powers, and it is at this point where we might need another way to intelligibility.

To develop this, we can take Lienhardt's claim that 'It is not suggested, of course, that the Dinka apprehend their beliefs in this way [in terms of the imaging process, including the process of "separation"]'. It is true that Lienhardt continues by giving an example, pertaining to the notion atyep, which suggests how close they are to our notion of 'image', but the fact remains that the 'experience-imaging' model is not especially appropriate if we ask the question, for instance, what type of reality do the Dinka themselves attribute to their Powers, and what exactly do they have in mind when they call them living agents? It is surely significant that Lienhardt has little to say on these matters, and that what he does say is not entirely consistent (compare, in this respect, his claims that the Dinka live in a 'single world', that the Powers 'operate beyond the categories of space and time which limit human actions', and that the Powers are living agents (ibid:28,147)).

There is no single way of interpreting Dinka (or any other) religion. From a semantic point of view, the 'experience-imaging' model can be regarded both as an heuristic device and as a substantial replication of certain features of Dinka religion. It affords one perspective and answers one set of questions. Other features are perhaps best treated in other terms: in the example just raised, understanding the type of reality of Powers would surely entail establishing what the Dinka regard by 'space' and 'time', what the notion of 'living agents' has to do with these notions, and how it is possible for the Dinka to live in a 'single world' when this world is so disrupted by space/time considerations. It is perhaps paradoxical that Powers are, from one point of view, intelligible in terms of 'experience' and 'metaphorical extension' of the imaging process, whilst from another perspective they become real living agents and all that that entails, but it should be born in mind that if we desired a full understanding of, for instance, our notion 'mind' we would be faced with a situation where: a) scientists, Christians and others would all give different accounts, and b) where different questions would so to speak articulate different usages (and therefore meanings) of the notion.

Thus my only criticism of Divinity and Experience is that Lienhardt does not seem to fully appreciate the advantages of what I have called 'two-way' intelligibility. This is to say that he does not fully free himself from the 'one-way' intelligibility provided by the general positivist approach: he lets his emphasis on the 'experience-imaging' model take precedence over asking, in a non-positivist fashion, questions about how the Dinka conceptualise the reality of their religious entities. I cannot push this criticism very far because Lienhardt frequently engages in remarkably sensitive analyses of features of Dinka religion, such analyses not always being couched in terms of the key provided by 'experience' (see for instance, his discussions of such Dinka notions as 'truth', 'justice', and 'respect' (46-7, 139-40)). Nevertheless, we have argued that his handling of the nature and reality of Powers is hampered by his interpretation of them solely as images. The Christian God has been interpreted by some theologians as a symbolic expression of existential depth or of the Unknowable,

but in an analagous vein to our criticism of Lienhardt's work, they also have been criticised for neglecting the propositional or dogmatic nature of God-talk. Can we realistically suppose that Dinka religion lacks dogma to the extent suggested by Lienhardt? Or are we rather to infer that he has treated it like this in order to facilitate his key of 'experience'?

Whatever criticisms one might make of Divinity and Experience, they all take a constructive form. To question Radcliffe-Brown's interpretation of primitive religion is to engage in a futile exercise, there being no worthwhile returns to one's endeavours. To question Lienhardt's work, on the other hand, is to raise the type of issue which most anthropologists of religion have consistently ignored. How do alien concepts cohere together? How do the Dinka express, organize and control their experiences? What are the consequences of their lacking our popular concept of 'mind'? How do conceptual shifts work (is there an entity called 'guilt' which we conceptualise in one way but which the Dinka conceptualise differently)? And, just to mention some issues which we have barely remarked on, how do the Dinka solve the problem of evil, what has their religion to do with moral life, and how exactly do their religious entities relate to and manifest themselves in the affairs of man? Instead of drearily trotting out the sociological symbolist, intellectualist or structuralist interpretations of primitive religion, should we not instead be attending to these essentially semantic and essentially profound questions, especially those which are raised by the ways in which man's various relationships with the world (characterised by terms like 'verification', 'expressive', 'experience', and 'events')⁴ give rise to equally various styles of meaningful relations?

To summarise the approach I am advocating, the fideistic study of primitive cultures does not simply entail grasping that notions of the 'witchcraft', 'guilt' and 'intention' level of description are quite variously articulated in different cultures. More fundamentally, we have to do with those categorisations of the world which lie behind, and inform, such institutions as witchcraft, sacrifice or courts of law. Imagine a culture which supposes that phenomena ranging from gods to material objects are thought of in terms of the idea of 'force'. Clearly, this notion will affect, amongst other things, how we interpret 'magic', the idea of being free to act in certain ways, and the relationship between spiritual and everyday affairs. But it is also important to realise that the way in which the key notion 'force' generates distinctive relationships and patterns is very largely a consequence of its 'reality' status. Thus if according to participant criteria 'force' is opposed to some notion of everyday mechanical causality, we would be inclined to seek its conceptual implications at, say, the moral level. If, on the other hand, the notion has a reality status which obscures our distinction between 'causing someone to do something' and 'causing a car to go', we would somehow have to trace a different set of conceptual implications (we might find, for example, that the notion has an existential status, having to do with life force, this explaining why it obscures our distinction between what can loosely be called physical and moral causality).

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Although I do not find it easy to make my point, examples such as these suggest that the way in which fundamental notions organise conceptual arrangements and social activities has much to do with their reality status; whether or not they concern attitudes (such as worship), moral propositions, 'dream times', the publically observable and verifiable world, poetic insights, transcendental cosmologies, immanent powers of a supposedly automatic nature, and so on. By treating Powers as experiences, Lienhardt has been able to trace a set of relationships between many other Dinka concepts. It is sad that British social anthropologists have been so obsessed by positivist reductionism, for if this had not been the case we might today be able to contrast the Dinka situation with the conceptual patterns associated with such basic reality constructs as 'life is an illusion', 'men do not have souls', 'all is alive', 'all is force', 'religion is love', 'only God knows the truth', and, to give a final example, don Juan's state of 'seeing'.

Notes

1. Needham's Belief, Language and Experience is rapidly acquiring the status of a classic in the field of semantic anthropology; all the more so because of Needham's prior allegiance to the reductionistic and crudely logical style of analysis known as structuralism.
2. Lienhardt has several interesting things to say about the relationship between, for example, witchcraft, morality and states of mind such as envy. Thus: 'An envious man...not recognising the envy in himself, transfers to another his experience of it, and sees its image in him, "the witch"' (ibid). Such analysis of witchcraft reminds one of Crick's outlined reconceptualisation in terms of 'moral spaces' (see J.A.S.O. Vol. 4, no.1).
3. To emphasise this point, we can remember Lienhardt's remark, 'We see the difference between the underlying passivity of the Dinka in their relation to events, and the active construction which we tend to place upon our role in shaping them' (ibid:235).
4. In an earlier article in J.A.S.O. (Vol.3 no.3) I have attempted to trace how don Juan's utterances can be interpreted in terms of a distinctive relationship with 'events'; I suggested that his discourse somehow belongs to the level of 'events', this explaining why so many of Castaneda's questions were inappropriately addressed.

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